

CHAPTER XVI

The Problem of Josiah 3:7: Did Jesus Bleed from Every Pore?

The problem of this chapter arises because critics challenge the correctness of words purporting to come from an angel to King Benjamin in which it is asserted that our Lord should bleed from every pore. Here are the angel's words:

And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, *blood cometh from every pore*, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people. (Most 3:7; italics ours.)

There is, of course, no problem to Latter-day Saints who accept the words of the angel and have the additional assurance from the Savior himself in this age that he did bleed from every pore.

Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, *and to bleed at every pore*, and to suffer both body and spirit. (D. & C. 19:18; italics ours.)

Critics of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon think that the prophet betrayed himself and his cause by lifting the idea of our Lord's bleeding from the Gospel of Luke.

And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44)

It will be noted, affirm these critics, that Luke does not say that Jesus sweat blood. All he means to convey is that in His agony the Savior perspired profusely; then he com-

pares His drops of sweat with drops of blood. Jesus sweat as *it were* drops of blood. Joseph Smith, so they say, mistakenly assumed from Luke's words that the Savior actually sweat blood and introduced the idea into the Book of Mormon. Indeed, they claim that nowhere in the New Testament is there a reference to the Lord's having a bloody sweat. And we have heard some persons assert that it is physically impossible for the body to sweat blood through its pores. To cap it all, certain New Testament authorities deny the authenticity of Luke 22:43-44, holding that Luke did not write these verses. So goes the case against the angel's words in Mosiah 3:7.

Let us examine the last two charges first. It is true that many of the early Greek codices, versions, and Church Fathers omit any reference to the appearance of the angel and to the "bloody sweat" as we now have them in the text of Luke 22:43-44, but it should be emphasized that opinions about the authenticity of these verses have been greatly divided in past years. Some very famous scholars may be named in either camp. For example, Westcott, Hort, Wellhausen, Merx, Gregory and Weiss rejected the authenticity of the verses, but Tischendorf, Keim, Pfleiderer, Harnack, Bauer, Holtzmann and Blass favored their genuineness. Maurice Goguel, famous French expert, says:

In my opinion these verses are genuine, for at a comparatively late period, when the idea of the divinity of Christ was definitely established, Jesus would not have been represented as being overwhelmed to the point of needing to be strengthened by an angel. One section of the evidence for the text (without verses 43-44) is Egyptian, and would date from the time of the Athanasian orthodoxy; it may have been under the influence of this orthodoxy that these verses were omitted. Their authenticity is confirmed by the fact that John knew the incident of Gethsemane and the angel.¹

It cannot be proved that the verses are not from the

hand of Luke. With this conclusion the Catholic Biblical Commission (1912) agrees. We shall therefore assume their genuineness.

Those who assert that it is impossible for a body to sweat blood are not acquainted with the facts. The possibility of this phenomenon was known to the ancients. Thus Apollonius of Rhodes (Third Century B.C.) refers to the bloody sweat as an extraordinary phenomenon,² and Aristotle in his *Historia Animalium* (III, 19) says this:

If the blood gets exceedingly liquid, animals fall sick; for the blood then turns into something like ichor, or a liquid so thin that it at times has been known to exude through the pores like sweat.³

And if one will take the trouble to consult a modern medical dictionary under *hemathidrosis* or *hematidrosis*, reference will be found to the phenomenon. Thus in *The American Illustrated Medical Dictionary* (1947, Phila.) we find this entry:

Hematidrosis—The sweating of blood or of fluid mixed with blood.

In *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary* (1955, Phila.) occurs this reference:

Hemathidrosis, hematidrosis—Condition of sweating blood.

In a much older medical work we find this interesting note:

Haematidrosis is a functional disturbance of the sweat apparatus whereby blood, through diapedesis into the coils and ducts from their surrounding vascular plexus, becomes mingled with the sweat and appears with it upon the normal skin, producing the phenomenon of so-called "*bloody sweat*." It is an exceedingly rare occurrence,⁴

Thus it is clear that the sweating of blood can occur, even if rarely.

Now let us tackle the more difficult problem raised by the Greek text of Luke 22:44. Four words of the verse particularly draw our scrutiny. They are *agonia*, *thromboi*, *hosei*, and *egeneto*. The first word means “agony” or “anxiety.” The great Italian Orientalist, Guiseppe Ricciotti, speaks of the word in this way:

For the Greeks "agony" was what took place in the "agon," that is, the struggle between charioteers or athletes competing for the prize. Their struggle demanded a most painful effort, an exhausting violence of limb and spirit, so that no one approached it without a sense of inward fear and anxious trepidation. Later, in fact, "agony" came to mean fear or trepidation in general, but especially that of the supreme struggle against death. Such was the case with Jesus. "And falling into an agony he prayed the more earnestly." He had resorted to prayer in a special way in all the most solemn moments of his life, and it becomes now his only refuge in this last hour. The "agony" is prolonged and the marks of the struggle appear on his body: he sweats, and his sweat becomes "as drops of blood running down upon the ground."⁵

The second word is the plural of *thrombos*, which is defined by the great University of Chicago *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* as “small amount of (flowing) blood, clot of blood.” Notice that *The New English Bible* (New Testament) translates Luke 22:44 in this manner:

And in anguish of spirit he prayed the more urgently; and his sweat was like clots of blood falling to the ground.⁶

And *The Amplified New Testament*⁷ translates the verse this way:

And being in an agony [of mind] He prayed [the] more earnestly and intently; and His sweat became like great clots of blood dropping down upon the ground.

Observe how both translations adopt “clots of blood” in their rendition of the verse. And Alexander Souter in his very excellent *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*⁸ defines *thrombos* simply as “a clot.”

The third word, *hosei*, is defined by the University of Chicago New Testament lexicon (see above) as a “particle denoting comparison *as, like, (something) like*, lit. 'as if,'" and is careful to point out, significantly, that in the manuscripts it is often interchanged with *hos*, a particle with numerous uses.

The fourth word, *egeneto*, is the aorist indicative form of the verb *ginomai*, with various meanings such as “come to be,” “become,” “originate,” “happen,” etc. *Ginomai* has, of course, many uses, grammatically speaking, including a use with persons and things which change their nature, to indicate their entering a new condition: *become something*.⁹

Now, in the light of the facts at our command let us attempt to give a reasonable interpretation to Luke's Greek words. Let us never forget that in Gethsemane our Lord was saddled with the awful weight of the sins of all mankind. Only a God—such He was—with power over death could bear the terrible consequences of this weight of sin and live. No Greek “agon” or any other struggle of men in all history could even remotely produce the great strain and opposition the Savior faced in Gethsemane. He was God, but still human, and as the time of the struggle lengthened, to a certain point His agony must have deepened the more. Isn't it reasonable to suppose that at the onset of our Lord's mental struggle and suffering His body underwent a clammy sweating which gradually changed in character as the agony increased¹⁰ and hematidrosis set in?

What was at first a heavy perspiration began to be darkened with blood, and even clots of blood would soon be in evidence. Such is the struggle we believe Luke is trying to tell us in his brief description. After all, he was a physician. Why should he mention “clots of blood” at all unless he meant to convey the idea that what was at first heavy drops of sweat “became” as “clots of blood”? Let us translate Luke's words as we believe they should be translated, adding words in brackets when necessary to make clear his meaning as we understand it:

And being in an agony [his horror of the impending ordeal] he prayed more fervently; and his sweat became [i.e., changed in character] as clots of blood falling down onto the ground. (Luke 22:44)

There are famous scholars who would agree in general with the interpretation given here of Luke's words. Following is the translation that Ricciotti gives of the verse:

And falling into an agony he prayed the more earnestly. And his sweat became as drops of blood running down upon the ground.¹¹

And on the same page Ricciotti speaks of our Lord's “face lined with thin crimson traces of the ‘drops of blood.’” He adds this challenge:

Physiologists are free to study Jesus' sweat from the scientific point of view, but they must not lose sight of the unique circumstances in which he suffered it. With this information which he is the only one to record, the physiologist Luke seems implicitly to invite such study.¹²

Of interest also are the words of Andres Fernandez, S. J., former professor and rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome:

For the third time Jesus returned to pray. His soul was so beset by anguish, and His heart so torn with

conflicting emotions that He broke out in a sweat of blood, which forced its way through all the pores of His skin, soaking His garments and running in streams down His body onto the ground.¹³

Such are the conclusions of these famous scholars. But certain critics may say, "They are scholars from the Catholic Church; we would expect them to say what they do." In answer to this criticism we point out that many Protestant scholars interpret Luke's words essentially as do Ricciotti and Fernandez. Certainly M. R. Vincent hints strongly at it.¹⁴ Then we call attention to Edwin W. Rice,¹⁵ and Professor A. T. Robertson in a commentary on Luke 22:44 says:

In an agony (en agoniai). It was conflict, contest from *agon*. An old word, but only here in the N. T. Satan pressed Jesus harder than ever before. *As it were great drops of blood* (hosei thromboi haimatos). Thick, clotted blood. An old word (*thromboi*) common in medical works, but here only in the N. T. This passage (verses 43 and 44) is absent from some ancient documents. Aristotle speaks of a bloody sweat as does Theophrastus.¹⁶

Of interest is the American Baptist Publication Society's *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, with its thoughtful explanation of Luke's words. Its general editor was Alvah Hovey, D.D., LL.D., a Bible scholar. The commentary on Luke was done by George R. Bliss, D.D. With the omission of certain historical data already given we present his comments:

44. *And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly.* The participle is of the Greek verb "to become," and means, here, "getting to be in an agony"; so that the thought is that, after he had prayed, and had received angelic succor, the distress was allowed to increase, and, with it, his prayer grew more intense. Even the sympathy of his Father, manifested through his

angel, did not prevent his anguish from reaching such a pitch that it forced the sweat through his pores—and *his sweat was* (i.e., *became*) *as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground*. This phenomenon was neither sweat alone nor blood alone. The latter is forbidden by the *as if*, the former by the fact that there would be little force in comparing sweat to blood, in respect merely to its form as drops, or as to their size. It is the color, also, caused by blood oozing forth through the skin, and coagulating as such, so that the sweat was like blood—clots (*thromboi*), not mere *drops*, rolling off the ground.... Gethsemane thus appears a prelude and epitome of Calvary, wanting only the physical distress and actual death to complete the experience. Alone with God, he faces the final agony, feels it by anticipation overwhelming him,—all that was involved in being made sin for sinners; shrinks from it, receives strength, rather, to endure it still further; then becomes calm and self-possessed, so as to be ready for the public sacrifice of himself, which he goes forth to meet.¹⁷

This commentary was discovered by us after we had written all that had gone before. It is rather remarkable how closely Dr. Bliss parallels our own reconstruction of what went on in Gethsemane.

Attention may also be called to the famous work of S. J. Andrews (once a Congregational minister), *The Life of our Lord Upon the Earth*, and his comments on the bloody sweat undergone by the Savior.¹⁸

It is obvious from the facts pointed out above that the Mormon people do not have to apologize for the position taken by the Book of Mormon with respect to our Lord's sweating of blood. Scholars from many branches of Christendom attest unwittingly to the strength of our position.

¹ *The Life of Jesus* (tr. by Wyon), p. 493, note. The Macmillan Co., 1946. He cites the scholars we have listed in the two camps.

² 4,1282 f.

³ See D. W. Thompson's translation in *The Works of Aristotle, IV*, 520^b Oxford.

⁴ C. T. Dade in *Reference Handbook of the Medical Sciences, IV*, 466. 1902.

⁵ *The Life of Christ* (tr. by Zizzamia), p. 588. The Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, Wis.

⁶ Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1961.

⁷ Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London and Edinburgh, 1958.

⁸ Oxford University Press, 1925.

⁹ See the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament referred to in the text.

¹⁰ M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament, I*, 425, says, "There is in the aorist participle [of Luke's words] a suggestion of a *growing intensity* in the struggle."

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 588.

¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 589.

¹³ *The Life of Christ* (tr. by Paul Barrett), p. 666. The Newman Press, Westminster, Md., 1959.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*

¹⁵ *People's Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, p. 293.

¹⁶ *Word Pictures in the New Testament, II*, 272. 1930.

¹⁷ *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, pp. 322-323; material italicized is in heavy type in the original with exception of (i.e., became). The Greek was given in true Greek letters. 1902.

¹⁸ P. 502, and notes. Zondervan Publishing Company edition of 1954.