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SKYVIEW BULLETIN

DID JESUS REALLY DIE ON A CROSS?



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The cross of Jesus has been the icon of Christianity through the centuries as it is used to describe the death of the Son of God. Many of the hymns we sing focus on the cross. Favorites like "The Old Rugged Cross," and "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross," and many others draw our attention to the cross and the death of Christ for the sins of the world. The word "cross" appears twenty-nine times in the New Testament in reference to the method of execution suffered by Jesus and comes from the Greek word *stauros* which means a pole or cross used as a means of capital punishment. Sometimes the word is used in a symbolic way to refer to the burdens or hardships incurred as a Christian. For example, Jesus said that we must take up our "cross" and follow Him (Luke 14:27). This suggests self-denial and an extinguishing of passion or selfishness.

Most Bible scholars have described the cross as an upright pole or beam with a cross-beam at the top on which the person to be crucified was either tied with ropes or nailed with spikes. This concept of the cross and crucifixion has been universally accepted among most who believe in Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross.

A recent on-line blog, however, calls into question the way Jesus died. Gunnar Samuelsson, a theologian at the University of Gothenburg recently wrote an article title: "Little Evidence Jesus Died On A Cross." This "scholar?" actually says that Jesus may have died on a spiked pole, or a tree trunk, or something entirely different." In fact he concludes that the "ironic image of Christ dying on the cross may be misleading" and that "crucifixion was more rare than commonly thought." He concluded that Jesus may not have died on a cross, but instead have been put to death on another gruesome execution device. He suggests that left up to the wicked minds of the Roman soldiers as to how a condemned person would be put to death, "the executions of that day could have taken a completely different form from the day before." Samuelsson supposedly conducted a three-and-a-half year study before reaching his conclusions about the way Jesus died. Exactly what data he studied or discovered is unclear.

An examination of the many reference works available do not support this "scholar's" finding. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says about the word "Cross" : "The form usually seen in pictures, the *crux immissa*, is that in which the upright beam projects above the shorter cross-piece. From the mention of an inscription nailed above the head of Jesus it may safely be inferred that this was the form of the cross on which He died."

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WORSHIP TIMES

SUNDAY

Worship.....9:30 A.M.
Classes.....10:50 A.M.
Worship.....6:00 P.M.

WORSHIP PLACE

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McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia makes this observation "In its simplest shape, consisting of two pieces of wood, one standing erect, the other crossing it at right angles, the cross was known at an early age in the history of the world."

Fausset's Bible Dictionary says: "Tradition, and the inscription over our Lord's head, make it likely that the form of His cross was +. The pole on which the brazen serpent was lifted by Moses was the type (John 3:14; Num 21:8-9). The fathers regarded its four limbs pointing above, below, and to both sides, as typifying" the height, depth, length, and breadth" of the love of Christ, extending salvation to all (Eph 3:18)."

Easton's Bible Dictionary defines the cross: 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."



What difference does it make what one believes about how Christ died?

Other references could be cited in which scholars agree Jesus died on a cross that consisted of an upright pole or beam with a cross-beam attached at the top with the upright beam extending above the cross beam. The Bible also supports this description of the cross on which Jesus was put death. The biblical description of the title "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS," being put on the cross and nails driven through Jesus' hands and feet support the idea of the cross as we traditionally picture it.

Jesus told His disciples that just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the He too would be lifted up in like manner (John 3:14). Peter, preaching to the Jews on Pentecost in Acts 2, said in verse 23: "...you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death" the Son of God. The word "crucified" according to Vincent's Word Studies means "to impale, fasten affix." The Bible, therefore, supports the concept of Jesus being lifted up, being affixed or fasten to a cross. The nail prints in his hands and feet, which served as evidence to Thomas that

Jesus had been resurrected, (John 20:24-29), prove that Jesus was attached to the "cross" by the nailing of his hands and feet. This certainly indicates the cross was a beam with a cross beam at the top.

What difference does it make what one believes about how Christ died? Samuelsson does not deny that Christ died in some manner, he questions that "manner." He also claims to believe that "the man who walked this earth was the Son of God, and that He will return to judge the living and the dead."

What matters is this: Samuelsson is questioning the accuracy of the scriptures' description of Christ's death. He makes the suggestion that "we should read the text as it is, not as we think it is." Good advice! Samuelsson should follow his own suggestion. The motivation for this "scholar's" thesis on the cross is questionable. Did he write this article to show his wisdom and scholarship? Paul warned: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" Colossians 2:8). Some of Samuelsson's critics claim that he wants to undermine Christianity. His response was that this accusation is simply "stupid."

What Samuelsson wrote is not likely to convert anyone to Christianity. In fact, the opposite is true. If we cannot accept the Bible for what it says about the cross of Christ, why accept anything else it says? If doubt can be raised concerning the method of the crucifixion of the Son of God, doubt can also be raised as to Christ even dying on an instrument of death. Or, doubt that he even lived.

John writes concerning the things written in scripture: "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

To believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is to believe everything the Bible says about Him. The Bible says Jesus was put to death on a cross and why question that? We can have life through His name if we believe the revelation given through scripture. If we do not believe, if we question what is revealed, we cannot have life. CEM

Adult
Auditorium
New class
beginning in
January:
The Life Of Christ

GOD'S
PLAN OF SALVATION
Believe—Heb. 11:6
Repent—Luke 13:3
Confess—Rom. 10:9
Be Baptized—
Mk. 16:16, Acts 2:38,
1 Pet. 3:21