

CROSS OR STAKE?

The churches of professing Christianity venerate and revere the cross as a sacred icon.

Their adherents believe that Jesus Christ was crucified, died on the cross and gained salvation for all of mankind.

Was Jesus Christ crucified on a two-beamed cross or a simple upright stake?

Is the cross that core symbol of Christianity?

What does the Bible say?

Let's begin with John chapter 19.

According to Cruden's Complete Concordance, the word translated "cross" is found in 28 references in the New Testament only.

One such reference is in John chapter 19 and verse 17.

17 And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha:

18 Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

19 And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.

The original Greek word translated "cross" is stauros; and, in several Greek lexicons and certain Bible dictionaries, it means an upright stake or post.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words refers to it as "the upright pale or stake to which the Romans nailed those who were thus to be executed."

Nelson's Bible Dictionary says this under the subject CROSS:

". . . the Greek word for cross referred primarily to a pointed stake used in rows to form the walls of a defensive stockade.

It was common in the biblical period for the bodies of executed persons to be publicly displayed by hanging them from the stakes of a stockade wall.

Scholars are not certain when a crossbeam was added to the simple stake.”

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia describes four different forms of crosses that were used:

One is what we commonly see: an upright beam protruding over a shorter crosspiece.

Then there’s the cross in the shape of the letter T.

Third, is the Greek cross where the wood pieces are approximately equal in length.

And lastly, the cross shaped in the letter X.

Let’s turn now to Acts chapter 5 and verse 30.

The physician Luke who wrote the book of Acts used another Greek word to describe the upright pole or stake upon which Christ was executed.

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

Under the word “tree,” Thayer’s New Testament Lexicon says xulon is “that which is made of wood, a beam from which anyone is suspended.”

Vine’s says “the tree being the stauros or the upright pale or stake to which the Romans nailed those who were to be executed.”

Other Bible references say that Christ was executed by being hanged on a tree, an upright post of wood (Acts 10:39; Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:23; and 1 Peter 2:24).

In Appendix 162 of the Companion Bible, it says this:

“It [stauros] never means two pieces of timber placed across one another at any angle, but always of one piece alone. . .

There is nothing in the Greek of the N.T. even to imply two pieces of timber.”

The words stauros and xulon disagree with today's image of the cross we often see in pictures.

Stauros was simply an upright pole or stake made of wood to which the Romans nailed those condemned to death by crucifixion.

It never means two pieces of wood joining each other at any angle.

The Greek text of the New Testament gospels does not clearly support the manner of Christ's execution was in the shape of a cross.

When all of the information is considered and aligned with what the Bible actually says, we can satisfactorily conclude that the Greek word stauros always means a stake or upright pole.

Notice John chapter 3 and verse 14.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.

So Jesus was to be lifted up in the same fashion as Moses lifted up the brass serpent.

Was that brass serpent lifted up on a cross?

The answer is in Numbers chapter 21 and verse 9.

9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

Jesus Christ was nailed to an upright wooden pole or stake, not a cross.

His arms were raised above His head. His hands were joined together and nailed to the upright wooden post. Both His feet were nailed to the bottom portion of the stake.

Where then did the emblem of the cross come from? And how did it come to be the object of reverence and worship many have for it today?

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, under the topic CROSS, very explicitly says, "That the cross was widely known as an emblem in pre-Christian times has been clearly shown by independent investigators. Indeed, it was a well-known heathen sign."

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words has this to say about the word stauros:

The shape of the latter [the two-beamed cross] had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt.

People will say what difference does it make whether it was a stake or a two-beamed cross?

The point of this article is to show what the Bible actually say about worshipping and revering the cross.

Whether you do so or not is your personal choice.

But, is it the right thing to do based on God's word?

There is no instruction in the Bible to worship the cross or use it in any manner or form.

Jesus Christ Himself spoke against combining idolatrous practices with the true worship of God.

"All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition . . .making the word of God of no effect (Mark 7:9,13)

As obedient followers of God, we must do what the Bible says.

We are to worship Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb, Who took upon Himself the penalty of our sins by dying on the stake—an upright pole, not a two-beamed cross—that we may be redeemed from death, reconciled to God, and ultimately become spirit-born members of His divine family (2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6).