**CROSS vs. STAKE**  
*All scriptural references are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted*

**INTRODUCTION**

There are varying beliefs regarding the device used for Christ's execution. Some believe Christ was killed using a simple, upright pole, others believe he was executed on a cross, and still others believe he was killed on an actual living tree. Each group presents evidence in support of their chosen belief. Though we at CommonTruth.com do not consider the device of Christ's death to be an issue of doctrine (we believe his actual death is a much more important priority), we realize that some Christian groups do regard this as very important.

Therefore, since our job is to present Scriptural truth, we have chosen to tackle this topic for those who are unsettled on the issue.

**DIFFERENCES IN DOCTRINE**

To start with, in the New Testament most Bibles refer to "The Cross" as the device Messiah / Christ was killed on. Some of the places in which this is mentioned is at [**Matthew 10:38, Matthew 27:32, 42 and Mark 8:34**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2010:38,%20Matthew%2027:32,%2042,%20Mark%208:34&version=KJV). Other Bible versions use the term "Stake" instead. Versions that use the word "stake" include: ***The Complete Jewish Bible, The Scriptures (ISR), The New World Translation,*** and ***The Sacred Scriptures Bethel Edition***. The Bible also refers to Jesus Christ as having been hung on a tree ([**Galatians 3:13**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%203:13&version=KJV)) (also [**Acts 5:30**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%205:30&version=KJV) and [**1 Peter 2:24**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%202:24&version=KJV) in **King James Version**). Since there isn't complete agreement among the various Bible versions, it is important to check the original language used in the Bible in order to know which meaning is originally intended. This is where we need to use an interlinear Bible text.

**TRANSLATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE**

We used the Interlinear Bible at [**www.Biblestudytools.com/interlinear-Bible/**](http://www.biblestudytools.com/interlinear-bible/)with their King James Strong's Version to look up the original Greek word for "cross" in the New Testament using the Strong's Concordance. We saw this information:

**#4716.** stauros stow-ros' from the base of 2476; a stake or post (as set upright), i.e. (specially), a pole or cross (as an instrument of capital punishment); figuratively, exposure to death, i.e. self-denial; by implication, the atonement of Christ:--cross.

We also looked up the word "crucify" with the Strong's Concordance, and found this:

**#4717.** stauroo stow-ro'-o from 4716; to impale on the cross; figuratively, to extinguish (subdue) passion or selfishness:--crucify.

Next we looked up the word "tree" in the Strong's Concordance, and this is what we found:

**#3586.** xulon xoo'-lon 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.

We searched through the interlinear Bible at [www.Scripture4all.org](http://www.scripture4all.org/) to see the various instances in which xulon was used. In Scripture, xulon was used for a variety of meanings, all of which matched any one of the above definitions for "xulon". The word was used when speaking of staves/clubs ([**Matthew 26:47,55**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2026:47,55&version=KJV)), the device of the Messiah's death ([**Acts 5:30, Galatians 3:13, 1 Peter 2:24**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%205:30,%20Galatians%203:13,%201%20Peter%202:24&version=KJV)), and stockades ([**Acts 16:24**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2016:24&version=KJV)), as well as trees ([**Luke 23:31**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2023:31&version=KJV)).

**GATHERING IT TOGETHER**

So far, now, this is what we have: The words "stauros" and "xulon" are both used for references to the device of the Messiah's murder. Both refer to singular wooden devices in some manner.Stauros means stake, pole, or cross; Xulon means beam, stocks, staff, or tree. In the various Bible versions, Jesus is referenced as being put on a cross, stake, or tree. At this point though, there is still no proof as to whether Jesus was nailed to a simple stake, a living tree, or a two beamed cross. Therefore, let's investigate this further.

**SCIENTIFIC PROOF**

As for death resulting from being nailed up, the most popular thought is that the Messiah would die of suffocation/asphyxiation. Frederick T. Zugibe, (Adjunct Associate Professor of Pathology at Colombia University College of Physicians and Surgeons), performed extensive experiments to test this theory: He took volunteers and crucified them (they weren't actually nailed, they were suspended by belts and straps on a sturdily constructed cross). He conducted two variations of crucifixion: One with a suppedaneum (a wooden block upon which toes would be supported, helping a victim stay supported on a cross/stauros ) and one without a suppendanuem. The results can be read [**here**](http://www.crucifixion-shroud.com/Turin2000.htm). These experiments show that a man on a cross would NOT suffocate to death, with or without a suppedaneum.

By way of comparison, Hermann Moedder, a doctor of radiology from Austria, carried out an experiment in the 1940's in Cologne, Germany, with medical students. He strapped them with their wrists directly above their heads Within minutes the students grew pale, their lung capacity and blood pressure dropped significantly, and their pulse rates increased. Moedder concluded suffocation would occur in minutes if they were not able to stand and rest. Though we don't have complete information about this experiment, it appears that a suppedaneum wasn't used, neither was a sedile (a block of wood attached to the stauros to support the buttocks slightly). This makes a difference because such devices can act as supports that the victim on the stauros could use for support in the breathing issues involved.

Now this is where the comparison of the two experiments is interesting: According to the Bible, a crucified man's legs were broken in order to hasten death ([**John 19:31-32**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2019:31-32&version=KJV)). This would indicate, according to the results of the above mentioned experiments, that Jesus Christ and the two robbers were killed on singular poles.Breaking their legs would take away the usefulness of the suppedaneum's support, thus hastening their deaths by suffocation. This would not happen on a cross, according to Dr. Zugibe's experiments.\*

**WHAT ABOUT THE SIGN POSTED ON THE BEAM?**

Now we have the matter of the sign posted above the Messiah's head as stated at [**Matthew 27:37**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2027:37&version=KJV). If the sign was posted above his head, then that would imply a cross, otherwise it would be above his hands, right? According to Scripture, the sign said something to the effect of "Jesus the Nazarene the King of the Jews". This sign was written in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek ([**John 19:19-20**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2019:19-20&version=KJV)). Therefore, this couldn't have been a tiny sign. However, we need to understand that we, the readers, are simply assuming what the position of the sign was. All the Bible says is that it was above his head, no indication of postion otherwise. It is plausible that Jesus was nailed with his hands straight up, and the sign placed above his head, as indicated by the Scriptures, but slipped in behind his arms.

**WHAT ABOUT THE NAILS?**

What about the number of nails that were driven into his hands/wrists? ([**John 20:25**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2020:25&version=KJV)). If Jesus were nailed to a stake, then only one nail would be used to nail his hands/wrists, right? Not necessarily. It's reasonable to say that a single nail won't support the weight of an adult male. Either the nail would rip out of the pole, or the man's hands would rip off from the nail from his own body weight. It's necessary to use multiple nails in order to have a secure hold.

**WHAT ABOUT THE WEIGHT OF THE CROSS?**

The Bible shows that victims carried the beams to the execution site ([**Luke 23:26**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2023:26&version=KJV)). Although this would also do away with the idea of Jesus being nailed to a living tree, most people still believe that this was actually just a patibulum - a cross beam for the cross - not the entire cross. But this isn't sensible, because Jesus told us, according to the interlinear Bibles, that we have to carry our own "stauros" ([**Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 14:27**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2016:24,%20Mark%208:34,%20Luke%2014:27&version=KJV)). If we are to translate "stauros" to mean "cross" then to carry solely the patibulum would be carrying only a part of it, not the entire thing. This would significantly reduce the impact of what Jesus was trying to convey. Also, if "stauros" were to be translated as an entire cross, according to some this could weigh approximately 200 - 300 pounds (about 91-136 kilograms) with the main beam weighing in at about 125 -175 pounds (57 - 80 kilograms). This could probably be managed with the two men, however Scripture shows that Simon the Cyrene actually took the stauros to carry on his own ([**Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2027:32,%20Mark%2015:21,%20Luke%2023:26&version=KJV)) (Note, the Scriptures say he actually bore the stauros, not just simply helped carry it).However, having just a single stake would be much more manageable weight-wise. Of course, people in those days were much hardier because they had more physical labor to perform on a day-to-day basis, but still, 300 pounds is an awful lot for such a man to carry on his back through the streets of Jerusalem and up a steep hill to Calvary.

**SO, NOBODY DIED ON A CROSS?**

We aren't saying that crosses were never used for execution, as execution methods varied according to time period and location. Archaeological finds have shown that sometimes a cross was actually used instead of a simple, singular beam. One of the most famous of these finds was that of a man named "Yehohanan, son of Hagakol" found in Jerusalem in 1968.

**SO, COULDN'T JESUS / YESHUA HAVE BEEN ON A CROSS?**

No. If he and the other men with him were killed on a cross, they would have taken days to die (probably from dehydration) according to the above mentioned scientific information. However, Scripture tells us they were dead within hours, not days ([**Mark 15:25-37**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%2015:25-37&version=KJV)). It is also notable that, in order to hasten death, the legs of the criminals were to be broken ([**John 19:31-33**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2019:31-33&version=KJV)). If they were on a cross, according to the above mentioned science, broken legs wouldn't have made a difference in time of death; that would only work when a victim is nailed to a singular pole.

**CONCLUSION**

So this is what we have here: A full cross would be too heavy for a man to carry all the way to Calvary, whereas a singular beam would be much more manageable. Scientific evidence also supports the use of a simple stake instead of a cross in the case of Jesus Christ's murder. Since a cross would take days to kill, and Scripture states that death happened within mere hours, this also points to a simple stake or pole. Couple these things with the original language used in Scripture, the evidence shows clearly that the true instrument of the Messiah's execution was a simple stake or pole.

**DOES IT MATTER?**

No, it does not really matter whether Jesus Christ died on a singular pole or a two beamed cross in the end. The more important matter is the fact the Jesus Christ actually died for our sins, paving the way to our Salvation and reconciliation with God.

May God's peace rest upon you all.

\* The Bible does not specify which leg bones were broken: If it were the thigh bones (the femurs), it would likely cause serious blood loss and hasten death, even on a cross. If, instead, the lower leg bones (the tibulae and fibulae) were broken, such hastening of death through blood loss would be unlikely. Since femurs are the strongest bones in the body, and are covered in thick muscle tissue, it takes a tremendous amount of force to break a healthy one; therefore, it would be more speedy and efficient to target the lower legs. Ergo, most opine that it was the lower legs which were targeted for this torture.