

THE WORST WAY TO DIE: A PHYSICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CRUCIFIXION

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Abstract and Research Concern

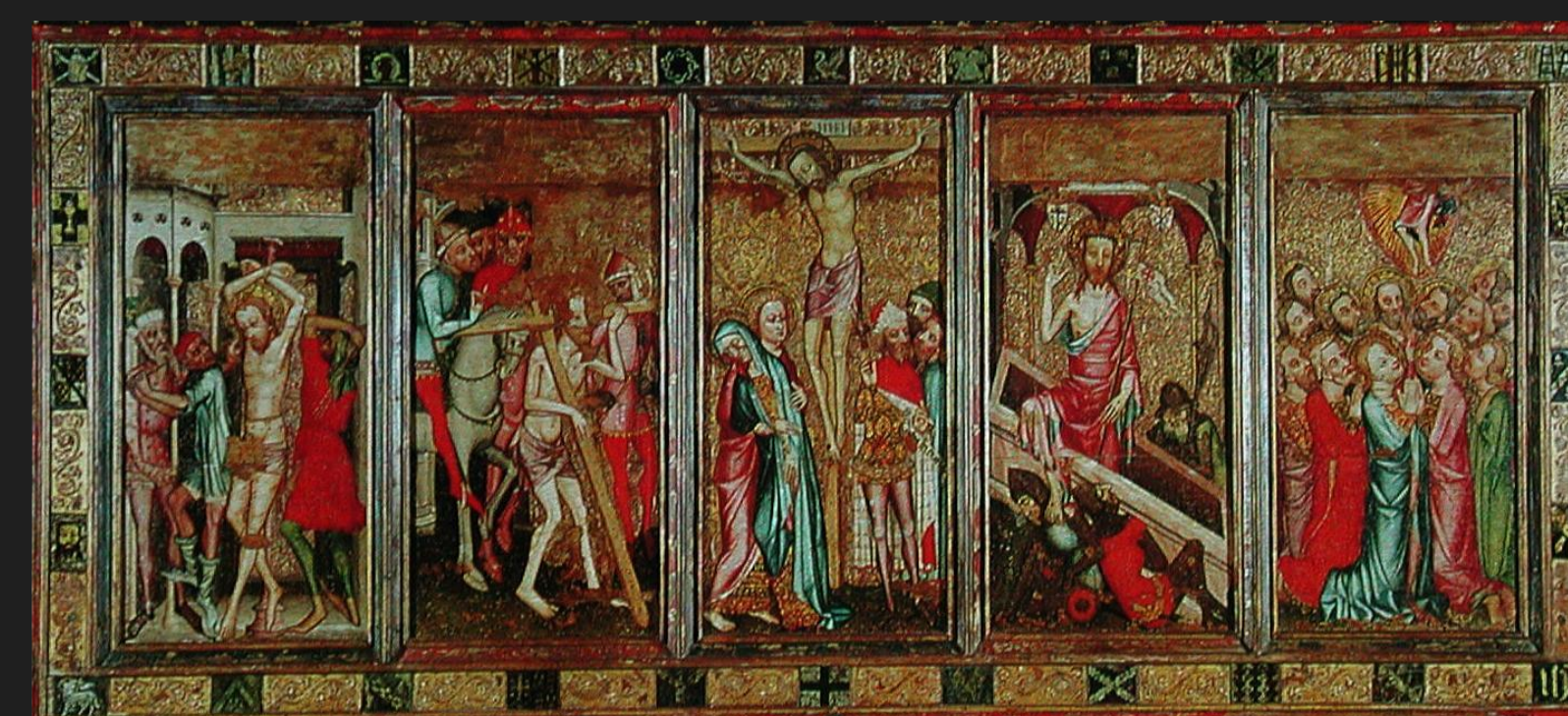
While most people have heard of crucifixion, they are unaware of what it entails. This study focuses on the keys physical aspects of crucifixion and sheds light on the damage it does to the body. Then it explores the facts that contribute to and directly cause death.



Research Questions and Methodology

The research questions for this are two-fold: What is the lived experience of a person while they are being crucified? What is the final cause of death within crucifixion?

The study underwent a verse by verse analysis of the crucifixion account from Matthew 27. Then I compiled the research of others to create an accurate depiction of what crucifixion victims and Jesus went through while hanging on the cross and reached a probable cause of death. This was then broken down into pieces to understand the pathophysiology behind each system failure and allowed me to better understand the suffering Christ went through on our behalf.

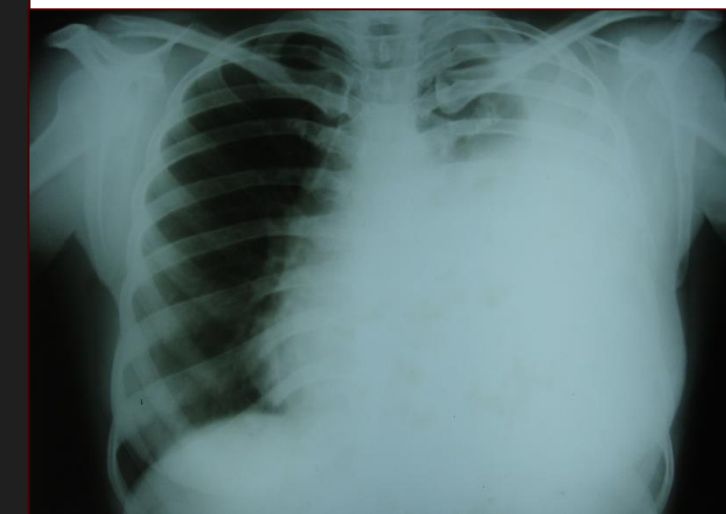


History of Crucifixion

Perfect in Rome, crucifixion was the final form of death in the *Summum Supplicium*. Beginning with decapitation, then burning, and finally crucifixion, the *Summum Supplicium* was an increasingly tormenting method of execution reserved for the worst criminal and insurrectionists in the state.

Respiratory Failure

Contortion of the torso during crucifixion placed the work of exhalation on the intercostal muscles. Once tired, they body would not be able to expel carbon dioxide causing the body's pH to decrease to unstable levels. Unable to exhale, no more oxygen could enter and Jesus would begin to suffocate.



Injury to the chest from the flogging and inability to breathe would cause a hemorrhagic pleural effusion—a buildup of blood and water in the sack surrounding the lungs. This accounts for the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side when pierced.

Dehydration

As dehydration can set in within 48 hours, it becomes a factor for cause of death. The mucous membranes secrete thick fluids, the tongue swells, and the person eventually loses consciousness and blood pressure.



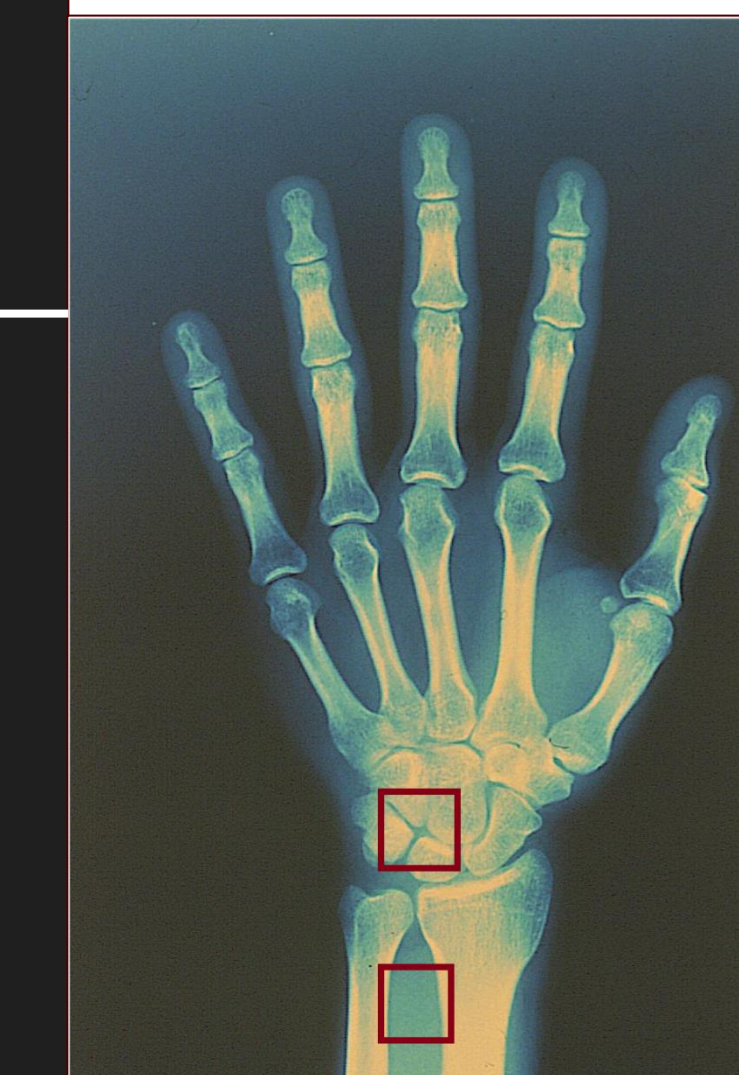
The Crown of Thorns

The thorns used were less than inch in length. They would tear the soft, vascular skin on the head causing bleeding and significant pain.



Median Neuropathy

There are two places that a spike could go through Jesus' wrist and support his weight: Dextor's space and in between the radius and ulna.



Both locations would sever the median nerve. This would cause severe, shooting pain the along the outer aspect of the entire arm and a drop in arterial blood pressure.

Scourging

From the flogging, Jesus' flesh would be torn off, and he would have extensive blood loss from the wounds sustained. These would loose even more blood due to the robe the soldiers placed on him. This would re-open all the wound and cause more blood loss.



Flagellation

Prior to crucifixion, the painful death process began with the scourging Jesus received. Most Jewish prisoners would get 39 whips with a flagrum—a whip with metal, glass, and bone in the end. This would leave the body with strips of bleeding flesh in excruciating pain and extensive blood loss.



Duration of Suffering

Most crucifixion victims lasted up to 48 hours on the cross before passing away. Jesus, however, died in only 3 hours. The catalyst for his expedient death lies in the extensive flogging and blood loss prior to crucifixion which greatly reduced the strength he had to breathe while he was on the cross.



Conclusion

While all parts of Jesus' flogging and crucifixion compounded to cause death, the main cause of death for crucifixion victims is respiratory failure. While went through the stages of hypovolemic shock and blood loss that would eventually cause death, respiratory failure would kill someone within the three hours time limit Jesus went through on the cross.

Hypovolemic Shock

Hypovolemic shock occurs when the body does not have enough blood to perfuse the organs and tissues necessary to sustain life. Death rapidly ensues if the victim does not receive immediate medical attention and blood transfusions. For Jesus, this was a result of blood loss from flagellation and dehydration.

