

# Is the Cross a Christian Symbol?

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A Roman Impalement

(Louvre Museum, Paris, France)

Onward, Christian soldiers!  
Marching as to war,  
With the cross of Jesus  
Going on before.

So reads the chorus to a very popular Christian hymn that churches have sung for many years. The song portrays the cross as the identifying sign of everything for which Christianity stands and around which Christians should rally in their fight against the forces of evil.

Throughout the world, people universally regard the cross as THE symbol of Christianity. Churches have crosses atop their steeples, on their walls, windows and doors. Catholics and Protestants wear crosses on necklaces, bracelets, rings, pendants, key chains and items of clothing. People in some churches "cross" themselves by touching the forehead, breast, and then each shoulder to form a symbolic cross in carrying out certain religious rituals or in blessing themselves or others. Some think the sign of the cross to be effective in warding off evil spirits and for generally protecting believers from harm.

All this seems perfectly natural to most people. After all, Jesus was crucified on a cross, was he not? Have not Christians used the sign of the cross throughout all ages to show to the world their belief in the saviour of mankind? Most Bible translations mention the cross many times, in both literal and figurative terms, as symbolizing the meaning of true Christianity as well as the sacrifices and trials that a true Christian must endure in this life to be true to the faith. What then could anyone possibly find wrong with the sign of the cross?

What most people do not fully realize is that Satan has deceived this *whole world* (Revelation 12:9). Many of the comfortable, familiar customs and traditions of this world have, indeed, been borrowed from rank paganism and have nothing at all to do with true Christianity. God tells us to prove all things (I Thessalonians

5:21). Before we accept *any* practice, we should *always* inquire into its origins. We must assure ourselves that it does not transgress any of God's laws and that it follows the traditions and practices of the early New Testament church. So, is the sign of the cross really an emblem of true Christianity or is it something far different?

### Pre-Christian Crosses

Did the use of the cross as a religious symbol begin with Christianity? Notice this paragraph from *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

“From its simplicity of form, 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, marked with crosses of different designs, 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.** (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1910, Vol. 7, pg. 506. Emphasis ours.)

Clearly, long before the coming of Christ, pagans used the cross as a religious symbol. The ancient world used many variations

of the form of the cross. Did the ancients use the type of cross that is generally used as a symbol of Christianity?

Two of the forms of the pre-Christian cross which are perhaps most frequently met with are the tau cross, so named from its resemblance to the Greek capital letter T, and the *svastika* or *fylfot*, also called "*Gammadion*" owing to its form being that of four Greek capital letters *gamma* G placed together. The tau cross is a common Egyptian device, and is indeed often called the Egyptian cross. (ibid.)

Variations of the tau cross were used extensively by nominal Christians in Egypt. "The ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol of life—the ankh, a tau cross surmounted by a loop and known as *crux ansata*—was adopted and extensively used on Coptic Christian monuments." (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., 1995, Vol. 3, p. 753). The tau form of the cross had been used as a pagan Egyptian symbol and then adopted by "Christians," called Copts, in Egypt. (A Copt is a member of the traditional Monophysite Christian Church originating and centering in Egypt. A Monophysite is one who adheres to a variation of Gnosticism that teaches that Christ is altogether divine and not human, even though He took on an earthly body.)

### **Tammuz and the Cross**

Where did the tau cross come from? In the book of Ezekiel, God supernaturally revealed to the prophet some of the secret sins of the nation of Israel. One of these sins was lamenting for a pagan god named Tammuz. "So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the LORD'S house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz" (Ezekiel 8:14). Who was Tammuz

and why would women be weeping for him? *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* writes in the article "Tammuz": ". . . in Mesopotamian religion, god of fertility embodying the powers for new life in nature in the spring" (Vol. 11, p. 532).

This "nature god" was associated with two yearly festivals, one held in late winter and the other in early spring.

The cult of Tammuz centred around two yearly festivals, one celebrating his marriage to the goddess Inanna, the other *lamenting his death* at the hands of demons from the netherworld. During the 3rd dynasty of Ur (c. 2112–c. 2004 BC) in the city of Umma (modern Tell Jokha), the marriage of the god was dramatically celebrated in February–March, Umma's Month of the Festival of Tammuz. . . . *The celebrations in March–April that marked the death of the god also seem to have been dramatically performed.* Many of the laments for the occasion have as a setting a procession out into the desert to the fold of the slain god. (ibid. Emphasis ours.)

What does the worship of Tammuz have to do with the sign of the cross? According to historian Alexander Hislop, Tammuz was intimately associated with the Babylonian mystery religions begun by the worship of Nimrod, Semiramis and her illegitimate son, Horus. The original form of the Babylonian letter T was †, identical to the crosses used today in this world's Christianity. This was the initial of Tammuz. Referring to this sign of Tammuz, Hislop writes:

That mystic Tau was marked in baptism on the foreheads of those initiated into the Mysteries. . . .

The Vestal virgins of Pagan Rome wore it suspended from their necklaces, as the nuns do now. . . . There is hardly a Pagan tribe where the cross has not been found. . . . [T]he X which in itself was not an unnatural symbol of Christ, the true Messiah, and which had once been regarded as such, was allowed to go entirely into disuse, and the Tau, "†", the sign of the cross, the indisputable sign of Tammuz, the false Messiah, was everywhere *substituted* in its stead. (*The Two Babylons*, 1959, p. 198-199, 204-205)

### Adopted by "Christians"

One can easily corroborate from history that nominal Christians adopted this pagan symbol as a sign of their religion, even though it had nothing to do with true Christianity.

“The death of Christ on a cross necessarily conferred a new significance on the figure [of the cross], which had hitherto been associated with a conception of religion *not merely non-Christian, but in its essence often directly opposed to it*. The Christians of early times were wont to trace, in things around them, hidden prophetic allusions to the truth of their faith, and such a testimony they seem to have readily recognized in the use of the cross as a religious emblem by those whose employment of it betokened *a belief most repugnant to their own*. The adoption by them of such forms, for example, as the tau cross and the *svastika* or *fylfot* was no doubt influenced by the idea of the occult Christian significance which they thought they recognized in those forms and which

they could use with a special meaning among themselves, without at the same time arousing the ill-feeling or shocking the sentiment of those among whom they lived". (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1910, Vol. 7, p. 506. Emphasis ours.)

When did "Christians" first begin using the cross as a sign of their religion? Did the apostles use it?

**"It was not till *the time of Constantine* that the cross was publicly used as the symbol of the Christian religion. Till then its employment had been restricted, and private among the Christians themselves. Under Constantine it became the acknowledged symbol of Christianity. . . .**

Constantine's action was no doubt influenced by the vision which he believed he saw of the cross in the sky with the accompanying words *en toutw nika* [by this conquer], as well as by the story of the discovery of the true cross by his mother St. Helena in the year 326". (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1910, Vol. 7, p. 506. Emphasis ours.)

As we have seen, an enormous body of evidence proves that the cross is not a Christian symbol but has its roots in rank paganism. Some will argue, however, that we may use the sign of the cross because 1) it represents the manner in which Jesus Christ died, and 2) we are not using it today to worship a pagan deity. However, its use as a Christian symbol is a product of syncretism, that is, the blending of pagan traditions and methods of worship with the true worship of God, something God strongly condemns.

Before entering the land of Canaan, God told the Israelites,

. . . “take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise." You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods”.

(Deuteronomy 12:30-31)

### Crucifixion and the Cross

Does the cross, the sign of Tammuz, truly represent the manner in which Jesus Christ died? The word "cross" appears 28 times in the New Testament, (King James Version 1611) and in all cases, it is translated from the Greek word *stauros*. **The original meaning of this word was not "a cross" but "an upright stake."**

“Originally Gk. *staurós* designated a pointed, vertical wooden stake firmly fixed in the ground. Such stakes were commonly used in two ways. They were positioned side by side in rows to form fencing or defensive palisades around settlements, or singly they were set up as instruments of torture on which serious offenders of law were publicly suspended to die or, if already killed, to have their corpses thoroughly dishonoured”. (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 1, p. 825)

Commonly, impalement was carried out in one of two ways:



“Two methods were followed in the infliction of the punishment of crucifixion. In both of these the criminal was first of all usually stripped naked, and bound to an upright stake, where he was so cruelly scourged with an implement, formed of strips of leather having pieces of iron, or some other hard material, at their ends, that not merely was the flesh often stripped from the bones, but even the entrails partly protruded, and the anatomy of the body was disclosed. In this pitiable state he was re-clothed, and, if able to do so, was made to drag the stake to the place of execution, where he was either fastened to it, or impaled upon it, and left to die”. (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1910, Vol. 7, p. 506)

The second method of impalement involved the condemned individual's hands being tied or nailed to the pole:

“In such a case, after the scourging at the stake, the criminal was made to carry the pole to the place of execution, and he was then fastened to it by iron nails driven through the outstretched arms and through the ankles. Sometimes this was done as the stake lay on the ground, and it was then lifted into position. In other cases the criminal was made to ascend by a ladder, and was then fastened to the stake. (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1910, Vol. 7, p. 506)

The Bible does not specifically state which method the Romans used in “the crucifixion” of Christ.

Pro-cross sources suppose that the Romans used a crossbar because they nailed an inscription above Jesus' head and that both His hands had been pierced by nails (John 20:25-27). However, this is far from conclusive proof; it cannot be proven how Christ was executed because the biblical account gives insufficient evidence. Thus, we do not know how to represent properly the stake upon which Jesus died.

Does it matter?

We must also consider if it is appropriate to use the very tool that was used to kill our saviour as an emblem of our faith. If Jesus Christ had been killed by hanging, would we use a gallows or a noose as a symbol of our faith? If He had been beheaded, would we use a guillotine? Why should we parade the instrument of shame and death before the world and be proud of it? The New Testament shows that the fact that Christ was killed by impalement was an offence to some. "But we preach Christ impaled, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (I Corinthians 1:23).

But did Paul not state that he gloried in the cross of Christ? In Galatians 6:14 Paul writes, "But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (KJV)

In this scripture, Paul addresses the same issue that the entire book of Galatians is all about, namely, how we are justified.

The Galatians had been led away from faith in Christ and had begun trusting in various physical works, like circumcision, for justification. Paul underscores his point that we cannot boast about any works of the flesh. We can only boast in Christ paying the penalty for our sins by giving Himself to be impaled.

Because of His voluntary sacrifice, God has imputed Jesus' righteousness to those who have faith in that sacrifice. Paul in no way glories in a pagan symbol, but rather in what Christ's death accomplished!

Satan the devil knew long before Jesus was born that He would die by impalement (Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14; Psalm 22:16).

In an attempt to deceive the world and lead people into worshipping a false Christ, the Devil made the cross a popular symbol of worship.

God instructs His true followers to worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23). When He called us, God told us to forsake all of this world's false religions, rituals and false, pagan symbols of worship including the cross.

Those who are true "Christian soldiers" must divest themselves from anything that is impure or unclean. God desires Christ's Bride, His true church, to be found "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27) at His coming.

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