

What Is the Medical Account of the Crucifixion?

Jesus was barely alive before being hoisted up for a crowd to watch Him expire in agony and certainly dead when taken down from the cross. The verdict: “cardiac and respiratory arrest, due to hypovolemic and traumatic shock, due to crucifixion.”

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The word “[excruciating](#)” is thought to come from Latin for “out of the cross.” There was no other word to describe the pain Jesus endured at the cross. His agony started with His ordeal in the garden the night before, praying so hard that He sweat blood. The extent of His suffering, before being nailed to the cross, is an important factor in [Christ](#)’s death.

Three Major Points

Although we know that Christ died on the cross, a few things need to be made clear:

1. Jesus had been considerably weakened before being crucified.
2. The spikes in His hands and feet were not what killed Jesus.
3. There is a quantity of medical literature explaining why it is virtually impossible for Him to have survived; to have merely swooned, as some cynics suggest.

Prepared to Bleed

Three events caused Jesus to be weaker on the day of His crucifixion than others hung on crosses before, after, or alongside Him. Historians note that Jesus died relatively quickly once nailed to the wood, but that was probably because of blood loss and, possibly, shock. Several factors exacerbated blood loss: fragile skin following His prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane; a particularly furious flogging; and certain props employed to mock Him.

1. Sweating Blood

A 21st-century forensic reconstruction starts with Jesus potentially suffering hematidrosis: “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” ([Luke 22:44](#)). Many readers believe this is either an exaggeration or a supernatural phenomenon, but hematidrosis

is [medically explained](#) as an “excretion of blood or blood pigments in the sweat” as a result of “severe anxiety [...] triggered by fear.”

Jesus knew what was coming ([Matthew 20:19](#)), all of the agony of being scourged, of torment on the cross and, worst of all, being forsaken by God ([Matthew 27:46](#)). “[Hematidrosis](#) [...] results in the skin becoming extremely tender and fragile, which would have made Christ’s pending physical insults even more painful.” His skin would have torn more easily once flogging began, leading, potentially, to more blood loss than normal. Modern doctors also explain that extreme stress strained Christ’s heart prior to being tortured.

2. Flogged with Fury

Jesus was struck with a whip made of “braided leather thongs with metal balls woven into them” plus “pieces of sharp bone.” “The sufferer’s veins were laid bare and the very muscles, sinews and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.” While the objective was to bring a person as [close to death](#) as possible without actually killing him, “many people would die from this kind of beating even before they could be crucified.”

Jesus’ back was not marked with red welts; the skin was not merely bleeding. His flesh was torn. Sometimes, a victim’s back was “so shredded that part of the spine was [...] exposed by the deep, deep cuts.” Some writers theorize that Jesus endured the maximum 39 lashings as determined by Jewish law, but there is contrasting speculation that the Roman soldiers probably ignored the law. No one knows. He was hated for having threatened the power of Caesar and mocked for having appeared to fail.

Consequently, Jesus might have endured more lashings than normal. Since “the decision to [scourge Jesus](#) was made before it was determined that he would be crucified,” punishment might have been particularly furious. “After Jesus was scourged, Pilate attempted to release him.”

3. Crown and Robe

Another unique aspect of Christ’s experience — being mocked as King of the Jews — further added to the pain and blood loss He endured. He was made to wear a crown of thorns that cut into His now-fragile skin and caused still more bleeding around the scalp. Christ was struck several times in the head, driving the thorns further into this area, amplifying both bloodshed and pain. Emergency room doctors and nurses see a lot of bleeding from head wounds due to the “profuse vascularity” of the scalp” and “denseness of the connective tissue [which] tends to hold vessels open when the scalp is lacerated.

For this reason, even small lacerations can cause considerable bleeding, [leading to hypovolemia, hypotension](#), and even death.” Many of the wounds on Jesus’ back would have begun to clot, some while He wore the robe His tormentors forced onto Him. Tearing it off of Jesus’ back was like the “careless removal of a [surgical bandage](#)” and broke the wounds open once more, as they humiliated Jesus, the soldiers also hastened His death.

Excessive blood loss and dehydration would have sent Christ’s body into shock before the nails were hammered into His wrists and feet. Traumatic pain would have also led to “injury shock” in addition to “[hypovolemic shock](#),” both of which are consequences of the sort of “traumatic event” Christ suffered. Shock itself would have added to His pain by causing “pericarditis” or “inflammation of the sac of the heart” which causes “stabbing pains in the chest.”

Having experienced an unthinkable amount of pain already, nails were driven into Jesus’ wrists and feet. The positioning of a person on the cross was devised to create the most discomfort possible, from the way one’s hands were raised to the side to the angle of knees and hips. One would have to continually push against the feet in order to breathe but doing so would send pain signals through every nerve. Shock was reducing His blood pressure, meaning oxygen was not getting to His organs and waste was not being removed.

Unable to Exhale

Christ would have had [trouble breathing](#), but inhalation was not as difficult as exhalation. “Adequate exhalation required lifting the body by pushing up on the feet and by flexing the elbows and pulling the shoulders inward. In order to accomplish this feat, all of Christ’s weight would have been focused in His feet, causing “searing pain,” not to mention the agony of His back rubbing against the rough wood as He struggled to exhale and inhale. A build-up of carbon dioxide from inadequate exhalation would have caused further cramping.

The End Verdict

A spear was thrust from below through Christ’s organs, releasing fluid and blood. If He was still alive at that point (highly doubtful), the spear killed Him. The Messiah was barely alive before being hoisted up for a crowd to watch Him expire in agony and certainly dead when taken down from the cross. Theologians suggest that Christ’s 3-6 hours was a relatively short period of time because of the trauma that He suffered prior to being crucified. Inflammation and fluid buildup put his organs under pressure; they could not function properly without blood-waste removal. Eventually, Christ’s system shut down. [The verdict:](#) “cardiac and respiratory arrest, due to hypovolemic and traumatic shock, due to crucifixion.”

What Does This Mean?

The resurrection means nothing unless Christ really died but refuting the evidence of His death and suggesting He was hidden somewhere and nursed back to health makes little sense. The gospels do not depict a weak, ailing Jesus displaying jagged, oozing wounds so that He could have recovered by the third day. “Common complications of hemorrhagic shock include kidney damage, other organ damage, death” plus potentially “gangrene due to decreased circulation to the limbs.”

The disciples saw Christ in good health, holes visible but healed ([John 20:27](#)), with energy to continue His ministry for some time. Those who believe that Christ died for their sins naturally feel a sense of guilt and pain when they realize what Jesus went through for their sake. But there is triumph here too, for God was able to rescue Christ from Sheol, and if He can do that, He is able to rescue us from our sin if we put our faith and trust in Him.

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<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/jesus-christ/medical-account-of-the-crucifixion.html>