

## **Yeshua (Jesus) Died on a Stake** **We Need Better Bible Teaching**

By Moshe Schwab

When we are taught something by a Bible teacher we trust that those teaching us have done their research. For example, take the word righteous. Instead of teaching that righteous means to do what is right, some have developed a doctrine that we are made right without doing what is right. It is ridiculous that people teach that it takes no actions of our own to live right. People have trouble accepting good exegesis because of false teaching.

The problem is that people don't see the truth as a good thing because they are locked into a false doctrine. What could possibly be wrong with teachings that tell us to do what is right or to live justly? Yet some will defend their faulty teaching like there is no tomorrow and say the Bible isn't saying that we should do what is right when we see the word righteous or righteousness.

It is really a shame how people defend these false doctrines. The Bible must be understood within a Hebraic context or we simply have fiction. The idea of righteousness is a Hebraic concept, doing what is right comes from both the Old and New Testament portions. I don't know about you, but I want the truth. God forbid that we should be understanding the scriptures to actually tell us to do what is right (I'm being sarcastic). God really wants us to do what is right not just think we are right! A lot can be shared about this topic and I encourage you to read my more in depth article entitled, [Righteous – Being a Tzadiq.](#)

### **Rethinking Crosses**

Let's use the word cross as another example. We have songs about the cross and pictures and statues of wood and stone, but the fact is, Yeshua died on a stake.<sup>1</sup> This is probably something that some of us can more easily accept. I realize that some are also stuck in this wrong teaching too, and feel deeply attached to crosses and pray to them. It may not be wrong to wear a cross (also, crosses are also not to be used as amulets to bring good luck), but it is definitely wrong to pray to them or use them in worship. My conscience prevents me from valuing this pagan symbol and perhaps you may need to rethink how you perceive crosses as well.

Why is this important? First of all, there are a lot of writings out there that try to discredit who Yeshua was based on just this one point of false theology, the cross symbol. The inclusion of pagan practices in Christianity has given some the chance to discredit believing in the Messiah Yeshua! If believers in the Messiah had retained their Hebraic roots, this would have never been a problem. Jewish practice would not have allowed pagan culture into Christian practice. Here is some information that I was able to find out about the use of the word "cross" in the Bible.

### **Archeological and Written Evidence**

We have some evidence as to what was NOT used to crucify Yeshua. Bullinger, a prominent 19th century Bible scholar, said that the Messiah was never represented by a cross by early believers.

Bullinger wrote that in the catacombs of Rome, Christ was never represented there as "hanging on a cross" and that the cross was a pagan symbol of life (the ankh) in Egyptian

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<sup>1</sup> The Complete Jewish Bible uses the word "stake" exclusively (79 times in NT) for Yeshua's execution. "But as for me, Heaven forbid that I should boast about anything except the execution-stake of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah!" Galatians 6:14 CJB.

churches that was borrowed by the Christians. He cited a letter from English Dean John William Burgon, who questioned whether a cross occurred on any Christian monument of the first four centuries and wrote: "The 'invention' of it in pre-Christian times, and the 'invention' of its use in later times, are truths of which we need to be reminded in the present day. The evidence is thus complete, that the Lord was put to death upon an upright stake, and not on two pieces of timber placed in any manner."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that there are no depictions of a cross at ancient gravesites is a very strong argument in this case. A lot of later Christian burial sites have crosses on many of the graves.

After reading the article on Wikipedia sited above, the majority consensus is that the word for “cross” should have been translated “stake.” It is the Greek word σταυρός, stauros. Most importantly, Thayer’s Lexicon cites written historical evidence as to what the word stauros means, “An upright stake, especially a pointed one (Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon).”<sup>3</sup> So, we have both archeological evidence and historical meaning from ancient writings showing that Yeshua was never crucified on a pagan cross-like structure, but on a stake.

### More Info

Another word used to describe how Yeshua was crucified is the Greek word xylon (for example, Acts 10:39; 1 Peter 2:24) which essentially means “a stick, club, or tree.”<sup>4</sup> Shaul uses this word referring to Yeshua dying on a tree in Galatians 3:13. He is quoting Deuteronomy 21:22-23 CJB, “If someone has committed a capital crime and is put to death, then hung on a tree (אֵץ, etz) his body is not to remain all night on the tree, but you must bury him the same day.” Also, the word translated “nails” in Yochanan (John 20:25) is the singular noun “nail” and so Yeshua’s hands were pierced by a single nail.<sup>5</sup>

There are also those that consider the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet as a possible connection to the cross as the Phoenician letter looks like a plus sign (The rabbis say that the block lettering is more probably how Hebrew was originally wrote, especially since Abraham came from the Babylon area.<sup>6</sup>). Tav means “mark, sign, and signature.”<sup>7</sup> So it really shouldn’t be construed as connected to the pagan cross. Yeshua said, “‘It is accomplished!’ And, letting his head droop, he delivered up his spirit;” John 19: 30 CJB. Perhaps when Yeshua said “‘accomplished,” He was not only giving His life for our redemption, but down putting His mark down (His Tav) as our redemption was now completed, finished.<sup>8,9</sup> A lot more could be said about the letter tav. I don’t

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instrument\\_of\\_Jesus%27\\_crucifixion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instrument_of_Jesus%27_crucifixion); see under subtitle "Stauros interpreted as stake only."

<sup>3</sup> STRONGS NT 4716: σταυρός σταυρός, σταυροῦ, ὁ (from ἵστημι (root sta); cf. Latinstauro, English staff (see Skeat, Etymological Dictionary, under the word); Curtius, § 216; Vanicek, p. 1126); 1. an upright stake, especially a pointed one (Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon). Under Thayer’s Greek Lexicon. See on the Internet at: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=G4716&t=KJV>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=G3586&t=KJV>.

<sup>5</sup> g2247. ἦλος hēlos; of uncertain affinity; a stud, i. e. spike:— nail. AV (2)- nail 2; a nail, Enhanced Strong’s Dictionary.

<sup>6</sup> In the Jewish writings, Abraham was the son of a prominent leader (Terah) and would have been an educated person who wrote in the local script of Babylon where he was from.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/alphabet\\_letters\\_tav.html](http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/alphabet_letters_tav.html).

<sup>8</sup> Also, the letter tav resembles to some extent the marking of the lintel and doorposts with the blood of the lamb so that the destroyer would pass over those homes. Yeshua was our Lamb of God who gave Himself for us. The letters hey, chet, and tav look similar.

believe it should be associated with a pagan symbol. We sometimes find out that the things that God prohibited were practices of the pagans, for example, not boiling a baby goat in its mother's milk (Exodus 23:19) was something the pagans did.<sup>10</sup> It makes sense then that we should not be associating a pagan symbol with the Messiah.

### **Nothing But God is to be Worshipped**

Yeshua said, "The Tanakh says, 'Worship ADONAI your God and serve him only.'"<sup>11</sup> The cross is a pagan symbol. God does not want us to worship symbols, pictures, and sculptures and that would include any symbol or artwork representing Him or His death (Deuteronomy 4:15-19).<sup>12</sup> If you remember the story of the bronze snake that Moshe (Moses) put on a pole, the Israelites later ended up worshipping it. The same is true for crosses too. There are some who worship crosses; it is especially wrong to associate Yeshua with a pagan symbol and worship it. It is wrong to worship any resemblance of a person or thing. It is definitely not acceptable to God. We should be careful what we put in places where we pray or worship. Shaul (Paul) said, "For of this you can be sure: every sexually immoral, impure or greedy person - that is, every idol-worshipper - has no share in the Kingdom of the Messiah and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty talk; for it is because of these things that God's judgment is coming on those who disobey him;" Ephesians 5:5 CJB.

As you can see, Shaul considers this a very serious topic. Shaul says, "Therefore, brothers, stand firm; and hold to the traditions you were taught by us;" 2 Thessalonians 2:15 CJB. They most certainly did not worship images, pictures, symbols, or anything made of wood or stone. Vine's Expository Dictionary says:

"By the middle of the 3rd cent. A.D. the churches had either departed from, or had travestied, certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols.

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<sup>9</sup> The writer of Hebrews says Yeshua is the "Completer," namely, the finisher or tav, (tav is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet). "Looking away to the Initiator and Completer of that trusting, Yeshua - who, in exchange for obtaining the joy set before him, endured execution on a stake as a criminal, scorning the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God;" Hebrews 12:2 CJB.

<sup>10</sup> The rabbis use this scripture to say that we shouldn't eat milk products with meat. Perhaps that's not a bad idea as milk products slows down digestion, but the scripture is referring to pagan practice only. Not eating milk products with meat is an extra command that is not in the Bible and does not have to be followed. Extra commandments put unnecessary burdens on believers that God never intended to be put on them. "In order to obey the mitzvot of ADONAI your God which I am giving you, do not add to what I am saying, and do not subtract from it;" Deuteronomy 4:2 CJB. While some extra commands are logical, many are not and in this case the command more clearly implies not to use anything pagan as part of our practice - for example, we should not be using crosses.

<sup>11</sup> "You are to fear ADONAI your God, serve him and swear by his name. You are not to follow other gods, chosen from the gods of the peoples around you;" Deuteronomy 6:13-14 CJB. These scriptures follow part of the Shema in Deuteronomy 6. The Shema is Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37-41. Yeshua often speaks from the Torah.

<sup>12</sup> "Therefore, watch out for yourselves! Since you did not see a shape of any kind on the day ADONAI spoke to you in Horev from the fire, do not become corrupt and make yourselves a carved image having the shape of any figure - not a representation of a human being, male or female, or a representation of any animal on earth, or a representation of any bird that flies in the air, or a representation of anything that creeps along on the ground, or a representation of any fish in the water below the shoreline. For the same reason, do not look up at the sky, at the sun, moon, stars and everything in the sky, and be drawn away to worship and serve them; ADONAI your God has allotted these to all the peoples under the entire sky;" Deuteronomy 4:15-19 CJB.

Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the "cross" of Christ."<sup>13, 14</sup>

Sometimes you come across things that completely surprise you like this excerpt from Vine's. When I began working on this I quoted someone else's brief teaching, but as you can see, this is something definitive that needs to be taught on more in detail and acted on accordingly.

### **Conclusion**

We need good Bible teaching, rooted in the Hebraic culture that we can act on appropriately or we will simply be doing what someone told us to do instead of what God wants us to do. The word that is translated "cross" in the Bible should be "stake." While I appreciate peoples' zeal to love God, it is wrong to worship crosses and the Tanakh says we are not to even touch unclean things, "Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean thing;" Isaiah 52:11 CJB. Put your zeal to good use some other way and also, stop worshipping things that God tells us not to worship!

Archeology shows that the cross was never used until perhaps the 4th century AD, so early believers did not use it. They wouldn't have allowed idols into their belief system because they were more connected to their Hebraic roots. Also, the historical written meaning of the Greek word *stauros* is a stake. It seems to be the general consensus of most scholars that "stake" is the meaning of the word *stauros* and not "cross."

The Bible is clear that we are to worship nothing, but the true God. Shaul (Paul) considers this a very serious topic. Bible teachers perhaps know the truth, but refuse to make an issue out of it because of some who want to retain their love of crosses. These Bible teachers have no *chutzpah* (temerity); they simply don't want to offend anyone. We need to know the truth and now that we know the truth, what will we do with it? We can't control what others do, but we can gently (Galatians 6:1) teach others the truth. That's what works the best. More importantly, we need to decide what we will do and how we will act. Kefa said, "For you have spent enough time already living the way the pagans want you to live;" 1 Peter 4:3 CJB.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://studybible.info/vines/Cross,%20Crucify>.

<sup>14</sup> "Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean thing;" Isaiah 52:11 CJB. We should not worship anything man made and perhaps we shouldn't wear or carry a cross that is associated with pagan beliefs. Let your conscience guide you.