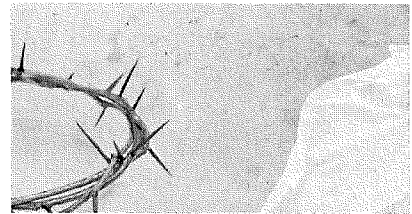


Bible Inspiration: The Crucifixion Clothes

by Dave Miller, Ph.D.

The Old Testament book of Psalms constituted the hymnal of the Jewish nation, containing a collection of 150 songs, laments, and praises by various authors. Since the Old Testament canon was very likely completed no later than 400 B.C. (Leupold, 1969, p. 8; cf. Archer, 1974, p. 440), and since the Septuagint is known to have been produced circa 250 B.C., the pronouncements in the Psalms predated the arrival of Jesus on the planet by centuries. Yet, within the sacred pages of the Psalms, scores of very detailed allusions pinpoint specific incidents that occurred in the life of Christ on Earth. These allusions constitute proof positive of the inspiration of the Bible.



For example, composed by David in the 10th century B.C. (Barnes, 1847, pp. 193ff.), Psalm 22 is unquestionably a messianic psalm—literally packed with minute details that forecast the death of the Messiah. In verse 18, the psalmist quotes Him as making the simple statement: “They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.” All four of the inspired New Testament evangelists of the first century A.D. allude to these incidental details that they report in connection with Jesus hanging on the cross (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23–24).

While commentators typically report that Roman law awarded the victim's clothes as spoils for the Roman executioners (e.g., Erdman, 1922, p.161; McGarvey, n.d., p. 725), others question the historicity of such a claim (e.g., Edersheim, 1915, 2:591–592). In any case, the soldiers that attended the cross consisted of a quaternion—four soldiers (Davis, 1870, 3:2651). Matthew and Luke state very simply that these soldiers divided His clothes and cast lots for them, with Luke adding “to determine what every man should take.” These “garments” (*mere*) likely included a head-dress, sandals, girdle, and outer garment (Robertson, 1916, p. 147). Apparently, according to John 19:23, the soldiers were able to decide ownership of these four clothing articles without gambling. If they were able to agree on consignment of the four articles—one clothes item for each soldier—why did they also cast lots? It is John who provides the added clarification:

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,” that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: “They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.” Therefore the soldiers did these things (John 19:23–24).

The tunic was indivisible and unique from the other clothes, and very likely more valuable. It stood alone as seamless and would need to be awarded to a single soldier only, rather than being ripped into four pieces. Hence, they agreed to gamble in order to decide ownership of the tunic.

Observe carefully that these four unnamed Roman military men, who just happened to be assigned crucifixion duty that day, and just happened to have charge of the condemned Jesus of Nazareth (who happened that day to wear a seamless tunic), were operating solely out of their own impulses. They were not Jews. They undoubtedly had no familiarity whatsoever with Jewish Scripture. They were not controlled by any external source. No unseen or mysterious force took charge of their minds, no disciple whispered in their ears to cause them to robotically or artificially fulfill a

prophecy. Yet, with uncanny precision, words written by King David a millennium earlier came to stunning fruition—words that on the surface might seem to contradict each other: the clothes were to be divided into separate parts, yet lots would be cast over the clothes. Roman soldiers unwittingly fulfilled the predictions of ancient Scripture in what to them were no more than mere casual, insignificant actions associated with the execution of their military duty, in tandem with their covetous desire to profit from their victim by acquiring His material goods.

But that's not all. The layers of complexity and sophistication of the doctrine of inspiration, like the layers of an onion, can be peeled back to reveal additional marvels. John informs us that the item of clothing, which necessitated the Roman soldiers need to resort to gambling to decide ownership, was “without seam, woven from the top in one piece.” Why mention this piece of minutia? What significance could possibly be associated with such a seemingly trivial detail? To gain insight into a possible explanation, one must dig deeper into Bible teaching. Since the Bible was authored by Deity, it naturally possesses a depth uncharacteristic of human writers. It reflects indication that its Author was unhampered by the passing of time or the inability to foresee or orchestrate future events. Such qualities are commensurate with the nature of divinity.

In 1500 B.C., God imparted the Law of Moses to the Israelites as the covenant requirements that would guide the nation of Israel through its national existence. This law included provision for the High Priest, the first being Aaron, the brother of Moses, commissioned by God Himself (Exodus 28). On the Day of Atonement (*yom kippur*), he alone entered the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle/Temple to make atonement for himself and all the people (Leviticus 16). Bible typology—another bona fide proof of Bible inspiration—portrays Jesus as our High Priest (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14; 9:11; et al.). Very uniquely and critically, Jesus performs for Christians parallel functions to the High Priest that absolutely must be performed if we are to be permitted to be saved to live eternally with Deity in heaven.

Among the articles of clothing stipulated by God for the High Priest was the skillfully woven “tunic of fine linen thread” (Exodus 28:39). According to Josephus, this clothing item was seamless:

Now this vesture was not composed of two pieces, nor was it sewed together upon the shoulders and the sides, but it was one long vestment so woven as to have an aperture for the neck; not an oblique one, but parted all along the breast and the back (3.7.4:203).

Coincidental? Perhaps. Nevertheless, John went out of his way to flag the point. And the Roman soldiers gambled for the seamless tunic of the Messiah—a tunic that subtly signaled His redemptive role as the one to make atonement for the world in the very act of dying on the cross. The handling of the clothes of Jesus Christ on the occasion of His crucifixion demonstrates the inspiration of the Bible and the divine origin of the Christian religion.

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