> *QUESTION: What were the sponge and vinegar that were offered to Jesus during His crucifixion, and why were they used?*

ANSWER:

Let’s begin by reading the account from the Gospel of John:

> *John 19:28–30*
> 28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”
> 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.
> 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

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1. What is a Sponge?

In the Swahili Bible, the word *sifongo* is used, which is equivalent to the English word *sponge* — often pronounced locally as *sponji* or *sponchi*. Sponges are absorbent materials, typically soft and porous, that can soak up liquids.

In ancient times, natural sea sponges were commonly used. The sponge mentioned in John 19 would likely have been one of these — not synthetic like modern sponges but a biological one that could easily absorb and retain liquid.

2. What is the Vinegar Mentioned Here?

The “vinegar” mentioned in John 19:29 is better understood as sour wine, commonly used by Roman soldiers. It wasn’t vinegar in the harsh, acidic sense we think of today, but more like a cheap, fermented drink — called *posca* — made from diluted sour wine. It was refreshing to the soldiers but bitter and unrefined.

Theologically, this detail is important for a few reasons:

It fulfills prophecy. Psalm 69:21 says:

> “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.”

Jesus’ request for a drink and the soldiers’ response directly fulfill this Messianic prophecy, affirming His identity and God’s sovereign plan.

It shows His humanity. Jesus saying, “I am thirsty” (John 19:28) is a profound statement. Though He is fully God, He was also fully man, and in that moment, He physically thirsted — a sign of His real suffering and bodily weakness.

It prepares for His final declaration. After receiving the sour wine, Jesus declared, *“It is finished”* — a powerful theological statement meaning that His redemptive mission was complete. The Greek word used, *tetelestai*, means “paid in full.” Through His suffering and obedience, He satisfied the requirements of justice for humanity’s sin (Romans 3:25–26).

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3. Why Did the Soldiers Offer Him Vinegar on a Sponge?

The act of lifting a vinegar-soaked sponge to Jesus on a hyssop branch might seem cruel or strange, but it holds deep meaning:

Hyssop was used in Old Testament rituals of cleansing and atonement (Exodus 12:22, Psalm 51:7). Using a hyssop branch symbolically connects Jesus' death with Passover, where hyssop was used to apply the lamb's blood on doorposts — a picture of salvation from judgment. Here, the true Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7) is about to give His final breath.

The sponge soaked in sour wine may have been meant as a mocking gesture, or perhaps a practical one, but in either case, God used it to fulfill Scripture and reveal Christ's identity as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:3–5).

Final Thoughts:

This moment at the cross — the sponge, the sour wine, the words "I am thirsty," and "It is finished" — are not just historical details. They are loaded with theological meaning, showing:

- Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy
- His true humanity and real suffering

- His role as the sacrificial Lamb

- The completion of God’s redemptive plan

Through this act, the door to salvation was opened for all who believe.

May the Lord bless you with understanding and draw you deeper into the truth of His Word.

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