ARTICLE of the MONTH
December, 2014

WAS JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED?

The very title of this month's article might strike the reader as one startling question for a Bible-founded Christian fellowship to pose; after all, did not the Apostle Paul plainly write to the congregation at Corinth that, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"—I Corinthians 2. 2?

Still, in the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*, published continuously by the Jehovah's Witnesses since 1950 (currently in 2013 revision), the above-quoted verse reads, "For I decided not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him executed on the stake." Similarly, that same translation renders Matthew 10. 38, "And whoever does not accept his torture stake and follow after me is not worthy of me." Indeed, nowhere in the *New World Translation* will we find the physical instrument of our Lord's death referred to as a "cross", nor the action itself as a "crucifixion"—the terms recognised throughout the Christian world.

Neither do the Jehovah's Witnesses stand alone in their objection; they, simply, are the largest and most prominent Christian group to make this case. In point of fact, conscientious protest against use of the cross, as a symbol for Jesus's sacrificial death, long pre-dates the 1931 nominate founding of the Jehovah's Witnesses religion: in 1896, *e.g.*, an entire book, *The Non-Christian Cross*, was published in London; and neither was that the first expressed objection to Christendom's cross.

Howbeit, owing to pertinacious door-to-door preaching on the part of the Jehovah's Witnesses, along with many years of Herbert W. Armstrong's "*The World Tomorrow*" broadcasts, as well as sharp circulars from certain others, this issue over the cross has come conspicuously before Christians as a challenge in recent decades; the matter fairly demands an honest examination, therefor.

One brief article such as this cannot hope to cover our subject thoroughly: but we will outline the salient points informing the controversy, showing whence cometh the applicative scruple; then offer evidence germane to its tenability. It will not do, for us as Christians, merely to dismiss the argument and rely upon time-honoured traditional custom—as, traditions have been known to fall into critical error. Indeed, Jesus warned the Pharisees, "Ye leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men…Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition…making void the word of God by your tradition"—Mark 7. 8, 9, 13a, *A.R.V.* (*see*, Matthew 15. 1–20; Mark 7. 1–23). Accordingly, Colossians 2. 8 likens the tradition of men to vain deceit (*see also*, I Timothy 6. 20–21; Acts 20. 29–30). Moreover, Isaiah 29. 13 further shows us that it is the man-made false doctrine which has caused many to become needlessly afraid of God. (*cf.*, II Timothy 1. 7; I John 4. 16, 18; Proverbs 3. 24–26; Joshua 1. 5c, 6a, 9; I Peter 5. 7; Hebrews 13. 5b–6; Psalm 118. 6; *see*, Jeremiah 29. 11; Isaiah 54. 14, 17).

Clearly, misinformation and disinformation have constituted a direct threat to Christian integrity, tracing back into the earliest times of the Apostles almost 2,000 years ago (I Timothy 5. 15; II Timothy 2. 18; I John 4. 1, 3; II Thessalonians 2. 7a; *e.g.*, II Corinthians 11. 13–15; II Timothy 3. 14–17; II Peter 1. 19–21; *cf.*, II Corinthians 11. 2–4; Galatians 1. 6–12; I Timothy 1. 3; I Timothy 6. 3–5).

Many regular church-going Christian friends might be surprised to learn just how prominent a role that exhortations to Truth maintained within the context of <u>correct</u> <u>doctrine</u>, comparing teaching with the Scriptures for specific verification, and *reasoning through* a matter, all carry in vital importance throughout the Bible (Isaiah 8. 20; Acts 17. 11; I Thessalonians 5. 21; II Timothy 2. 15; I Corinthians 2. 5; Isaiah 1. 18a [*cf.*, Acts 17. 2; Acts 18. 4, 19; Acts 19. 8; *see also*, Acts 24. 24, 25; Acts 26. 24–29; Acts 28. 23]; John 4. 23, 24; John 7. 16, 17; Ephesians 4. 11–15; I Timothy 4. 1, 6, 13, 15–16; II John 7–11; Romans 16. 17, 18; Titus 2. 1, 7–8; Titus 1. 9; Hebrews 13. 8, 9; I Peter 3. 15; II Timothy 2. 2; II Timothy 4. 2–4; II Timothy 1. 13, 14; John 8. 31–32, 36; Proverbs 23. 23; II John 4; III John 3, 4).

It also becomes essential, when regarding differences in appreciation of a point in question, that we consider such issues without prejudice (Proverbs 18. 13); for when we personally invest into a point-of-view, then *that* resulting bias can blind us from recognising a more truthful understanding. Instead, our aim needs to become anchored in prayerful seeking first of wisdom from God, so as to discern His will respecting the contention under our review (Proverbs 4. 7; James 1. 5; James 3. 17; Colossians 1. 9–10; Romans 12. 2; Ephesians 5. 9–10, 17); caution additionally warns us, in so doing, not to dismiss portions of, nor venture beyond, what JEHOVAH has given us in His Word (I Corinthians 4. 6; Proverbs 30. 5, 6; *e.g.*, Deuteronomy 4. 2; Deuteronomy 12. 29–32; Revelation 22. 18–19).

— The Case Against Christian Use of the Cross —

One charge against the cross is, that it is an idol, that the cross in itself becomes an object of worship amongst Christians who hold it as a symbol both for our Lord's death as well as their identity and affiliation with a particular Christian denomination. In this usage, however, we would caution alike our Roman Catholic, our "Oxford Movement" Anglican/"High Church" Episcopalian, and our other more formalised Christian friends, who obediently may bow or genuflect whenever a cross-image passes before them, that such expression of deferential devotion and humbling is itself a form of worship (*please read carefully*, Exodus 20. 4–5a [*reiterated at*, Deuteronomy 5. 8, 9a]; Leviticus 26. 1; Deuteronomy 4. 15–19; *see also*, Exodus 34. 17; Exodus 20. 23; Leviticus 19. 4; *cf.*, Acts 15. 19–20; I John 5. 21). To *venerate*, is to worship; wherefore, if we venerate the *image* of the cross, in representation of our worship as Christians, this thought alone is in serious error!—Inadvertently or not, such devotion constitutes an idolatry. (I Corinthians 10. 14)

One apologist has referred to that beloved Hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross", as an assertion of cross-worship—but is it? As we read the words of this Hymn, what we do find instead, is an *appreciation* of the cross; for the recognition expressed, specifically directs our attention to our Lord's death and all of what that accomplished, the relation of the cross to the sacred import of that event, and nothing to the cross as an object or image of its own merit. Thus the cross attains its beauty, according to the Hymn, because of our Lord's blood shed upon it (Romans 5. 6–8; I Corinthians 15. 3, 4, 20–22), not as a venerated object of polished and varnished brass (resembling precious gold—*cf.*, Exodus 32. 2–4) carried in a church processional. Moreover, the chorus of this Hymn speaks of clinging to the cross [to the death of Jesus Christ and the hope to which *it alone* has given blessed assurance—*see*, Acts 4. 10–12; Acts 10. 43; John 14. 6; Romans 6. 3–11; John 6. 51; I Timothy 2. 5–6; Hebrews 2. 9; Titus 2. 11; Acts 24. 15]; but then the words go on to state that the believer singing this Hymn will "exchange it [the cross of sacrificial death which each true Christian bears—Matthew 16. 24; Luke 14. 27] one day for a crown [of eternal life—James 1. 12; II Timothy 4. 8; I Peter 5. 4; Revelation 2. 10; II Timothy 2. 11–12a; Romans 8. 14–25]". This Hymn, therefore, does not, when understood for its message, engender *worship* of the cross; the very argument that it does, therefore, is a specious one. It becomes entirely possible, then, to deeply appreciate the most precious *meaning* one associates with a thing, without such affirmation of love and respect for its significance being taken merely as some form of contrived dissemblance supposedly concealing an improper worship of it.

None-the-less, the issue raised here, over any propriety of the cross as a Christian emblem, involves certain Biblical principles—among them: "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction *that causeth* to err from the words of knowledge"—Proverbs 19. 27; "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord [JEHOVAH—Isaiah 52. 11], and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you"—II Corinthians 6. 16, 17; "Know ye not that a little leaven [of malice and wickedness, Verse 8] leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump [of sincerity and truth, Verse 8], as ye are unleavened"—I Corinthians 5. 6b, 7a (*see also*, Galatians 5. 7–9, where "leaven" serves as a metaphor for deviation from the Truth: *cf.*, Matthew 16. 6–12; Mark 8. 15; Luke 12. 1).

The history of the cross, as a symbol, shows that some fashion of it has interwoven with the idolatry of virtually every ancient heathen culture, in one manner or another, applied in ways as variant as phallic rites, pagan sun worship, and astrology. The cross also is traced to having represented the first letter in the name of Tammuz, the sun-god of ancient Babylonia, whose supposed death was mourned annually by the women (*see*, Ezekiel 8. 4–17 [note Verse 14]). Thus, the cross has an extensive history connected with things abominable to God (*e.g.*, verses 6, 9, 10, 13, 15, 17).

Nevertheless, even as admittedly dubious as is the widespread pre-Christian record of the cross, such information simply presents possible empirical evidence of the Biblically-corroborated truth that, at the time when organised false worship began, the world all spake one language, and thus could readily share ideas—prior to God's separation of mankind into distinct ethnic/linguistic groups and His geographical scattering of humanity (*see*, Genesis 11. 1–9); but, such facts offer nothing by any way of proof regarding the very shape and form of the instrument upon which Jesus was put to death. Yet, while its disreputable account as an icon in false devotions puts an ugly light on any use of the cross for a symbol of proper worship: nevertheless, we already have determined that idolatry of *all* sorts is an affront against God; therefore, that point is not here in contention.

However, Cross *worship* was introduced into the Roman Catholic religion in the ninth century; whereupon it caused a schism in the church, between those who embraced cross-devotion, and some who viewed it to be idolatry. Claude, the Bishop of Turin, who rightly condemned cross-worship, remarked, "God commands us to bear our cross, and not to worship it; but these are all for worshipping it, whereas they do not bear it at all." Thus, even as he castigates the improper adoration of the cross; none-the-less, in contrasting its worship with the bearing of it, his words plainly demonstrate that the cross itself was well-fixed as the instrument of Jesus's execution, long before devotion to it as an icon became an issue; therefore, this dispute in the Catholic church over illicit reverence borne of cross-worship cannot afford us true evidence for any supposed "introduction of the heathen cross into Christianity", as some would set forth in their tracts: for if the cross came into Christian belief and practice from an outside influence and source, then it had to have done so far earlier than the ninth century.

And the history involved—even as it is touted as though it were a solid evidentiary proof—is actually one of the more *tenuous* arguments against the cross. The Great Apostasy, which, as we have seen above from the Scriptures, began a considerable time before the Apostles fell asleep in death, is remarkably well documented. Indeed, should we seek to trace our celebration of Christmas back to the pagan rites connected with the winter solstice, specifically the Roman Saturnalia, we need merely consult any secular encyclopaedia. Likewise, Easter's connexion with heathen springtime life-renewal-and-fertility-worship is thoroughly established through multiple historical records (though, rabbits, eggs, and flowers-in-bloom, as popular emblems of the holiday, ought to be enough to inform us!). That the Trinity did not exist in Christian understanding at the time of the Apostles, but gradually developed (and through much bitter controversy) over the following four centuries, is again a very well certified fact of even secular recitals of that period: we can follow each stage of it, name and penetrate the personalities involved. Similarly, we are able to track popular ideas about death, soul-immortality, and the notion of a permanent hereafter either of utter bliss or of hopeless torment, to ancient Greece and the Hellenisation of the Roman church (particularly under Augustine's singular devotion to Platonic philosophy). Of a truth, all of this is so very well familiarised within Christendom's chronicles, so as to fall into the arena of "common knowledge".

Though strangely, as thoroughly accounted for, as is the infusion of paganism into the doctrines of the Roman church as it centralised itself and solidified its political power; nevertheless, nowhere do we find a comparable specific history of an *introduction* of the cross *into* this Roman Papal (or, even pre-Papal) entity: the record is oddly silent or merely speculative on where and how the cross came to represent Jesus's death. And so, the natural question becomes, <u>why</u>? Would not such an alteration (if it be that), to conform to a heathen icon of idol worship and witchcraft, have reverberated just as sharply at the time of its occurrence, as did other departures in teaching?

The pagan sun-worshipping emperor, Constantine, is said to have had a vision of a cross in the heavens in A.D. [C.E.] 312; and later, after he had converted to Christianity, then to have introduced the cross at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. But Justin Martyr (114–167 A.D.) wrote (c. 155 A.D.) of Jesus's having been nailed to an upright stake with a cross-beam—a *cross*—this fact acknowledged by the Jehovah's Witnesses in their *Awake!* magazine of November 22, 1976, on page 27.

It is argued that JEHOVAH God never would have permitted His Son to be executed on a cross—since the cross already was an ancient heathen object of worship. That might seem persuasive—until we stop, and realise that it was a heathen Roman Governor (Pilate) who gave the order (reluctantly, in accedence to overwhelming popular sentiment from the Jewish crowd) to have Jesus put to death. What sensibility would a pagan such as Pontius Pilate have held about any supposed objections which God might have had, to a cross? And, do we read any Divine disapprobation specifically of the cross or its particular shape anywhere in Holy Scripture? (which, please remember, contains <u>all instruction needed</u> to *complete* a Christian—II Timothy 3. 16–17)

The very institution of the Passover—the sacrifice of the lamb within which God caused the final curse against Egypt, of death to their first-born (Exodus 11. 4–7), to *pass over* each Hebrew family upon witness of the shed blood of the lamb at the door of their home (Exodus 12. 3–13)—served as a direct shadow of Jesus Christ's sacrifice to come, our Lord's blood shed for the life of the world (I Corinthians 5. 7b; John 6. 51c; *cf.*, Exodus 12. 5; I Peter 1. 19; Acts 8. 32, 33 [*see*, verse 35; Isaiah 53. 7, 8a]; John 1. 29): we read at Exodus, chapter 12, verse 7, that the Israelites were to take the blood of the Passover lamb, and put it vertically upon the two [door] side-posts, and horizontally across the lintel at the top of the door—arguably, somewhat in the shape of a cross (or, two crosses conjoined horizontally). And while this tells us nothing about the shape of the instrument of our Lord's death; still, it does suggest that the form of a cross was not, of itself, objectionable to God—even in a type (or, pre-figure) of the sacrificial Ransom-death of His Son (*e.g.*, Job 33. 24, 30, 25; Hosea 13. 14; I Timothy 2. 5–6; Hebrews 2. 9; Titus 2. 11).

Writing in 1899, on page 63 of the booklet, *Tabernacle Shadows of the Better Sacrifices*, Pastor Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916) points out:

> The blood sprinkled on and before the "Mercy Seat" was in the design of a cross, with the top or head of the cross on the "Mercy Seat." This is shown by the description: "He shall sprinkle it with his finger upon the Mercy Seat eastward [toward the "Veil"] and before [across, in front of] the Mercy Seat."

The reference is to Leviticus 16. 14, where Aaron, the High Priest (*see*, verse 11), represented Jesus, our High Priest (*cf.*, Hebrews 5. 1–5). —Aaron's sprinkling of the Blood of Atonement in the shape of a cross appears to be the sole place in Scripture which makes any direct association between Jesus's shed blood for man's At-One-Ment with God, and the suggestion of a cross—though nowhere in the Bible are we given this specific meaning or applied interpretation; therefore, the matter needs more than this for its argument.

But what this *does* show us, is, that God has no express objection to the cross shape being associated with our faith. In fact, there are numerous things, designs and idolatrous images linked with heathen worship as icons, even despite which profane connexions, God has seen perfectly fit to apply to His purposes, *e.g.*, circles and squares (Proverbs 8. 27, *A.R.V.* [*see also*, *N.W.*, *margin*]; Isaiah 40. 22; Exodus 27. 1; Exodus 28. 16; Revelation 21. 16), the sun and the moon (Psalm 84. 11; Malachi 4. 2; Deuteronomy 33. 14; Psalm 89. 36, 37; Psalm 104. 19; Revelation 12. 1), the lion and the bull (Hosea 11. 10; Revelation 5. 5; Ezekiel 1. 10; Jeremiah 52. 20; Hebrews 9. 13), also the dove (Genesis 8. 8–12; Song of Solomon [Canticles] 2. 14; John 1. 32).

While the above proves nothing whatever about the specific form and shape of the instrument used for Jesus's execution; what it nevertheless surely demonstrates is, that this issue is far more nuanced and complex, than the seemingly direct and absolutist polemical arguments one usually encounters would connote. We clearly cannot arrive at a resolution by history alone, as the record is fraught with conflicting data. Certain centuries-known archaeological finds suggest that the cross gradually entered Christian belief over the course of the first few centuries after our Lord's death. But more recent discoveries show Christian connexion to the cross in the first century A.D. [C.E.].

— Linguistic Concerns —

The foregoing is almost incidental, however, to the primary case raised against the *cross* and *crucifixion*: we might say that the *crux* of the present disputation surrounds the strict meaning of *stauros*, the Greek word translated *cross* in nearly all English language Bibles.

In the Jehovah's Witnesses' treatises on this subject, they are fond of citing from particular references (which other objectors to the cross also use, usually quoted exactly as the Watchtower does, possibly second-hand from the Jehovah's Witnesses' publications, but without crediting them). One of these works is, *The Imperial Bible-Dictionary*, in an 1874 [London] edition, edited by P. Fairbairn, page 376. We will quote as much as we prudently can of the first paragraph of the pertinent entry directly from the original, editing-out only that portion which discusses unrelated forms of crucifixion and impalement, including some rather gruesome graphic descriptions which are not germane to settling the pivotal dispute at the centre of our enquiry, and over which we have some degree of concern that certain readers could find such delineations needlessly disturbing (*see*, I Corinthians 10. 23, 24; Romans 15. 2; Romans 14. 19; *cf.*, Proverbs 15. 26; Proverbs 16. 24; Ephesians 5. 15; I Corinthians 10. 31; I Corinthians 16. 14). We also will carefully underline the excerpted parts used in the Jehovah's Witnesses' publications, so these highlighted statements can be viewed within their greater context and considered in light of it [note: the Watchtower Society editors substitute the English transliteration, *stau·ros´*, for the Greek; but for the sake of absolute authenticity to the originating publication, we here do not]:

> **CROSS, CRUCIFY.** The Greek word for cross, *σταυρός*, properly signified a *stake*, an upright pole, or piece of paling, on which anything might be hung, or which might be used in impaling a piece of ground. But a modification was introduced as the dominion and usages of Rome extended themselves through Greek-speaking countries. Even amongst the Romans the *crux* (from which our *cross* is derived) appears to have been originally an upright pole, and this always remained the more prominent part. But from the time that it began to be used as an instrument of punishment, a transverse piece of wood was commonly added: not, however, always even then. For it would seem that there were more kinds of death than one by the cross; … There can be no doubt, however, that the [sort extending their arms on a patibulum] was the more common, and that about the period of the gospel age crucifixion was usually accomplished by suspending the criminal on a cross piece of wood.

Unfortunately, in selectively quoting only those statements which directly corroborate their argument about linguistics, the Watchtower Society leave an erroneous impression, that *The Imperial Bible-Dictionary* of 1874 actually *verifies the Society's specific contention* that Jesus was nailed to an upright pole and not upon a cross—when in fact this *Bible-Dictionary*, as we have above seen, reaches the opposite conclusion. We appreciate the Jehovah's Witnesses for their diligent research, but we regret that they are not forthcoming with the associated fact that their source does not agree with their position. If they would disclose that reality, and then wanted to discredit that source's verdict as arising out of the pervading religious bias in favour of the cross, they certainly were free to do that; however, failing to reveal that their adduced resource does not concur with their central point, effectively amounts to concealing that actuality—particularly when quoting from an 1874 reference-work which most people could not hope to locate and cross-check, at least throughout earlier decades of the Society's application of it prior to the advent of Internet-access.

It is an excellent conscientiousness, whenever repeating words from another's writings with respect to corroborating an hypothesis, that one would meticulously include any modifying context, so as to accurately represent the originating source. We have grown all too familiar, sadly, with the intentional elimination of a modifying context, when quoting someone for the perpetration of a deceptive slander; but we would expect better from our Watchtower Society friends, given especially the high premium which they place upon truth. Regrettably, certain others, who hold their own doctrinal differences with the Jehovah's Witnesses on other matters, but who agree with the 'Witnesses in their stance on the cross, have likewise misrepresented *The Imperial Bible-Dictionary*, by parroting the quotations from it expressly as put forth by the Watchtower.

Happily for the Jehovah's Witnesses (and others who concur with them on this issue), they do have long-established references, ones that anyone can check, and which utterly agree with their objection to the cross.

Ethelbert William Bullinger (1837–1913), an Anglican clergyman and Biblical scholar (though certainly something of a "maverick" as to his beliefs within his Church of England), came clearly and forthrightly to the Biblical Truth on the subject of "hell", the mortality of the soul, and the cessation of the soul between death and resurrection. (*please see*, Articles of the Month, December 2008, June 2010, July 2008). Some others of Ethelbert W. Bullinger's views, such as what has since been termed, "hyperdispensationalism", as well as his teaching that there were *four* (not, two) criminals executed along with Jesus, have remained controversial (*cf.*, John 19. 32; Luke 23. 39, 40).

Among his several noted works, Bullinger put together extensive notes for *The Companion Bible*, a King James Version with commentary and a series of 198 Appendixes, which was compiled and completed after his death by certain of his close associates, then published as an entire work, posthumously, in 1922: it remains in print as a widely regarded reference. Appendix 162, "THE CROSS AND CRUCIFIXION.", is unequivocal in its assertion that Jesus was impaled on an upright pole, and certainly not crucified on a cross:

> In the Greek N.T. two words are used for "the cross", on which the Lord was put to death.
>
> 1. The word *stauros*; which denotes an upright pale or stake, to which the criminals were nailed for execution.
>
> 2. The word *xulon*, which generally denotes a piece of a dead log of wood, or timber, for fuel or for any other purpose. It is not like *dendron*, which is used of a living, or green tree, as in Matt. 21. 8; Rev. 7. 1, 3; 8. 7; 9. 4, &c.
>
> As this latter word *xulon* is used for the former *stauros*, it shows us that the meaning of each is exactly the same.
>
> The verb *stauroō* means to drive stakes.[1]

Our English word "cross" is the translation of the Latin *crux*; but the Greek *stauros* no more means a *crux* than the word "stick" means a "crutch".

Homer uses the word *stauros* of an ordinary pole or stake, or a single piece of timber.[2] And this is the meaning and usage of the word throughout the Greek classics.[3]

It never means *two* pieces of timber placed across one another at any angle, but always of one piece alone. Hence the use of the word *xulon* (No. 2, above) in connection with the manner of our Lord's death, and rendered "tree" in Acts 5. 30; 10. 39; 13. 29. Gal. 3. 13. 1 Pet. 2. 24. This is preserved in our old Eng. name *rood*, or *rod*. See the *Encycl. Brit.*, 11th (Camb.) ed., vol. 7, p. 505d.

There is nothing in the Greek of the N.T. even to imply two pieces of timber. ... The evidence is thus complete, that the Lord was put to death upon an upright stake, and not on two pieces of timber placed at any angle.

---

[1] There are two compounds of it used: *sustauroō*=to put any one thus to death with another (Matt. 27. 44. Mark 15. 32. John 19. 32. Rom. 6. 6. Gal. 2. 20); and *anastauroō*=to raise up and fix upon the stake again (Heb. 6. 6). Another word used is equally significant: *prospēgnumi*=to fix or fasten anything (Acts 2. 23).

[2] *Iliad* xxiv. 453. *Odyssey* xiv. 11.

[3] e.g. Thucydides iv. 90. Xenophon, *Anabasis* v. 2. 21.

Very clearly then, E.W. Bullinger "did his homework". The problem, however, resides in his reliance upon the Greek *classics*, to proffer proof for his conclusion—when those were written in Classical Greek. Xenophon and Thucydides, whom he cites in his third footnote, lived across parts of the fourth and fifth centuries, B.C. [B.C.E.]. And Homer wrote in the eighth century, B.C.. The New Testament Books [Christian Greek Scriptures] were written in the first century, A.D. [C.E.]. And they were recorded in the

common business language of their time, Koine Greek—which differs significantly from the Classical Greek of Homer.

We, in our age, are familiar with shifts in language over the passage of time—even in the era of the printing press which tended to standardise the formally written tongue. Our *Authorised* [or, "King James"] *Version* of the Holy Bible was translated in 1611, into what now is referred to as "Elizabethan" English. For our purposes (and, looking to the high regard we generally hold for it), it might do as well to call that form, "Classical English". We still basically comprehend it, though we no longer speak or write in what, for us, has become "archaic" English.

But, even with only four-hundred years separating that English from our own, we still can run aground when navigating within it: we discover that we do not *entirely* understand "Classical English", unless we specifically are *schooled* in its departures from more contemporary English. Its different word-forms generally pose little of difficulty, even for a child—we quickly adapt to those,—yea, enjoy them as formally reverent and uncommon in a most lovely way, that attentively sets Scripture properly apart from and well *above* the mundanity of everyday speech.

However, for an illustrative academic exercise of a sort, may we ask; What does the word, *prevent*, mean? Most English speakers and writers would agree that it denotes an anticipation in such a way as to forestall: to preclude: to stop, debar, or hinder effectually: to keep from coming to pass. If I were intending to <u>prevent</u> you from doing something, that would mean, I have anticipated the likelihood of your discharging [whatever it is that I believe you are planning to do], and in response I aim to plot a way to *stop* you *before*hand, to destroy (if possible) your opportunity for accomplishing that particular piece of business (or, to interfere successfully between you and it).

Now, with the immediately above in mind, what do we make of the following statement in Psalm 119. 147 as our "King James

Version" renders it: "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy Word."?

If we read that phrasing in terms of how we currently understand the language, we become confronted by an astounding impossibility—that the Psalmist somehow was able to restrain that morning's dawn from occurring! Since that thought makes for utter nonsense, we run next to the larger context of verses 145 through 152, and therein learn that the writer is in some worry and distress over what his godless and lawless enemies seek to do to him (a frequent theme in the Psalms—*cf.*, *e.g.*, Psalm 31. 9–15), and he at the same time finds reassurance and comfort in JEHOVAH God, and in His Word. That gives us a *hint*, maybe, on what "prevent" means, in Psalm 119. 147: simply put, this Psalmist was in a state under which he could not sleep properly—he was awake even before dawn, from his anxiety. So far, however, that is only a surmise; from the word itself, we do not know that—until we take it apart:

"Prevent" comes of combining the prefix "pre" [in front of/before] with "event"; hence, "pre-event", before or in front of the event. In 1611, this meant, merely, to precede, or to anticipate: to be, go, or act earlier than: to go faster than—all of which now are regarded as inactive or archaic definitions for "prevent". Considering the context, we might paraphrase the thought in Psalm 119. 147, "I arose [got out of bed] before dawn", or, "I awoke [was already awake] before dawn" (to use our own idiomatic forms, since the literal translation, "I preceded the dawning of the morning", might not be as clear to our understanding). We *could* translate it, "I anticipated the dawning of the morning" (meaning, "I realised that dawn was coming")—another way to express a restless inability to sleep. But, however we interpret this verse, the writer certainly did <u>not</u> PREVENT dawn from coming!

In our own time (to give a familiar example), the simple word, "gay", has virtually lost its meaning of, "carefree", "light-hearted", "colourful", "cheerful", "lively", "bright", "sportive", "merry", "showy",

"flamboyant", "of loose life"—and, perversely, from a slang usage, has come lately to indicate (almost exclusively) "homosexual".

With that last linguistic paramutation in mind, recall how *The Imperial Bible-Dictionary* of 1874, quoted previously, pointed out that, from the time when the upright wooden pole (or, pale) began to be used as a form of punishment, a transverse piece of wood was commonly added to it—that there were various configurations employed—but that, by the time of our gospel age, the form familiar now to us, of the cross, was the most common. *Could* the Greek meaning of *stauros* have modified to include ***any*** form of wooden-poled execution-instrument, even as the Latin *crux* did?—absolutely. But do we have incontrovertible *proof* of such a metamorphosis in this specific meaning of *stauros*?—scholars appear divided on that point, as we shall see. Therefore, for us, that remains an open question.

Yet, based on all that we realise about the malleability of language, especially over the passage of some considerable time, what we *can* assert with affirmed confidence is, using the Classical Greek of several hundreds of years earlier, to verify or preclude meanings in Biblical Greek, is at best a flawed exercise, and thus quite likely to deplane into an "apples vs. oranges" discussion, contending much, yet proving nothing.

— Testimony From *Vine's* —

One more important resource for the Jehovah's Witnesses (and others), with regard to their contention about the cross, is *Vine's Expository Dictionary of N T Words.* And while this standard reference gives us essentially the same material we already have discussed; still, we want to look at it—if, for no other reason than,

we would not have it be said that we have avoided its argument—and now, from *Vine*'*s*:

> **Cross, Crucify**
> A–1: ***σταυρός*** (Strong's #4716 — Noun Masculine — stauros — stow-ros′) denotes, primarily, "an upright pale or stake." On such, malefactors were nailed for execution. Both the noun and the verb stauroo, "to fasten to a stake or pale," are originally to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of a two beamed "cross." The shape of the latter had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt. 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. Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the "cross" of Christ.

Vines, W.E., M.A. Entry for 'Cross, Crucify'. Vine's Expository Dictionary of N T Words. http://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/ved/view.cgi?n=616. 1940.

This *Vine*'*s* entry highlights an important point, to which we have alluded earlier, yet rarely as straightforwardly admitted in a standard reference-work as here in *Vine*'*s*, that the establishment ecclesiastical system, which would grow into the Roman Catholic church and "Holy Roman" empire, was already an apostate body, and even that from at least seventy-five years prior to the time of Emperor Constantine and the Counsil of Nicaea where the Roman organised church was united officially to the Roman State [seat of

temporal power] and anti-trinitarians were driven out. For more on issues associated with the Great Apostasy, please see Articles of the Month, June 2007, March 2008, March–April 2009, April 2012.

However, the theory which *Vine's* extrapolates from the known history concerning adoption of paganism into the ecclesiastical church, with regard to the cross—specifically, that the pagan Tau or T, standing for the heathen god Tammuz, was *adopted* to stand for the "cross" of Christ (by implication, during the third century A.D. [C.E.])—is conjectural, and is neither entirely confirmed nor utterly denied by documentable history. Moreover, the shape of the two is not the same (the Tau resembles the capital letter "T"; it lacks a vertical extension above the cross-member), and historical records *do* show executions by Romans taking place on various forms of crosses, most commonly the one familiar to Christians, as far back as two centuries and longer before the time of Christ, and also afterwards for some considerable period.

Moreover, Justin Martyr, writing one full century prior to the time that *Vine's* assigns to the "adoption" of the cross "into" Christianity, expressly states that Jesus was crucified upon a cross, which he then goes on to describe for us thus: "For the one beam is placed upright, from which the highest extremity is raised up into a horn, when the other beam is fitted on to it, and the ends appear on both sides as horns joined on to the one horn." [This quotation courtesy of *Awake!* Magazine, November 22, 1976, page 27, published by the Jehovah's Witnesses] Clearly, then, Justin Martyr, a renowned early Christian writer, describes the *stauros* on which Jesus died, in terms of the same form known to Christians for centuries as a "cross". And, while Justin Martyr is not an inspired authority, his testimony, coming merely one-half century after the death of the Apostle John, is devastating to the central claim relied upon from *Vine's*, that the cross was brought-over from heathen sources in the mid-third century, A.D..

And so, unfortunately for the Jehovah's Witnesses and others who seek definitive evidence against the cross as non-Christian in origin (specifically as applied to the instrument upon which our

Lord died), *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, while tempting to cite and quote from, actually fails to provide the *proof* which they seek, only expounds a common *theory*—the which, as we now see, can be questioned and challenged by more ancient evidence.

We note here, that even earlier information establishes that crucifixion and impalement existed side-by-side in Jesus's time and even before; further, that *stauros* and *xulon* could be used for both.

Plautus (254–184 B.C.[B.C.E.]) wrote (translated here from the Latin): "I suspect you're doomed to die outside the gate, in that position: Hands spread out and nailed to the *patibulum* [cross-beam]." (*Miles Gloriosus*, *359–360*); "Oh, I bet the hangmen will have you looking like a human sieve, the way they'll prod you full of holes as they run you down the streets with your arms on a *patibulum*, once the old man gets back" (*Mostrellaria*, *55–57*). Not very gracious remarks, these—but this is a worldly writer; nevertheless, what this *does* show is, two centuries before our common era [C.E.], Romans *crucified* criminals. And other quotations from this same author reveal that the Latin *crux* meant a *cross* (as well as a pale or stake) back at that time: "I'll give two hundred pounds [L. *talent*] to the first man to charge my *crux* and take it—on condition his legs and arms are double-nailed, that is." (*Mostellaria*, *359–360*); "Let him bear the *patibulum* through the city; then let him be nailed to the *crux*" (*Carbonaria*, fr. 2).

Seneca (c. 4 B.C.–65 A.D.) offers similar testimony, and refers to both impalement and crucifixion; however, since some of his comments are distasteful or gruesomely graphic, we will not quote them. Later Roman writers, such as Lucius Apuleius (123–170 A.D.) also make direct reference to crucifixions in their time, and in particular the victim being made to bear the cross-beam [*patibulum*] for some considerable distance, across his shoulders and arms, as he is marched to his execution, as in the above-quoted references.

However, we must caution here that the common *existence* and *use* of crucifixion as a Roman means of execution in our Lord's time on earth does not *of itself* prove that Jesus was crucified and not impaled: it merely opens-up both possibilities for our consideration. But, what all of this *does* prove, is that the Jehovah's Witnesses are mistaken in their general assertion that the Latin *crux* came to mean a cross as well as a stake some time after the first century A.D.[C.E.]. It is possible, though, given the above quotations, that the term, *crux*, in scrupulous sense, referred

specifically to the *stake* or *pale* itself, to which then a *patibulum* might or might not have been fixed, depending on whether a crucifixion or an impalement were intended; but that, when in less formal popular usage, *crux* was applied to both stake and cross.

Likewise, although in the Classical Greek of several hundred years earlier, *stauros* simply meant a stake or pale; none-the-less, extant Greek writings from as early as the first part of the second century B.C. disclose that the common definitions of both *stauros* and *xulon*, by that time, as also the case with the Latin *crux*, may have expanded to include *any* instrument of execution constructed from wood. Therefore, the academic argument over the meaning of *stauros* is essentially moot, rendered irrelevant. But we still don't have a definitive answer, either way, on specifically how Jesus was put to death.

— Illustrations of Impalement —

Visuals are highly effective tools in both persuasion and indoctrination. And the Jehovah's Witnesses' Watchtower Society have no shortage of both photographs and artwork to employ as illustrations throughout their books and magazines—including a wide variety of *almost* "life-like" paintings depicting Jesus as impaled on a "torture stake". Each time our Lord's ransom-sacrificial death is discussed in their literature, it seems, yet another dramatic visual image of impalement as his form of death appears: indeed, at this point, our friends in the Society must have, within their art department, nearly one hundred or even more different pictures of Jesus impaled: they very clearly seek to etch this visual image securely into the minds of both their followers and any whom they hope to reach with their message. It may safely be said that individual Jehovah's Witnesses believe this presentation of the matter absolutely—they do not question it—they assume that their Governing Body have entirely researched the situation, and that the Watchtower's portrayal must absolutely be accurate. Thus, they promote it contentiously (hence, the "challenge" prompting this article).

Let us now look at yet another piece in the Watchtower Society's "arsenal" (as it were) of resource-material. One key reference for them, is Justus Lipsius's *De Cruce Liber Tres*, of 1629, the which contains meticulous illustrations showing thirteen variations on crucifixions, and three of impalement (one horribly gruesome, and the other two being a man nailed to a upright pole—one with fire below him and one without the flames). It is this last (absent any burning) which the Watchtower leadership have used

as their model for a "torture stake", and upon which all of their pertinent illustrations are based. Thus, their pictures portraying Jesus as impaled upon a stake, all show his hands nailed up over his head, and with a single spike driven through both of his wrists.

But this clearly is in error. We find it astounding that no-one (evidently) brought it into their attention at the time when they adopted this form of impalement for Jesus's death, that the Bible very plainly states that he was nailed through his *hands*, and not through his *wrists* (*see*, John 20. 25). Therefore, each-and-every-one of their lovely paintings depicting Jesus Christ impaled…all are *wrong*. Now, for anyone who follows the Society "religiously", and believes everything they print and teach, this realisation of so visible and incontrovertible an *error* on their part must come as something of a rude shock. But sometimes, it is just such an unexpected moment of conscientious recognition gifted from the Word of God, which opens one up to receive further enlightenment and thereby become drawn more closely to the Truth. (Proverbs 4. 18)

— How Readest Thou the Scriptures? —

When endeavouring to determine Truth, any discussion must come down to what the Bible tells us. We need to preface this study, however, by stating for the record that, nowhere in the specifics of Scripture-testimony will we find it absolutely and unambiguously *stipulated* that Jesus was impaled, or that he was crucified. But strong inferences can be drawn from things which God's Word *does* tell us.

Our first stop is, John 19. 17, which, using Benjamin Wilson's 1864 *Emphatic Diaglott*, we will render, word-for-word, directly from the Greek: "And carrying the cross [*stauros*] of himself he went out into the being called of a skull a place which is called in Hebrew Golgotha" [punctuation not included because the original Greek had none; the system of marks, points, stops, *etc.*, not having been invented until the ninth century A.D. (C.E.)]

This Scripture is important, because it points out that Jesus Christ bore the instrument of his death as he was made to go to Golgotha to be executed. In those examples from contemporaneous period secular literature which we already have examined with regard to the meaning of *crux*, we have seen several references to the Roman practice wherein a condemned man would have been made to bear his *patibulum* through the public streets to his place

of execution—thus, John 19. 17 would tend toward indication of a crucifixion and not an impalement; but again, the Scripture does not specify that distinction unequivocally for us.

Matthew 27. 37 is further evidence, since it places the *titilus* (a piece of wood used as a signboard to indicate the victim's crime) above Jesus's *head*. The three other Gospel-accounts refer also to this wooden sign—but only Matthew specifies *where* it was located explicitly with respect to Jesus (*cf.*, Matthew 27. 37; Mark 15. 26; Luke 23. 38 [which stipulates that it was over him, but not *which part* of him]; John 19. 19). Had Jesus been impaled, as the Watchtower Society insist, then that wooden notice of his accusation would have, of necessity, been placed just above Jesus's *hands*, and not right above his *head*—and indeed, the Watchtower's illustrations do place it immediately above his hands.

But neither is this Scripture absolutely definitive, since, in the case of impalement, placing the *titilus* directly above Jesus's hands, still would be (technically speaking) "above his head", even though not contiguously. However, since Matthew easily could have specified Jesus's hands (which would have left impalement the only possibility), yet instead indicated his head; this observation alone renders the upright pole theory a bit thin on plausibility. But is it at least *possible* that Jesus was impaled, given the two descriptive Scriptures which we have considered thus far?—yes.—although more than somewhat unlikely.

And now we return to John 20. 25, which we previously had visited to prove that our Lord was nailed through his *hands* and not through his *wrists*. This verse varies little from translation to translation; but we will quote it here from the Jehovah's Witnesses' own *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, 2013 edition, incorporating all of their latest revisions:

'So the other disciples were telling him: "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them: "Unless I see in his hands the print [mark, *margin*] of the nails and stick my finger into the print of the nails and stick my hand into his side, I will never believe it."'

Our common expression, "Doubting Thomas", stems from this verse. But please take notice that, even twice, Thomas here refers to the "nail**s**" (plural) which had been driven through Jesus's hands —more than one nail. However, the "print" is singular, virtually

ruling-out two or more nails thrust through his two hands together in the same location. Thus, this would indicate a single nail through each hand, separately—again suggesting a *patibulum*.

Nevertheless, there are at least two other explanations which would still allow the single pole theory to stand. One is, the hands could have been nailed separately, side-by-side, on the post [*stauros*] above Jesus's head. The problem here is one of practicality and reasonableness: accounts of the time speak of a man lying on his back, upon the wooden death-instrument, to be nailed to it. This physical action would, at the least, require a considerable downward force from the driving implement, in order to first have the nail pierce through flesh and tendons, and then fix securely into a wooden pole. Are we to believe, when convenience should have dictated a single nail run through both hands for impalement, that the executioners still took the physically-awkward step of nailing sideways, or even at oblique angles, simply to drive separate spikes individually through Jesus's hands, yet both above his head?

Another theory is that Thomas's use of "nails" (plural) refers to both hands and feet, since the Scripture does not make that distinction precise. But again, we need to heed the *context* here; not Thomas, neither Jesus himself, refers to the feet (Vs. 20, 27). The Jehovah's Witnesses have, however, referenced also Luke 24. 39, wherein our Lord *does* speak of his *feet*, as well as his hands, having been nailed—and thus, while this indication is somewhat unconvincing, since it is not in the context of John's account of Thomas's words and reactions, and thus requires some degree of conjecture to bend around what is directly obvious in John 20. 25; none-the-less, it is sufficient to open a discussion to the effect that John is not absolutely conclusive, either.

And so…here we are!—ALMOST at the point of defining, from Scripture and secular evidence, that Jesus was crucified and not impaled. Howbeit, as any competent barrister can explain to you;

one can drive more than adequate "reasonable doubt" through an argument which fails to incontestably establish a matter. Well, where does that now leave us?

— Wisdom from Above —

Certain principles call for our consideration at this point. First, JEHOVAH God *knows* past, present, and future: "Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; *I am* God, and *there is* none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: … yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it."—Isaiah 46. 9–10, 11b.

Instructive as to the absoluteness of God's foreknowledge; at I Peter 1. 18–20, we read: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,"

Here we have a direct statement, often overlooked by many Christians as for its import in this regard—that God foreknew Adam's fall into sin and mankind's need for salvation, even before He created the world [Greek: *kosmos*; orderly arrangement]—before Genesis 1. 1 (*see also*, Acts 2. 23). We have every confidence, therefore, that He likewise and precisely foresaw our recent centuries' dispute over the exact form of the wooden instrument upon which Jesus was put to death; inasmuch as God, in inspiring the Bible writers, certainly *could* have—plainly and indubitably—resolved the issue for us; yet, He did not: He instead left it *somewhat* open-ended, for us to deduce and surmise and attempt to figure out through investigation and reasoning.

As we noted earlier, the Scriptures do contain <u>all</u> that is needed to <u>complete</u> and <u>perfect</u> a Christian: "All scripture *is* given

by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."—II Timothy 3. 16–17

That God did not absolutely define this matter of the cross in His Word, becomes enlightening also for us: the point thus emerges as an issue not vital to our faith and integrity therefor, and hence does not present itself to be a subject meet for contention (*see*, Jude 3; I Timothy 6. 12; I Timothy 4. 10, 11). What *matters*, rather, is *why* Jesus died, with all that his death, by God's grace and mercy, accomplished (John 3. 16, 17; Hebrews 2. 9; I Timothy 2. 5–6; Hebrews 12. 2; Luke 3. 6; Revelation 21. 1–5; Isaiah 11. 6–9; Isaiah 9. 7), and not the precise shape of the wooden contrivance upon which he died. We are to be separate from the world, yes (James 4. 4; I John 2. 15; Titus 2. 12; *cf.*, Ephesians 2. 2; Romans 12. 2); but this does not require us to adopt a spirit of variance (Galatians 5. 20—also rendered "strife", "quarrels", etc.), from an overwrought scruple of segregation, as some are wont to do. (*see*, John 13. 34, 35; John 15. 17–21; John 17. 14–16; *cf.*, I Peter 3. 16; I Peter 2. 12; Matthew 5. 16; James 3. 13–18)

One thing which God *has* instructed, is, for us who would follow His Son (I John 2. 5–6; John 13. 15; John 15. 8–12; I Peter 2. 21), not to engage in endless debates over essentially inconsequential matters (Romans 14. 1; *cf.*, II Timothy 2. 14, 23; Titus 3. 9; I Timothy 1. 4; I Timothy 6. 4–5; Acts 18. 15; *contrast*, Romans 12. 18). Instead, we are warmly invited to speak Truth in a spirit of love (Ephesians 4. 15, 2; Ephesians 5. 2).

— Physiological Indications —

We should mention also, that, from the science of forensic pathology has arisen an entire body of evidence for consideration, relating to the ways in which impalement or crucifixion would act,

physiologically, upon the human body, to end someone's life—all of which is well worth looking into for corroboration. But we caution at the same time that there can exist a tendency to approach an examination of such data with some already fixed viewpoint on whether Jesus was executed by impalement or by crucifixion; moreover, since there was no coroner on hand to do an autopsy, our surmising on the exact cause of Jesus's death must be an educated conjecture, not any established fact. We are not a medical doctor, neither an advanced student of human anatomy; and most of the discussion involving Jesus Christ's death from that standpoint necessitates a degree of speculative extrapolation drawn out of what the Scriptures do tell us, measured against specific physical fleshly responses which modern physicians are able to recognise. And while the intricacies of a simulated post-mortem examination constructed nearly two millennia after the fact might indeed prove quite diverting for those with medical degrees or morbid curiosity, we will leave the bulk of that discussion, which waxes lengthy and technical and resides well outside our field of expertise, to others better versed in it: we, rather, shall confine ourselves herein to certain more general "laymen's" observations.

One problem with impalement, of the very kind which the Watchtower Society insistently aver as to have been what was used for Jesus's execution, as far as the Romans were concerned, was, that it was too *humane.* It is ironical that the Society should refer to this device as a "*torture*" stake—since it was in fact the *cross* which became instituted by preference over impalement for the express purpose of causing a more protracted suffering. You see, death accomplished by nailing (or, fastening) to the stake was relatively rapid; because the victim, suspended by hands (or, wrists) which were pulled up over and above his head—began asphyxiating within minutes, and literally suffocated-to-death rather quickly.

This fact creates at least two difficulties for the Jehovah's Witnesses and others who would maintain that Jesus was impaled

upon an upright pole: One is, Jesus survived nailed-up for six hours, from 9:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon (Mark 15. 25, 33, 34–37; *cf.*, Numbers 28. 4–6). The other is, at his moment of death, Jesus *cried-out* (Matthew 27. 45–50; Luke 23. 44–46; Mark 15. 34–37; *see*, Psalm 22. 1, 14–18)—something which any man, robbed of his last breath, would be unable to do.

By contrast to the stake (or, pale); a man on a cross potentially could remain alive for as long as three days in slow agony—until a combination of exposure, insect bites, fatigue (from pain and lack of sleep commingled with extreme stress), dehydration and blood-loss (resulting in hypovolemic shock)* eventually overcame him. For this reason, it was common practice to break the legs and thus deprive a victim of his own means for physical support, thereby causing him not to be able to raise himself to respirate, all his weight now being suspended from his arms, hastening death by suffocation—once the executioners were satisfied that this victim had suffered long enough, or else for any reason requiring the execution to come to an end (*see*, John 19. 31–37). Verse 33 reveals that the soldiers were surprised to find Jesus already dead—and then, just to be certain of that observation, one of them jabbed his spear into Jesus's side (verse 34); whereupon, out came blood and water. (*see*, Isaiah 53. 5; Zechariah 12. 10)

Thus, John's gospel account may reveal the likely cause of Jesus's death—(though again, we cannot be utterly positive)—a myocardial injury (severe bruise to the heart) prior to his execution, which occasioned his heart to weaken and then rupture under the stress of crucifixion, whereupon the resultant blood pooling in his chest-cavity would have separated into its elements of blood-corpuscules and clear pericardial fluid, just as John describes. Moreover, a burst heart would be consistent with the Bible's recount of Jesus's crying-out (in response to the intense pain and his own instant realisation that this was death striking him)—so saying his final words and then immediately expiring.

---

1 Hypovolemic shock is an urgently critical condition whereby bodily fluid has become drained, and blood volume depleted, to the point that the heart no longer can circulate it to-and-from the various parts of the body and vital organs.

We are not told, specifically, of such a chest-trauma, neither how it might have occurred; however, the Scriptural account and customary legend allow for a conceivable scenario. John 19. 17 reports that Jesus was made to carry his *stauros* [in this case, we believe, the *patibulum*, as was the Roman custom—see page 20 of this article, final two paragraphs]. Yet, it is otherwise reported (Matthew 27. 32; Mark 15. 21; Luke 23. 26) that another man named Simon, of Cyrene, who happened to be passing by, was detained and enlisted to carry it for Jesus.

Now, logic tells us that something had to have befallen there. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, most often run parallel in their narratives; but then John, who wrote later, fills in pieces which the other gospels lack, and often does not include items already elucidated in the other three gospels. So then, John tells us that Jesus was made to bear the *stauros*—and the three other gospels let us know that one hapless passer-by was imposed upon to carry it. Long tradition has it, that Jesus stumbled under the weight of it, though this is nowhere recorded in the Bible, and such time-honoured narratives are rightfully the subjects of serious doubt. But, some of these apocryphal stories might have roots in actual eye-witness recollections. Whatever the case, this one, that our Lord (probably severely weakened from his beatings and scourgings) collapsed under the burden of his *stauros* (quite possibly also under the psychological gravity of what he was about to do [Hebrews 5. 7–9; Matthew 26. 36–46; Mark 14. 32–42; Luke 22. 39–46]), commends itself to our consideration as more than likely. At this point, as he would have been helped back up to his feet, it could have been realised that he was not going to be able to bear under the weight of the *stauros*, and then a by-stander (who perhaps just simply looked strong enough) was compelled to carry the *stauros* in his stead.

Now if, as we believe, this was a *patibulum*, it was likely that Jesus's arms were strapped to it as it lay horizontally across his upper back just below his shoulders, for him to bear (again, as was the custom). In that case, he could not use his arms to break his fall (as a man ordinarily would do instinctively, to protect his face and upper body)—and his chest would have taken the full brunt of the blow, compounded by the heavy weight of a six-foot-long piece of wood, probably upwards of ½ foot in diameter, across the top of

his back. Such a fall forward, under said circumstances, would have knocked the "wind" out of him and possibly injured him quite severely, causing deep internal bruising and bleeding. At this point, as he was helped off the ground, his physical weakness from the amount of injury would have made it very plain that somebody else was going to have to convey the *stauros*—Jesus couldn't. This also would be one way for JEHOVAH to cause the Scripture to be fulfilled (John 19. 33, 36; *see*, Exodus 12. 14, 21, 24–27, 46; Numbers 9. 12; Psalm 34. 20; *cf.*, I Corinthians 5. 7).

Do we *know* this to be just how it occurred?—no. But this conjecture, which is most reasonable, and which would not be possible within the "torture stake" theory, is one that answers all requirements given in Scripture and in secular histories of crucifixions, as it logically explains Jesus's early death (the thieves executed with him still were alive after he was already dead—John 19. 32, 33), and harmonises all Biblical accounts in one very strong possibility—until or unless God were to inform us differently (Proverbs 4. 18).

We need to proceed carefully, however—this is no more than plausible construction, not God-given proveable fact—we must not regard or present it as though we knew it to be true: it cannot pass the test of I Thessalonians 5. 21. But it is what we have thusfar—and we reiterate: were it necessary to *prove* this matter beyond any doubt, as a requisite to our Christian faith and walk, then God would have provided us with the needed absolute proof.

Another physiological point for the Jehovah's Witnesses to consider, again with regard to the notion of a spike driven through the wrists, is the high likelihood of bleeding-to-death. Major arteries and veins run through the wrists—one reason that slashing of the wrist is a regular choice of suicides—because it brings death rapidly through massive blood-loss. It would be difficult enough to avoid rupturing one of these mainline blood-vessels with a rough-edged (not machine-made) hand-forged spike run through *one* wrist; driven through *two* wrists, it would be close to impossible.—especially given the further ripping and tearing of flesh that would occur from the sheer *weight* of a man's body hanging (and struggling) from puncture-wounds, exacerbated by chafing and abrading against the jagged corners of crude primitive nails thrust

through the wrists and cutting into tissues surrounding said piercings, particularly when the "torture stake" was raised from horizontal to vertical position, then dropped into place in the receiving hole designed to support it. (ouch!!)

Howbeit, the physiological case, once again, preponderantly favours the cross over the "torture stake". Therefore, taken together, all that we thusfar have surveyed does not bode especially well for the Watchtower Society's view, in our considered opinion; even while we have not DISproved their position entirely.

— Archaeological Evidence —

Historically, this has been the cross objectors' strong suit. 'If the cross had any legitimate part in original Christian belief, then *find* it for us in earliest excavated evidences of Christianity'—and no-one had: it always showed-up in artifacts dated long after even the A.D.[C.E.] 325 Council of Nicaea—buttressing the view that the cross had been yet one more import from heathen reverences, "introduced" into Christendom by the not-entirely-converted pagan sun-worshipper, Emperor Constantine. All known and extant pieces of physical evidence from early Christianity favoured that view.

In response, those defending the cross could only express the theory that its image had deliberately been avoided by early Christians—to prevent any from being tempted into idolatry—and there likely is truth to that…IF the cross was Christian in the first place.

But our non-cross friends chose a more obvious explanation: 'Apostolic Era Christians had no connexions to the cross, since Jesus never was nailed to one'. Moreover, they argued, 'If Jesus's death would be represented by a *cross*; then why did early Christians instead choose the sign of a *fish* to be able to recognise one another covertly, during the early days when they were under official ban and persecution?'

This is a fair question. But it splits two ways: if Jesus were *known* to have been crucified upon a cross, then that fact, in the

awareness also of enemies who hunted-down Christians, would have made the sign of a cross too obvious to evade detection; whereas, a fish would be meaningless to those outside of the Christian fellowship, as it was an "inside" reference to Christian evangelism (Luke 5. 9–10, 11; *see*, Matthew 4. 18, 19; Mark 1. 16, 17; *cf.*, Matthew 10. 16; Matthew 28. 19–20; II Timothy 4. 1–5; I Corinthians 9. 16, 19–23; Philippians 2. 13–15; I Peter 2. 9, 12; II Timothy 2. 23–26; I Peter 3. 13–17).

However, a first breaching of the theory that Constantine had brought-in the cross from his own heathen background came in 1856, when Raffaele Garrucci (1812–1885), an Italian archaeologist and collector/cataloguer of religious artifacts, examining the interior walls of the Paedagogium (thought to be a prison for slaves), on the Palatine Hill in Rome, discovered a piece of rude caricature mocking the crucifixion of Jesus, which has been dated very broadly, as being from between 161 and 235 A.D.—in any case, long before Constantine. In his book, *Light From the Ancient Past*, published in 1946, second edition in 1959, on page 373, Jack Finegan (1908–2000) described Garrucci's find as follows: "this crude graffito shows a man's body with an ass's head, on a cross. The feet are supported on a platform and the outstretched arms fastened to the transverse bar of the cross. To the left is a smaller figure of a boy or a young man in an attitude of adoration." The Latin inscription below this drawing can be translated as being either, "Alexamenos worships his god", or (using the vocative), "Alexamenos, worship god". Clearly, this particular piece of [artwork?] was to poke insulting fun at the Christian faith of one chap especially, "Alexamenos". But it established *archaeologically* a common connexion between the Christian faith and crucifixion on a cross, existing as early as c. 200 C.E.[A.D.].

Tertullian (A.D. 160–230), who authored between 190 and 220, also encountered this same sort of disrespectful parody. He wrote in Apologeticus, 16. 12–14: 'A new representation of our god

has quite recently been publicised in this city, started by a certain criminal hired to dodge wild beasts in the arena. He displayed a picture with this inscription: "Onokoites, the god of the Christians". The figure had the ears of an ass, one foot was cloven, and it was dressed in a toga and carrying a book. We laughed at both the caption and the cartoon.'

Within each of the Jehovah's Witnesses' proprietary translations of the Bible (of which there are two essentially—*The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, and *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*), there appears an article of generous length, carefully laying out the Watchtower Society's perspective on the cross/crucifixion issue, explaining the reasons why "torture stake" and "impaled" appear in their Bibles, where most of us are accustomed to seeing "cross" and "crucified". **[**note: in the 2013 revised edition, we notice that "impaled" has been changed to descriptive phrases such as "executed on the stake", for clarification, because "impale" has various meanings, including, "to fence-in with stakes (wooden pales): shut in: to surround with a border: to put to death by spitting on a stake: to put to death by fastening up upon a stake: to burn at the stake". On pages 1722 and 1723 of their 2013 revision of *The New World Translation*, within Appendix A2 ("Features of This Revision"), the following explanation of this change appears:

> The English verb "impale" was used in previous versions of this Bible in connection with the execution of Jesus. While this term could refer to the way that Jesus was nailed to the torture stake, it is more often used in reference to the ancient method of execution by running a sharp stake through the body and fixing the victim on it. Since Jesus was not impaled *with* the torture stake, this revision uses such expressions as "executed on a stake" and "nailed to the stake" with regard to

the manner in which Jesus was fastened to the torture stake. —Matthew 20:19; 27:31, 35.

We wanted to include their own statement of the case for making this change, not merely our characterisation of it.**]**

In 1950, in the first edition of *The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*, and in several subsequent editions, their obligatory recital of the cross/"torture stake" discussion deliberates on the dearth of archaeological records connecting the cross with Christianity and contains the observation, "The passing of time and further archeological discoveries will be certain to prove its [*i.e.*, the torture stake's] correctness…"; But this particular statement does not appear in their 1984 Reference Edition, neither in any editions subsequent. The Watchtower Society no longer can wax so confident in their declarations against the probability of early archaeological trails suggesting that Jesus was crucified, owing to discoveries made in more recent decades.

Interestingly enough, despite period literary references to Roman crucifixion as a means both to punish and terrorise slaves, and as a common method of execution before, during, and after the time of Christ (discussed in excerpts, on pages 17 and 18 of this treatise), and also in the face of records to indicate thousands of crucifixions having been carried-out in the Roman Empire, there none-the-less appeared no *archaeological* evidence of the practice itself, let alone any early Christian connexion to it.

That would change, however, in 1968, when Vassilios Tzaferis, the Greek archaeologist, in excavating a Jerusalem tomb, found the bones of a crucified man by the name of Yehohanan, son of Hagakol, a man who lived in Jesus's time. Unlike the Biblical accounts of Jesus, the nails were driven through the man's arms, between the radius and the ulna (the two long bones of the forearm), just above the wrists. But, here was clear archaeological proof that death by nailing to a *cross*, specifically, was indeed

practised by the Roman government in Jerusalem during the same time-frame when Jesus was executed. This laid to rest the arguments about a shortage of wood, and others, which insisted that impalement was used almost exclusively. Nevertheless, this intriguing 1968 discovery still made no direct connexion between crucifixion, the cross, and Christianity.

However, an article which appeared in the Jerusalem Christian Review in 1998, written by Jean Gilman, discusses the excavations from years before, by Italian archaeologist P. Bagetti, of a first century catacomb on the Mount of Olives containing inscriptions indicating that it was used for interment "by the very first Christians in Jerusalem". The engraving on one of the ossuaries [stone coffins for bones] reads, "Shimon Bar Yonah"—Simon [Peter] son of Jonah (*see*, Matthew 16. 16, 17; John 1. 42; John 21. 15–17), and is clearly marked with a cross. Coins found in this catacomb were minted during the early part of the first century A.D.[C.E.], and other evidence dates the burials as being from the mid first century—after Jesus's execution and before the Christian Scriptures had been written. One group of sarcophagi [limestone coffins] bear the names of "Eleazar" [Lazarus], "Martha", and "Mary"—a coincidence?—or, could these be the very ones in the Book of John, chapter 11? Another sarcophagus etched with the sign of a cross had the name "Shlom-Zion", followed by the designation, "daughter of Simon the Priest". The name of Jesus appears as a commemoration on several of the coffins. Numerous common names were found on coffins bearing crosses, and others designated "proselyte" [a non-Jewish (or Gentile) convert to Christianity]; but one unusual name also appears on an ossuary with crosses—"Shappira"—unique in first century writings to Acts 5. 1.

Is any of this *absolute proof*?—no. But it is interesting, in light of the above, that, in their *Reasoning from the Scriptures* book (1985, 1989), pp. 90–92, the resources from which the Watchtower Society quote, in order to at least *imply* a lack of archaeological evidence for the cross in inceptive Christianity, date from [in order of appearance], 1946, 1962, 1900, 1904, 1940, [1922], 1967, 1897.

Even so, from what we have seen, the evidence from archaeological digs and investigations has advanced considerably beyond the older sources which the Society continue to lean upon for support of their position. And while not entirely conclusive; none-the-less, such more recent data seriously weaken the assertion that archaeology confirms that Jesus was executed on a pale and absolutely not on a cross.

— Ye Olde "Electric Chair" Illustration —

It was one warm early autumn day in 1959, when this writer was challenged on the sidewalk in Tenafly, New Jersey, by a friendly pair of smiling Jehovah's Witnesses, with the suggestion, "What if someone very dear to you were convicted and condemned on false charges, and executed by the electric chair; would you honour that person by *wearing* a small model of an electric chair made of gold? —would you pin it as an emblem on your lapel, or wear it as a keepsake on a gold necklace?—could you even bear to *see* a *picture* of an electric chair?—would you treasure it?—or, would you want nothing to do with it?" At an impressionable age at the time, I was given pause by the subjunctive speculation: their thought was a novel one to these ears.

But, even 55 years ago, this wasn't a new line of enquiry: "Judge" Rutherford, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses religion, had asked essentially this same thing starting in the late 1920s, as he increasingly objected to "all of this jewelry" [the cross-and-crown pins commonly worn by Bible Students], and leading up to his proclamation that the cross was pagan in origin, and that Jesus had been nailed to an upright stake.

Jehovah's Witnesses might not be entirely happy with this characterisation of it; but their replies to comments and questions concerning their teachings are largely scripted, taught by rote repetition, in a rehearsed set of 'if the householder says *that*, then you say *this*' sort of "call-and-response". They conduct "Kingdom

Ministry School" class meetings at their Kingdom Halls which feature planned and scripted skits taking place between one posing as the 'householder' or a 'co-worker' or an 'incidental witnessing prospect' opportunity, and one or two posing as a Jehovah's Witness or a pair of Jehovah's Witnesses engaging this person in a discussion.

The scripting is based on precomposed lines of conversation which have proved themselves to be effective and persuasive over the course of decades, up-dated for current circumstances; but the *effect* of all of this strict conditioning is, the J.W. doesn't develop the propensity to *think independently* nor heed the holy Spirit's prompting in how to respond (*cf.*, Luke 21. 13–15; Luke 12. 12; Matthew 10. 20); also, we almost can recite in advance what a Jehovah's Witness is apt to say, once we have some amount of experience at occupying them in an exchange of ideas concerning Scripture and doctrine.

Their little book, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, published in 1985, then slightly revised in 1989, somewhat formalises this process by serving as a handy reference of pre-packaged rejoinders for them to use in most commonly encountered witnessing situations. Indeed, their 'electric chair' argument remains, albeit in somewhat less specific form:

> How would you feel if one of your dearest friends was [sic—should be "were" or "had been"] executed on the basis of false charges? Would you make a replica of the instrument of execution? Would you cherish it, or would you rather shun it? —*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, p. 92.

It is worth remembering that the late "Judge" Rutherford had been, by original profession, an attorney-at-law and Democrat [political] Party operative and organiser—which occupations involve the artful skill of subtil persuasion and moving the inclinations of

people without luxury of time sufficient for searching-out and fully reflecting upon the implications of the argument; in short, the wily salesmanship of the politician and clever guile of the lawyer to employ verbal sleight-of-hand, so as to create an emotive impression which appears *plausibly* valid on its surface, in order to give quick birth to an intended opinion within the mind of any receptive hearer.

Our obligation, *as students*, however [II Timothy 2. 15], is to *dig into* the premise of the argument and follow the trajectory of its reasoning, to see if it is logically valid and intellectually honest.

This one, comparing a Christian cherishing a cross with someone treasuring the replica of a gallows or electric chair (or whatever means) used to unjustly execute a dearest friend on false charges, presents substratal difficulties on both counts. It draws a justified parallel between Jesus Christ and 'one of your dearest friends'—since no dearer friend than Jesus can be had. And Jesus certainly was executed on the basis of trumped-up false charges. So far, so good.

But then the questions that follow, quietly by-pass the all-important *reason* for Jesus's death, and *why* we commemorate it! Instead, the appeal is to human fleshly sentimentality and revulsion at the horror and the injustice, set against one's hurt feelings over the wrongful execution of a loved one in the flesh—and therein lies the 'red herring' logical fallacy.

The listener, drawn into the pathos of such a situation, might well fail to notice the "bait-and-switch" tactic—but the thinking Christian who reveres the Ransom will spot it. The execution of a loved one based in false accusation is a human tragedy and loss; but 'the old, old story' of how Jesus died for us (Romans 5. 6–8; John 3. 16; *cf.*, I John 3. 16; John 15. 13) is, by contrast, one of victory and triumph—not only for himself—but for the entire human race! Hence, unlike the humanity-based bereavement emotionally played-upon through the example set-up by the Watchtower Society; grief turns to joy since Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day! (*cf.*, Matthew 28. 1–10; Luke 24. 1–35)

Whereas we would mourn over the loss of a dear friend or loved one who sleeps in the prison-house of death, and thus is utterly forfeited from us (except in fond memory) until the Day of Resurrection; we instead *glory* in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we can say, 'He is *risen*!'—and, *because* he is risen, *his* death is pure exultant *gain* and never loss—the shining hope for *all* of mankind! (Hebrews 2. 9; I Corinthians 15. 12–22; Romans 11. 33–36!)

The Apostle Paul specifically and often referred to the very instrument of our Lord's death as the epitome of his faith symbolising reconciliation to God. To illustrate, we will quote a few examples from the 2013 edition of the Jehovah's Witnesses' own *New World Translation*:

'By means of his flesh he abolished the enmity, the Law of commandments consisting in decrees, in order to make the two groups in union with himself into one new man and to make peace, and to reconcile fully both peoples in one body to God through the torture stake, because he had killed off the enmity by means of himself.'—Ephesians 2. 15–16;

'and through him to reconcile to himself all other things by making peace through the blood he shed on the torture stake, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens.'—Colossians 1. 20;

'But may I never boast, except in the torture stake of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been put to death [executed on the stake—*margin*] with regard to me and I with regard to the world.'—Galatians 6. 14.

For the sake of readers unaccustomed to the style of *The New World Translation*, we will repeat Galatians 6. 14, this time from the *King James Version*:

'But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.'

From this verse arose that beloved Hymn, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory": we trust that this lays to rest the "electric chair" comparison, and explains why it is that treasuring the instrument of our Lord's death for what it *represents*, sanctioned by precious Scripture, cannot be compared to our revulsion at a hypothetical instrument used unjustly to put a loved one to death! Regardless of how we perceive the contrivance used to execute our Lord—cross, or stake, or some other—may we cherish it for <u>his</u> precious blood shed upon it, for the life of the world!—John 6. 51

— Summary Considerations —

Dear friend, having examined and reviewed the evidence, both Scriptural and temporal, with regard to the Jehovah's Witnesses' "torture stake" theory, we have found their view to be interesting, stimulating, thought-provoking—though ultimately, as we now have amply seen, lacking in persuasive force. Is it at least *conceivable* that Jesus Christ was nailed to a single upright pole, rather than to a cross?—we cannot completely rule that thesis out. But is it *presumable*?—frankly, upon what we know, it is quite doubtful, even while we are not able to entirely establish that it is false. Is there compelling evidence to suggest that JEHOVAH God "disapproves" of a Christian envisioning His Son's death as having occurred upon a cross?—not that we have been able to discover; and not, after considered examination, that we have seen revealed through the Jehovah's Witnesses' (and others') postulations. In light of all that we have looked at, we remain content that Jesus was indeed crucified; nevertheless, we would not *insist* dogmatically that those who believe he was impaled are incorrect, for we have not utterly disproved their position.

The sole item which we can verify unequivocally to be erroneous is, the Watchtower Society's insistent depiction of Jesus as (supposedly) nailed with a spike through both wrists—the nails were put through his <u>hands</u> (John 20. 25). This alone proves the <u>Society</u> <u>*fallible*</u>. That demonstrable fact, standing of itself, and given the plain reality that they have remained in this error, shows openly that it is possible to advance in light beyond them (*consider carefully*, Proverbs 4. 18), that the Watchtower Governing Body are

not on the leading edge of what God has been revealing to His people, a fact inferrable simply from the plain observation that others operating entirely outside of their Organisation are none-the-less able to see their error and reprove it (*cf.*, Matthew 24. 45–47; Luke 12. 42–44; Amos 3. 7; *contrast*, Jeremiah 23. 21, 22; Jeremiah 29. 9). For those Jehovah's Witnesses able to discern this, we appreciate their situation, within which they might now find the Society's spiritual bed too confining, and its covers therewithin hereafter insufficient to secure them (*see*, Isaiah 28. 20; *contrast*, Psalm 145. 14, 18; Jeremiah 29. 11–14a).

We would encourage our Jehovah's Witness and other legalistic friends, who have sensed a need to be dogmatic about *every detail* of understanding, and to contend against all others for the defence of each point or item, whose assurance seems to lie, in large measure, from having a sure and absolute answer for just about every possible enquiry; to recognise that God does not require, nor does He grant, that degree of exactness from, or to, believers. The Scripture says to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, and to be always ready to give an answer [defence] to every one who asks [demands] a *reason* for the *hope* which is in us, with meekness and fear [profound respect—*see*, II Timothy 1. 7; *cf.*, Colossians 4. 5, 6]—I Peter 3. 15: it does not tell us that we must have a stipulated and fixed answer for *everything* (I Corinthians 13. 9, 12). We do have the liberty in Christ to admit that we at times are not certain, or that we do not know (*see*, Galatians 5. 1; II Corinthians 3. 17; *cf.*, Galatians 2. 4; James 2. 12), even that more than one view might be acceptable.—when the matter at issue is not an essential one to important doctrinal understanding.

The Jehovah's Witnesses lay great stress upon I Corinthians 1. 10, which, in their *New World Translation*, 2013 edition, reads: "Now I urge you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you should all speak in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you may be completely united in the same mind and in the same line of thought." This Scripture occurs in the context of contentious sects, parties, and divisions having been fomented, and that is the situation which Paul is addressing with the Corinthian congregation (*see*, verses 11–13; I Corinthians 3. 3–11; *cf.*, Romans 16. 17; Titus 3. 10;

Matthew 7. 15; Acts 20. 29–30); the Apostle is urging a unity of *spirit*, not a mental lock-stepped absolute adherence to the same or identical view on each-and-every particular. (*cf.*, Hebrews 13. 1; Psalm 133. 1; I Peter 3. 8; Philippians 1. 27; Romans 12. 15–18; Philippians 2. 2, 5; Romans 15. 5–6; John 17. 20–21; I Corinthians 6. 17; II Corinthians 13. 11)

And yet, in the *New World Translation* (2013), Romans 14. 1 tells Christians: "Welcome the man having weaknesses in his faith, but do not pass judgment on differing opinions [inward questionings, *margin*]."

— How Do We Resolve All Of This? —

We find ourselves at an interesting impasse (of a sort) right now: to be all in one agreement [accord]—and yet, to welcome the Christian with a differing opinion, or a weakness in his (or, her) faith. Philippians 4. 5a, *N.W.* (2013) instructs: "Let your reasonableness become known to all men." ["moderation"—*A.V.*; "forbearance" ("gentleness", *margin*)—*A.R.V.*]. Even-handedness, balance: let us see where we can find some reasonableness—"to speak injuriously of no one, not to be quarrelsome, but to be reasonable, displaying all mildness toward all men. For we too were once senseless, disobedient, led astray, being slaves to various desires and pleasures,…"—Titus 3. 2, 3, *N.W.* (2013).

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith [JEHOVAH]:"—Isaiah 1. 18a. We, as Christians, stand both grateful and thankful to our Almighty God for so very many things!—one of which is, that all points of doctrine essential to our understanding Him and His Plan for mankind and creation (Ephesians 3. 11), and to the practice and exercise of our faith, are defined conclusively in the Holy Scriptures—many directly, by explicit statement, also by surrounding context and/or by overall Biblical context through a topical examination of every passage related to the particular precept—some others indirectly (though no less surely), by whether or not they can be harmonised with the "hub" principle of the Ransom and with other core articles of understanding which come

directly defined. Thus, even seemingly ambiguous or "conflicting" statements in the Bible can be resolved by various methods of study which are open freely to us (Isaiah 28. 9, 10, 13a), and rendered utterly plain once properly understood: exhaustive topical examination; study of symbolic language; study by time-frame or dispensation; immediate as well as overall context; type and antitype [let the Bible itself instruct directly—we invite our readers to please request a copy of the highly illuminating and informative little booklet, *How To Study The BIBLE and Have It Make Sense*, at no cost, and with no obligation].

In the case of a belief, such as this present one of the cross versus the "torture stake", in which the conclusion drawn falls short of being absolute, God has not by any means left us bereft of His way in handling a situation such as that. The classic Bible passage defining Christian liberty and individually-accountable conscience is to be found from Romans 14. 1 through Romans 15. 7 —a set of verses often neglected by legalists looking to establish their proprietary system of exacting adherence to a strictly pre-determined programme of dogma—especially when any independent thinking and investigation is looked upon with suspicions of "disloyalty" to a given organisational authority held over the individual believer. As one dear Christian sister framed the matter in a letter to this writer:

> When people are taught to parrot what they are told, instead of to think, research and reason, they are not prepared to handle an open discussion and don't know what to do with Scriptures that they have not previously studied. If fear of reprisals (of which there are severe ones in certain organizations) is causing them not to think beyond what they are taught in the organization, they will probably just have to wait a few years—to receive their enlightenment and other blessings in the Kingdom…[Isaiah 29. 17–19]

Please savour this—that she fully expects them to be *blessed* in the coming age by JEHOVAH, not condemned (Galatians 3. 8; Genesis 22. 15–18). Something for further consideration on these very lines: as we already have seen from the Bible (I Peter 1. 20a; page 23 of this article), God had planned for our salvation long before He created us; moreover, it is His will to save as many as are

willing to be saved (Ezekiel 18. 23, 32; Ezekiel 33. 11; *see*, I Timothy 2. 3–4). Please notice the word-order in I Timothy 2. 4; that the saving (from the sin and the death of Adam, Vs. 5 and 6) comes before their receiving the [accurate] knowledge of the Truth (*cf.*, Zephaniah 3. 9; Luke 2. 10; Luke 3. 6). Most religionist thinking is just the reverse—that a preciously few are saved, and the vast majority are condemned—a sad picture, and a portrait of failure. But, God's plans never fail! (Isaiah 46. 3–13; Isaiah 55. 1–13; Isaiah 29. 17–19; Revelation 21. 3–4; Revelation 22. 1–3, 17; Romans 11. 33–36). Do please see Article of the Month, August 2010.

We would like at this time to share with you certain excerpts from the aforesaid passage in the Book of Romans (our comments appear in brackets):

"Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? to his own lord he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be made to stand; for the Lord hath power to make him stand. **[**This is a vital point—lest we wax too ready to cast aspersions upon what another Christian believes and practises in good conscience, so long as said beliefs and practices do not violate the Scriptures—*see*, Romans 14. 1; Romans 15. 7; *cf.*, Mark 7. 1–5; Acts 28. 2**]** One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord: **[**Here we have, addressed for us, the matter of keeping the seventh day Sabbath versus (or with) keeping Sunday in remembrance of the day on which our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead; or, for that matter, the keeping of other holidays, anniversaries, *etc.*—the important point being, one's heart-orientation in reverence toward God in so doing, not necessarily the specific reason or designation for the original celebration; *cf.*, Esther, chapter 9**]**... For none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived *again*, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. But thou, why dost thou judge thy brother? or thou again, why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord [JEHOVAH—Isaiah 45. 23–24], to me every knee shall bow,

And every tongue shall confess [give praise, *margin*] to God. So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. **[**Do please note the *individuality* emphasised by way of this statement (*cf.*, Galatians 6. 5), particularly in light of what immediately follows**]**. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block in his brother's way, or an occasion of falling. I know, and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean of itself: save that to him who accounteth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. **[**With this we are given the gist of it, in regard to our entire discussion this month. Indeed, this article has laid out a careful and very strong *circumstantial* case, we hope in a fair-minded full light of both views, that Jesus was crucified and not impaled; although we have not utterly *proved* the matter—because, given the information presently available to us, absolutely conclusive proof is not possible. Nevertheless, what we do have is more than sufficient to persuade us not to abandon the cross for the "torture stake". However, that stated; if you, dear reader, see the cross as a vile heathen symbol detestable to God, and cannot conscientiously reconcile that impression with your view of our Lord's death—if (in other words) the cross remains "unclean" for you; then, *for you*, it *is* unclean—and your rightful course would be to shun it (Isaiah 52. 11). And we who accept the cross without difficulty would be wrong to judge you in rejecting it, for you are acting in obedience to your own conscience before JEHOVAH God. Please understand also, that we, who have carefully examined your case, and have failed to become convinced by it, are likewise following the directives of our conscience, in our desire to glorify God (I Corinthians 10. 31)**]** … So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another. … The faith which thou hast, have thou to thyself before God. Happy is he that judgeth not himself in that which he approveth [*cf.*, Galatians 6. 4]. … Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you to be of the same mind one with another according to Christ Jesus: that with one accord ye may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ also received you, to the glory of God."—Romans 14. 4, 5–6a, 7–12, 13–14, 19, 22; 15. 5–7, *A.R.V.*

"Peace *be* to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen."—Ephesians 6. 23–24.

* * *