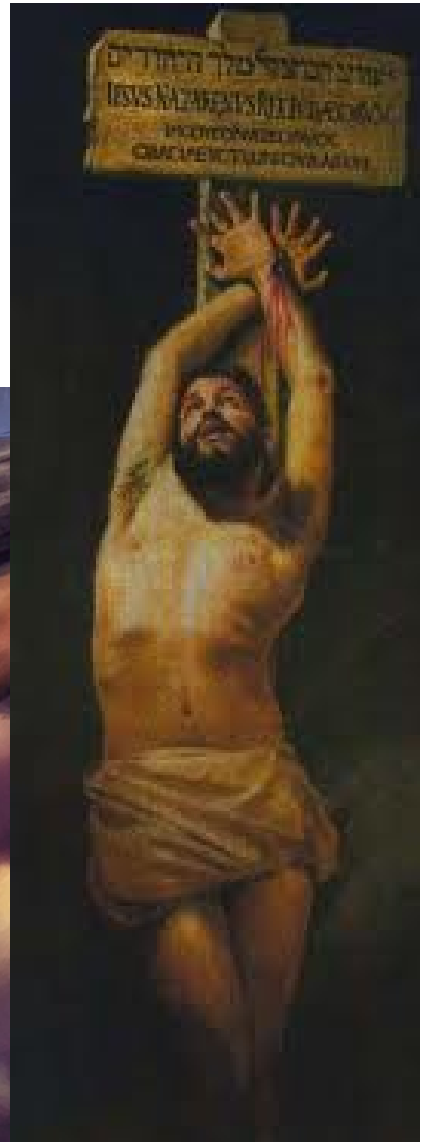


Did Jesus Die on a Cross or a Torture Stake?



Why do Bible Students use the symbol of the cross and crown?

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”
Revelation 2:10

Would displaying a cross and crown on an elder’s podium be considered idolatry? What about wearing a cross and crown pin? In any case, was Jesus really crucified on a cross—or was it a stake? Wasn’t the cross a shameful pagan Roman symbol? Hasn’t the apostate Christian Church used the cross as in object of worship—kissing it, praying before it, etc. All fair questions. . . .

Did Jesus Die on a Cross or a Torture Stake?

The word “Cross” is an important word which actually appears 28 times in virtually all New Testament versions with the exception, of course, of *The New World*. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* leaves its definition open—and also refers to its figurative usage as follows:

NT: #4716

stauros (stow-ros'); from the base of NT:2476; a stake or post (as set upright), i.e. (specifically) a pole or cross (as an instrument of capital punishment); figuratively, exposure to death, i.e. self-denial; by implication, the atonement of Christ:

KJV - “cross”

See also “cross” – *Diaglott*, Rotherham, NAS, NIV, RSV, ASV, TLB, NKJV

Carrying the Crossbeam to the Execution. From about the 6th century BC to the 4th century AD, crucifixion methods varied considerably among the Persians, Carthaginians and Romans. When the condemned criminal was forced to carry the crossbeam (*patibulum*¹) on his shoulders—often torn open by flagellation—it was then nailed to an upright stake for crucifixion. Simon, a Cyrenian, was forced to help Jesus carry his cross; otherwise Jesus might have fallen down upon his chest because of his loss of strength from excessive beatings.

Luke 23:26

“And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.”

Shameful Method of Execution. Yes, it really was a shameful method of execution by the Romans—especially reserved for slaves. But the exact reason for Jesus coming to earth as a Man was to die in the shameful sinner’s place! Mankind is a slave to sin, so Jesus truly took the sinner’s place. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15)

Philippians 2:7-8

“And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**” NAS

Hebrews 12:2

“And all the time we must concentrate on nothing but Jesus, in whom our faith had its beginning and must have its end, for he, for the joy that lay ahead of time, **courageously accepted the cross, with never a thought for the shame**, and has now taken his seat at the right hand of God.” *William Barclay translation*

Symbol—Not an Idol or Abomination. Truly, Papacy has taken the symbol of the cross in the Scripture and made an idol of it in worship, going far beyond just appreciating what it represents to us as Christians. Papacy has even taken the “cup” and “bread,” symbols of the body and blood of Christ—and converted them into the actual body and blood of Christ, sacrificed over and over again.

1 Corinthians 11:25, 26

“After the same manner also he took the **cup**, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as **often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death** till he come.”

Partaking is called the “mass.” By replacing Jesus’ sacrifice “once for all” (Heb 10:10) with the mass, these appropriate symbols have become an “abomination that makes desolate” (Daniel 11:31). Even though misused by the Papacy, the bread and the cup are good symbols for Jehovah’s people. Just so, the Papacy’s idolatry of the cross should not be the basis for how Jehovah’s people view the cross, any more than it would be if the Papacy had instead chosen to worship a stake.

History of Crucifixion. *Britannica* reports that the first historical record of Crucifixion was about 519 BC when "Darius I, king of Persia, crucified 3,000 political opponents in Babylon" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, crucifixion) Some further detail is given in "The Eerdman's Bible Dictionary", Rev. Ed., 1975: **CROSS** ... Crucifixion is first attested among the Persians (cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* i.128.2; iii.132.2, 159.1), perhaps derived from the Assyrian impalement. It was later employed by the Greeks, especially Alexander the Great, and by the Carthaginians, from whom the Romans adapted the practice as a punishment for slaves and non-citizens, and occasionally for citizens guilty of treason. Although in the Old Testament the corpses of blasphemers or idolaters punished by stoning might be hanged "on a tree" as further humiliation (Deut. 21:23), actual crucifixion was not introduced in Palestine until Hellenistic times. The Seleucid Antiochus IV Epiphanies crucified those Jews who would not accept Hellenization (Josephus *Ant.* xii.240-41; cf 1 Macc. 1:44-50).

Archeological Proof for a Cross. Historical findings have substantiated the traditional cross. One finding is a graffito dating to shortly after 200 A.D., taken from the walls of the Roman Palatine. It is a drawing of a crucified ass; a mockery of a Christian prisoner who worships Christ. The Romans were no doubt amused that Christians worshiped this Jesus whom they had crucified on a cross.

In June of 1968, bulldozers working north of Jerusalem accidentally laid bare tombs dating from the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. Greek archeologist Vasilius Tzaferis was instructed by the Israeli Department of Antiquities to carefully excavate these tombs. Subsequently one of the most exciting finds of recent times was unearthed - the first skeletal remains of a crucified man. The most significant factor is its dating to around the time of Christ. The skeleton was of a man named Yehohanan son of Chaggol, who had been crucified between the age of 24 and 28. Mr. Tzaferis wrote an article in the Jan/Feb. 1985 issue of the secular magazine *Biblical Archaeology Review* (BAR), and here are some of his comments regarding crucifixion in Jesus' time:

At the end of the first century B.C., the Romans adopted crucifixion as an official punishment for non-Romans for certain limited transgressions. Initially, it was employed not as a method of execution, but only as a punishment. Moreover, only slaves convicted of certain crimes were punished by crucifixion. During this early period, a wooden beam, known as a furca or patibulum was placed on the slave's neck and bound to his arms.

...When the procession arrived at the execution site, a vertical stake was fixed into the ground. Sometimes the victim was attached to the cross only with ropes. In such a case, the patibulum or crossbeam, to which the victim's arms were already bound, was simply affixed to the vertical beam; the victim's feet were then bound to the stake with a few turns of the rope.

If the victim was attached by nails, he was laid on the ground, with his shoulders on the crossbeam. His arms were held out and nailed to the two ends of the crossbeam, which was then raised and fixed on top of the vertical beam. The victim's feet were then nailed down against this vertical stake.

In order to prolong the agony, Roman executioners devised two instruments that would keep the victim alive on the cross for extended periods of time. One, known as a sedile, was a small seat attached to the front of the cross, about halfway down. This device provided some support for the victim's body and may explain the phrase used by the Romans, "to sit on the cross." Both Eraneus and Justin Martyr describe the cross of Jesus as having five extremities rather than four; the fifth was probably the sedile. (p. 48,49)

The Cross—Epitome of Christian Faith. Apostle Paul often referred to the cross as the epitome of his faith symbolizing reconciliation to God.

Ephesians 2:15-16

“Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that **he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross...**”

Colossians 1:20

“And, having **made peace through the blood of his cross**, by him to **reconcile all things unto himself**; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”

Christians Invited to Carry Cross. While Apostle Paul described some as “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18), he himself gloried in the cross because of all that it represented.

Galatians 6:14

“But God forbid that I should **glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

So likewise the Christian is invited to take up his Cross to follow Jesus Christ. Obviously, it is not a literal cross that followers of Jesus are to carry—but symbolically a life of humble sacrificing of their lives to walk in Jesus’ footsteps.

Matthew 16:24

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross**, and follow me.” (Also Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23)

If a Christian is “faithful till death” carrying his Cross, he will receive a “crown” of immortal life (Revelation 2:10). This scripture is the basis of the Bible Student [Logo of the Cross & Crown, also depicted on the cover of the Watchtower Magazine](#) (upper left corner) until discontinued by J.F. Rutherford.

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Jew Redeemed from Curse of Law. Because Jesus redeemed not only mankind in general but additionally the Jew who was additionally condemned under the Law, Jesus had to hang on a “tree.” Now under the Law, only a criminal first stoned to death would be hung on a “tree” until evening.

Deuteronomy 21:21-23 NAS

“Then all the men of his city shall **stone him to death**; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear of it and fear. "And if a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is **put to death**, and you **hang him on a tree**, **his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree**, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.”

Thus, after put to death, the corpse is hung on a tree—but only till end of day. A cross, of course, as well as a stake would be made from a tree.

Jesus Executed by Roman Government. Therefore, although Mosaic Law did not require crucifixion—only a body to be hung on “a tree”—Roman law did crucify criminals for several centuries.

Galatians 3:13

“Christ hath redeemed us from the **curse of the law**, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that **hangeth on a tree**”

Of course, Jesus did not pick his manner of execution. But because as “king” Jesus supposedly was committing an insurrection against Caesar—the Roman government executed him. The Law was, therefore, fulfilled by One who kept the Law perfectly and although worthy of life died as “cursed” by the Law.

The *Orpheos Bakkikos* crucifixion, hematite seal, early Christian era, but reflecting ancient Greek themes. Formerly housed at the Altes Museum in Berlin, but lost or destroyed during World War II.^[40]

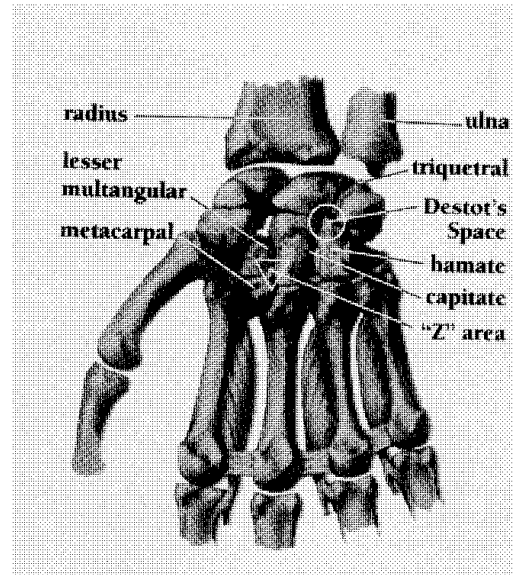
Nails in Jesus’ Two Outstretched Hands. Apostle Thomas—who missed the earlier resurrected appearances of Jesus—knew that more than one nail punctured Jesus’ hands. (If on a stake, both hands overhead, as pictured by the WT, would have only one nail.) So Thomas wanted to see the prints of “nails” on Jesus’ two outstretched “hands.”

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John 20:25-27

“The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except **I shall see in his hands the print of the nails [plural]**, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. “And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.”

To demonstrate that one nail through the hand could hold several hundred pounds, Frederick T. Zugibe, Professor of Pathology at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, demonstrated that a nail through the hand could hold several hundred pounds. (In his research, Zugibe used the severed arms of fresh cadavers, nailing them through either of two locations in the palm of the hands (see illustration) and suspending weights from the arms (a rather gruesome experiment, to say the least!).



Hands Pierced Overhead would bring Asphyxiation within Minutes. Medical research has shown that Jesus could not have died with both hands over his head on a stake. According to Frederick T. Zugibe, Adjunct Associate Professor of Pathology at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, Jesus did not die of asphyxiation with both arms nailed over his head. <http://e-forensicmedicine.net/ShroudBibliog.htm>

According to experimental research with volunteer medical students hanging with hands tied overhead, asphyxiation begins within minutes. Jesus was on the cross six hour from 9 a.m. till 3 p.m.—appropriately marking the two times of the morning and evening “continual burnt offering.”

Numbers 28:4-6

“The one **lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even**; And a tenth part of an ephah of flour for a meat offering, mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil. It is a **continual burnt offering**, which was ordained in mount Sinai for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD.”

Jesus on the Cross for Six Hours. Noon was probably when the Father withdrew His fellowship—as exemplified by the sun withdrawing light from the earth. When Jesus exclaimed, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” he realized he was fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 22. He then probably began to receive comfort with his perfect memory scanning the whole Psalm and realizing how it described exactly how he felt and what was happening:

Psalm 22:14-16
“I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And Thou dost lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.”

So Jesus knew—with no voice from heaven or angel to tell him—that he was victorious and will rule over the nations because of his righteousness:

Psalm 22:27-28, 31
“**All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations** will worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's, And He rules over the nations
....They will come and will declare His righteousness To a people who will be born, that he [Jesus] has performed it.”

After commending his spirit to the Father, he died faithful:

Mark 15:25	“And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. ”	Put on cross at 9 a.m.
Matthew 27:46-50	“Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? "that is," My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?....And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. ” NAS	Darkness at Noon till 3 p.m. when Jesus died.

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Meant to be a public spectacle, instead of dying in a very short time, crucifixion was designed to be a very long, protracted torturous method of execution—sometimes requiring days. The reason, however, Jesus died in just six hours was because of myocardial injury to his heart. This is verified by the gospel account according to John who was at the scene of crucifixion.

Jesus Died from a Ruptured Heart. So instead of dying very quickly by asphyxiation from his arms over his head, Jesus died by myocardial injury to his heart as evidenced by the record of an eye witness: Apostle John.

John 19:34

“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side,
and **forthwith came there out blood and water.**”

Dr. David A. Ball—and many other medical doctors*—say he died by myocardial injury to his heart. Jesus who earlier had probably fallen flat on his chest with his arms strapped to the crossbeam, sustained myocardial injury to his heart. Then the tremendous workload on the heart of the crucifixion process caused an external rupture of the myocardium which characteristically would account for the presence of clear pericardial fluid as well as volume of blood.

*Dr. William Stroud, an eminent physician of England and Scotland, gathered much evidence along this line and included it in his book entitled *The Physical Cause of the Death of Christ...* He quotes a Dr. C. D. Ludwig, who describes a case of rupture of the right auricle of the heart: “The pericardium was so distended by a large quantity of transparent serum and coagulated blood, as to push the lungs upward. The yellowish serum contained in its cavity exceeded half a pound. The heart was encompassed by much clotted blood, which adhered to it on all sides, and was perceived to have escaped slowly through a fissure detected in the margin of the right auricle.” Dr. Stroud states that “from the researches of Landisi, Ramazzini, Morgagni, and other anatomists, it appears that a quart of blood, and sometimes much more, might thus be collected in the pericardium, where it would speedily separate into its solid and liquid constituents, technically called crassamentum and serum, but in ordinary language, “blood and water.”” (Pages 127, 143)

Because Jesus was dead, the soldiers did not have to break his legs as was customary as for the two thieves on the other two crosses. These details were recorded as evidence of the scriptures fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken” (Psalm 34:20) and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10).

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John 19:31-37 NAS

“The Jews therefore, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. 32 The soldiers therefore came, and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other man who was crucified with Him; 33 but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, **they did not break His legs**; 34 but one of the **soldiers pierced His side with a spear**, and immediately there came out blood and water. 35 And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. 36 For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "Not a bone of Him shall be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced." NAS

Both Matthew and Mark report that Jesus shouted and died. Dr. Ball also said it is impossible for anyone suffocating to shout. But someone suffering a heart rupture could sense doom and cry out as Jesus did:

Matthew 27: 47 NAS

“And about the ninth hour **Jesus cried out with a loud voice**, saying, " *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* "that is," My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? "

Mark 15:34

“And at the ninth hour **Jesus cried out with a loud voice**, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" which is translated, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

The reporting of this phenomenon stamps the Gospel record as a truthful report based on modern medical knowledge unavailable to anyone at that time who would attempt to fabricate a legend.

Jesus Died for our Sins and is Crowned with Life! Because of Jehovah’s wonderful Divine Plan and Jesus’ willingness to die as a corresponding price for Adam as well as all his children—Jesus is now crowned with life immortal.

Hebrews 2:9

“But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, **crowned with glory and honor**: that he by the grace of God should **taste death for every man**”

Adam and all who die because of his sin will be made alive in the Kingdom and be given an opportunity to live forever on an earthly paradise. “As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). With Satan “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4) bound during the thousand years “to deceive the

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nations no more” (Revelation 20:1-4)—the vast majority mankind’s billions will be saved.

But the followers of Christ—who have taken up their cross faithfully till death will “reign with him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6). As sympathetic “priests and kings,” they will help the rest of the world to perfection and life. Thus, with Apostle Paul, we can glory in our “infirmities” that soon we may win the crown of life (2 Corinthians 12:9).