



# 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society teaches that the cross is not a valid Christian symbol and the Jesus did not die on a cross but a "torture stake." [Other biblical references to the cross should be cross-referenced to this note.]

- 1 Cross = *stauros*
- 2 See John 20:25
- 3 Archeology

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

## EXPLANATION

1. **Greek: *stauros*:** Using partial quotes and references, the Watchtower Society asserts that the Greek word *stauros* in the New Testament should not be translated as "cross" but as "stake" or "pole." They state: "In classical Greek the word (*stau-ros*) rendered 'torture stake' in the *New World Translation* primarily denotes an upright stake, or pole, and there is no evidence that the writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures used it to designate a stake with a crossbeam." They also say, "*Stau-ros* in both the classical Greek and Koine carries no thought of a "cross" made of two timbers. It means only an upright stake, pale, pile, or pole...."<sup>1</sup>

When the Greek lexicons are checked, however, one finds this is not the case. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich's *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* states: "...a stake sunk into the earth in an upright position; a cross-piece was oft attached to its upper part, so that it was shaped like a T or thus ⚡."<sup>2</sup> In Thayer's Lexicon the number two definition for *stauros* is "a cross."<sup>3</sup>

2. **Cross-reference:** The Watchtower's "torture stake" theory is illustrated in *Awake!* with a drawing of Jesus hanging on a stake with both hands over his head and a single nail piercing both wrists.<sup>4</sup> When cross-referenced with John 20:25, however, it is clear that two nails were used on Christ's hands, not one. Thomas said, "...Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails... I will not believe." Note he said nails (plural). A cross beam would require at least two nails because the hands would be to either side rather than together above the head as on a stake.

3. **Archaeology:** The Watchtower Society not only claims that Christ did not die on a cross, they further state that there is no evidence that a cross with a crossbeam was ever even used by Romans during the first century. They claim the stake was "the then customary usage of this means of execution in the Orient."<sup>5</sup> They maintain, "The evidence is, therefore, completely lacking that Jesus Christ was crucified on two pieces of timber placed at right angles.... The passing of time and further archaeological discoveries will be certain to prove its [torture stake] correctness."<sup>6</sup> This last quote was first published in 1969. In 1968, perhaps at the same time the claim was being written, a discovery was made in a dig in Jerusalem that cripples the Watchtower's argument.

In 1968 the remains of a crucified man named Yehoanan were unearthed in Jerusalem dating to the time Christ. The book, *Archaeological Commentary on the Bible* states: "Both hands had been pierced by a single large and crude iron nail. His open arms had been nailed in the way shown in the traditional crucifixion paintings...."<sup>7</sup>

The cross is an important symbol for Christians because it is on a cross that Christ died for their sins. It is faith in Christ's atoning death on the cross, burial, and resurrection that saves (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

<sup>1</sup> *Insight on the Scriptures*, (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988): 2:1116; 1:1190.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Bauer, William Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957): 772.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977): 586.

<sup>4</sup> "What God Has Promised," *Awake!* April 8 (1974), p.14.

<sup>5</sup> "Did Christ Die on a Cross?" *Watchtower*, March 15 (1957), p. 57. The Society is quoting Hermann Fulda, *The Cross and Crucifixion*.

<sup>6</sup> *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1969): 1157. In later editions of the same appendix, the Society discontinued the claim that archaeology would vindicate their claim. See 1985 edition, p. 1151.

<sup>7</sup> Gonzalo Baez-Camargo, *Archaeological Commentary on the Bible*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984): 211. Note: evidence indicates that the man was crucified in with legs bent at the knee rather than outstretched as in traditional crucifixion portraits. For an illustration and more information, see: Edward M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison, Eds. *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Regency Reference Library, 1983): 141.

## KEY TO USING THIS PAGE

The biblical passage is highlighted in blue to indicate that this is a passage to which alternative religions use to support their unique teachings about Christ. The notes to the left of the passage can be written in the margins of a Bible to help explain the passage (however, do not write the numbers). The numbers correspond with the detailed explanations at the bottom of the page. These explanations help readers to fully understand the meaning of each marginal note.