

Did Jesus Sweat Blood in Gethsemane?

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As Luke describes the intense emotional agony of Jesus in Gethsemane, he writes:

And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

Luke 22:44

Did Jesus actually sweat blood? When answering this question affirmatively, it is generally noted that there is a very rare medical phenomenon where this occurs, called hematomidrosis. This is said to be prompted by cases of extreme emotional stress. Adding further support to the idea that Jesus experienced this very rare medical condition, it is noted that Luke, being a physician, would have included this detail.

While such information *could suggest* our Savior's sweat turned to blood as He prayed in Gethsemane, I must confess (to the shock of some), I am not fully convinced this actually happened. For me, there are some issues that first must be settled before we can say with absolute certainty that His sweat literally turned to blood.

For example, did you know that verses 43-44 of Luke chapter twenty-two are NOT found in most of the early manuscripts? This could suggest that they are an addition, and not part of Luke's original writing. IF Luke did write them, we must keep in mind that he was not an eyewitness to the events in Gethsemane (Luke 1:1-3). Neither Matthew nor John, who were eyewitnesses, record this very significant and rare sight of sweat turning to blood. Mark, who likely used Peter's testimony for his Gospel, also does not include this significant detail.

First and foremost to questioning this well-accepted event, is that Luke does NOT say Jesus' sweat turned to blood. Before you protest that statement, look very closely at what Luke (IF it is truly from Luke) actually wrote:

And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became **like** drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

Luke 22:44 (Emphasis Mine)

If Luke meant to say that *His sweat became drops of blood*, why did he insert the word "like"? The Greek word translated "like" (*hōsei*) literally means, as one resource noted, "as if." Using this meaning, the writer was saying the sweat of Jesus became "as if" it were blood. "As if" blood, is NOT literally blood.

Consider another example from the book of Acts (also authored by Luke) where this same word is used:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise **like** a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues **as of** fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

Acts 2:1-3 (Emphasis Mine)

For years we have been taught, and rightly understand, that there was a noise **like** (from same family of words as *hōsei*) a violent rushing wind, but there was not a literal wind. We have been taught, and rightly understand, that there were tongues "**as of**" (same word used in Luke 22:44) fire, but not literally fire. Should we stray from this application when we get to Luke 22:44? Notice how preacher and Bible commentator of years past, H. Leo Boles, does this very thing. In his commentary on Acts, Boles writes of Acts 2:2-3, "This was not 'fire'; it was 'like as if fire'; it is not said that there was either fire or wind..." Then, in his commentary on Luke, where the same Greek word *hōsei* is used, he writes, "Cases of great mental anguish, causing drops of blood to ooze from the body like sweat, are known to medical authorities." Boles does what many have been guilty of doing with these two passages.

Another interesting statement found in Luke 22:44 is that the sweat like blood was falling down upon the ground. Are we to image a lot of blood loss? Isn't such a description more properly applied to heavy perspiration?

If the issues we have addressed be true, then what we have in Luke 22:44 is the author using a simile. Luke is saying the emotional intensity of Jesus was so great that His sweat was profusely pouring forth from His skin *like* (as if it were) blood.

Does such an interpretation diminish the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane? Not in the least! Consider the words used by the inspired writers to describe the state of Jesus that night: grieved, distressed, troubled, in agony. Make no mistake about it, Gethsemane was an intense moment for our Savior. However, let us be careful not to go beyond what is written in our understanding of what actually occurred.