



March 14, 2025

### **Cross or Stake, Important?**

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast of lower Alabama. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

Last time we discussed the events around the time of Christ's crucifixion. We've been reviewing the events relating to the final Passover and subsequent death and resurrection of our Messiah, the son of God, now for several weeks. Several of you have conveyed "How helpful this has been for my studies and edification".

There are so many prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures that predict a number of details relating to Christ' crucifixion. Sometimes those details can be general in nature.

Recently I've been asked again "why does the church teach Christ died on a cross?" I think it prudent I carefully clarify where I can without reading any intent into the folks asking the question.

What does "the church" teach? I think there might be a better question. Better yet, what does the Bible actually say in regards to this topic? Any given fellowship is not the final authority, nor should it ever over ride God's Word.

In Isaiah 53:9 "*And they made His grave with the wicked-But with the rich at His death*" His being crucified with criminals and then being placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea was predicted.

The scourging and beating that Christ endured was predicted in Isaiah 53:5 "*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.*"

His being nailed to the crucifixion stake is predicted in Psalm 22:16 "*They pierced My hands and My feet.*"

After His death the body of Jesus was taken down (Luke 23:53) so the "cross" that held Jesus held him up from the ground.

After His resurrection Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples, except Thomas, who was not present. When Thomas was told of the appearance of Jesus he said, "*Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.*" (John 20:25) Thomas referred to the nails driven through the hands of Jesus as He was fastened to the cross and also was pierced by the soldier's spear. (John 19:34)

At times in the past, and unfortunately some still today have been very dogmatic in explaining that Christ was crucified this way or that way, when we really do not know every minute detail for sure.

I remember once giving a sermon message in a congregation I pastored, and the very next week when I was not in attendance as I was covering another congregation an elder gave a message explaining that Jesus had to have been crucified on a stake (not a cross) , and what I had said was in error. So sad.

What was the "cross" on which Jesus was crucified?

The Greek word translated "cross" is *stauros*. There are 28 verses in the Greek Scriptures where the Greek word "*stauros*" is found. In all 28 instances the KJV and NKJV translations renders *stauros* as *cross* in English. The Online Bible Greek Lexicon comments on #4716 *stauros*: "from the base of #2476." Then the Lexicon comments on #2476: "histemi, to cause or make to stand, to place, put, set"

Stauros can refer to the upright or stake portion of an instrument of execution that has been used in several cultures down through history. The ancient application was a pointed pole that was used for impaling the victim. At times executioners used a crosspiece at the top of or in different places on the stake; at other times, there was no crosspiece. The history varies.

Many years ago I gave a detailed message on the crucifixion (using my medical background) with many facts that we do know from the Bible, and several took exception to my message because they were so traditionally locked into a belief based on no actual evidence.

It's frankly almost impossible to know exactly what type the Romans used in the crucifixion of Christ. It is clear, however, that the Romans attached a sign or signs on the cross over His head (Matthew 27:37; John 19:19). The words on the sign or signs were written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. (John 19:20) This may possibly indicate there were three signs and they were placed on the upright pole extending above Jesus.

The following is Albert Barnes Commentary on Matthew 10:38: "When persons were condemned to be crucified, a part of the sentence was that they should carry the cross on which they were to die to the place of execution. Thus, Christ carried his, until he fainted from fatigue and exhaustion. (See notes at Matthew 27:31). The cross was usually composed of two rough beams of wood, united in the form of this figure of a cross. It was an instrument of death. (notes at Matt 27:31-32). To carry it was burdensome, was disgraceful, was trying to the feelings, was an addition to the punishment."

Easton's Bible Dictionary under the heading cross states: "The forms in which the cross is represented are these:

1. The crux simplex (I), a "single piece without transom."
2. The crux decussata (X), or St. Andrew's cross.
3. The crux commissa (T), or St. Anthony's cross.

4. The crux immissa (t), or Latin cross, which was the kind of cross on which our Saviour died. Above our Lord's head, on the projecting beam, was placed the "title."

The apostle Peter refers to the crucifixion instrument as "the tree" - Grk # 3586 xulon (1 Peter 2:24) The Strong's Greek Lexicon comments on #3586 xulon: "from another form of the base of 3582; timber (as fuel or material); by implication, a stick, club or tree or other wooden article or substance:--staff, stocks, tree, wood."

After Jesus was condemned He began to carry the stauros. (John 19:17) The other Gospel accounts tell us that Simon a Cyrenian was then compelled to bear the stauros. (Mark 15:21)

I believe it is very likely that it was the cross piece (or horizontal beam) that was carried to the place where the upright pole was located. An upright pole would seem to have been too heavy to carry. Maybe the upright portion was an actual tree? Then the victim was nailed to the cross piece and hoisted upward and the cross piece was fastened to the upright timber or tree. Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary also proposes this scenario. But we simply can't be for certain.

The Bible contains no specific description of the stauros on which Jesus died. The word stauros was used in non-biblical writings of the time to refer to pieces of wood of various shapes, with and without crosspieces. *If* it were important that we know its exact shape, the Gospel writers could have easily provided us that information—yet none of them do. What is important for us to know, is the willing sacrifice Jesus (and His Father) made of His own life for our sakes.

It's important that we don't make this cross discussion a stumbling block for others by saying "it has to be this way, or it must be that way". It is when we become specific without knowing all the details that we can form an opinion so strongly it then alienates others.

Sadly, the “church” has often been very good on becoming dogmatic at the expense of all others not part of its specific fellowship.

A more important aspect we might discuss, is that because Christ's death is of such monumental significance to the Christian, some have mistakenly thought that the cross has to be part of Christian worship.

Firstly, we should remember that it was an instrument of torture. Hebrews 12:2 refers to "*Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*"

It's true that the apostle Paul referred to the cross in a symbolic way (1 Corinthians 1:17, 23). Paul also used the cup of wine from the Passover as a symbol (1 Corinthians 10:21). John the Baptist referred to Christ as the "*Lamb of God*" (John 1:36). But this doesn't mean that we must begin to use cups, or figures of lambs, as religious ornaments or as objects of worship. (although in some religions it is commonly done).

Furthermore, the second of God's Ten Commandments strictly prohibits the use of objects in worship. "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them*" (Exodus 20:4-5). So the concept becomes a slippery slope with strong opinions and convictions that it must be done one way or another.

Again, the exact shape of the crucifixion stake is not important. What is important is that our Savior willingly gave up His life to pay the penalty for our sins.

We will again recognize, commemorate, and soberly honor that in the soon upcoming annual Passover ceremony. I hope what I've shared here will be of help to those with questions. Let's strive to achieve the balance physically, but more important spiritually in our lives as we allow Christ to live in us. (Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:5).

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Scott Hoefker', with a stylized flourish at the end.

T. Scott Hoefker

Senior Pastor, CGM

Church of God Ministries (CGM)/(Ministerios de la Iglesias de Dios)

[tshoefker@cogministries.org](mailto:tshoefker@cogministries.org) / [www.cogministries.org](http://www.cogministries.org)

P.O. Box 983, Daphne, AL, 36526-0983 / 251-930-1797 Offices