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THE CRIMSON OR SCARLET WORM

by Lanny and Marilyn Johnson

Psalm 22 (sometimes called the Psalm of the Cross) is a great chapter of the Bible that tells about the suffering and death of Christ 1,000 years before he actually gave his life upon the cross. Verse 1 says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? ..." In the gospels of Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, Jesus cried out the same words while hanging on the cross. In verse 6 of Psalm 22, Jesus says something odd: "But I am a worm, and no man." What did he mean by saying "I am a worm"?

Usually in the Bible, the Hebrew word for a worm is "rimmah", which means a maggot – but the Hebrew word Jesus used here for worm, is TOLA'ATH, which means "Crimson worm" or "Scarlet worm". Both scarlet and crimson are the colors of blood – deep red.



The Crimson worm [coccus ilicis] is a very special worm that looks more like a grub than a worm. When it is time for the female or mother Crimson worm to have babies (which she does only one time in her life), she finds the trunk of a tree, a wooden fencepost or a stick. She then attaches her body to that wood and makes a hard crimson shell. She is so strongly and permanently stuck to the wood that the shell can never be removed without tearing her body completely apart and killing her.

The Crimson worm then lays her eggs under her body and the protective shell. When the baby worms (or larvae) hatch, they stay under the shell. Not only does the mother's body give protection for her babies, but it also provides them with food – the babies feed on the LIVING body of the mother!

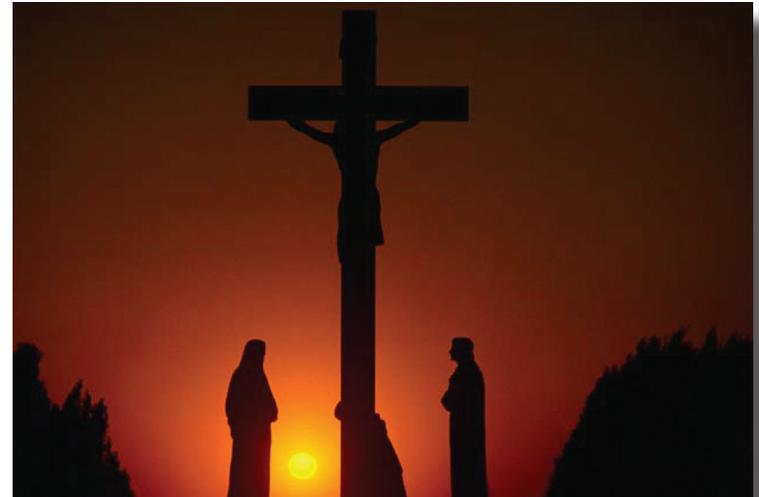
After just a few days, when the young worms grow to the point that they are able to take care of themselves, the mother dies. As the mother Crimson worm dies, she oozes a crimson or scarlet red dye which not only stains the wood she is attached to, but also her young children. They are colored scarlet red for the rest of their lives.

After three days, the dead mother Crimson worm's body loses its crimson color and turns into a white wax which falls to the ground like snow.

So what did Jesus mean by saying "I am a worm"? There are a lot of ideas what Jesus might have meant, but nobody really knows for sure. However, it is very interesting that, just like the

Crimson worm, Jesus sacrificed or gave up his life on a tree so that his children might be washed with his crimson blood and their sins cleaned white as snow. He died for us, that we might live through him!

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isaiah 1:18



OTHER INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE CRIMSON WORM:

- The Crimson worm is common to the region of old Israel.
- In ancient days the dead bodies of the female Crimson worms were scraped from the tree, dried, and then ground into a powder that was used to dye their cloth and garments a scarlet or red color.
- They are round, about the size of a pea. Because they don't look like a worm, some people thought they were part of a plant.
- The crushed worm was also used to make medicine that helps the heart beat smoothly.
- The white wax body was used to make shellac, a preservative of wood.

