



The Medical Account of the Cross

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The physical trauma of Christ begins in Gethsemane with one of the initial aspects of His suffering - the bloody sweat. It is interesting that the physician of the group, Luke, is the only one to mention this. Luke's biblical account tells of Jesus' suffering, "*And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*"

Though very rare, the phenomenon of *He-ma-ti-dro-sis*, or bloody sweat, is all documented. Under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat. This process alone could have produced marked weakness and possible shock.

After the arrest in the middle of the night, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas, the High Priest. One of the soldiers struck Jesus across the face for remaining silent when questioned by Caiaphas. The palace guards taunted Jesus to identify them as they each passed by, spat on Him, and struck Him in the face. In the early morning, Jesus, battered and bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night, is taken across Jerusalem to the Praetorium of the Fortress Antonia. It was there, in response to the cries of the mob, that Pilate ordered Bar-Abbas released and condemned Jesus to scourging and crucifixion.

Preparations for the scourging are carried out. Jesus is stripped of His clothing and His hands tied to a post above His head. The Roman legionnaire steps forward with the flagrum in his hand. This is a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each. The heavy whip is brought down with full force across Jesus' shoulders, back and legs thirty-nine times.

At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper and deeper into the *sub-cu-ta-neous* tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles. The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises, which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally, the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped.

The half-fainting Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with His own blood. The Roman soldiers see a great joke in the provincial Jew claiming to be a king. They throw a robe across His shoulders and place a stick in His hand for a scepter. A small bundle of flexible branches covered with long thorns is pressed into the scalp of Jesus. Again there is copious bleeding (the scalp being one of the most vascular areas of the body). After mocking Him and striking Him across the face, the soldiers take the stick from His hand and strike Him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp. Finally, the soldiers tire of their sadistic sport and the robe is torn from His back. This has already become adherent in the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, and its removal, just as the careless removal of surgical bandages, causes excruciating pain - almost as though He were again being whipped, and the wounds again begin to bleed.

Jesus is then led off to be crucified. The heavy beams of the cross are then tied to His shoulders, and the procession of the condemned Christ, two thieves and the execution detail, begins its slow journey. The weight of the heavy wooden beam, together with the shock produced by copious blood loss, is too much. Jesus stumbles and lacerates the skin and muscles of His shoulders. Jesus tries to rise, but His human muscles have been pushed beyond their endurance.