



Harry Anderson, *The Crucifixion*. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

The scriptures consistently emphasize the importance of the Savior's Crucifixion in the Atonement.

Teaching the Scriptural Emphasis on the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ

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A colleague recently shared with me how, when teaching missionary preparation classes, he would role-play with students. When students pretending to be missionaries would ask him (acting as an investigator) if he knew about Christ's Atonement, he would say, "Yes, I saw that Mel Gibson movie about Christ dying for our sins on the cross." At least half of his students would correct him, stating that Christ atoned for our sins in Gethsemane, but not on the cross. This not only indicates a lack of the interpersonal skill of building on common beliefs but is also doctrinally incomplete. It also might explain why another colleague lamented the fact that in his extensive inter-faith work, he frequently encounters Christians whose perception is that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (herein referred to as "the Church") do not believe Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world.

Robert L. Millet once wrote, "It is probably the case that if one hundred Protestants were asked where the atonement of Christ took place, those one hundred persons would answer: At Golgotha, on the cross. It is also no doubt true that if one hundred Latter-day Saints were asked the same question, a

large percentage would respond: In Gethsemane, in the garden.”¹ While I am not aware of any scientific studies that address Millet’s hypothesis, a few informal classroom surveys indicate that, depending on how the question is asked, students at Brigham Young University tend to emphasize Gethsemane when discussing Christ’s Atonement.

One faculty member gave 110 students in a Book of Mormon class the following fill-in-the-blank question without any prior instruction on the Savior’s Atonement: “Where did the Atonement take place?” Of these students, 27 percent wrote only Gethsemane, and 73 percent wrote Gethsemane *and* the cross.² But when the question was changed (in a separate Book of Mormon class) to be “Where did Christ atone for our sins?” 51 percent of the students filled in the blank with Gethsemane only, with 49 percent writing in Gethsemane and the cross.³

To see which event students would emphasize, a separate BYU faculty member administered an online survey in which he asked students the following question: “Where would you say the Atonement mostly took place? A. In the Garden of Gethsemane. B. On the Cross at Calvary.” Across 752 students, 88 percent said, “In the Garden of Gethsemane,” and 12 percent said, “On the Cross at Calvary.”⁴ My anecdotal experiences with hundreds of students and others similarly suggest that when asked about Christ atoning for our sins, members of the Church tend to emphasize Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane more than his Crucifixion on the cross.⁵

Gethsemane and Christ’s Crucifixion are *both* part of the Savior’s Atonement; in fact, the Atonement is broader than these two events. The Bible Dictionary defines Christ’s Atonement as follows: “By [Jesus Christ’s] selection and foreordination in the Grand Council before the world was formed, His divine Sonship, His sinless life, the shedding of His blood in the garden of Gethsemane, His death on the cross and subsequent bodily resurrection from the grave, He made a perfect atonement for all mankind.”⁶ While there are many aspects of the Savior’s Atonement, this paper focuses on the events of Gethsemane and the Savior’s Crucifixion.

Many important questions could be asked with respect to Gethsemane and the Crucifixion of Christ, including how these topics have been treated in general conference⁷ and Church curricula⁸ and how the symbol of the cross has been perceived in the Church over time.⁹ The question this paper explores is, To what extent does the canonized scripture of the Church focus on the

importance of Gethsemane and Golgotha with respect to Christ’s suffering for our sins and pains?

In this study I will identify scripture references that can be explicitly connected to either Gethsemane or Christ’s Crucifixion as pertaining to an expiation of sin or his suffering of our pains. For example, passages that speak of the Savior bleeding from every pore would relate to Gethsemane. Verses regarding the death or sacrifice of Jesus Christ would tie into the Crucifixion.¹⁰

Several important passages about Christ’s Atonement focus on resurrection, but not in relationship to his suffering for sin (for example, Alma 11:42). These are not included in the present study. In some cases, it is not clear whether a verse refers to Gethsemane, Christ’s Crucifixion, or both. For example, several passages teach principles such as “We have redemption through his blood” (Ephesians 1:7),¹¹ or “Salvation was and is and is to come in and through the atoning blood of Christ” (Mosiah 3:18).¹² These verses could allude to suffering in Gethsemane that caused Christ to “bleed at every pore” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–18; see Mosiah 3:7; Luke 22:44). Alternatively, they could refer to “the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20; see John 19:34; Hebrews 13:11–12; Alma 34:11–13; and 3 Nephi 9:19). Although passages about the atoning blood of Christ could refer to blood Christ shed at Gethsemane or on the cross (or both), for the purposes of this study, verses about the blood of Jesus Christ are not counted unless the verse is explicitly connected to either Gethsemane or Christ’s death.¹³

Understanding what the scriptures themselves emphasize is important. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught, “If you want to know what emphasis should be given to gospel principles, you simply teach the whole standard works and, automatically, in the process, you will have given the Lord’s emphasis to every doctrine and every principle.”¹⁴ As will be demonstrated, the standard works focus heavily on Christ’s Crucifixion. There are fifty-two scriptural references to the salvific power of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ and two references to Christ’s suffering our sins in Gethsemane.

Following an analysis of scriptural references to Christ suffering our sins and pains in Gethsemane and his Crucifixion, I will discuss how we can help our students understand and appreciate the scriptural emphasis on Christ’s Crucifixion. At the outset, I wish to clearly state that the purpose of this paper is *not* to diminish the importance of Gethsemane. Gethsemane and the Crucifixion are not in competition with each other; both are vital aspects of Christ’s Atonement.

References to Gethsemane and the Crucifixion in the Old Testament

There do not appear to be any direct references to either Gethsemane or the Crucifixion in the Old Testament. Although Isaiah 53:4–5 (“he hath borne our griefs . . . he was wounded for our transgressions”) is often quoted in association with the Atonement, a literal reading of these verses does not specify when or where this suffering takes place.¹⁵

References to Gethsemane in the New Testament

The accounts of Christ in Gethsemane appear in four passages: Matthew 26:36–56, Mark 14:32–52, Luke 22:39–53, and John 18:1–11. Both Matthew and Mark (the only two scriptural authors to use the word *Gethsemane*) describe Jesus as being deeply distressed (see Matthew 26:37–38; Mark 14:33–34). They, along with Luke, record Christ praying, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). Luke adds the details that an angel came and strengthened Christ, and that Christ “being in an agony . . . prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44).¹⁶ John does not record any of Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane.¹⁷ Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all describe Christ’s capture in Gethsemane, although they differ in specific details.

The events of Gethsemane are not explicitly mentioned again in the New Testament.¹⁸ It is important to note that nothing in the text of the New Testament indicates that Christ’s suffering for our sins took place in Gethsemane. We read of his anguish, his prayer, his sweat being as blood, but the text does not say that he suffered for our sins or experienced our pains in this location.

References to the Crucifixion in the New Testament

The narrative descriptions of Christ’s Crucifixion are found in Matthew 27:31–56, Mark 15:20–41, Luke 23:26–49, and John 19:16–37. As with Gethsemane, there is nothing in these Crucifixion accounts that states Christ suffered for our sins while on the cross. However, unlike Gethsemane, New Testament authors make Christ’s death a salvific focal point.

At least twenty-one New Testament passages specifically link Christ’s death with our salvation (emphasis added throughout).¹⁹

- “Even so must the Son of man be *lifted up*: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but *have eternal life*” (John 3:14–15).
- “I, if I be *lifted up from the earth*, will *draw all men unto me*” (John 12:32).
- “Christ *died for the ungodly*” (Romans 5:6).
- “While we were yet sinners, *Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8).
- “We were *reconciled to God by the death of his Son*” (Romans 5:10).
- “Christ our passover is *sacrificed for us*” (1 Corinthians 5:7).
- “Christ *died for our sins*” (1 Corinthians 15:3).
- “*He died for all*, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which *died for them*” (2 Corinthians 5:15).
- “Christ hath *redeemed us from the curse of the law*, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that *hangeth on a tree [cross]*” (Galatians 3:13).
- “That he might *reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross*, having slain the enmity thereby” (Ephesians 2:16).
- “Having made peace through *the blood of his cross*, by him to *reconcile all things unto himself*” (Colossians 1:20).
- “Yet now hath he *reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable*” (Colossians 1:21–22).
- “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances, that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, *nauling it to his cross*” (Colossians 2:14).²⁰
- “Who *died for us*, that . . . we should *live together with him*” (1 Thessalonians 5:10).
- “For this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that *by means of death . . . they . . . might receive the promise of eternal inheritance*” (Hebrews 9:15).
- “He . . . *put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*” (Hebrews 9:26).
- “We are *sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ*” (Hebrews 10:10).
- “This man, after he *had offered one sacrifice for sins* for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12).
- “Who his own self *bare our sins in his own body on the tree [cross]*, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24).

- “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might *bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh*, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).
- “Four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, . . . saying, . . . *Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood*” (Revelation 5:8–9).

In addition to these verses, in numerous instances New Testament authors emphasize the importance of the cross or the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.²¹ Consider the following examples:

- “The preaching of *the cross* is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it *is the power of God*. . . We preach Christ crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23).
- “I determined not to know any thing among you except *Jesus Christ, and him crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2:2).
- “*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 6:14).
- “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who *for the joy that was set before him endured the cross* . . . and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

From the foregoing, the New Testament clearly places a much stronger salvific emphasis on Christ’s Crucifixion relative to his suffering in Gethsemane.

References to Gethsemane in the Book of Mormon

Only one Book of Mormon reference can be directly connected to the events of Gethsemane with relative certainty. In Mosiah 3:7 King Benjamin said Christ “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.”²² Although King Benjamin describes Christ’s anguish because of sin, he does not explicitly state that Christ suffered for the sins of the world at that time. The relationship with Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–18 (discussed below) clarifies that this passage describes Christ’s suffering for sin in Gethsemane.

Other references to Christ’s sufferings do not provide enough context to connect them directly with a specific event or location.²³ For example, while Alma 7:11–13 is often associated with Christ’s experiencing our pains in Gethsemane, the verses make no clear reference to the events in the garden.²⁴ In fact, Alma 7:12 speaks of the death of Christ in relation to taking upon him our infirmities. Other passages about Christ’s suffering our pains do not specifically depict where this took place. Jacob taught, “He suffereth the pains of all . . . men, women, and children . . . that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day” (2 Nephi 9:21–22). While this passage is sometimes associated with Gethsemane, Jacob does not state when or where this suffering would occur and links Christ’s suffering the pains of all people with suffering that allows the Resurrection to take place—perhaps an allusion to the death of Christ. Similarly, Doctrine and Covenants 18:11 describes Christ suffering our pains directly in connection with his death.

Four Book of Mormon verses speak of Christ’s suffering in association with his Atonement without providing enough context to determine whether this refers to Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane, on the cross, or both. For example, Aaron taught that “there could be no redemption for mankind save it were through the death and sufferings of Christ, and the atonement of his blood” (Alma 21:9, see Mosiah 18:2; Alma 22:14; 33:22).²⁵ These verses certainly refer to the death or Crucifixion of Christ and are discussed below. Given that *suffering* is sometimes linked with Gethsemane in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 3:7), but also with his death (see 1 Nephi 19:10–12; Jacob 1:8; and Helaman 14:20), it cannot be textually established with certainty that passages about the sufferings of Christ refer to events in Gethsemane; therefore, they are not included in the present study.²⁶

References to Christ’s Crucifixion in the Book of Mormon

In contrast to the one clear reference to Gethsemane, Book of Mormon authors make nineteen explicit references to Christ being “lifted up” or “crucified.” Collectively Jacob, Nephi, and the brass plates prophesy of the Savior’s Crucifixion ten times,²⁷ and Jesus Christ himself makes five references to being crucified.²⁸ King Benjamin, Abinadi, Nephi the son of Helaman, and Moroni also speak of Christ’s Crucifixion.²⁹

At least eighteen Book of Mormon passages specifically associate Christ’s death with our salvation. Consider the following verses:

- “I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and *slain for the sins of the world*” (1 Nephi 11:33).
- “He offereth himself a *sacrifice for sin*. . . . No flesh . . . can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who *layeth down his life*” (2 Nephi 2:7–8).
- “It behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and *die for all men*, that all men might become subject unto him” (2 Nephi 9:5).
- “He *layeth down his own life* that he may *draw all men unto him*” (2 Nephi 26:24).
- “He hath *poured out his soul unto death* . . . he *bore the sins of many*, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Mosiah 14:12).³⁰
- “He shall be led, *crucified*, and slain, . . . giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men—*having . . . taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions*” (Mosiah 15:7–9).
- “These are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom *he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions*” (Mosiah 15:12).
- “The *redemption* of the people . . . was to be brought to pass through the . . . *death of Christ*” (Mosiah 18:2).
- “There could be no *redemption* for mankind save it were through the *death* . . . of Christ” (Alma 21:9).
- “The . . . *death of Christ atone[s] for their sins*” (Alma 22:14).
- “Ye say also that [Christ] shall be *slain for the sins of the world*” (Alma 30:26).
- “The Son of God . . . will come to redeem his people and . . . shall . . . *die to atone for their sins*” (Alma 33:22).
- “He shall *bring salvation* to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the *intent of this last sacrifice*” (Alma 34:15).
- “[Christ] surely must *die, that salvation may come*. . . . This *death* . . . *redeemeth all mankind*” (Helaman 14:15–16).
- “I have come . . . to *save the world from sin*. . . . Whoso repenteth, . . . I will receive. . . . Behold, for such I have *laid down my life*” (3 Nephi 9:21–22).
- “Come forth . . . that ye may know that I . . . have been *slain for the sins of the world*” (3 Nephi 11:14).



- “After that I had been *lifted up upon the cross* . . . I might draw all men unto me” (3 Nephi 27:14).
- “Thou hast loved the world, even unto the *laying down of thy life* for the world . . . *to prepare a place for the children of men*” (Ether 12:33).

These passages collectively demonstrate that the Book of Mormon, like the New Testament, strongly emphasizes the death of Christ in the expiation of sin relative to his bleeding from every pore in Gethsemane.

References to Gethsemane in the Doctrine and Covenants

Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19 provides the clearest scriptural explanation of Christ suffering for our sins in Gethsemane. In this passage the Savior says, “I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; 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—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.”

Although these verses do not specifically provide a location for these sufferings, its relationship with Luke 22:44 (“his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground”) and Matthew 26:39 (“if it be possible, let this cup pass from me”) indicate Christ is likely referring to Gethsemane.³¹ Because of his suffering in Gethsemane, those who repent will not need to suffer as Christ did.

References to Christ’s Crucifixion in the Doctrine and Covenants

At least seventeen passages in the Doctrine and Covenants refer to Christ’s Crucifixion or death.³² Of these, six do not reference its salvific power, such as, “Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:37; see 45:52; 76:35; 110:4; 138:5, 27). The other eleven passages specifically link Christ’s death with our salvation:

- “The Lord your Redeemer *suffered death in the flesh*; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, *that all men might repent* and come unto him” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:11).

- “He was *crucified, died*, and rose again the third day . . . that as many as would believe and be baptized in his holy name, and endure in faith to the end, *should be saved*” (Doctrine and Covenants 20:23, 25)
- “Jesus was *crucified* . . . *for the sins of the world*, yea, for the remission of sins” (Doctrine and Covenants 21:9).
- “I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was *crucified for the sins of the world*” (Doctrine and Covenants 35:2).
- “Jesus Christ . . . was *crucified for the sins of the world*” (Doctrine and Covenants 46:13).
- “I, the Lord . . . was *crucified for the sins of the world*” (Doctrine and Covenants 53:2).
- “Thus saith the Lord, . . . even he who was *crucified for the sins of the world*” (Doctrine and Covenants 54:1).
- “Jesus [came] to be *crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world*” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:41).
- “The *great atoning sacrifice* . . . was made by the Son of God, *for the redemption of the world*” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:2).
- “*Redemption* had been wrought through the sacrifice of the Son of God *upon the cross*” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:35).
- “*Redemption* . . . through the *sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son of God*” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:57).

As do the New Testament and the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants clearly emphasizes the importance of the Savior’s Crucifixion to a much stronger degree than it does the events of Gethsemane. Nevertheless, across canonized scripture, the Doctrine and Covenants provides the best scriptural support that Jesus Christ suffered for our sins in Gethsemane (see Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19).

References to Gethsemane and Christ’s Crucifixion in the Pearl of Great Price

The events of Gethsemane are not explicitly mentioned in the Pearl of Great Price; however, there are two passages regarding Christ’s Crucifixion that relate to his expiation of sin. In Moses 7:45, “Enoch . . . cried unto the Lord, saying, . . . When shall *the blood of the Righteous be shed*, that all they that mourn *may be sanctified and have eternal life*?” While this verse does not specify where the blood would be shed, the response to this question is, “Enoch

saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced, saying: *The Righteous is lifted up, and the Lamb is slain*” (Moses 7:47). In a second reference, a few verses later, Enoch “beheld the Son of Man *lifted up on the cross, after the manner of men*” (Moses 7:55).

An additional reference to the Crucifixion (although ambiguous with regard to its salvific power, and therefore not counted in the present study) is Moses 5:5, 7, in which Adam and Eve were commanded to “offer the firstlings of their flocks . . . [in] similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father.”

Teaching Students about the Emphasis on the Crucifixion

The standard works emphasize Christ’s Crucifixion significantly more than the events of Gethsemane. Given this emphasis, religious educators may want to help their students (1) identify and understand the importance of the scriptural focus on the Savior’s Crucifixion, (2) better understand Christ’s Crucifixion, and (3) learn more about the historical realities of crucifixion. The following suggestions, designed for adult learners, could also be adapted for teenagers. The first two are based on the idea that students will better retain information that they uncover, as opposed to things that they are told. As Elder David A. Bednar taught, “An answer we discover or obtain through the exercise of faith, typically, is retained for a lifetime. The most important learnings of life are caught—not taught.”³³

Helping Students Identify the Scriptural Emphasis on Christ’s Crucifixion

Many approaches could be beneficial in helping students identify the scriptural emphasis on the cross. There are several opportunities to do so, particularly when teaching chapters that focus on the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ (for example, Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19; 1 Corinthians 1–2; 2 Nephi 10; 3 Nephi 27; Doctrine and Covenants 20:21–31; or 45:2–5). Consider the following as one possible approach to helping students identify the frequency with which the scriptures connect Christ’s Crucifixion to our salvation.

A teacher might begin by asking students to write down every scripture they can think of that clearly states that Christ died for our sins, as well as verses that teach that Christ suffered for our sins or pains in Gethsemane. Students may respond with scriptures that do not directly relate to Gethsemane (for example, Isaiah 53:4–5; 2 Nephi 9:21; Alma 7:11–13) or suffering for our

sins (for example, Luke 22:39–46). The teacher could carefully and gently show that these verses are not explicitly about Christ suffering for our sins in Gethsemane. Eventually (perhaps with guidance) students will identify Mosiah 3:8 and Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19 as the only scriptural passages that specifically describe Christ suffering for sins in Gethsemane when used in conjunction with Luke 22:39–46. Throughout this process the teacher should be careful to preserve the dignity of learners and not overemphasize or draw out the activity. The purpose is to help students identify gaps in their knowledge to increase their motivation to learn more, not to make anybody feel self-conscious if they cannot think of relevant verses or provide passages that do not textually say what the students think they do.

At this point, the teacher could provide students with a list of verses from the New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants that discuss the salvific power of Christ’s Crucifixion.³⁴ Students could explore these verses in groups or individually and then share what they learn.³⁵ Their own exploration will help them discover the scriptural emphasis on the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The teacher can help students not only understand the numerical emphasis but also the doctrinal significance. For example, a teacher might ask, “Why do you think the scriptures describe how Christ “suffered death in the flesh” right after stating “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:10–11). Alternatively, teachers might ask students to read John 12:32, 2 Nephi 26:24, and 3 Nephi 27:14 and look for *why* the Savior was crucified. How could understanding these passages motivate them to draw nearer to Christ? Aiding students in identifying and reflecting on passages about Christ’s Crucifixion will help them more deeply feel that Jesus Christ atoned for their sins on the cross because of his deep love for each of us.

Helping Students Understand Christ’s Crucifixion

One approach to assist students in deepening their own understanding of Christ’s Crucifixion is to provide them with the opportunity to study side by side what each Gospel account says about the Crucifixion. While most appropriate in studying the New Testament, this is a valuable activity when studying any book of scripture that emphasizes Christ’s Crucifixion. By carefully examining the text for both similarities and differences, students can uncover insights they had not previously noticed.³⁶

The teacher could provide (either in writing or verbally) several questions that might help stimulate student thought and discussion. For example:

- What are the final seven statements that the Savior says while on the cross? Which of them are recorded in which Gospel accounts? Why is each of these significant?
- Who is at the cross supporting the Savior? Who is not mentioned as being present?
- Why might John's detail about hyssop be important? (see John 19:29; compare Exodus 12:22). How else does John emphasize that Jesus is the Lamb of God?
- What detail about the temple is included by Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Why might this be significant?
- What scriptures were fulfilled by the Savior's Crucifixion?

In addition to this student-centered approach, teachers naturally could share their own personal insights, as well as those they have learned from studying what others have taught about the Savior's Crucifixion.³⁷

Helping Students Understand the Historical Realities of Crucifixion

The historical realities of crucifixion are important and can help students better understand the Savior's sacrifice. Although we cannot grasp the spiritual suffering Christ went through in atoning for our sins in Gethsemane and on the cross, we may be able to comprehend the physical suffering of crucifixion more than we currently do. Although the physical torment was only a small portion of the immense agony he felt, as we better recognize what Jesus Christ did, our appreciation for him will increase. President James E. Faust stated: "My reason for wanting to learn all I can about the Atonement is partly selfish: Our salvation depends on believing in and accepting the Atonement. Such acceptance requires a continual effort to understand it more fully. . . . Any increase in our understanding of His atoning sacrifice draws us closer to Him."³⁸ Thus, better understanding the physical realities of crucifixion will draw us closer to Christ.

To comprehensively review historical details related to crucifixion is beyond the scope of this article.³⁹ For illustration purposes, I discuss just two aspects of historical crucifixion that can help students better understand Christ's suffering on the cross. Because of the graphic nature of this topic,

teachers should approach it in a manner best suited to individual sensitivities of their students.

First, many students may not be familiar with the process of scourging, which often preceded crucifixion. Describing the crucifixion of Jews in approximately 170 BC, the Jewish historian Josephus wrote, "They were whipped, their bodies were mutilated, and while still alive and breathing, they were crucified."⁴⁰ In the time of Christ this scourging was carried about by Roman soldiers and was a brutal process (see Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1). As one commentator describes:

The lictors (Roman legionnaires assigned to this duty) used a whip made of leather cords to which small pieces of metal or bone had been fastened. Paintings of the scourging of Jesus always show him with a loincloth, but in fact the victim would have been naked, tied to a post in a position to expose the back and buttocks to maximum effect. With the first strokes of the scourge, skin would be pulled away and subcutaneous tissue exposed. As the process continued, the lacerations would begin to tear into the underlying skeletal muscles. This would result not only in great pain but also in appreciable blood loss. The idea was to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death. It was common for taunting and ridicule to accompany the procedure. In the case of Jesus, the New Testament tells us that a crown of thorns, a purple robe, and a mock scepter were added to intensify the mockery.⁴¹

A second aspect of crucifixion that students may not have considered is the torment separate from the pain of being nailed to a cross. For example, crucifixions were done in public places,⁴² and everything about them was intended to shame the victims. The mental degradation of being mocked by multitudes is increased when we recognize that although we do not know for certain that Christ was crucified naked, ancient art and literature indicate that "individuals were often crucified nude."⁴³ Full or partial nudity would also have physical consequences, such as the raw, bloody backside of the victim constantly rubbing on the coarse wood of the cross.⁴⁴ Moreover, "bodily functions uncontrolled, insects feasting on wounds and orifices, unspeakable thirst, [and] muscle cramps"⁴⁵ would add to the excruciating pain.

While these are details that perhaps one does not wish to linger on, helping students understand the physical realities of crucifixion can deepen their appreciation for how much the Savior loves them. We can better understand passages such as, "He loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life" (2 Nephi 26:24), "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13), and "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Conclusion

The Atonement of Jesus Christ encompasses both the events in Gethsemane and the Savior's Crucifixion, among other important elements (as described in the introduction). On at least ten different occasions, Jesus Christ has testified in the first person that these two events occurred, once regarding Gethsemane, and nine times regarding his Crucifixion.⁴⁶ He has said:

- “I, God, have suffered these things for all, . . . 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” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:16, 18).
- “I have come . . . to save the world from sin. . . . For such *I have laid down my life*” (3 Nephi 9:21–22).
- “Come forth . . . that ye may know that I . . . have been *slain for the sins of the world*” (3 Nephi 11:14).
- “My Father sent me that I might be *lifted up upon the cross*” (3 Nephi 27:14).
- “I was *lifted up*” (3 Nephi 28:6).
- “Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also *the prints of the nails in my hands and feet*” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:37).
- “I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was *crucified for the sins of the world*” (Doctrine and Covenants 35:2).
- “I am he who was *lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified*” (Doctrine and Covenants 45:52).
- “I, the Lord . . . was *crucified for the sins of the world*” (Doctrine and Covenants 53:2).
- “*I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father*” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:4).

As stated previously, the purpose of this paper is *not* to minimize the vital nature of Gethsemane—modern prophets have clearly taught of its centrality in the Savior's Atonement. With growing frequency, when Church leaders discuss Gethsemane, they also mention the Savior's Crucifixion. For example, in 2018 President Henry B. Eyring declared, “Jesus Christ bore in Gethsemane and on the cross the weight of all our sins.”⁴⁷ Since 2010 there have been more than forty similar statements made in general conference, linking the importance of Gethsemane and Christ's Crucifixion in our salvation.⁴⁸

When we speak of canonized scriptures that clearly refer to Christ atoning for our sins or suffering our pains, at least two passages describe Gethsemane and fifty-two the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.⁴⁹ Many of our students will benefit from an increased understanding of what the scriptures teach about the Savior's Crucifixion. Understanding this scriptural emphasis may help them build bridges with people of faith traditions that tend to focus on the cross. Learning about the scriptural emphasis on Christ's Crucifixion is an important part of deepening our appreciation for his Atonement and understanding his love for us. **RE**

Notes

1. Robert L. Millet, “This Is My Gospel,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 389–411. While it is not common for Christians outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to speak of Christ suffering for our sins in Gethsemane, occasional references occur. For example, Alfred Edersheim wrote, “Alone [in the Garden of Gethsemane], as in His first conflict with the Evil One in the Temptation in the wilderness, must the Saviour enter on the last contest. With what agony of soul He took upon Him now and there the sins of the world, and in taking expiated them.” Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1907), 2:539, at <https://archive.org/details/lifetimesofjesusmeo2eder/page/539>.
2. Some of those who wrote “Gethsemane and the cross” also included other events, such as the Resurrection. An additional eight students (not counted in these percentages) gave answers such as “on earth,” or “in the premortal life.” Approximately fifty class members chose not to provide an answer to this question. This missing data could potentially affect the overall results. This data was collected by Ryan Sharp in an in-class survey.
3. See previous note. In this case, an additional six students (not counted in these percentages) gave answers such as “on earth,” or “in the premortal life.” Again, about fifty students chose not to provide an answer. The percentages quoted come from a total of 109 students.
4. These data were collected by Anthony Sweat. The survey was administered online; this bonus question was part of a regular three-question reading quiz prior to class. Students were offered one extra-credit point for answering (any answer received the point). While the question Professor Sweat asked clearly had a very narrow frame of Christ's Atonement and did not include other options (such as both Gethsemane and the cross), this was intentional in order to distinguish which aspect was most emphasized by students.
5. Some of this emphasis may come from a natural inclination to focus on what is unique about a particular person or faith. Part of the reason many members emphasize Gethsemane may be that some people have stated that what happened in Gethsemane was more important than what happened on the cross. For example, an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, which does not represent Church doctrine, states: “For Latter-day Saints, Gethsemane was the scene of Jesus' greatest agony, even surpassing that which he suffered on the cross.” S. Kent Brown, “Gethsemane,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York:

Macmillan, 1992), 542. It is true that a few Church leaders between 1945 and 1982 stated that what happened in Gethsemane had more salvific importance than what happened on the cross. However, these same individuals, as well as many other Church leaders, on other occasions emphasized the importance of Christ's Crucifixion. See John Hilton III, "The Use of 'Gethsemane' by Church Leaders: 1859–2018," *BYU Studies Quarterly* (forthcoming).

6. Bible Dictionary, "Atonement."

7. See Hilton, "Use of 'Gethsemane,'" and Robert L. Millet, *What Happened to the Cross? Distinctive LDS Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007).

8. For example, an initial analysis of images published in the *Ensign* between 1971 and 2018 indicates 207 pictures of Gethsemane and 97 of the Crucifixion (unpublished research by John Hilton III and Sarah Cox).

9. See Michael G. Reed, *Banishing the Cross: The Emergence of a Mormon Taboo* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2012).

10. While we sometimes speak of Christ's sacrifice in broad terms, potentially encompassing multiple events, the scriptures make it clear that atoning sacrifices involve death (see Leviticus 16:11, 15; Alma 34:10–15; Moses 5:5–7).

11. For other New Testament passages, see Acts 20:28; Romans 3:25; 5:9; Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:14, 20; Hebrews 9:12–14; 10:19; 13:11–12, 20; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 7:14.

12. For other Book of Mormon passages, see 1 Nephi 12:10–11; Mosiah 3:15–16; 4:2; Alma 5:27; 13:11; 21:9; 24:13; 34:36; Helaman 5:9; Mormon 9:6; Ether 13:10; and Moroni 10:33. Similar passages appear in the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price (e.g., Doctrine and Covenants 27:2; 76:69; Moses 6:59–62).

13. While not definitive, some passages of Restoration scripture suggest that Christ shedding his blood may specifically refer to his death. See Moses 7:45, 47 and Doctrine and Covenants 135:3; 136:36.

14. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Foolishness of Teaching," *Religious Educator* 6, no. 1 (2005): 9–10 (address to religious educators, 18 September 1981). For related commentary, see Jasmin Gimenez, "4 Reasons Why Latter-day Saints should reverence and study the Crucifixion more," <https://bookofmormoncentral.org/blog/4-reasons-why-latter-day-saints-should-reverence-and-study-the-crucifixion-more>.

15. Even when this verse is applied to Jesus Christ, it could be fulfilled in ways other than through Christ's suffering in Gethsemane. For example, the Gospel of Matthew points to Isaiah 53:4 as being fulfilled when Christ physically healed others (see Matthew 8:16). Other passages that, when viewed in light of the New Testament or latter-day revelation, connect with Gethsemane or the Crucifixion (e.g., Psalm 22:1, 16; Isaiah 22:23, etc.) are not directly related with these events without this additional context.

16. This passage has a complicated textual history, with some people arguing that it is not part of the original text of Luke. For an in-depth discussion of these verses, see Lincoln H. Blumell, "Luke 22:43–44: An Anti-Docetic Interpolation or an Apologetic Omission?," *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 19 (2014): 1–35. The Joseph Smith Translation changes this phrase to be, "he sweat as it were great drops of blood," shifting the emphasis to be on the blood. See Robert J. Matthews, *A Plainer Translation: Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 1975), 373.

17. John uses the word *garden* to describe Christ's location. The phrase *Garden of Gethsemane* never appears in scripture but rather combines *Gethsemane* (Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32) and *garden* (John 18:1).

18. Some might argue that passages such as Acts 20:28 or Hebrews 5:7 describe the events of Gethsemane; however, these verses only ambiguously describe Christ's suffering. The Joseph Smith Translation for Hebrews 5:7–8 indicates that they allude to Melchizedek, not Christ. See Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 383–84.

19. I have added emphasis in scriptures throughout this paper. Unless noted, the emphasis is mine, not part of the original. Many additional verses speak of Christ and his Atonement or our gaining salvation through Christ without directly mentioning his death (e.g., Acts 15:11). This list focuses solely on his death and redemption for sin. Other verses could be included but were not fully explicit about Christ dying for our sins (e.g., John 11:51; 18:14; Romans 8:34; 14:9, 15; 1 Corinthians 8:11; Hebrews 2:9).

20. The New Revised Standard Version translates this verse as follows: "Erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross."

21. The word *crucify* and its variants occur fifteen times in Acts–Revelation; the word *cross* (relating to Christ's Crucifixion) appears eleven times in these same books.

22. Interestingly, neither Mosiah 3:7 nor Doctrine and Covenants 19:18 (a clear cross-reference) makes it explicit that Christ bled from every pore in Gethsemane. However, these verses appear to be connected with Luke 22:44, which describes Christ bleeding in Gethsemane.

23. Another passage that could be associated with Gethsemane is 3 Nephi 11:11, in which Christ states, "I have drank out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning." This passage appears to connect with Matthew 26:42 and Doctrine and Covenants 19:19; however, it is possible that Christ alludes in this passage to the Crucifixion (see Mosiah 15:7).

24. Note that Alma 7:11 says, "He shall *go forth*, suffering pains and afflictions." The phrase "go forth" perhaps suggests not a one-time event but a continuing suffering throughout the experiences of life; compare Matthew 8:16–17.

25. Death and sufferings are also used together with Jesus Christ (but not in explicit connection with redemption) in Alma 16:19; 3 Nephi 6:20; and Moroni 9:25.

26. This same logic suggests that verses such as Alma 7:13 ("the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people") could refer to either Christ's death or Gethsemane, and as such are not included in the present study.

27. See 1 Nephi 11:33; 19:10, 13; 2 Nephi 6:9; 10:3, 5; 25:13; and Jacob 1:8.

28. See 3 Nephi 11:14; 27:14 (3x); 28:6.

29. See Mosiah 3:9 (King Benjamin) 15:7 (Abinadi) Helaman 8:14 (Nephi, the son of Helaman) and Ether 4:1 (Moroni).

30. Isaiah 53:12 is similar but is not counted in this study, as it is the information specifically provided by Abinadi that makes it clear that this verse is a reference to Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 13:33–35).

31. Interestingly, Elder Mark E. Petersen used Doctrine and Covenants 19:18 specifically to discuss "blood shed on the cross." Petersen, "O America, America," *Ensign*, November 1979. Similarly, Elder John Taylor (then of the Quorum of the Twelve) associated Christ's sweating blood with his Crucifixion, stating, "Jesus himself sweat great drops of blood, and in the agony of his suffering cried out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:259 (2 March 1879).

32. A separate verse from the Doctrine and Covenants not included in this analysis is Doctrine and Covenants 138:7, which is a quotation of 1 Peter 3:18.

33. David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” *Religious Educator* 7, no. 3 (2006): 8 (Church Educational System broadcast, 3 February 2006).

34. Handouts are available at www.johnhiltoniii.com/crucifixion.

35. It could be effective to have students split into groups of three and have one person study the New Testament, another the Book of Mormon, and another the Doctrine and Covenants and then compare what they learn.

36. A handout of these passages arranged side by side is found at www.johnhiltoniii.com/crucifixion.

37. For a thorough examination of the final twenty-four hours of the Savior’s life, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah, from Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994–98). A shorter, but still valuable treatment of Christ’s suffering on the cross is provided by Andrew Skinner, *Golgotha* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004).

38. James E. Faust, “The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope,” *Ensign*, November 2001.

39. For a comprehensive study of crucifixion, see John Granger Cook, *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Significantly shorter (and much more accessible) overviews are provided by Gaye Strathearn, “The Crucifixion,” in *New Testament History, Culture, and Society: A Background to the Texts of the New Testament*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2019), 353–71; Gaye Strathearn, “Christ’s Crucifixion: Reclamation of the Cross,” in *With Healing in His Wings*, ed. Camille Fronk Olson and Thomas A. Wayment (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 55–79; Eric D. Huntsman, “Preaching Jesus, and Him Crucified,” in *His Majesty and Mission*, ed. Nicholas J. Frederick and Keith J. Wilson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 55–76; and Kent P. Jackson, “The Crucifixion,” in *From the Last Supper to the Resurrection*, vol. 3, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, ed. Richard N. Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 318–37. Numerous other resources are available, such as short articles on specific topics. For example, see Ben Witherington III, “Biblical Views: Images of Crucifixion: Fresh Evidence,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 39, no. 2 (March/April 2013): 28, 66–67.

40. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 12.255–56.

41. Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 94.

42. Quintilian, *Declamations* 274.13; English translation in D. R. Shackleton Bailey, ed. and trans., *Quintilian: The Lesser Declamations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1:259.

43. Cook, *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World*, 427.

44. See Jackson, “Crucifixion,” 321.

45. Rutledge, *Crucifixion*, 94.

46. In addition to these canonized references, Joseph Smith recorded the words of Jesus Christ in his 1832 account of the First Vision, writing, “The Lord opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord. And he spake unto me, saying, ‘Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee. Go thy way, walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments. Behold, I am the Lord of glory. *I was crucified for the world, that all those who believe on my name may have eternal life.*” Joseph Smith, History, circa Summer 1832, p. [1], emphasis added, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/articles/primary-accounts-of-first-vision>.

47. Henry B. Eyring, “Try, Try, Try,” *Ensign*, November 2018, 90.

48. There is a notable increase in this type of statement in the 2010s. For an extended analysis of how Church leaders have discussed Gethsemane, see Hilton, “Use of ‘Gethsemane.’”

49. As stated previously in this paper, the exact number could change depending on how one counts verses that refer to the “sufferings” or “blood” of Christ (e.g., Mosiah 3:18; Alma 21:9). Based on the methodology discussed in this paper, Mosiah 3:7 and Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19 were counted as passages regarding Gethsemane and Christ’s Atonement. Passages counted as references to Christ suffering of our sins in his Crucifixion included the following: John 3:14–15; 12:32; Romans 5:6, 8, 10; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20, 21–22; 2:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Hebrews 9:15, 26; 10:10, 12; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; Revelation 5:8–9; 1 Nephi 11:33; 2 Nephi 2:7–8; 9:5; 26:24; Mosiah 14:12, 15:7–9, 12; 18:2; Alma 21:9; 22:14; 30:26; 33:22; 34:15; Helaman 14:15–16; 3 Nephi 9:21–22; 11:14; 27:14; Ether 12:33; Doctrine and Covenants 18:11; 20:23–25; 21:9; 35:2; 46:13; 53:2; 54:1; 76:41; 138:2, 35, 57; and Moses 7:47, 55.