

THE "CROSS" OF CHRIST!

A number of churches (including the Jehovah Witnesses) claim that Jesus Christ was nailed to a simple upright post or "stake." In so-called "passion plays" you often see a complete cross (upright AND crossbeam) being dragged to "Golgotha" by the one playing the role of Christ. Some sources claim Jesus carried just the CROSSBEAM to the place of execution which, along with Himself, was hoisted up and attached to an existing stake. However, in reality, Christ was nailed to something FAR DIFFERENT to what most people have been led to believe! This article examines all the crosses used by the Romans for executing criminals, and PINPOINTS the exact type that Christ died upon. Be prepared for surprises!

John D. Keyser

"Quickly throwing His own clothes back on Him, they half-dragged, half-carried Him from the garrison room back to the street. They led Him out, and, holding up the HEAVY WOODEN BEAM He was to bear, slowly LOWERED IT ON TO HIS HIDEOUSLY TORN BACK. Then, urging Him on with whips, they began to lead the procession through the crowds...When they first placed the HEAVY BEAM on Jesus' back, He trudged a few painful steps, and crying out in pain, stumbled and fell under the weight.

"As the mob wound through the streets, they grabbed a man out of the crowd who happened to be Simon of Cyrene, a well-known older man, the father of Alexander and Rufus. The soldiers laid Jesus' STAKE on him, so he could trail along after Jesus....

"The grisly procession continued out of the gate, turned slightly to its left and passing through a stony area where the herdsman gathered their flocks for sale, descended along a pathway into a pleasant garden area bounded by a group of trees against the bluff of a large limestone outcropping.

"Turning to the left, they started climbing this rocky hill, until they achieved the grassy slope atop it, and thus could look back at the city of Jerusalem only about two or three city blocks away from this height. The hollowed-out caves in the face of the limestone outcropping had given rise to its name, 'the place of the skull,' which was the meaning of its Hebrew name, Golgotha.

"There the hole was dug for the STAKE, and Jesus' body was nailed to it, His arms wrenched over His head and driven firmly to the timber with a SINGLE SPIKE through them, while His feet were fastened to the wood with a large spike driven between the bones of His toes.

"Then He was hoisted in the air as the STAKE was jammed into the ground. A scream of sheer agony spasmodically burst forth from Jesus as the soldiers labored with shovels to insure that the STAKE was propped upright."

This graphic and often gut-wrenching excerpt from Garner Ted Armstrong's book, *The Real Jesus*, purports to show the WAY Jesus Christ was fastened to the instrument of His death.

Apart from the obvious geographical inaccuracies (see our article, *Just Where in Jerusalem Did Our Savior Die?*), is this an ACCURATE account of the MODE of crucifixion that Christ underwent?

Diversity of Views

The Jehovah's Witnesses also believe Christ was nailed to a SINGLE, UPRIGHT POST OR STAKE:

There is no evidence that the Greek word STAUROS' meant here [Matthew 10:38] a "cross" such as the pagans used as a religious symbol for many centuries before Christ to denote the sun-god.

In the CLASSICAL GREEK the word STAUROS' meant merely an UPRIGHT STAKE or pale, or a pile such as is used for a foundation. The verb STAURO'O meant to fence with pales, to form a stockade or palisade, and this is the verb used when the mob called for Jesus to be impaled...The root verb STAURO'O occurs more than 40 times [in the New Testament], and we have rendered it "impale," with the footnote: "Or, 'fasten on a STAKE or pole.'"

The inspired writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures wrote in the common (koiné) Greek and used the word STAUROS' to mean the same thing as in the classical Greek, namely, a STAKE or pale, a simple one WITHOUT A CROSSBEAM OF ANY KIND or at any angle. There is NO PROOF TO THE CONTRARY. The apostles Peter and Paul also use the word XY'LON to refer to the torture instrument upon which Jesus was nailed, and this argues that it was an UPRIGHT STAKE WITHOUT A CROSSBEAM, for that is what XY'LON in this special sense means. (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Galatians 3:13; I Peter 2:24) At Ezra 6:11 we find XY'LON in the Greek Septuagint (I Esdras 6:31), and there it is spoken of as a BEAM on which the violator of law was to be hanged, the same as at Luke 23:39; Acts 5:30; 10:39.

The fact that STAUROS' is translated CRUX in the Latin versions furnishes no argument against this. Any authoritative Latin dictionary will inform the examiner that the basic meaning of CRUX is a "TREE, frame, or other wooden instrument of execution" on which criminals were impaled or hanged (Lewis-Short). A cross is only a LATER MEANING of crux. -- *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, by the New World Bible Translation Committee, 1969. Appendix p.1155.

Another viewpoint is presented by Bo Reicke in his work *The New Testament Era*:

On his way from the Praetorium to the place of crucifixion, Jesus, as was CUSTOMARY, had to carry THE TRANSVERSE BEAM (LATIN PATIBULUM) of the cross between the rows of spectators, while the UPRIGHT (GREEK STAUROS,

"POST"; LATIN PALUS, STIPES) stood in place at the execution site and was USED OVER AND OVER AGAIN...The details of the crucifixion can be reconstructed as follows. Upon the hill stood several PERMANENT UPRIGHTS, doubtless strong, but no more than about ten feet high. In the middle was a kind of wooden seat (Latin "sedile"). At the top, or a little beneath it, there was a groove to receive the TRANSVERSE BEAM; in the first case, the cross had three arms (like a "T"), in the second case, four arms (Latin "crux commissa" or "immissa")...The prisoner was stripped and his arms were tied to the TRANSVERSE BEAM; nails were sometimes driven through his hands (here, again, according to John 20:23). He was then placed on the seat, the transverse beam and his feet were tied to the upright, and the notice of the complaint was attached to the top (Matthew 27:35-37 and parallels). The victim was to HANG in this agonizing position until released by death, which usually came about through difficulty in breathing and stoppage of circulation, NOT SO MUCH THROUGH LOSS OF BLOOD. Fortress Press, Philadelphia. 1968. Pages 185-187.

Was THIS, then, the way our Savior was crucified? Obviously, there are SEVERAL ideas or theories about the FORM of crucifixion Jesus suffered.

A History of the Cross

To a Roman Catholic the cross is the most important symbol of his faith. As such it is found displayed on top of roofs and towers, and can be seen on altars, furnishings and ecclesiastical garments. In the majority of Catholic churches, the floor plan of the structure is laid out in the shape of the cross. And, of course, Catholic homes, hospitals and schools have the cross adorning the walls. Everywhere in the Catholic world the cross is outwardly honored and adored in a myriad of ways.

During baptism, when an infant is sprinkled, the officiating priest makes the sign of the cross upon its forehead reciting: "Receive the sign of the cross upon thy forehead." When an initiate receives confirmation, he or she is signed with the cross; and ashes are used to make a cross on the forehead of fervent Catholics during Ash Wednesday. When a Catholic goes to church, he dips the forefinger of the right hand in "holy water" before entering into the church proper -- touching the forehead, the chest, the left and the right shoulder, thus tracing the figure of the cross. During Mass, the Catholic priest blesses the altar with the cross sign 30 times and makes the sign of the cross 16 times.

In general, Protestant churches do not believe in making the sign of the cross or in worshipping the instrument of Christ's suffering -- recognizing that these things are UNSCRIPTURAL and SUPERSTITIOUS. Nevertheless, the use of the cross has quite often been retained on steeples, pulpits and in numerous other ways as a form of decoration.

It was not until Christianity became paganized (or, more correctly perhaps, paganism became Christianized), that the image of the cross came to be considered a Christian symbol. In the year 431 A.D. crosses in churches and in chambers were introduced by the apostatizing Catholic Church, while the use of crosses on steeples was not sanctioned until about 586 A.D. During the sixth century the

Universal or Catholic Church sanctioned the crucifix image and, after the Council at Ephesus, required that private homes possess a cross.

While the cross is a symbol of many so-called Christian churches today, it cannot be maintained that its origin was within true Christianity -- it was a sacred symbol among many non-Christian peoples LONG BEFORE CHRIST EVER ARRIVED ON THE SCENE! According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (1943 edition) the "cross has been used both as a RELIGIOUS SYMBOL and as an ornament from the dawn of man's civilization. Various objects, dating from periods long anterior to the Christian era, have been found, in almost every part of the old world. India, Syria, Persia and EGYPT have all yielded numberless examples, while numerous instances, dating from the later Stone Age to Christian times, have been found in nearly every part of Europe. The use of the CROSS AS A RELIGIOUS SYMBOL in pre-Christian times and among non-Christian peoples may probably be regarded as almost UNIVERSAL, and in very many cases it was connected with some form of NATURE WORSHIP. Two of the most frequent forms of pre-Christian cross are the TAU CROSS, so named from its resemblance to the Greek capital letter T, and the swastika or fylfot....The TAU CROSS with a handle (crux ansata) often occurs in EGYPTIAN and ASSYRIAN sculptures as a SYMBOL OF DIVINITY" (Vol. 6, p. 753).

On the walls and monuments of ancient Egypt, one can readily see the use of the Tau cross. Notes the famed historian William F. Seymour in reference to Egypt: "Here unchanged for thousands of years, we find among her most sacred hieroglyphics THE CROSS in various forms...but the one known specially as the 'cross of Egypt,' or the TAU CROSS, is shaped like the letter T, often with a circle or ovoid above it. Yet this mystical symbol was not peculiar to this country, but was revered...among the Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Mexicans, and every ancient people in both hemispheres" (The Cross in Tradition, History, and Art, pp. 22, 26).

Even The catholic Encyclopedia acknowledges that "the sign of the cross, represented in its simplest form by a crossing of two lines at right angles, GREATLY ANTEDATES, in both the East and the West, THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY. It goes back to a VERY REMOTE period of human civilization (Vol. 4, p. 517, article: "Cross").

"But," you might ask, "since our Savior died on a cross does this not make it a Christian symbol?" While it is true that to most people the cross has come to be associated with Christ, there are a few (knowing full well its history and the superstition surrounding it) who look at it in a different way. After all, Christ was not the first to be crucified on some sort of a cross. William Seymour, in The Cross in Tradition, History, and Art notes that crucifixion as a method of death "was used in ancient times as a punishment for flagrant crimes in Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Palestine, Carthage, Greece, and Rome....Tradition ascribes the invention of the punishment of the cross to a woman, THE QUEEN SEMIRAMIS"!

Obviously Christ died on some sort of a cross -- and yet MANY kinds of crosses are used in the Catholic religion. A page in the Catholic Encyclopedia shows forty -- if you do a little research you will probably come up with even more! This prompts a question: If the Catholic use of the cross began simply with the cross Christ died on -

- and was not influenced by paganism-WHY do they use so many different types in their worship? A noted author says: "Of the several varieties of the cross still in vogue, as national and ecclesiastical emblems, distinguished by the familiar appellations of St. George, St. Andrew, the Maltese, the Greek, the Latin, etc., these is NOT ONE amongst them the existence of which MAY NOT be traced to the REMOTEST ANTIQUITY"! (The Pentateuch Examined, Vol. 6, p. 113).

So now we come to the bottom line -- WHAT SORT of cross did Jesus Christ pay the supreme sacrifice on? Surprises are in store!

The Medical Report

In 1986, The Journal of the American Medical Association carried an article entitled "A Medical Report On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ." Authored by William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel and Floyd E. Hosmer, this report makes some interesting points:

In its EARLIEST FORM in Persia, the victim [of crucifixion] was either tied TO A TREE or was tied to or impaled on an UPRIGHT POST, usually to keep the guilty victim's feet from touching HOLY GROUND. Only later was a TRUE CROSS used; it was characterized by an UPRIGHT POST (stipes) and a HORIZONTAL CROSSBAR (patibulum), and it had several variations. Although archaeological and historical evidence strongly indicates that the LOW TAU CROSS was preferred by the Romans in Palestine at the time of Christ, CRUCIFIXION PRACTICES OFTEN VARIED IN A GIVEN GEOGRAPHICAL REGION and in accordance with the imagination of the executioners, AND THE LATIN CROSS AND OTHER FORMS ALSO MAY HAVE BEEN USED.

The medical report goes on to discuss other interesting aspects of the crucifixion process:

It was customary for the condemned man to carry his own cross from the flogging post to the site of crucifixion outside the city walls. He was usually naked, unless this was prohibited by local customs. SINCE THE WEIGHT OF THE ENTIRE CROSS WAS PROBABLY WELL OVER 300 POUNDS, ONLY THE CROSSBAR WAS CARRIED. The PATIBULUM, weighing 75 to 125 pounds, was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar. Outside the city walls were PERMANENTLY LOCATED THE HEAVY UPRIGHT WOODEN STIPES, on which the patibulum would be secured. In the case of the Tau cross, this was accomplished by means of a mortise and tenon joint, with or without reinforcement by ropes. To prolong the crucifixion process, a horizontal wooden block or plank, serving as a crude seat (sedile or sedulum), often was attached midway down the stipes. Only very rarely, and probably LATER THAN THE TIME OF CHRIST, was an additional block (suppendaneum) employed for transfixion of the feet....The criminal was then thrown to the ground on his back, with HIS ARMS OUTSTRETCHED ALONG THE PATIBULUM. The hands could be nailed or tied to the crossbar, but nailing apparently was preferred by the Romans.

The medical report concludes by saying:

Furthermore, ossuary findings and the Shroud of Turin have documented that the nails [PLURAL] commonly were DRIVEN THROUGH THE WRIST RATHER THAN THE PALMS.

After both arms were fixed to the crossbar, the patibulum and the victim, together, were lifted onto the stipes. On the low cross, four soldiers could accomplish this relatively easily. However, in the tall cross, the soldiers used either wooden forks or ladders.

Next, the feet were fixed to the cross, either by nails or ropes. Ossuary findings and the Shroud of Turin suggest that nailing was the PREFERRED ROMAN PRACTICE. Although the feet could be fixed to the sides of the stipes or to a wooden footrest (suppendaneum), they usually were nailed directly to the front of the stipes. To accomplish this, flexion of the knees may have been quite prominent, and the bent legs may have been rotated laterally....The length of survival generally ranged from three or four hours to three or four days and appears to have been INVERSELY RELATED TO THE SEVERITY OF THE SCOURGING [AND ALSO THE TYPE OF CROSS]. However, even if the scourging had been relatively mild, the Roman soldiers could hasten death by breaking the legs below the knees (crurifragium or skelokopia).

Different Types of Crosses

This same report lists nine variations in the type of cross employed by the Romans throughout their history. They are as follows:

- 1) Infelix lignum -- Tree
- 2) Crux simplex -- Upright post
- 3) Crux composita -- Stipes and Patibulum
- 4) Crux humilis -- Low cross
- 5) Crux sublimis -- Tall cross
- 6) Crux commissa -- T shaped (Tau) cross
- 7) Crux immissa -- t shaped (Latin) cross
- 8) Crux capitata -- t shaped (Latin) cross
- 9) Crux decussata -- X shaped cross

At the time of Christ, however, there were THREE BASIC MODES of crucifixion referred to by the Roman philosopher Seneca: "I see," he says, "THREE CROSSES, not indeed of one sort, but fashioned in different ways; one sort suspending by the head persons bent toward the earth, others transfixing them through their secret parts [crux simplex], others extending their arms on a

PATIBULUM [cruis composita]." (Consol. ad Marciam, XX). Note that Seneca doesn't mention WHAT the patibulum, along with the victim, was attached to! This is important as we will see later.

Can we eliminate some of these variations and determine the EXACT MODE of crucifixion our Savior underwent? And, if we can, DOES IT REALLY MATTER; or is this just an exercise in useless details? Yes, we can determine the CORRECT MODE of crucifixion; and yes, it does matter -- in fact ITS CRUCIAL TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST! A correct understanding of how Christ was crucified brings to life and ENRICHES the stupendous SYMBOLISM in the Old Testament that points to the sacrifice of our Passover Lamb, and the incredibly detailed and intricate prophecies surrounding it.

The "Furca"

Jewish author and lawyer Haim Cohn, in his book entitled The Trial and Death of Jesus, discusses the first form of crucifixion mentioned by Seneca:

In cases of crucifixion, however, the scourging was particularly elaborate: the convict was first UNDRESSED, THEN HIS HEAD WAS COVERED, then a forked instrument with two prongs (furca) was placed on his back and his two hands bound to it, each hand to one of the prongs and thus the convict had to drag the furca to the place of crucifixion; once arrived there, he was flagellated while remaining bound to the furca. -- KTAV Publishing House, New York. 1977. Pages 376-377.

A little more information is provided by James Hastings:

It [the stipes, upright post] was erected on some spot outside the city, convenient for the execution, AND REMAINED THERE AS A PERMANENT FIXTURE, ONLY THE CROSS-BAR OR PATIBULUM BEING CARRIED TO THE SPOT, usually by the person who was to suffer death. This consisted sometimes of a single piece of wood, MORE OFTEN of two parallel bars joined at one end, between which the head of the victim passed, and to the ends of which his hands were fastened. -- A Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. I. Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1951. P.528.

There are a number of factors that preclude this from being the mode of Jesus' crucifixion: 1/. He was CLOTHED as He walked to Golgotha; 2/. His head was NOT covered, allowing Him to talk to the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:27-31); 3/. He was Scourged IN JERUSALEM and NOT at the execution site; 4/. Simon of Cyrene assisted in carrying the crosspiece, indicating that Christ could NOT have been bound to it.

The Crux Simplex (Upright Post or Stake)

We saw earlier what the Roman Philosopher Seneca said about the stake or crux simplex: "...others [type of cross] transfixing them through their secret parts..." No mention is made here of NAILING the victim to the stake. A New Standard Bible Dictionary, edited by Jacobs, Nourse and Zenos, states that "this form [crux simplex] was later elaborated into the 'crux compacta,' of which there were, IN THE TIMES

OF CHRIST, two varieties the crux commissa ('St. Anthony's cross') shaped like a T, and the crux immissa (the 'Latin cross') shaped, as we generally know it, like a t." (N.Y. & London, 1926. P.160).

Various groups, including Garner Ted Armstrong's church and the Jehovah's Witnesses, claim Christ was nailed to an upright stake, using TWO NAILS one for the hands and one for the feet. Is this a VIABLE hypothesis? The Jehovah's Witnesses, as we have just seen, claim the Greek word "stauros" as found in the New Testament can ONLY refer to an upright stake. But is this true?

Ernest L. Martin, in his book Secrets of Golgotha, says NO:

Remarkably, however, there are some religious denominations who DEMAND that Christ was crucified on a simple upright pole or stake BECAUSE THAT WAS THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE WORD STAUROS. Yes, that was the FIRST meaning, but for such interpreters to say that "stauros" had that EXCLUSIVE significance in the first century is to DENY THE ABUNDANT LITERARY EVIDENCE which shows it did not...Actually, the word "stauros" in the first century could refer to ALL KINDS of executionary impalements in which individuals were nailed or tied to ANY supportive timbers or TREES for judgment...It [the word "stauros"] had AT LEAST THREE different meanings in the New Testament alone. Note that the board plank which supported the arms of Christ (called the patibulum in Latin) was itself called a "stauros" (Luke 23:26). But it had a further meaning. The actual POLE or the TREE TRUNK on which the "patibulum" was nailed was also called a "stauros" (John 19:19). And THE WHOLE COMPLEX TOGETHER [both "patibulum" and the pole or stake reckoned as a single executionary device] was called a "stauros" (John 19:25).

Consider this: We have seen in the medical report that the entire complex (patibulum AND stake or stipes) weighed well over 300 pounds, with the patibulum itself weighing 75 to 125 pounds. This means the stake alone weighed anywhere from 175 to 225 pounds! For a man in a weakened state, such as Christ was (and let's not forget the two robbers), to carry or drag this amount of weight the more than 3,000 feet to the crucifixion site would have been well nigh impossible! The custom was for the stake to REMAIN at the site of the crucifixion -- IT WAS USED OVER AND OVER AGAIN! The patibulum, however, was manageable, and, as we have seen, was balanced across the nape of the neck "and balanced along both shoulders," with the outstretched arms tied to or holding it.

There is something else to consider. According to the medical report in The Journal of the American Medical Association, the major effect of the crucifixion process was the interference with NORMAL RESPIRATION or breathing:

The weight of the body, pulling down on the OUTSTRETCHED ARMS AND SHOULDERS, would tend to fix the intercostal muscles in an inhalation state and thereby HINDER PASSIVE EXHALATION. Accordingly, exhalation was primarily diaphragmatic, and breathing was shallow. It is likely that THIS FORM OF RESPIRATION WOULD NOT SUFFICE and that hypercarbia would soon result. The onset of muscle cramps or tetanic contractions, due to fatigue and hypercarbia, WOULD HINDER RESPIRATION EVEN FURTHER. ADEQUATE EXHALATION

REQUIRED LIFTING THE BODY BY PUSHING UP ON THE FEET AND BY FLEXING THE ELBOWS AND ABDUCTING THE SHOULDERS.

This would be impossible for someone crucified to the crux simplex or stake: With the arms fully stretched ABOVE THE HEAD it would be impossible to flex the elbows and abduct the shoulders! Death by asphyxiation would QUICKLY result.

Heart failure is also brought on by the crucifixion process. Some years ago Dr. Hermann Modder of Cologne, Germany carried out some scientific tests to determine the cause of Christ's death. He discovered an interesting fact:

In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks VERY QUICKLY into the lower half of the body. AFTER SIX TO TWELVE MINUTES blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has DOUBLED. Too little blood reaches the heart, and FAINTING ENSUES. This leads to a SPEEDY orthostatic collapse through insufficient blood circulating to the brain and the heart. Death by crucifixion is therefore [also] due to heart failure.

It is a well authenticated fact that victims of crucifixion did not usually die for two days or even longer. On the vertical beam there was often a small support attached called a "sedile" (seat) or a "cornu" (horn). If the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time BY SUPPORTING HIMSELF ON THIS, the blood returned to the upper half of his body and the faintness passed. When the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the "crurifragium" was proceeded with: his legs were broken below the knee with blows from a club. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight on the footrests and HEART FAILURE QUICKLY FOLLOWED. -- The Bible as History, by Werner Keller. Pages 348-349.

Once again, it would be difficult for a man nailed to the crux simplex or stake, with his arms stretched out ABOVE HIS HEAD, to push (and pull) himself upwards sufficiently to bring complete circulation back to the upper part of his body. With the circulation AND breathing problems associated with crucifixion, the single stake type of transfixion afforded little relief and the victim died quickly. Someone crucified in this fashion COULD NOT SURVIVE MORE THAN A FEW HOURS! This, then, strongly suggests Christ was NOT nailed to the crux simplex or "torture stake" as the Jehovah's Witnesses and others claim.

In the summer of 1968, a discovery was made in Jerusalem that strongly indicates the common mode of crucifixion, during the time of Christ, was NOT the crux simplex or stake. During the clearing of a construction site on the hill of Givat Hamivtor on the eastern edge of the city, workers uncovered the grave of one Johanan Ben Ha'galgol. The grave and remains were dated to the time between 7 A.D. and 70 A.D.

Werner Keller, in his book The Bible as History, records what they discovered:

It was noticed with feelings of horror that his feet were separated from the smashed skeleton and were lying one on top of the other and joined together by a rusty nail WHICH HAD BEEN DRIVEN THROUGH BOTH FEET. Fragments of

wood, the remains of a wooden slab, were attached to it. Behind Johanan's feet, the nail was bent obviously by having been driven into harder material. JOHANAN'S FOREARMS ALSO SHOWED SIGNS OF HAVING HAD NAILS [PLURAL] DRIVEN THROUGH THEM. In the course of Johanan's death struggles, his skin had suffered abrasions on the nails [plural].

Finally, the Bible itself refutes the possibility of the crux simplex being used in Christ's execution. Notice John 20:24-25: "Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. When the other disciples told him that they had seen the Lord, he declared, 'Unless I see the nail marks IN HIS HANDS and put my finger where the NAILS [GREEK: PLURAL] were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it. '"

Ralph Woodrow, in his book *Babylon Mystery Religion: Ancient and Modern*, also noticed this: "The statement of Thomas about the print of NAILS (PLURAL) in the hands of Jesus (John 20:25) would seem to indicate a CROSS PIECE, for on a single stake his hands would have probably been driven through with ONE NAIL." (P.53).

Just What Was Jesus Nailed To?

Since we have ruled out the crux simplex or stake, just WHAT was our Savior nailed to?

Let Ernest Martin answer the question:

Many scholars today believe it is inconceivable that Christ, who had been subjected to extensive beatings and whippings, could have carried a fully assembled Latin cross that would have weighed 200 pounds or more [well over 300 pounds according to The Journal of the American Medical Association report]. This certainly had to be the case. The "cross" he transported was only the UPPER CROSSPIECE which was nailed to a larger and more substantial support. It was to this board plank that Christ's arms or his wrists were affixed, and THIS IS WHAT SIMON OF CYRENE CARRIED THE FINAL DISTANCE TO GOLGOTHA. Such crosspieces associated with crucifixion were given a technical name in Latin (patibulum). When Golgotha was finally reached, Christ then had his arms or wrists nailed to the patibulum. Both he and the patibulum were then hoisted upwards and the crosspiece was nailed to some SUBSTANTIAL STOCK OF WOOD large enough to support the person being crucified. It was also common to bend the victim's legs upwards and nail the feet to the stock of wood itself. -- *Secrets of Golgotha*, pp.169-170.

Most scholars accept this viewpoint. Notice what *A Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by James Hastings, has to say:

Stau.ros means properly a stake, and is the translation not merely of the Latin CRUX (CROSS), but of palus (stake) AS WELL. As used in the NT, however, IT REFERS EVIDENTLY NOT TO THE SIMPLE STAKE USED FOR IMPALING, of which widespread punishment crucifixion was a refinement, BUT TO THE MORE ELABORATE CROSS USED BY THE ROMANS IN THE TIME OF CHRIST...The

upright post to which alone the name properly belongs, was usually a piece of some strong, cheap wood, pine or oak, of such length that when firmly planted in the ground the top was from 7 1/2 to 9 ft. high...It was erected on some spot outside the city, convenient for the execution, AND REMAINED THERE AS A PERMANENT FIXTURE, ONLY THE CROSSBAR OR PATIBULUM BEING CARRIED TO THE SPOT, usually by the person who was to suffer death. This consisted sometimes of a SINGLE PIECE OF WOOD, more often of two parallel bars joined at one end, between which the head of the victim passed, and to the ends of which his hands were fastened. The cross which Jesus carried was doubtless simply the CROSSBAR in one of these two forms. Keim argues IN FAVOR OF THE SIMPLER, partly because Jesus is represented as clothed, which would hardly have been the case had He carried the double patibulum; partly because of the CARRYING OF IT BY SIMON, which he regards rather as a rude joke of the soldiers than as rendered necessary by the weight of the crossbar, WHICH COULD IN NO CASE HAVE BEEN VERY HEAVY (Jesu von Nazara, iii. 398, Eng. tr. vi. 125). - Vol. I. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951. P.528.

Jewish author and lawyer Haim Cohn agrees with this:

In cases of crucifixion, however, the scourging was particularly elaborate: the convict was first UNDRESSED, THEN HIS HEAD WAS COVERED, then a forked instrument with two prongs (furca) was placed on his back and his two hands bound to it, each hand to one of the prongs -- and thus the convict had to drag the furca to the place of crucifixion; once arrived there, he was flagellated while remaining bound to the furca. A Milder form of castigation was for the convict to carry his own gallows to the place of execution: THE VERTICAL STAKE OF THE CROSS WAS A PERMANENT FIXTURE, or also ready installed beforehand for each particular execution, while the TRANSVERSE BAR (PATIBULUM) WAS LOADED ON THE BACK of the convict, for him to drag to the place of execution; in some instances he was already bound or nailed to the patibulum on his way there, in others he was allowed to carry the patibulum FREELY ON HIS BACK and would be bound or nailed to it only there. -- The Trial and Death of Jesus, pages 376-377, note 25.

This agrees, in the main, with Seneca's observations.

It is quite plain, therefore, that Christ was subjected to the Milder form of crucifixion; whereby He carried ONLY the patibulum or crosspiece.

The Epistle of Barnabas, found appended to the Codex Sinaiticus, indicates this type of crucifixion!

Notice chapter 12:

Again, when Israel is made war upon by foreigners [Amalekites], He [God] speaks to Moses; and in order to warn them [the Israelites], by means of this very war, that they had been delivered over because of their sins, the Spirit suggests to Moses that he should make a TYPE OF THE CROSS and of Him who was to suffer. He thus intimates that, unless they hope in Him, they will forever be subject to war. Moses, therefore, placed shield upon shield where the fray was thick; and then,

standing where he towered above all the rest, he EXTENDED HIS ARMS. The result was that Israel was again victorious; then, when he lowered them [his arms], the men were again cut down. Why? They were to understand that they could not be saved unless they put their trust in Him. -- Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, edited by Quasten and Plumpe. Verses 2-3.

And how did Moses EXTEND his arms? "And Aaron and Hur supported his [Moses'] hands, ONE ON ONE SIDE, AND THE OTHER ON THE OTHER SIDE; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun." (Exodus 17:12). Obviously, Moses' arms were extended AS IF ATTACHED TO A PATIBULUM! Since the Epistle of Barnabas has been dated to the reign of Vespasian (70-79 A.D.)-see Lightfoot and Ramsay -- then this "type of the cross" could NOT have been contaminated by Catholic theology! And furthermore, EARLY CHRISTIANS were known to pray with their ARMS EXTENDED, once again indicating the manner of Christ's transfixion!

The Messianic Jews claim the killing and roasting of the Passover lamb pointed to the way in which the Messiah was to be hung. In the booklet Let Us Celebrate the Feast, by Rivi and Danny Litvin, we find this remarkable information:

God said that the blood of the lamb was to be spilled, and it was to be placed on the door posts and on the lintels of the home. THUS IT FORMED THE FIGURE OF THE CROSS. THE SHED BLOOD OF THE LAMB FORMED A CROSS. But remember, the Jewish people did not know what a cross was at that time. It would become apparent only later. The cross was a pagan religious symbol which the Romans adopted. And, in a form of sacrifice to their gods, they killed their enemies on it. At the time of Yeshua [Christ], though, this instrument of cruelty was well known to the Jewish people for the Romans murdered many thousands of Jews on crosses in addition to Yeshua.

But not only was the blood of the lamb shed in the form of the cross, the lamb itself was roasted WITH A SKEWER FROM HEAD TO TAIL AND ANOTHER SKEWER FROM SHOULDER TO SHOULDER. So again, we see the death of the Passover lamb associated with the FORM OF A CROSS [patibulum and upright] pointing towards the death of Yeshua on a cross. -- Hope of Israel Ministries (HIM), Covina, CA. P. 23.

The "Trunk" of the Tree!

Now that we have established Christ carried the crosspiece or patibulum to Golgotha, WHAT WAS IT NAILED TO? Most scholars and commentators claim the patibulum was nailed to an existing pole or stake already waiting at the crucifixion site. This is absolutely correct -- in most cases! But was CHRIST nailed to a stake, along with the patibulum?

A clue to this can be found in the New Testament. Notice what Christ said to the women of Jerusalem on His way to the Mount of Olives and Golgotha: "For if they do these things in (dative: WITH) a GREEN TREE, what shall be done in (dative: WITH) the dry?" (Luke 23:31). A GREEN TREE -- could Christ, along with the patibulum, have been nailed to a LIVING TREE? Both Peter and Paul thought

so! Notice Galatians 3:13: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone WHO IS HUNG ON A TREE!'"

Paul is here quoting Deuteronomy 21:23 where it states that the Israelites in the time of Moses were to hang the dead bodies of malefactors on the bough or limbs of a TREE until sundown. The "tree" in Deuteronomy meant a plain and simple TREE, and other examples of this type of punishment in the Old Testament indicate that the "trees" in question were all LIVING TREES! (See Joshua 8:29; 10:26, 27).

Peter says, in I Peter 2:24, that "He [Christ] bore our sins in his body ON THE TREE, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness..."

Luke bluntly states, in the book of Acts, that "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead WHOM YOU HAD KILLED BY HANGING HIM ON A TREE" (5:30). Now what could be plainer than that? In chapter 10 Luke repeats this same theme: "We are witnesses of everything he [Christ] did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. THEY KILLED HIM BY HANGING HIM ON A TREE." Not content with that, Luke further says: "When they had carried out all that was written about him, THEY TOOK HIM DOWN FROM THE TREE and laid him in a tomb" (Acts 13:29).

The word "tree," in these instances, is translated from the Greek word XYLON, which can sometimes mean a dry piece of wood such as a stock or stave, and is rendered thus in Matthew 26:47, Acts 16:24 and Rev. 18:12. However, in the majority of cases it is rendered TREE -- see also Rev. 2:7, 22:2, 22:14 and 22:19

Some might argue that the word "Xylon" COULD mean that Christ was nailed to a dry wooden stake or post; and they could justifiably do so if we had no CONTEXT in the New Testament to show that XYLON means a green tree in this particular circumstance. But we have seen that Christ called "xylon" a GREEN TREE right in the CONTEXT of the crucifixion scene! As He was being led to Golgotha He plainly said to the women following Him: "If they do these things with a GREEN TREE [XYLON], what shall be done with the dry [tree]?" Jesus is CLEARLY showing that it was WITH (OR BY MEANS OF) A GREEN TREE (XYLON) that He would meet His death. Even the Jehovah's Witnesses ADMIT that most translations of the New Testament (in certain verses) say Christ died on a TREE! See Make Sure of All Things, page 140.

The early Christians knew that Jesus -- along with the patibulum -- was nailed to a LIVING TREE! In the book The Cross in Tradition, History, and Art, by William W. Seymour, we find this comment:

Of the first class [of cross], the most prominent in point of time and IN IMPORTANCE, is the TREE OF LIFE. "The Tree of Life, which was planted by God in Paradise, PREFIGURES the precious Cross," writes Damascenus, "for after that death was by the means of a TREE, it was needful that BY A TREE should be given Life, and the Resurrection." -- The Knickerbocker Press, N.Y. & London. 1898. P. 47.

Melito of Sardis echoed the same understanding and consistently said the "cross" of Christ was a TREE: "Just as from a TREE came sin, so ALSO from a TREE came salvation" (New fragment, III. 4).

The author of the Epistle of Barnabas also makes this indelibly clear: "But this suffering was due to His own choice. IT WAS ORDAINED THAT HE SHOULD SUFFER ON A TREE, since the inspired writer attributes to Him the following words: 'Save me from the sword,' and, 'Pierce my flesh with nails, because bands of evildoers have risen against me'" (5:13). Further on, in the eleventh chapter, any doubt that may remain is completely dashed:

Let us now inquire whether the Lord took pains to HINT in advance at the water and the Cross...He says in another Prophet: "He who does these things WILL RESEMBLE THE TREE planted by running waters: it yields its fruit in its season, nor does its leaf fall off; what ever he does will prosper"...Note how at the same time He describes the water and the Cross. This is what He means: Blessed are those who, fixing their hope on the Cross, have descended into the water; for by the words "in its season" He refers to the reward; then, He means, I will pay it. For the present, however, this is what He means by the words "its leaf does not fall": every word that passes your lips in faith and love will be for many a means of conversion and hope...He also DESCRIBES THE CROSS in another Prophet, who says: "And when will these things be accomplished? The Lord says: "WHEN A TREE IS FELLED AND RISES AGAIN, AND WHEN BLOOD TRICKLES FROM THE TREE." Once more you have a HINT of the Cross and of He who was to be crucified!

In chapter eight, the author of Barnabas mentions the sacrifice of the Red Heifer, and states that the priests TIED A CRIMSON THREAD TO A TREE which represented the cross (stauros) of Christ!

What could be clearer? CHRIST WAS NAILED TO A LIVING TREE!!

The Book of Exodus mentions the occasion when Moses was told by the Lord to "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole [standard, upright support]; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent, and PUT IT ON A POLE [STANDARD, UPRIGHT SUPPORT]; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived." (21:89).

What's so significant about this? "And as Moses lifted up [on the "upright support"] the serpent in the wilderness, EVEN SO MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP." (John 3:14). The WAY the serpent was set on the upright support was to be INDICATIVE OF HOW CHRIST WAS ATTACHED TO HIS "UPRIGHT SUPPORT." And what exactly was Moses' serpent attached to?

Let us go to the Epistle of Barnabas again:

Moreover, after Moses had commanded them, "You shall have neither a carved nor a molten [cast] statue for your God," yet he makes one himself TO SHOW A TYPE OF JESUS. Moses, therefore, made a carved serpent, and set it up

conspicuously, and called together the people by proclamation. So they came together and begged Moses to offer a prayer for their recovery. But Moses said to them, "Whenever one of you," he said, "is bitten, let him come to THE SERPENT THAT IS PLACED ON THE TREE, and let him hope and believe that, though dead, the serpent is able to vivify, and he shall immediately be saved." -- 12:67.

What could be more conclusive?

There is even more evidence that our Savior was nailed to a LIVING TREE in the second-century work of Ignatius. In his letter to the Smyrnians, he refers to the cross (stauros) as a TREE -- one so ALIVE it even bore fruit! (Smyr. 1:2). In his letter to the Trallians (verse 11), he uses the following analogy: "Shun these wildlings, then, which bear but deadly fruit, and when one tastes it, he is outright doomed to die! Surely, such persons are not the planting of the Father. For if they were THEY WOULD APPEAR AS BRANCHES OF THE CROSS, and their fruit would be imperishable -- the Cross through which by His Passion He calls you to Him, being members of His body."

Ignatius also says that it was believed "that the instrument of death on which Christ was crucified represented 'the Tree of Life' which was mentioned in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 2:7; 22:2,14), and, of course, that Tree of Life was a LIVING XYLON (TREE) just as the apostles Peter and Paul said Christ was crucified on a similar XYLON (TREE)." (Secrets of Golgotha, p. 174).

If we turn to Jeremiah 11:19, we read the following:

But I was like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they had devised schemes against me, saying, "LET US DESTROY THE TREE WITH ITS FRUIT, and let us cut HIM off from the land of the living, that his name may be remembered no more."

This prophecy shows that the TREE AND THE PERSON ON THE TREE would be destroyed together and, although the original teaching of this Old Testament prophecy seemed to refer to the prophet Jeremiah, Jerome (early church father ?340-420 A.D.) claims it refers to Christ!

Notice what The Anglican Commentary says about this very verse:

Jerome well says on this verse, "All the churches AGREE in understanding that under the person of Jeremiah THESE THINGS ARE SAID OF CHRIST. For he is the lamb brought to the slaughter that opened not its mouth. THE TREE IS HIS [CHRIST'S] CROSS, AND THE BREAD [FRUIT] HIS BODY: for he says himself, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' And of him they purposed to cut him off from the land of the living that his name should no more be remembered." -- Vol. V, p.395.

Vestiges of this new understanding can be seen in the customs of various peoples around the world.

When the ancient Finns of Savolax and Karelia (districts of Finland) buried their dead, they would strip the lowermost branches from off a TREE alongside the road leading to the cemetery, and CARVE A CROSS on the tree together with the initials of the deceased, and sometimes, also, the year of his death. Quite frequently, this information would be cut into a piece of board WHICH WAS THEN FASTENED TO THE TREE. This they did instead of erecting a wooden or stone cross at the grave site itself.

A similar custom prevailed amongst the Estonians. In some districts the crown of a young tree was chopped off, in others a CROSS WAS CARVED in a tree by the way, OR A NAIL HAMMERED INTO IT! (See The Mythology of All Races, vol. IV, by Uno Holmberg. Archaeological Institute of America, Boston. 1927. Pp. 25 & 26).

In Sweden, a tree was planted in the vicinity of every newly constructed house to which sacrifices of FIRST FRUITS were offered, and every autumn THAT OF A SHEEP! This custom was known as the "vardtrad." From this tree no branches were ever cut. (Mythology of All Races, page 26).

This last example couldn't be any plainer! "But CHRIST has indeed been raised from the dead, the FIRSTFRUITS of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." (I Cor. 15:20-22). And, in John 1:29: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the LAMB OF GOD, who takes away the sin of the world!'"

The Nag Hammadi Library

When the collection of Gnostic documents was uncovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, a number of interesting letters were discovered in the library.

One in particular -- the Letter of Peter to Philip -reveals the very instrument Christ was nailed to!

And Peter opened his mouth....He spoke thus: "Our illuminator, Jesus, [came] down and was crucified. And he bore a crown of thorns. And he put on a purple garment. AND HE WAS [CRUCIFIED] ON A TREE and he was buried in a tomb. And he rose from the dead" (Verse 139).

Amidst the well preserved papyri of this same library, another letter purported to have been written by the apostle Peter came to light. And what do you think? It revealed the exact same thing!

Notice:

When he [Christ] had said those things, I saw him seemingly being seized by them. And I [Peter] said, "What do I see, O Lord, that it is you yourself whom they take, and that you are grasping me? Or who is this one, GLAD AND LAUGHING ON THE TREE? And is it another one whose feet and hands they are striking?"

The Savior said to me, "He whom you SAW ON THE TREE, glad and laughing, this is the living Jesus"...And I saw someone about to approach us resembling him, even HIM WHO WAS LAUGHING ON THE TREE. And he was filled with a Holy Spirit, and he is the Savior. (VII, 3:81-82).

Even though the theology is Gnostic and somewhat garbled, the FACT of Christ being nailed TO A LIVING TREE is more than apparent in these documents.

When you take all the sources we have examined, both Biblical and secular, what could be clearer? OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST WAS INDEED NAILED TO A LIVING TREE!!

Further New Testament Proof

In Matthew 27:38 we find a VERY interesting verse which, when coupled with John 19:32-33, can be dumbfounding in its implication! It reads thus: "Two robbers were crucified with him [Christ], one on his RIGHT and one on his LEFT." Going now to John, we read: "The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the FIRST man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the OTHER. BUT WHEN THEY CAME TO JESUS and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs."

Do you see the PROBLEM with this?

Think about it for a minute! If Christ was nailed to the CENTER CROSS, as depicted in the standard crucifixion scene, with one robber on one side and the other on His other side, HOW could the Roman soldiers break the legs of the FIRST robber, then those of the OTHER FINALLY coming to Christ? It wouldn't matter which end of the row of crosses the soldiers started from, Christ would ALWAYS be the SECOND man they came to!!

Do you see that?

Being in the "middle" should have made Christ the SECOND to be killed. Now THIS presents quite a problem, doesn't it?

Dr. Bullinger, in his Companion Bible, noticed this anomaly and came up with an ingenious if IMPRACTICAL solution:

It was this very circumstance that caused Dr. Bullinger to reckon that the Bible indicated, at least to him, that there were actually four others besides Christ who were crucified that day. He thought that the Bible was showing that there were two others on each side of Christ who were crucified with him. Here was his reasoning. Since the New Testament called those crucified with Christ both "robbers" (Matt. 27:38) and also "malefactors" (criminals) (Luke 23:32), Bullinger came to the conclusion that there were TWO "malefactors" and also TWO "robbers." This is why Bullinger believed the two malefactors on one side had their legs broken first and then the soldiers came to Christ in the midst of the TWO malefactors and TWO robbers. But there is no need for such an interpretation. Actually, ALL robbers are criminals (malefactors), but it is NOT true that all criminals are robbers. Luke

simply used the generic term "malefactors" (criminals) to refer to the TWO robbers who were crucified with Christ. -- Secrets of Golgotha, p.176.

Needless to say, Dr. Bullinger was confronted with a REAL problem: How could the Roman soldiers first break the legs of the two robbers and then come to Jesus who was in the MIDST of them? How indeed!

The answer lies in the Book of John:

The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the BODIES [NOTE: PLURAL -- BODIES] should not remain on THE STAUROS [NOTE: SINGULAR -- THE CROSS OR TREE OF CRUCIFIXION] on the Sabbath day (for that day was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other crucified with him. But WHEN THEY CAME TO JESUS, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs. -- John 19:31-33.

These verses show that Christ and the two robbers were CRUCIFIED TO ONE STAUROS OR UPRIGHT! Now, it is absurd to imagine that all three men (including their patibulum) could be nailed to the same stipes or stake -- there simply would not be enough room! However, a tree of the appropriate size would handle the three victims without any trouble at all. Since we have already proved Christ was nailed to a LIVING TREE, and have seen that the two robbers were nailed to the same "upright" as Christ was, then ALL THREE WERE NAILED TO THE SAME TREE!

There is proof for this in other works. The Arabic Infancy Gospel has our Savior prophesying to His mother at a young age: "In thirty years, mother, the Jews will crucify me in Jerusalem, and those two robbers WILL BE FASTENED TO THE STAUROS [SINGULAR] WITH ME, Titus on my right and Dumachus on my left." (The New Testament Apocrypha, by Hennecke Schneemelcher, Vol. I, p.408). And in another work entitled Christ's Descent into Hell, one of the robbers is reported to have said: "Truly, I was a robber, and the Jews HANGED ME ON A STAUROS [SINGULAR] WITH MY LORD JESUS CHRIST" (ibid., p. 480).

There is a strong tradition in ancient Syriac manuscripts that says one of the robbers crucified with Christ was converted when the shadow of Jesus fell upon him, and was baptized by the water which flowed from our Savior's side when pierced by the Roman spear (Legends of the Madonna, by Jameson). For this tradition to be at all believable, the robber would have had to be in VERY CLOSE PROXIMITY to Christ's side -- almost touching Him in fact! This would indicate the robber had to be on the same "stauros" as Christ.

In the Christmas customs of the Swedish Lapps of heathen times, we find a remarkable ritual that is a residue of the very way Christ and the two robbers were put to death on the single stauros or tree! A missionary by the name of Graan reported that the Lapps collected morsels from all the dishes prepared for the Christmas feast and, in the form of an offering of the first-fruits, put them in a small trough of birch bark which was then hung in a TREE near their tent. Previous to hanging the trough, they carved the FIGURE OF A MAN on four sides of the tree trunk! Now notice what occurred next! "Into each of these [the FOUR FIGURES],

every man in the village who had put food into the trough, had to THROW three spoonfuls of FAT with his left hand." (The Mythology of All Races, vol. IV, by Uno Holmberg. Archaeological Institute of America, Boston. 1927).

Not only that but, according to Graan, the Lapps selected another nearby tree, cut the top of it off so that the trunk measured 12 feet high, and SMEARED THE BLOOD OF A SLAUGHTERED REINDEER on it some distance up from the roots!

Another man (Hagstrom) who spent time with the Lapps said they CARVED THE FIGURE OF A MAN ON TWO SIDES of the tree, and a CROSS on the third side! "Even the pine was marked with the sign of the cross and was SMEARED a good way upwards from its root WITH REINDEER BLOOD. Moreover, it had been customary, he says, to hang up a trough of birch-bark in tall trees which were CARVED ON TWO SIDES AND MARKED WITH THE SIGN OF THE CROSS" (ibid, p.67). Here we see a DIRECT REPRESENTATION of Christ and the two robbers!

It is interesting to note that FAT was an important part of the Temple offerings of the Jews. In Leviticus 3 we read the following concerning the peace offering:

Then he shall offer from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as an offering made by fire to the Lord, ITS FAT and the whole fat tail which he shall remove close to the backbone. And the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, the two kidneys and THE FAT that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove; and the priest shall burn them on the altar as food, AN OFFERING MADE BY FIRE TO THE LORD...and the priest shall burn them on the altar as food, AN OFFERING MADE BY FIRE FOR A SWEET AROMA; ALL THE FAT IS THE LORD'S. -- Leviticus 3:9-11, 16.

Under the covenant BOTH THE BLOOD AND FAT were looked upon as exclusively God's. The blood contains the life, which only God can give; and the FAT was considered the RICHEST PART of the animal sacrifice or offering. BOTH fat and blood, you will note, were part of this old Lapp custom.

How could a custom such as this possibly have originated unless, at some point in the history of the Lapps, they were told that Christ was nailed to a LIVING TREE with the two robbers and then stoned? Remarkable indeed!

Dr. Bullinger's problem is now easily solved. The soldiers broke the legs of the robber on Christ's right side (who had his back to Christ and was located on the northeast side of Him Christ was facing west towards His Father's Temple) and then they broke the legs of the robber on Christ's left side (who also had his back to Christ but located on the southeast side of Him). So, starting at the northeast side of the TREE, the soldiers killed the first robber, went to the southeast side and killed the second robber, then they came to Christ who was facing WEST. When they reached Christ they found Him already dead.

It all makes perfect sense when we realize Jesus and the two robbers were CRUCIFIED TO THE SAME TREE!

The Evidence of Architecture and Art

It was common in early artwork of the crucifixion to depict branches and leaves (sometimes even fruit) protruding or growing out from the stauros or upright Christ died on. The stauros was shown as a LIVING symbol which represented life itself.

The Theological Dictionary, by Kittel, highlights this:

Early Christian art indicates a CLOSE RELATIONSHIP between the TREE OF LIFE AND THE CROSS. The cross of Christ, the wood of suffering and death, is for Christians a TREE OF LIFE. In the tomb paintings of the 2nd century it is thus depicted for the first time as the symbol of victory over death. It then recurs again and again. THE IDEA THAT THE LIVING TRUNK OF THE CROSS BEARS TWIGS AND LEAVES is a common motif in Christian antiquity.-- Vol. V, pp. 40, 41.

In the windows of S. Denis, and of S. Chapelle, in Paris, and in those of the cathedrals of Bourges, Chartres, and Rheims, and in many manuscripts, "the CROSS IS A TREE with the branches lopped and covered with a greenish bark." (Handbook of the Middle Ages, by Labarte. Page xviii).

At an exhibition of specimens of medieval art in London, in 1861, there was a crimson velvet chasuble of the 16th century, showing Christ suspended, not from a cross, BUT FROM A VERITABLE TREE, leafless and lopped of its branches. (New York Post, May, 1861).

In paintings, church windows, and enamels of the Middle Ages, the BODY OF THE CROSS IS ALMOST ALWAYS GREEN.

In the Office (order) of the Cross in the Roman Catholic Church, the cross is called the "Tree of life," and the worshippers are taught to address it in this fashion: "Hail, O Cross, triumphal wood, true 'salvation of the world, AMONG TREES THERE IS NONE LIKE THEE IN LEAF, FLOWER, AND BUD...O Cross, our only hope, increase righteousness to the godly and pardon the offenses of the guilty." (The Two Babylons, by Hislop. P.200).

From the Devotions on the Passion, published by the Church of England, the London Record of April, 1842, gives the following excerpt:

"O faithful cross, THOU PEERLESS TREE,

No forest yields the like of thee, Leaf, flower, and bud;

Sweet is the wood, and sweet the weight,

And sweet the nails that penetrate Thee, thou sweet wood."

There are many other examples of the tree tradition. A processional cross from Ciampini's Vetera Monimenta shows leaves and fruit growing out of the body of the cross. From a cross in Bosio's La Trionfante e Gloriosa Croce we find leaves AND ROOTS growing out of the "upright."

In England, obviously reflecting the memory that Christ died on a TREE, we find church crosses with branches and leaf designs protruding, at regular intervals, down the entire length of the shafts. Churches at Castle Acre, Norfolk; Hethersett, Norfolk; Stradsett, Norfolk; Bosbury, Herefordshire; and Bury Saint Edmunds, Suffolk show this same motif.

Why Was Christ Nailed To a Tree?

Now that we have seen the overwhelming evidence demonstrating that Christ was crucified on a TREE, the question that comes to mind is -- why a tree? This is a valid question when most victims in Christ's day were indeed nailed to an upright post or "stipes" that was already located at the execution site.

Aside from the obvious prophetic and symbolic implications, the best answer to this question is TIME, plus the number of people being executed at the same time!

Christ's death was a "hurry-up" affair. The Passover was rapidly approaching and it was Biblical law that NO ONE could hang on the instrument of death beyond sundown. Hastings, in his book *Christ and the Gospels*, states that it was in fact quite common, in times of haste, to nail malefactors to trees (Vol. II, p.749).

An example of this is found in a work of Tertullian, an early (155-222 A.D.) church father, called *Apologeticus*: The Roman proconsul of Africa punished the priests of Saturn "by crucifying them ON THE VERY TREES OF THEIR TEMPLE, in the shadow of which they had committed their crimes" (9:2).

According to Jewish custom of the time, all work had to be completed by noon of Nisan 14 so that the priests would be free to assist in the sacrificing of the Passover lambs, which, in itself, was a formidable operation.

The sacrifice of the Red Heifer and the leading out of the Azazel Goat show that the priests accompanied the victim to the Mount of Olives, and, in the case of the goat, handed it to a "fit man" (whom Jewish tradition states had to be a Gentile) to complete the ritual. Since the Red Heifer and the Azazel Goat PREFIGURED CHRIST, it is quite apparent the priests accompanied Him to Golgotha on the Mount of Olives that fateful day in 30 A.D. Since the priests had to be ready in the Temple by noon for the sacrifices, Christ's crucifixion had to be, of necessity, accomplished in a HASTY manner.

Also, the outcome of Jesus' "trial" was not known in advance, thus the Roman soldiers did not have time to dig a hole some five or six feet deep to secure the extra upright. Pilate tried, right down to the last minute, to have Christ released. If there were no stakes at all at the site, then the soldiers would have had to dig THREE holes! Using a LIVING TREE as the main "upright" for the patibulum of Christ and the two robbers saved time and work.

All the soldiers had to do was nail the victim's arms to the patibulum and then lift each one up to the middle of the chosen tree where they were secured.

And this is exactly what happened!

The Spiritual Significance of Christ's Death

Now we come to the really fascinating part! Imagine, if you will, the people walking down the roadway known as "The Descent of the Mount of Olives" (Luke 19:37) with their Passover lambs under their arms or over their shoulders, heading for the Temple to have them killed. As they travelled down the road, these people would have seen the building of the Miphkad Altar (called the "Beth ha Deshen) -- where the Red heifer and the Atonement offerings were burnt -- on their right, and at the summit itself (Golgotha: Place of the Skull), on their left, **THREE MEN NAILED TO A TREE!** What an extraordinary scene for the Passover season!

However, it's the **SYMBOLISM** of this scene that's intriguing! The people passing by saw Christ nailed to the tree and facing west towards the Temple, while one of the robbers, nailed to the same tree, was facing northeastwards. The other robber was in a similar position but facing southeastwards. With their **SIX ARMS** extended upwards and outwards as they hung from their individual patibulums; and with the **TRUNK OF THE TREE** passing up through the center of the three men, **WHAT** do you suppose this scene looked like to the Jew of the day? What was it that Christ appeared in the midst of in Revelation 1:12-13? **THE SEVEN GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS OR MENORAHS!** The lampstand or menorah had **SIX BRANCHES** extending upward and outward from a **CENTRAL TRUNK** just like the crucifixion scene! And what did the seven branched lampstand symbolize?

Let Ernest L. Martin answer:

This scene [the three men nailed to a tree] would have meant that there were **SIX ARMS EXTENDED UPWARDS** around the tree itself. This scene could provide a **SYMBOLIC** spectacle of a **LIVING MENORAH** (the seven branched lampstand). The Menorah did in fact represent the **TREE OF LIFE** and the Light of the World. And notice the irony of the crucifixion scene. Here was Christ **EAST** of the Holy of Holies and looking westwards towards the curtain of his Father's House. Beyond that curtain were supposed to be a mercy seat (denoting the Throne of God) with the **WINGS OF TWO CHERUBIM OUTSTRETCHED** over that throne. Both cherubim were made to **FACE ONE ANOTHER AND TO FACE THE ONE WHO SYMBOLICALLY SAT ON THE MERCY SEAT**. These were found in the original Temple within the inner curtain of the Holy Place.

Ernest Martin continues by describing the **INVERSE** of what was found in the Holy of Holies:

Now look at the scene of the crucifixion "**OUTSIDE THE CAMP.**" It was a **SIGNIFICANT REVERSAL** to what was originally designed by God to be within the Holy of Holies. Here was the real Lord being crucified on a tree **HAVING TWO ROBBERS AS HIS "CHERUBIM" WITH THEIR ARMS STRETCHED UPWARDS AND THEIR FACES TURNED AWAY FROM HIM IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION...** Their six arms extending upwards around a central trunk of a tree (the trunk being the seventh "arm") could be reckoned a symbol of a **LIVING MENORAH**. Christ was pictured after his resurrection as standing in the midst of the seven

branched lampstand (Rev. 1:3) in a glorious and living existence with all the power of the universe at his beck and call. Was his crucifixion intended to show an OPPOSITE signification on a "Menorah" of degradation and shame? Whereas he should have been sitting on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, he was in a DIAMETRICALLY CONTRARY situation as a sin offering being crucified near the OUTSIDE ALTAR [MIPHKAD ALTAR] of the sanctuary. The scene, from the Christian point of view, would have been totally opposite from what should have been.

Dr. Martin follows this by saying that the cross, which most people associate with Christianity today, IS NOT THE TRUE SYMBOL OF CHRIST'S DEATH:

If there is anything to this symbolism, then the NATIONAL SYMBOL of the modern State of Israel (the seven branched lampstand) REPRESENTS CHRIST BEING CRUCIFIED BETWEEN TWO ROBBERS (HIS "CHERUBIM") FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD. THIS WOULD MEAN THAT THE MENORAH IS THE SYMBOLIC CRUCIFIX OF CHRIST, not the kind that is normally seen in Christian society today. The representation of the cross (and its various forms) that most Christians look to today (atop churches, around peoples' necks, and even embossed on Bibles) is made of two pieces of dry (NOT LIVING) wood which could have NO CONNECTION TO THE LIVING TREE OF LIFE.

There is yet more symbolism to Jesus' death on the tree on the Mount of Olives. Consider this: As the people were walking down the roadway that led to the eastern gate of the Temple, carrying the lambs to be sacrificed, they would, as they passed by the crucifixion site, TURN THEIR BACKS on the One to whom they were about to sacrifice the Passover lambs! "And while worshippers were entering the Temple to pay tribute to the One sitting within the Holy of Holies (originally enthroned between two cherubim), the crowds were actually TURNING THEIR BACKS on the real Christ from heaven and his two "cherubim" (the robbers nailed to the same tree with their BACKS TO HIM AS WELL)." (Secrets of Golgotha, p.263).

Now think about this: When Christ finally died on that "accursed tree" with the backs of the people to Him He cried out, "My God, My God, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" THIS MEANS THAT HIS HEAVENLY FATHER ALSO TURNED HIS BACK ON HIM momentarily, thus allowing Christ to carry all the sins of the world on His back in that final sacrificial position.

ISN'T THAT INCREDIBLE?

Our Savior truly DIED REJECTED -- rejected by ALL including the Father Himself! What a marvelous fulfillment!

The Things We Have Learned

We have seen, in this article, how the modern conception of the cross (two pieces of dead wood or a simple stake) DOES NOT represent the instrument of Christ's death. We have seen that the Savior of Mankind was nailed, along with the patibulum He carried out of the eastern gate of the Temple to the Mount of Olives, to a LIVING TREE growing at the Place of the Skull Golgotha, along with the two

robbers who were crucified on the EXACT same tree He was. We have see the evidence of ancient manuscripts, and the visible witness of architecture and art (for those with the eyes to see), and how the death on the TREE was symbolized by the Old Testament rituals and the very beginnings of mankind in the Garden of Eden.

This new knowledge should fill us with awe at the meticulous planning of our Heavenly Father, and how everything was fulfilled in its place and in its time, and we should be thrilled at the prospect of witnessing the fulfillment of events yet to come. These vital truths should enrich our faith in the purpose and ability of our Father in heaven and His Son our Savior Jesus Christ to bring to completion His great Master plan for mankind and those of us He has called to serve and represent Him.

May God grant us the faith and the power of His spirit to serve faithfully through the good times and the bad, that we may stand before the returning Messiah and hear those words ringing in our ears: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"