

The Mandrake Connection

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INTRODUCTION:

There are many interpretations of the life and death of Jesus, most of which are based on fantasy or fiction masquerading as miracle. *The Mandrake Connection*, however, is a product of my skepticism of miracles. This critical interpretation of the crucifixion story is based on the gospel texts, pharmacognosy, medicine, ancient history, old-world geography, and Judean sociology. Virtually every statement is referenced with footnotes to biblical texts, scientific studies, or historical writings.

The Mandrake Connection hypothesizes that Jesus was drugged to appear dead on the cross, and that his compatriot, Lazarus, tested the potion first to be sure it would work. Close examination of the known gospels and other historical writings strongly supports this hypothesis.

I have chosen to present this research as a story, followed by a discussion of the pharmacological and historical facts known today. Much of this work uses the Christian gospels to reconstruct the time-line of Jesus' life - where he went, what happened when, and who he knew. This approach was used to great effect by Rabbi Hugh Shonfield in his writings including *The Passover Plot*, which suggested the possibility that Jesus was drugged.¹ If this was a possibility, I wanted to find out how it could have been accomplished. My extensive research led to *The Mandrake Connection*. Here emphasis is placed on Jesus' strong belief that he was the Messiah² as guided by Old Testament scripture, and the way he directed those who helped him with the task to fulfill that scripture. The discussion section contains recent medical findings and references to the new-found gospels. Readers are especially encouraged to follow the story in their personal Bibles as they read.³

But be forewarned - your views on the story of Jesus may never be the same.

JSC, MD. November 2011

¹ Schonfield, H. 1965. *The Passover Plot*. Shaftsbury, Dorset: Element Books. ISBN 1-85230-836-2.

² Mt 1:21, Mk 8:29, Lk 9:20, Jn 11:27: "Christ" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew title "Messiah" (See Jn 1:41).

³ Gospel names are abbreviated as follows: Mt = Matthew, Mk = Mark, Lk = Luke, Jn = John. All gospel quotes are from the *Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, 2nd edition*. 1972. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

THE SETTING: Roman-occupied Israel⁴ in the last year of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.⁵

THE STORY:

It was fall in Israel⁶ and Jesus had encountered a setback.⁷ After many months of healing and teaching the multitudes, he had returned to the Nazareth of his childhood⁸ and, although he did have some devoted followers,⁹ the main population of Nazarenes had rejected his ministry.¹⁰ Indeed, he had not been able to perform many miracles there,¹¹ and the setback made him realize that the people of Galilee were not going to embrace him as the living Messiah.¹² Yet it was too late to turn back. His deep belief was unshakable - he was the Messiah as told by the oracle of the Old Testament.¹³ He must go forward, though the oracle prophesied what lay ahead - betrayal, rebuke, judgment by his enemies, torture, and an ignominious death.¹⁴ He also knew that he had to miraculously survive these ordeals and appear to the multitudes again to fulfill the scripture.¹⁵ Only then would the Israelites follow the teachings that he fully believed - that the people should follow God's law and treat rich and poor alike with love and respect, thus bringing salvation to Zion.¹⁶ To be the Messiah and bring about this social revolution was a most awesome challenge, and his spirit was up to the task.¹⁷

But how could he accomplish this? It would take much knowledge of religious customs, laws, and human nature. And help - human as well as divine - would be required.¹⁸ Jesus took the original twelve disciples aside and told them what was to come: that he was to be captured, tried, and put to death.¹⁹ Most of the disciples flatly rejected the whole idea, as they had already assumed they would be part of the leadership of the upcoming Kingdom of God on Earth.²⁰ How could they form the administration of the new order if the leader was to be crucified? From their replies, Jesus realized that he could not confide in all twelve disciples if secrecy was needed in the upcoming events.²¹

⁴ Rome had occupied Israel for about 93 years by the time of Jesus' ministry.

⁵ The ministry of Jesus as told in the Bible is at maximum 15 to 16 months in duration.

⁶ Jn 7:2: The Feast of the Tabernacles occurs between late September and late October.

⁷ Mt 13:57-58, Mt 15:8, Mk 6:3-6, Lk 4:23-24, Jn 6:66-67, Jn 7:5

⁸ Mt 13:54, Mk 6:1, Lk 4:16

⁹ Jn 6:66-68

¹⁰ Mt 13:57, Mk 6:3-4, Lk 4:29

¹¹ Mt 13:58, Mk 6:5.

¹² Mt 15:8, Mk 6:6 (first sentence), Lk 4:28-29, Jn 5:18

¹³ Mt 11: 27, Lk 4:18-21, Lk 4:43, Jn 4: 25-26, Jn 8: 23-29, Jn 9:39

¹⁴ Mt 12: 38-40, Mk 9:12-13, Mk 9:31, Lk 9:22, Jn 2:19-21

¹⁵ Mt 26:31-32, Mk 9:31, Mk 10:33-34, Mk 14:27-28, Lk 9:22

¹⁶ Isa 11:1-5, Mt 1:6, Lk 3:32, Lk 6: 20-38

¹⁷ Mk 9:9-13, Lk 22:15-18, Jn 8: 23-29

¹⁸ Jesus had many other helpers and friends in the area of Jerusalem. For examples See Mt 26: 18-19, Mk 11:1-6, Mk 14: 13-16, Lk 19: 29-38, Lk 22: 8-13, Lk 23: 49, Jn 12:1-3.

¹⁹ Mt 16:21, Mt 17: 22-23, Mk 9:31-32

²⁰ Mt 16: 22-23, Mt 17:23 (second sentence), Lk 9:45-46

²¹ Mt 16: 22-23, Mk 9:32; Lk 18:34, Jn 16:16-19 indicates that some of the disciples were not informed of the plot.

He would need outside help.²² Help from people who would not be under surveillance and who could keep a secret.²³

So Jesus left Galilee and traveled in private to Judea,²⁴ following after a larger party that had gone ahead for the October Feast of the Tabernacles.²⁵ He sent messengers ahead to prepare for his arrival in Jerusalem.²⁶ When Jesus later arrived, he stayed with the brother and two sisters named Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, who welcomed him into their house in Bethany,²⁷ just two miles' walking distance from the temple in Jerusalem.²⁸

In the following months, Jesus would plan the final scenes of the upcoming drama,²⁹ confide in Lazarus and other confidants,³⁰ and direct each secretly to do his or her part.³¹ He knew that if he were declared the Messiah and crucified for this treason against Rome,³² he would need a lot of help to survive the ordeal.³³ Then, and only then, would the populace accept him as the Messiah.

Jesus was very familiar with the scripture,³⁴ and had read that trickery and even outright lying had been important to the Israelites back in the times of Genesis.³⁵ A powerful trick would be required for this upcoming task.³⁶ Jesus apparently knew of a potion made from herbs indigenous to the area that was probably known to only a few healers at that time.³⁷ This potion would induce a deep state of anesthesia and apparent death quickly when administered by mouth.³⁸ It could be made very strong so that only a sip

²² Lk 8:2-3, Lk 9:51-52, Lk 10: 1

²³ Lk 11:53-54, Lk 13:31, Lk 20:20, Jn 7: 1, Jn 7:13

²⁴ Mt 19:1, Mk 10:1, Jn 7:10

²⁵ Jn 7:2

²⁶ Lk 9:51-52

²⁷ Lk 10: 38-39, Jn 11:1-2

²⁸ Mt 21:17, Mt 26:6, Mk 11:1, Mk 11:11-12, Jn 8:1, Jn 11:18 (Bethany is on the SE slope of the Mount of Olives)

²⁹ Mt 20:18-19, Mk 10:33-34, Lk 18:31-33

³⁰ Possible confidants of Jesus include Lazarus, Joseph of Arimethea, Nicodemus, the Beloved Disciple, Mary Magdalene, and the "bystander" at the crucifixion.

³¹ Jesus was very good at getting people to do unusual tasks for him. Evidence can be read in the Gospel of Judas as reflected in Jn 13:27-28. Also see Mt 21:2-3, Mk 11:2-3, Lk 5:4-5, Lk 19:30-32.

³² To announce that one was King of the Jews (i.e. Messiah) was considered High Treason by the Romans, for which crucifixion was the punishment (ref 1, ch 7).

³³ As predicted in Psalms 49:14-15 and Hosea 6:1-2.

³⁴ Jesus could read scripture and was very familiar with it. See Mt 27:46 (direct quote of Psalms 22:1), Mt 12: 3-5, Mt 12:39-41, Mk 7:6-8 (quote of Isa 29:13), Lk 4:16-20 (quote of Isa 61:1-2), Lk 6:3-4 (refers to 1 Sam 21:4-6), Jn 7:38, Jn 8: 39-40.

³⁵ Genesis 12:10-16, also 19:32-36, also 26:7, also 27:1-23, also 29:21-25, also 30:37-43, also 34:22-25, also 37:29-36.

³⁶ The task is outlined by Jesus in Lk 18:31-33.

³⁷ Ketchum, JS. 2006. *Chemical Warfare Secrets Almost Forgotten*. Santa Rosa, CA: Chembooks, Inc. ISBN 978-1-4243-0080-8. Although Mandrake had been used to incapacitate enemy troops in 200 BCE and 50 BCE, only the more esoteric healers and seekers probably knew the effect of combinations of psychoactive plant extracts.

³⁸ These properties would be essential to make Jesus appear dead during the crucifixion.

would be needed for effect, and it was potent in a vinegar solution.³⁹ The biblical prophesy that the Messiah would be mocked and given vinegar to drink during his travails could provide a perfect method for administration of the drug.⁴⁰ Jesus worked out plans on how it might be given to him at the critical time.⁴¹ There was only one problem: the dose of the potion needed to create the near-death state was critical. Too little and it wouldn't work, too much and the drug itself could be fatal.⁴² In those days there was no standardization of medications, no milligram scales, no Food and Drug Administration.⁴³ Herbal potions are known to vary widely from batch to batch,⁴⁴ and there would probably be only one opportunity to act, with no second dose possible.⁴⁵ Thus it was imperative to have someone test the potion to be sure it was right.⁴⁶ That task fell to Lazarus. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on how you look at it,⁴⁷ Mary and Martha were apparently not informed of this plan.⁴⁸

Now during these months, Jesus was walking to the Temple in Jerusalem during the day and teaching ideas that were very radical for that age.⁴⁹ The Jewish leaders and the Pharisees were incensed and tried to get him to say unlawful things so they could arrest him on the spot, but Jesus' skillful oratory combined with the body blocks of his followers thwarted their attacks at every turn.⁵⁰ His goal was twofold - to teach those who wished to hear his ideas, and to purposefully set the stage for his eventual arrest and rapid trial by stirring up the hornets' nest of his enemies.⁵¹ For Jesus knew his cause was lost if he was to be merely imprisoned. He would be forgotten and his chance of being the Messiah would be lost forever.⁵² He had to get the Jewish Council and priests angry enough that they would insist on putting him to death.⁵³ So he attacked the status quo by

³⁹ The incapacitating dose of atropine (the main active agent in Mandrake) is only 10 milligrams (JS Ketchum, p.11) and is soluble in dilute acids such as vinegar (*see* entry for atropine in: O'Neil, MJ, Editor. 2001. *The Merck Index 13th Edition*. Whitehouse Station, NJ: Merck & Co. ISBN 0911910-13-1

⁴⁰ Psalms 69:21.

⁴¹ A hint of this planning appears in Jn 18:11.

⁴² Mouth dryness is caused by 2 mg of atropine, incapacitation by 10-20 mg, and death at 100 mg (see JS Ketchum).

⁴³ Crystallization of alkaloids and standardization of medicines would not begin for another 1500 years after Jesus' life.

⁴⁴ Fleming, T, Editor. 2000. *PDR for Herbal Medicines, 2nd Edition*. Montvale, NJ: Medical Economics Company. ISBN 1-56363-361-2. Forward p.v, section on dosage.

⁴⁵ Jesus would be in full sight of the public and under Roman guard during the crucifixion.

⁴⁶ Blunt, W & Raphael, S. 1979. *The Illustrated Herbal*. New York: Thames and Hudson. ISBN 0-500-01226-1, p.12.

⁴⁷ If Martha and Mary had known that Lazarus was in a drug coma, they probably would have cared for him until the drug wore off instead of declaring him dead and summoning Jesus to resurrect him, in which case Jesus would not be credited for perhaps his best-documented miracle.

⁴⁸ This indicates that Jesus was very secret and selective in what he asked his friends to do. *See also* the newly discovered *Gospel of Judas* for another example.

⁴⁹ Mt 21:23-27, Mt 22:15-22, Mk 11:27-33, Lk 19:45-48, Jn 10:22-38

⁵⁰ Mt 21:45-46, Mk 12:12, Lk 20:19-26, Jn 10:31-39

⁵¹ Mt 21:12-16, Mk 11:15-18, Lk 11:53, Jn 8:48-59

⁵² From the oracle of the Torah (Old Testament), Jesus knew he must suffer death (not imprisonment), see Psalm 18:4-5.

⁵³ Preferably death by crucifixion. There could be no survival of death by beheading.

day, when the surrounding multitudes of followers could buffer him from arrest,⁵⁴ and then retreated to hide in safety in Bethany by night,⁵⁵ where he and his confidants could plan for the happenings to take place during Passover, which was several months away.⁵⁶

These daytime skirmishes became more intense as time went on. After several narrow escapes,⁵⁷ Jesus decided to leave the area for the sake of safety, so he traveled East across the Jordan River to where John had baptized.⁵⁸ There in the river wilderness he continued his teaching to the multitudes that flocked after him.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, back in Bethany, Lazarus decided that the time was right to test the potion.⁶⁰

What happened next is related in the Book of John, chapter eleven.⁶¹ Mary and Martha apparently found their brother quite ill, and immediately sent for Jesus to come and help.⁶² But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it."⁶³ He was, in fact, explaining exactly what was happening.⁶⁴ After this, Jesus waited two more days to see what would transpire.⁶⁵ It must have seemed a long two days. When he heard nothing further, he became concerned and decided to return to Bethany.⁶⁶ His followers reminded him of the danger awaiting him back in Judea,⁶⁷ but he calmed them and said, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to wake him out of sleep."⁶⁸ Again, his followers did not understand.⁶⁹ Frustrated, Jesus decided to use their ignorance to advance his cause, saying: "Lazarus is dead. And for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."⁷⁰ Jesus realized that he could turn the situation into a sign for these doubting disciples. If Jesus had been with Lazarus at the time he took the potion, he would probably have "spotted" for him, watching over the body during the profound anesthetic out-of-body experience,⁷¹ preventing Lazarus from being declared dead and placed in the tomb, and thus not be credited for perhaps the greatest of his known miracles.⁷²

⁵⁴ Mt 21:46, Mk 12:12, Lk 19:47-48, Lk 20:19, Lk 22:2

⁵⁵ Mt 21:17, Mk 11:11, Lk 21:37

⁵⁶ Jn 10:22-23 states it was winter when Jesus was teaching at the Temple in Jerusalem, so he had three or four months to plan for the events of Passover.

⁵⁷ Jn 10:31, Jn 10:39

⁵⁸ Jn 10:40

⁵⁹ Jn 10:41-42

⁶⁰ Jn 11:1

⁶¹ Jn 11:1-44

⁶² Jn 11:3

⁶³ Jn 11:4

⁶⁴ Jesus is referring to the upcoming survival of the crucifixion.

⁶⁵ Jn 11:6

⁶⁶ Jn 11:7

⁶⁷ Jn 11:8

⁶⁸ Jn 11:11

⁶⁹ Jn 11:12

⁷⁰ Jn 11:14-15

⁷¹ The concept of a "Road Man" or "Spotter", a sober individual to care for others undergoing trance states, is well known in both Eastern and Western history. The "designated driver" is a modern equivalent.

⁷² Jn 12:9-11, Jn 12:17-18

So Jesus returned to Bethany.⁷³ By the time he got there, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days.⁷⁴ He probably had recovered within 24 hours after taking a large dose of the potion,⁷⁵ but was unable to get out of the tomb and had been patiently awaiting rescue. According to the authors of John, Jesus became quite eloquent, telling Martha, who seemed genuinely troubled:⁷⁶ “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”...⁷⁷ “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”⁷⁸ With this, he convinced them to roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb.⁷⁹ And Lazarus came out alive but probably quite dehydrated and famished,⁸⁰ “his hands and feet bound in bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth.”⁸¹ The stage was now set for the Son of Man to be given up to his enemies - the potion had been tested and verified. It was only necessary to wait for the Passover for the final act.⁸²

Jesus was still in danger, however,⁸³ so he went north to Ephraim, a town near the wilderness, to wait for the Passover.⁸⁴ Six days before the Passover he returned to Bethany,⁸⁵ and stayed again with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary⁸⁶ while word was spread by his followers to prepare for Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem the next day,⁸⁷ the first Palm Sunday.⁸⁸ The simple but impressive ride into the holy city⁸⁹ that day again stirred his hornets’ nest of enemies,⁹⁰ who now also targeted Lazarus for death.⁹¹ With Lazarus under surveillance,⁹² Jesus’ other confidants had to take over the preparations.⁹³ Just who these helpers were is under much debate, but it is quite possible that one was Nicodemus, a Jewish priest who had access to the goings-on in the upper echelon of Jewish leaders.⁹⁴ With this help and inside information, Jesus was able to pick the right time for his arrest,

⁷³ Jn 11:17-18

⁷⁴ Jn 11:17

⁷⁵ See Ketchum, p.315 for the duration of atropine poisoning. Mixtures of several drugs might last longer.

⁷⁶ Jn 11:20-24

⁷⁷ Jn 11:25-26

⁷⁸ Jn 11:40

⁷⁹ Jn 11:39, Jn 11:41

⁸⁰ Lazarus had nothing to eat or drink for four days.

⁸¹ Jn 11:44

⁸² To have the best chance at surviving crucifixion, Jesus knew that Jewish customs would insist that he be taken down from the cross before sunset at the beginning of the Passover. *See* Jn 19:31

⁸³ Jn 11:49-53

⁸⁴ Jn 11:54, Ephraim is about 20 Km north of Jerusalem

⁸⁵ Jn 12:1

⁸⁶ Jn 12:2-3

⁸⁷ Jn 12:12

⁸⁸ Mt 21:8-9, Mk 11:8-10, Jn 12:13

⁸⁹ Jn 12:14-15 (see also Zec 9:9),

⁹⁰ Lk 20:26, Jn 12:19.

⁹¹ Jn 12:10

⁹² This is an assumption considering Lazarus was marked for death, as was Jesus (see Jn 12:10 and Lk 20:19-20).

⁹³ In Mt 27: 47-49, one helper appears as the “bystander” that offered the sponge to Jesus over the protests of the others.

⁹⁴ In Jn 11:53-54, how did Jesus know the Council wanted to put him to death? Certainly the council of the chief priests would have kept a planned assassination secret. Jn 7:45-51 states that Nicodemus was a member of the priests.

trial, and crucifixion.⁹⁵ As mentioned before, timing was of the essence. Jesus' cause was lost if he languished in prison.⁹⁶ If he was to be crucified, he planned to use the potion tested by Lazarus. Given at the right time, it would make him appear dead so other helpers could take his body down before actual death occurred.⁹⁷ Then he would appear alive later as foretold by Hosea.⁹⁸ Jesus decided that the crucifixion must take place the day before Passover, preferably around noon. By Jewish law, Passover begins at sundown, and the holy day could not be desecrated by having a crucifixion in progress.⁹⁹ With this in mind, Jesus planned for his arrest to be the night before Passover. His sense of timing can be felt as he encourages Judas - "What you are going to do, do quickly."¹⁰⁰

Judas indeed worked quickly, and before early dawn¹⁰¹ Jesus was in the hands of the Jewish leaders.¹⁰² They interrogated him and turned him over to the Romans.¹⁰³ Without Roman agreement, no one could be put to death in occupied Judea.¹⁰⁴ The Romans almost blew the whole thing, refusing to find fault in Jesus,¹⁰⁵ but a crowd packed with anti-Jesus protesters (and possibly pro-Jesus sympathizers¹⁰⁶) called for the release of Barabbas.¹⁰⁷ So Jesus was flogged by the Romans and eventually handed over to the Jewish authority for crucifixion¹⁰⁸ at noon, the sixth hour of the day.¹⁰⁹ Just in time.

Jesus was then taken to the hill called Golgotha, "the place of the skull," for crucifixion.¹¹⁰ Apparently, these gruesome affairs were public shows in those days,¹¹¹ with people and soldiers milling about, drinking, gambling, and mocking or grieving for the unfortunate people being executed.¹¹² Women as well as men were present at Jesus' crucifixion.¹¹³ The twelve "official" disciples were probably *not* present to avoid being recognized and arrested as collaborators.¹¹⁴ Mingling with the crowd, however, were

⁹⁵ Mt 26:2 and Jn 12:32 suggest that Jesus was planning to be crucified.

⁹⁶ Like John the Baptist (Mk 6:17)

⁹⁷ Death by upright crucifixion usually takes 3 – 4 days (ref 1: Ch 12).

⁹⁸ Hosea 6:1-2

⁹⁹ Jn 19:31

¹⁰⁰ Jn 13:27

¹⁰¹ Jn 18:3: Torches and lanterns indicate that it was dark. Early dawn at Passover in Jerusalem would be about 6AM local time.

¹⁰² Mt 26:57, Mk 14:53, Lk 22:54, Jn 18:13

¹⁰³ Mt 27:2, Mk 15:1, Lk 23:1, Jn 18:28-29

¹⁰⁴ Jn 18:31

¹⁰⁵ Mt 27:18-19, Mk 15:10, Lk 23:4, Lk 23:13-16, Jn 19:12

¹⁰⁶ It was in the interest of both the Priests' Council and Jesus to proceed quickly with the crucifixion.

¹⁰⁷ Mt 27:20-21, Mk 15:11, Lk 23:18-23

¹⁰⁸ Mt 27:26, Mk 15:15

¹⁰⁹ Jn 19:14 - The Judean day began at 6 AM, so their sixth hour is noon. Mk 15:25 states that Jesus was crucified in the third hour (9 AM), but this is doubtful because Jesus was first interrogated by the Council of Priests, then Pilate, then Herod, then Pilate again before being scourged and then released back to the Priests' Council for crucifixion.

¹¹⁰ Mt 27:33, Mk 15:22, Lk 23:33, Jn 19:17-18

¹¹¹ Mt 27:39, Mk 15:29, Jn 19:20

¹¹² Mt 27:34-36, Mt 27:39-43, Mk 15:23-24, Lk 23:34-37, Jn 19:23-24

¹¹³ Mt 27:55-56, Mk 15:40-41, Lk 23:49, Jn 19:25

¹¹⁴ There is no mention of any of the twelve disciples being present at the crucifixion. Judas Iscariot was definitely not there.

anonymous followers of Jesus, including an unnamed disciple concealing the rescue potion under his robe and waiting for the right moment to act.¹¹⁵

He may have tried to act right away. According to the gospels of Mark and Matthew, Jesus was offered wine mixed with Gall or Myrrh¹¹⁶ before he was actually crucified, but he turned it down¹¹⁷ or took only very little at that time.¹¹⁸ Perhaps he realized that the timing was too soon, that he had to suffer and appear to die later in the day.¹¹⁹ It must have been hard to say no. So the executioners hung him on the cross for at least three hours,¹²⁰ during which time Jesus was conscious enough to talk to his mother and Mary Magdalene.¹²¹ The chief priests, accompanied by some scribes, came by to observe that all was going as they had planned, mocking the false king who would think of deposing them.¹²² And during these hours, a multitude of women and acquaintances of Jesus watched from all around, crying and lamenting for their suffering hero.¹²³

The sun was getting low in the sky, and the soldiers would soon break the legs of those crucifixees unfortunate enough to be still alive.¹²⁴ This was to be done to hasten death before sunset¹²⁵ - which was the start of the upcoming Holy Day.¹²⁶ Suddenly, Jesus called out in a loud voice. Just what he said is under gospel dispute,¹²⁷ but the meaning to his waiting friends was clear. It was the signal for the potion to be administered. At this signal, the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and John agree that vinegar was put on a sponge, which was then held to Jesus' mouth despite the protestations of other witnesses.¹²⁸ There is no mention of the sponge being offered to the other two men being crucified.¹²⁹ Where this drink came from, and why it was up there on Golgotha during those grisly executions, we are not told. We are also not told what was in the vinegar, but these three gospels go on to say that Jesus quickly bowed his head and gave up the spirit after being given the vinegar.¹³⁰ The sudden onset of the powerful, easily absorbed, and highly concentrated anesthetic potion produced a convincing death that all the witnesses could appreciate, especially when the Roman soldier's spear failed to provoke a reaction

¹¹⁵ Mt 27:48, Mk 15:36

¹¹⁶ Both Gall (Colocynth - bitter apple or vine of Sodom, a purgative) and Myrrh are bitter tasting and could thus disguise other ingredients and deter anyone else from taking a drink of the potion.

¹¹⁷ Mk 15:23

¹¹⁸ Mt 27:34

¹¹⁹ Perhaps this potion contained only opium extract to help Jesus withstand the rigors of the crucifixion.

¹²⁰ Mark says the crucifixion lasted from the third to the ninth hour (6 hrs time), but John states it started about the sixth hour (noon) and was over before sunset (the start of Passover).

¹²¹ Jn 19:26-27

¹²² Mt 27:41-43, Mk 15:31-32, Lk 23:35

¹²³ Mt 27:55-56, Mk 15:40-41, Lk 23:49, Jn 19:25

¹²⁴ Survival of crucifixion is documented in Josephus' autobiography, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, section 75.

¹²⁵ Sunset in Jerusalem at Passover is about 7 PM local time; "evening" would start about 5 PM.

¹²⁶ Jn 19:31-32.

¹²⁷ Mt 27:46 & Mk 15:34 - "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"; Lk 23:46 - "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit"; Jn 19:28 - "I thirst."

¹²⁸ Mt 27:48-49, Mk 15:36, Jn 19:29

¹²⁹ The other two men had their legs broken to hasten their deaths after the potion was given to Jesus. He was spared because he already appeared dead. See Jn 19:28-33.

¹³⁰ Mt 27:50, Mk 15:37, Jn 19:30

from Jesus.¹³¹ Unresponsive, with flaccid muscles and dilated and fixed pupils,¹³² he was obviously dead, thus his legs did not need to be broken, again fulfilling the prophecies.¹³³

At this point another secret disciple of Jesus enters the picture - Joseph of Arimathea.¹³⁴ Joseph, the gospels tell us, was well off, and a respected member of the Judean council,¹³⁵ yet he was definitely on Jesus' side,¹³⁶ and was probably an active member of the plan to help the Messiah. Because of his connections and influence, he was allowed to take the body of Jesus to a new tomb he had made near Golgotha.¹³⁷ Thus, now under care of friends,¹³⁸ Jesus was taken down from the cross, wrapped in linen cloths, and carefully placed in the tomb.¹³⁹ Then a large stone was placed in front of the entrance.¹⁴⁰ It was not until the next morning that Judean soldiers were assigned to guard the tomb against tampering.¹⁴¹ Inside that cold, hand-hewn cave, Jesus lay quiet, his breathing slow and scant,¹⁴² his pulse rapid but thready,¹⁴³ his body temperature low.¹⁴⁴ Only his mind was active as it experienced the intensity of a profound out-of-body experience brought on by the potion. The coma would last about six hours or more before he slowly awakened.¹⁴⁵

No one knows for sure how Jesus got out of the tomb, but it may have happened like this: Jesus' compatriots removed him from the unguarded tomb late on the first night, then replaced the stone to delay the discovery of the empty tomb. This occurred before the Jewish Council placed the guards at the tomb in the morning.¹⁴⁶ On the second night, when the crowds of followers would have dispersed or become involved in the Passover celebrations¹⁴⁷ it would have been easy to befriend the Judean guards at the tomb,¹⁴⁸ giving them food and conversing or gaming into the night. Then some wine laced with the potion caused them to "tremble and become like dead men" – both are signs of mandrake intoxication.¹⁴⁹ While they were drugged, some strong compatriots rolled back

¹³¹ Jn 19:34. The other three gospels state that a Centurion was present, but do not mention the spear wound.

¹³² Mandrake intoxication causes fixed dilation of the eye pupils, simulating the pupils seen in death.

¹³³ Exodus 12:46, Num 9:12, Ps 34:20, Jn 19:36.

¹³⁴ Mt 27:57, Mk 15:43, Lk 23:50, Jn 19:38

¹³⁵ Mk 15: 43, Lk 23:50

¹³⁶ Mt 27:57, Lk 23:51, Jn 19:38

¹³⁷ Mt 27:58-60, Mk 15:45-46, Lk 23:53, Jn 19:38-42

¹³⁸ John names Joseph and Nicodemus.

¹³⁹ Lk 23:55, Jn 19:41-42

¹⁴⁰ Mt 27:60, Mk 15:46

¹⁴¹ Mt 27:62-66

¹⁴² Respiratory depression is an effect of opium drugs.

¹⁴³ Rapid pulse is an effect of Mandrake. The pulse would be thready because of dehydration and blood loss.

¹⁴⁴ The ground temperature would have been about 70F (21C), and he would have been placed directly on the rock with only the linen shroud for insulation.

¹⁴⁵ See Ketchum, p.315 for the duration of atropine poisoning. Mixtures of several drugs might last longer.

¹⁴⁶ Mt 27:62-66

¹⁴⁷ Passover celebration continued for seven more days.

¹⁴⁸ These were guards placed by the Jewish Priest's Council (Mt 27:62-66). They were not Roman soldiers.

¹⁴⁹ Mt 28:4, *see* Ketchum pp. 13-14.

the heavy stone door, revealing the empty tomb. Jesus, meanwhile, was recovering in a safe place –perhaps back in Bethany.¹⁵⁰ He must have been in very poor physical shape - drugged, dehydrated, covered with superficial wounds from the flogging, and probably feverish and suffering from peritonitis brought on by the spear wound in his abdomen or cellulitis and osteomyelitis from the nail wounds in his arms and legs.¹⁵¹ His brain may also have been affected by periods of anoxia while in coma on the cross, producing a condition of partial brain damage.¹⁵² But his body was gone from the tomb, resurrected by the miracle of the human mind, body, and spirit. The word of the prophets had been fulfilled.¹⁵³

It is here that our scenario ends. What happened to Jesus after the rescue is a matter of much conjecture. Some say he died quickly of his wounds and his place was taken by a disciple of similar physique who then appeared to witnesses from Judea to Galilee.¹⁵⁴ Others say he left Palestine, married, had children, lived to a ripe old age, and died in Europe, Eurasia, or the Far East.¹⁵⁵ The Bible says Jesus lived forty more days,¹⁵⁶ which is possible with deep wound infection followed by sepsis, shock, and death.¹⁵⁷ During those last days he apparently was so physically and mentally changed by the trauma of crucifixion that his disciples could not fully recognize him,¹⁵⁸ although his physical wounds did convince a “doubting Thomas.”¹⁵⁹ He was probably cremated¹⁶⁰ or buried in secret and his grave remains unknown to this day.

¹⁵⁰ Lk 24:50. Bethany was close enough to Jerusalem that Jesus could have appeared before the disciples as told in Mk 16:14 and Jn 20:19-20.

¹⁵¹ Edwards, WD, et al. 1986. “*On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ.*” JAMA, 21 Mar, Vol 255 No 11, pp. 1455-1463.

¹⁵² Anoxia could have occurred during the 30 to 45 minutes it took Joseph of Arimathea to get permission to take the body down for burial. See Mt 27:57-59, Mk 15:42-46, Lk 23:50-53, Jn 19:38.

¹⁵³ Hos 6:1-2, Lk 24:45-46, Jn 20:9

¹⁵⁴ see Ref 1, Ch 13.

¹⁵⁵ Stories place Jesus’ grave in Spain, France, Kashmir, and Japan (among other locations).

¹⁵⁶ Acts 1:3

¹⁵⁷ Untreated osteomyelitis or abdominal infection followed by rapid septic spread could cause death after 40 days or longer.

¹⁵⁸ Lk 24:15-16, Lk 24:36-37, Jn 20:14-15, Jn 21:4-5

¹⁵⁹ Jn 20:26-28

¹⁶⁰ Acts 1:9. “...as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”

DISCUSSION:

Is there such a potion as described in the scenario? What is it made of, and how could Jesus have known of it?

The existence of powerful potions capable of making a person appear temporarily dead have been known to man probably since prehistoric times.¹⁶¹ However, because use of such medications was accompanied by wild visions, unpleasant after-effects, and could occasionally be fatal, they have been generally regarded by the general population as sacred or magical, and used only by those few seekers or shamans willing to take the risk to experience the near-death experience with its remarkable effects on the mind.¹⁶² We have no record of the experiences or whereabouts of Jesus from his teenage years to the age of thirty.¹⁶³ It is quite likely that a young man seeking for God in those years would come into contact with the shamans of the day and be given entheogenic potions to help him on his spiritual journey.¹⁶⁴ Thus Jesus well may have had knowledge of drug-induced out-of-body experiences as both an observer and a participant. One hint from the Bible is contained in the story of Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana - the turning of water into wine.¹⁶⁵ It is quite possible that Jesus placed distilled alcohol perhaps containing a mind-altering drug into one of the stone vessels before ordering the servants to add water.¹⁶⁶ The process of distillation was very difficult and known only to a few in those days, but it would have been of great importance to the shamans for extraction and purification of herbal essences.¹⁶⁷

Of the various herbal agents available in the area of Palestine in Jesus' time, *Atropa Mandragora*, commonly known as Mandrake, is the most likely one to have been used for the main ingredient of the potion. It is mentioned in Genesis as being quite prized, even being used in payment for sexual favors.¹⁶⁸ We know that this agent existed in the region around the time of Jesus because the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, who died circa 100 CE, mentions it under the name Baaras.¹⁶⁹ The famous herbalist, M. Grieve, places its original habitat as Southern Europe.¹⁷⁰ The effects of large doses of Mandrake

¹⁶¹ McKenna, T. 1992. *Food of the Gods*. New York: Bantam Books. ISBN 0-553-07868-2, p.4.

¹⁶² Grinspoon, L. & Bakalar, JB. 1997. *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*. New York: The Lindesmith Center. ISBN 0-9641568-5-7, p.31.

¹⁶³ This jump in the time record appears between Mt 2:23 to 3:1 and Lk 2:52 to 3:1. Mk and Jn begin with Jesus already age 30.

¹⁶⁴ Mt 15:21, Mk 7:24, Mk 7:31: Jesus was familiar with Tyre and Sidon, both cosmopolitan ports on the Mediterranean Sea. He may have become familiar with entheogens there.

¹⁶⁵ Jn 2:3-10

¹⁶⁶ The six vessels held 20 to 30 gallons each. Just one vessel would hold plenty of wine for a large wedding party, especially considering that wine had already been served. The unadulterated water in the other five may have been saved for purification rituals. See Jn 2:6.

¹⁶⁷ Gildemeister, E. 1913. *The Volatile Oils*. Vol 1, Sec IV. New York: John Wiley & Sons. Methods included suspending cooled sheep's wool in the vapors arising from a boiling solution, then squeezing out the distilled substance into another vessel.

¹⁶⁸ Genesis 30:14-17

¹⁶⁹ Josephus, TF. circa 75 CE, English edition 2006. *The Wars of the Jews or History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, Ltd.

¹⁷⁰ Grieve, M. 1931. *A Modern Herbal*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace & Co. See entry for Mandrake. Text searchable at www.botanical.com

are due to its atropine and scopolamine content: fixed dilation of the pupils, suppression of sweating and saliva, rapid weak pulse, delirium, coma, and death.¹⁷¹ Mandrake was used in Pliny's time as an anesthetic for operations, and centuries later the medieval herbalist Bartholomew referred to Mandrake as an anesthetic: "the rind thereof meddled with wine... gene to them to drink that shall be cut in their body, for they should slepe and not fele the sore knitting."¹⁷² Shakespeare wrote about such a potion in *Romeo and Juliet*, which is based upon a true story from the fifteenth century Girolamo de la Corte's *History of Verona*.¹⁷³ In this famous tragedy, Friar Laurent gives Juliet a vial of potion to drink, which was evidently based on Mandrake.¹⁷⁴ In more recent times, the United States Dispensatory of 1894, a large compendium of medicinal compounds, listed Mandrake as *Mandragora Officinalis*, explaining "it was used by the ancients as an anesthetic agent before surgical operations, and Morion or Death-Wine... was made from it."¹⁷⁵ It is most likely that the potion used by Jesus and Lazarus contained Mandrake.

The potion probably had a second ingredient - extract of *Papaver Somnificum* - the Opium Poppy. Opium was also well known in the Near East around the time of Jesus.¹⁷⁶ Homer's *Odyssey* (c. 700 BCE) mentions the land of the Lotus Eaters, which depicts a place where the inhabitants constantly ingested a plant that induced a sleep-like euphoria matching that produced by Opium. The land of the Lotus Eaters may have been the southern coast of present-day Turkey,¹⁷⁷ not far via Mediterranean trade routes from the land of Palestine. The active ingredient in white poppies - mainly morphine - can be extracted by boiling mashed opium pods in water containing some burnt lime (calcium oxide). After the sludge settles, the strained liquid is then evaporated in the hot, dry desert air to make extremely strong brown residue that can be dissolved in wine or vinegar. A large dose of this crude morphine would make the skin cold, clammy and cyanotic (blue), the muscles flaccid, the respiration very slow, and the body insensitive to pain stimulation.¹⁷⁸ These effects of Opium, combined with the effects of Mandrake (rapid, weak pulse, dilated pupils) would simulate a profound death-like state.

A third herbal extract containing Harmine and Harmaline from Wild Syrian Rue (*Peganum harmala*) may have also been an ingredient. These compounds are soluble in dilute acids such as vinegar.¹⁷⁹ *Peganum* had been used for centuries before Jesus' time

¹⁷¹ Gilman, AG, et al, Editors. *Goodman and Gilman's - The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics, 8th Edition*. New York: Pergamon Press. ISBN 0-08-040296-8. p. 158

¹⁷² See Grieve, M. entry for Mandrake.

¹⁷³ Brooke, A. 1562. edited by Munro, JJ. 1908. *Brooke's 'Romeus and Juliet.'* New York: Duffield & Co.

¹⁷⁴ Shakespeare, W. circa 1590, Valpey, AJ. Edition, 1833. *Romeo and Juliet*, Act IV, Scene I. London: A.J. Valpey.

¹⁷⁵ Wood, Remington & Sadtler. 1894. *United States Dispensatory, 17th ed.*, Philadelphia: JB Lippincott Co., p. 1681.

¹⁷⁶ Opium has been cultivated in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley since 3000 BCE. A major trade route extends from there to the ports of Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia, adjacent to Galilee. By 1000 BCE, Egypt was also famous for opium cultivation.

¹⁷⁷ Homer was from the southern coast of Turkey.

¹⁷⁸ Goodman and Gilman, p. 500

¹⁷⁹ *The Merck Index*. See entries for Harmine, Harmalol, and Harmaline.

for religious ceremonies and medicine.¹⁸⁰ It is native to the Middle East and grows well in dry climates such as Palestine. Peganum ingestion lowers sensitivity to pain.¹⁸¹ Extracts of *P. harmala* may also reduce the toxicity of Mandrake,¹⁸² while prolonging and intensifying the effects of both opium and Mandrake.¹⁸³ Peganum, therefore, may be the key to the effectiveness of the potion.

Thus it is quite likely that the “Passover Potion” contained a trinity of herbal agents - Mandragora, Opium, and Harmala. Acting together, they could have the power to produce a profound and convincing image of death to all but the closest observer. Other early followers of Jesus may have known about this potion. The resurrection of Dorcas is an example.¹⁸⁴

How would it be possible to survive entombment without suffocating?

We are told of Lazarus coming out of the tomb “with his head wrapped in a cloth.” If indeed his face were heavily wrapped during preparation of the body after death, would not suffocation occur while in the comatose state? Light is shed on this question by Joe Zias, an archaeologist at the Rockefeller Museum of Jerusalem. Mr. Zias, an expert on ancient Judean burial methods, states that, according to Jewish custom of the first century, the head was left uncovered when the body was wrapped for burial.¹⁸⁵ It is possible that Lazarus put the cloth over his head when he walked out of the tomb to protect his dilated eyes from the bright sunlight. As for Jesus, once he was taken down from the cross by his friends who knew he was really alive, it is likely that his nose and mouth were kept clear to allow any possible respiration, and perhaps, once in the privacy of the tomb, he may have been given artificial respiration to assist his survival before being left alone with his head uncovered by the burial shroud.¹⁸⁶ Thus it is quite possible for both Jesus and Lazarus to survive the entombment procedures common in first-century Judea.

If this scenario is what really happened, why isn't it told plainly in the Bible?

One must remember that two thousand years ago, society was far less advanced. With little technology, almost no scientific knowledge, and no advanced medicine, the average person was superstitious as well as religious, and believed strongly in miracles including

¹⁸⁰ Myers, LA, 2011. *Gnostic Visions: Uncovering the Greatest Secret of the Ancient World*, ISBN: 978-1-4620-1548: Ch 7: Zoroaster and Peganum Harmala.

¹⁸¹ Farouk, L, et al. 2008. “Evaluation of the analgesic effect of alkaloid extract of *Peganum harmala* L: possible mechanisms involved.” *J Ethnopharmacol*, Feb 31; 115(3):449-54.

¹⁸² Peganum extracts are acetylcholinesterase inhibitors. See Zheng, X, et al. 2009. “Acetylcholinesterase inhibitive activity-guided isolation of two new alkaloids from seeds of *Peganum nigellastrum* Bunge by an *in vitro* TLC-bioautographic assay.” *Archives of Pharmacal Research*, Sep; 32(9), 1245-1251.

¹⁸³ Peganum is a Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitor (MAOI). See Sjoerdsma, A et al. 1958. “A simple method for the measurement of monoamine oxidase inhibition in man.” *Lancet* 275(2), pp.159-160. MAOIs prolong and intensify both potent analgesics (morphine) and anticholinergic agents (mandrake). See Goodman and Gilman, p. 417.

¹⁸⁴ Acts 9:36-41.

¹⁸⁵ The Associated Press, *Scholars denounce shroud as a hoax*, as printed in the Winston-Salem Journal, c. 1998.

¹⁸⁶ Jn 19:40 states that Jesus' body was handled in the burial customs of the Jews.

miraculous births¹⁸⁷ and resurrection.¹⁸⁸ These attributes would be expected of any person claiming to be the Messiah. Jesus knew this through the oracle of the Old Testament, and thus planned to survive the crucifixion to fulfill the prophecies. The resurrection was to help bring about the end of days and usher in the Kingdom of God.¹⁸⁹ When the kingdom later failed to occur, a new religion based on the teachings and life of Jesus struggled to survive in an increasing hostile environment. Palestine was ripe for revolution against Roman occupation, and within 40 years after Jesus' crucifixion, was the stage for an extremely brutal "War of the Jews" as described by the historian Josephus.¹⁹⁰ In response to the insurrection, hundreds of thousands of Jews throughout the Roman Empire were slaughtered,¹⁹¹ any member of the house of David – the lineage of Jesus¹⁹² – was to be arrested or killed on the spot if identified,¹⁹³ temples and records were torched, and those who followed the original path of Jesus were scorned, scattered, and their belongings looted.¹⁹⁴ Followers of Jesus were banned from the Jewish temples¹⁹⁵ and the center of power of the infant church was destroyed in Palestine to be taken over by the followers of St. Paul who eventually ran the church from Rome.¹⁹⁶ In all this chaos, just about everyone who might have known the truth of the crucifixion story was killed or discredited.¹⁹⁷ It was after this war that the four gospels of the New Testament were written,¹⁹⁸ and it was important for the writings to reflect the life of a supernatural persona – the miraculously resurrected Jesus – in order to gain converts.¹⁹⁹ It would have been counterproductive for the leaders of the early church to damage the new religion by telling the true story behind the resurrection. Of course, once the fledgling church started to gain power and be an accepted religion, it had to maintain the integrity of its basic tenets, the most important of which were Jesus' miraculous conception and resurrection. The text of the *Nicene Creed*, which was written in 325 CE, emphasizes

¹⁸⁷ Genesis 21:1-3 relates the miraculous birth of Isaac, and Lk 1:7-13 tells of the miraculous conception of John the Baptist.

¹⁸⁸ Examples of resurrection that predate Jesus include the stories of the Egyptian Osiris, the Greek Orpheus, and the Assyrian Ishtar.

¹⁸⁹ Lk 24:49 and Acts 1:4: The "promise of the Father" is the advent of the Anointed One as prophesied in Daniel 9:24-27.

¹⁹⁰ Titus Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, c. 75 CE

¹⁹¹ Over one million people died in the Roman siege of Jerusalem alone (see Josephus).

¹⁹² Mt 1:1-17

¹⁹³ Eusebius. circa 290 CE, English edition of the Text of Burton 1872. *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Book III, Ch 12: "How Vespasian ordered search to be made for the descendants of David"

¹⁹⁴ See Eusebius, Book II, Ch 22 & 23. Even St. Paul was killed and James, the brother of Jesus, was stoned to death.

¹⁹⁵ The exact date of the schism is unknown, but the beginning can be seen in Acts 4:1-3 and it is virtually complete by Acts 21:27-30.

¹⁹⁶ Saint Irenaeus. circa 180 CE. English translation, Roberts, A., Donaldson, J., Eds. 2010. *Against Heresies*, Bk III, Ch 3, sections 1 and 2. Pub: Ex Fontibus Co. ISBN 1-45362-460-0

¹⁹⁷ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Bk III, Ch 4, sec. 1 and Ch 7, sec 36, show examples of the destruction.

¹⁹⁸ The earliest gospel, Mark, was probably written between 70 and 100 CE.

¹⁹⁹ Gentile (non Jewish) converts were especially influenced by miraculous acts, such as the resurrection of Dorcas (Acts 9:36-42) and the healing of the crippled man of Lystra (Acts 14:8-11).

these miracles. To not believe the *Nicene Creed* is considered heresy in the Roman Catholic Church to this day.²⁰⁰

Doesn't this story destroy the teachings of Jesus by explaining his resurrection as non-miraculous?

Absolutely not. It *does* affect the power of the “religious-industrial” theocracy that grew up around the persona of Jesus,²⁰¹ but it only enhances the picture of this devout and determined man who had the intelligence and willpower necessary to complete such a difficult, painful, and dangerous task. Jesus combined the discipline of an Olympic athlete, the calm of a Buddhist monk, the skills of a social psychologist, and the techniques of an old-world shaman²⁰² to fulfill the prophecies of the Messiah and help bring about the “end of days.” To see Jesus in this light increases the power of his six main teachings - do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not bear false witness, love your neighbor as yourself, and honor your father and mother.²⁰³ After all, if Jesus as a man could willingly plan and survive the torture of crucifixion, we remaining mortals just might muster the ability to bring great joy and justice to the planet by following his six simple rules.

²⁰⁰ “...heresy must concern a matter that has been revealed by God and solemnly defined by the Church (for example, the Trinity, the Incarnation, ... the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary).”
From “Catholic Answers” at www.catholic.com/tracts/the-great-heresies .

²⁰¹ Millions of people have been killed and billions oppressed by bigotry in the name of institutionalized Christianity over the past 1700 years.

²⁰² DeRienzo, P. & Beal, D. 1997. *The Ibogaine Story*, Ch.16. New York: Autonomedia.

²⁰³ Jesus’ Six Commandments appear in Mt 19:18-19 and Mk 10:19. “Do not defraud” (Mk) is a close equivalent to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt).