

John 19:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

Analysis

Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. The ὄξος (oxos, vinegar/sour wine) was posca—cheap wine or wine vinegar that Roman soldiers drank. A sponge soaked in this liquid was lifted on ὑσσώπου (hyssōpou, hyssop) to Jesus's lips.

The mention of hyssop carries profound typological significance. Hyssop was used to apply the Passover lamb's blood to doorposts in Egypt (Exodus 12:22), sparing Israelites from the death angel. Here, as the true Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), Jesus receives vinegar on hyssop at the moment of His sacrificial death. The same plant that applied the old covenant's protective blood now appears at the offering of the new covenant's redemptive blood.

Hyssop was also used in purification rituals (Leviticus 14:4, Numbers 19:6, 18). Psalm 51:7 prays, 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.' The hyssop at the cross connects Jesus's death to cleansing from sin—He who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This act of minimal mercy—offering drink to a dying man—fulfills Psalm 69:21. Yet it also extends Jesus's suffering slightly, allowing Him to speak His final words. God's providence orchestrates even this small detail for redemptive purposes.

Historical Context

Roman soldiers at crucifixion sites carried posca (acetum)—a mixture of sour wine, water, and herbs that served as a cheap beverage and mild antiseptic. Offering it to victims was a minor mercy, not kindness but practical measure to extend interrogation or simply common humanity.

The hyssop plant (possibly marjoram, which is sturdier) had branches firm enough to hold a wet sponge but also rich covenantal symbolism in Jewish thought. John, writing for an audience familiar with the Old Testament, deliberately highlights this detail to connect Jesus's death to Israel's redemptive history.

Earlier, Jesus had been offered wine mixed with myrrh (Mark 15:23), a narcotic to dull pain, which He refused. But this plain sour wine He receives, remaining fully conscious through His sacrifice. This was no accident but deliberate choice—He would bear sin's full weight without anesthetic.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the hyssop's connection to Passover lamb's blood and purification rituals illuminate Jesus's crucifixion?
2. What does Jesus's refusal of the drugged wine but acceptance of plain vinegar reveal about His commitment to fully experience the cross?
3. In what ways does God's providence orchestrate even small details (like a sponge on hyssop) to fulfill His redemptive purposes?

Interlinear Text

σκεῦος οὖν ἤκειτο ὅξους μεστόν· οἱ δὲ, πλήσαντες
a vessel Now there was set of vinegar full G3588 and they filled
G4632 G3767 G2749 G3690 G3324 G1161 G4130

σπόγγον ὅξους καὶ ὑσσώπῳ περιθέντες προσήνεγκαν
a sponge of vinegar and hyssop put it upon and put
G4699 G3690 G2532 G5301 G4060 G4374

αὐτοῦ τῷ στόματι
it to his mouth
G846 G4750

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 19:18 (Parallel theme): And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave:

Luke 23:36 (Parallel theme): And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar,

Mark 15:36 (Parallel theme): And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.

Exodus 12:22 (Parallel theme): And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.

Matthew 27:48 (Parallel theme): And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

Psalms 51:7 (Parallel theme): Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Matthew 27:34 (Parallel theme): They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

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