

~IMPALEMENT (583)

(im-pale'ment)

.. What Does The Greek Reveal About The Shape Of The Instrument

.. Figurative Usage

- In the literal sense, the fastening of a victim either dead or alive to a stake, or pole. The execution of Jesus Christ is the best-known case.
- And how our chief priests and rulers handed him over to the sentence of death and impaled him. ([Luke 24:20](#))
- Now it was preparation of the Passover, it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews; See! Your king! ([John 19:14](#))
- However, they shouted; Take him away! Take him away! Impale him! Pilate said to them; Shall I impale your king? The chief priests answered; We have no king but Caesar. ([John 19:15](#))
- At that time, therefore, he handed him over to them to be impaled. Then they took charge of Jesus. ([John 19:16](#))
- This man, as one delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you fastened to a stake by the hand of lawless men and did away with. ([Acts of Apostles 2:23](#))
- Therefore let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you impaled. ([Acts of Apostles 2:36](#))
- **Impalements** by nations in ancient times were carried out in a variety of ways.
- The Assyrians, noted for their savage warfare, impaled captives by hanging their nude bodies atop pointed stakes that were run up through the abdomens into the chest cavities of the victims.
- Several reliefs have been found on monuments, one such depicting the Assyrian assault and conquest of Lachish, on which this method of **impalement** is shown.

- After that Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that he had pulled away from Lachish. (**2 Kings 19:8**)
- The Persians also used **impalement** as a form of punishment. Some say the Persians customarily first beheaded or flayed those they impaled. Darius the Great forbade interference with the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, and any violator of that decree was to be impaled, literally, raised up, on a timber pulled out of his own house.
- And by me an order has been put through that, as for anybody that violates this decree, a timber will be pulled out of his house and he will be **impaled** upon it, and his house will be turned into a public privy on this account. (**Ezra 6:11**)
- During the reign of Darius son, Ahasuerus or Xerxes I, two of the palace doorkeepers were hanged, or **impaled**, on a **stake**, the usual punishment meted out to traitors by the Persians.
- In those days while Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two court officials of the king, doorkeepers, became indignant and kept seeking to lay hand on King Ahasuerus. (**Esther 2:21**)
- And the thing came to be known to Mordecai, and he immediately told Esther the queen. In turn Esther talked to the king in Mordecai's name. (**Esther 2:22**)
- So the matter was sought out and eventually found out, and both of them got to be hanged on a stake, after which it was written in the book of the affairs of the days before the king. (**Esther 2:23**)
- Haman and his ten sons were similarly hanged on a **stake**.
- At that Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him; Let them make a stake fifty cubits high. Then in the morning say to the king that they should hang Mordecai on it. Then go in with the king to the banquet joyful. So the thing seemed good before Haman, and he proceeded to have the stake made. (**Esther 5:14**)
- Later the king said; Who is in the courtyard? Now Haman himself had come into the outer courtyard of the king's house to say to the king to hang Mordecai on the stake that he had

prepared for him. (**Esther 6:4**)

- Harbona, one of the court officials before the king, now said; Also, there is the stake that Haman made for Mordecai, who had spoken good concerning the king, standing in Haman's house, fifty cubits high. At that the king said; You men, **hang** him on it. (**Esther 7:9**)
- And they proceeded to hang Haman on the stake that he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's rage itself subsided. (**Esther 7:10**)
- The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the one showing hostility to the Jews, they killed, but on the plunder they did not lay their hand. (**Esther 9:10**)
- Accordingly Esther said; If to the king it does seem good, let it be granted tomorrow also to the Jews that are in Shushan to do according to the Law of today, and let the ten sons of Haman be hanged upon the stake. (**Esther 9:13**)
- So the king said for it to be done that way. Then a Law was given out in Shushan, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. (**Esther 9:14**)
- But when Esther came in before the king he said with the written document. Let his bad scheme that he has schemed against the Jews come back upon his own head, and they **hanged** him and his sons upon the stake. (**Esther 9:25**)
- **Herodotus [III, 125,159][IV, 43] also cites other examples of Persian impalements.**
- It was Jewish Law that those guilty of such heinous crimes as blasphemy or idolatry were first killed by stoning, by beheading, or by some other method, and then their dead bodies were exposed on stakes, or trees, as warning examples to others.
- And in case there comes to be in a man a sin deserving the sentence of death, and he has been put to death, and you have hung him upon a stake. (**Deuteronomy 21:22**)
- His dead body should not stay all night on the stake, but you should by all means bury him on that day, because something

accursed of God is the one hung up, and you must not defile your soil, which Yehowah your God is giving you as an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 21:23)

- And he hanged the king of Ai upon a stake until the evening time, and as the sun was about to set Joshua gave the command, and then they took his dead body down from the stake and pitched it at the entrance of the gate of the city and raised up a great pile of stones over him, down to this day. (Joshua 8:29)
- And after that Joshua proceeded to strike them and put them to death and hang them upon five stakes, and they continued hanging upon the stakes until the evening. (Joshua 10:26)
- Let there be given to us seven men of his sons, and we must expose them to Yehowah in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen one of Yehowah. Accordingly the king said; I myself shall give them. (2 Samuel 21:6)
- Then he gave them into the hand of the Gibeonites and they proceeded to expose them on the mountain before Yehowah, so that the seven of them fell together, and they themselves were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the start of the barley harvest. (2 Samuel 21:9)
- The Egyptians may also have first killed their criminals before fastening them to stakes, as is indicated by Joseph's prophetic words to Pharaoh's chief baker;
- In three days from now Pharaoh will lift up your head from off you and will **certainly hang you upon a stake**, and the fowls will certainly eat your flesh from off you. (Genesis 40:19)
- But the chief of the bakers he **hung** up, just as Joseph had given them the interpretation. (Genesis 40:22)
- And it turned out that just as he had interpreted to us so it happened. Me he returned to my office, but him he **hanged**. (Genesis 41:13)
- The Greeks and Romans, it is said, adopted the practice of **impalement** from the Phoenicians, and not until the days of Constantine was it abolished in the empire.

- Very seldom was a Roman citizen **impaled**, for this was a punishment usually given slaves and criminals of the lowest sort. **Impalement** was looked upon by both Jews and Romans as a symbol of humiliation and shame, reserved for those accursed.
- His dead body should not stay all night on the stake, but you should by all means bury him on that day, because something accursed of God is the one hung up, and you must not defile your soil, which Yehowah your God is giving you as an inheritance. (**Deuteronomy 21:23**)
- Christ by purchase released us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse instead of us, because it is written: **Accursed is every man hanged upon a stake.** (**Galatians 3:13**)
- More than that, when he found himself in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient as far as death, yes, death on a torture stake. (**Philippians 2:8**)
- In the **First Century**, if the Jews had the right to **impale** a person for religious reasons, a point on which there is some doubt, it is quite certain they could not do so for civil offenses, only a Roman official like Pontius Pilate had such authority.
- Hence Pilate said to them; Take him yourselves and judge him according to your Law. The Jews said to him; It is not lawful for us to **kill** anyone. (**John 18:31**)
- Hence Pilate said to him; Are you not speaking to me? Do you not know I have authority to release you and I have authority to impale you? (**John 19:10**)
- Nevertheless, the Jews, and especially their chief priests and rulers, bore the prime responsibility for Christ's **impalement**.
- And immediately at dawn the chief priests with the older men and the scribes, even the whole Sanhedrin, conducted a consultation, and they bound Jesus and led him off and handed him over to Pilate. (**Mark 15:1**)
- So Pilate put the question to him; Are you the king of the Jews? In answer to him he said; You yourself say it. (**Mark 15:2**)
- But the chief priests proceeded to accuse him of many things.

(Mark 15:3)

- Now Pilate began questioning him again, saying; Have you no reply to make? See how many charges they are bringing against you. **(Mark 15:4)**
- But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate began to marvel. **(Mark 15:5)**
- Well, from festival to festival he used to release to them one prisoner, whom they petitioned for. **(Mark 15:6)**
- At the time there was the so-called Barabbas in bonds with the seditionists, who in their sedition had committed murder. **(Mark 15:7)**
- So the crowd came on up and started to make petition according to what he used to do for them. **(Mark 15:8)**
- Pilate responded to them, saying; Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews? **(Mark 15:9)**
- For he was aware that because of envy the chief priests had handed him over. **(Mark 15:10)**
- But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas to them, instead. **(Mark 15:11)**
- Again in reply Pilate was saying to them; What, then, shall I do with him whom you call the king of the Jews? **(Mark 15:12)**
- Once more they cried out; **Impale** him! **(Mark 15:13)**
- But Pilate went on to say to them; Why, what bad thing did he do? Still they cried out all the more; **Impale** him! **(Mark 15:14)**
- At that Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them, and, after having Jesus whipped, he handed him over to be **impaled**. **(Mark 15:15)**
- Therefore let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you impaled. **(Acts of Apostles 2:36)**

- **Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you impaled but whom God raised up from the dead, by this one does this man stand here sound in front of you. ([Acts of Apostles 4:10](#))**
- **The God of our forefathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew, hanging him upon a stake. ([Acts of Apostles 5:30](#))**
- **This wisdom not one of the rulers of this system of things came to know, for if they had known it they would not have impaled the glorious Lord. ([1 Corinthians 2:8](#))**
- **The Romans sometimes tied the victim to the stake, in which case he might live for several days before his physical endurance was overcome by the torture of pain, thirst, hunger, and exposure to the sun. As in the case of Jesus, nailing the hands, and likely the feet also, of the accused to a stake was customary among the Romans.**
- **Consequently the other disciples would say to him; We have seen the Lord! But he said to them; Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and stick my finger into the print of the nails and stick my hand into his side, I will certainly not believe. ([John 20:25](#))**
- **Next he said to Thomas; Put your finger here, and see my hands, and take your hand and stick it into my side, and stop being unbelieving but become believing. ([John 20:27](#))**
- **See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Feel me and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones just as you behold that I have. ([Luke 24:39](#))**
- **For dogs have surrounded me, the assembly of evildoers themselves have enclosed me. Like a lion they are at my hands and my feet. ([Psalms 22:16](#)) Footnote**
- **And blotted out the handwritten document against us, which consisted of decrees and which was in opposition to us, and He has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the torture stake. ([Colossians 2:14](#))**
- **Since the wrists have always been considered by anatomists as part of the hands, some medical men think the nails were driven between the small bones of the wrists to prevent the stripping out that**

could have occurred if they had been driven through the palms. [See The Journal of the American Medical Association, March 21,1986, p. 1460]

- This would be consistent with the Bible's own use of the word **hand** to include the wrist in such texts as;
- After that I asked her and said; Whose daughter are you? To which she said; The daughter of Bethuel the son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him. Accordingly I put the nose ring on her nostril and the bracelets on her hands. (**Genesis 24:47**)
- Where bracelets are said to be worn on the **hands**, and,
- He, for his part, came as far as Lehi, and the Philistines, for their part, shouted exultantly at meeting him. And Yehowah's spirit became operative upon him, and the ropes that were upon his arms came to be like linen threads that have been scorched with fire, so that his fetters melted off his hands. (**Judges 15:14**)
- Where reference is made to fetters that were on Samson's **hands**.
- The record does not say whether the evildoers **impaled** alongside Jesus were nailed or simply tied to the stakes. If only tied, this might explain why, when Jesus was found dead, they were still alive and had to have their legs broken.
- The soldiers came, therefore, and broke the legs of the first man and those of the other man that had been **impaled** with him. (**John 19:32**)
- But on coming to Jesus, as they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. (**John 19:33**)
- Death by suffocation soon followed the breaking of their legs, since, as some think, this would have prevented the raising of the body to ease tension of chest muscles. Of course, this is not a conclusive point on why the evildoers outlived Jesus, for they had not experienced the mental and physical torture inflicted on Jesus.
- He had previously undergone an all-night ordeal at the hands of his enemies, in addition to being beaten by the Roman soldiers, perhaps to the point that he could not carry his own torture stake, as was the custom.
- So they came to a spot named Gethsemene, and he said to his

disciples; Sit down here while I pray. (Mark 14:32)

- Also, they impressed into service a passerby, a certain Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, that he should lift up his torture stake. (Mark 15:21)
- On going out he went as customarily to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples also followed him. (Luke 22:39)
- Now as they led him away, they laid hold of Simon, a certain native of Cyrene, coming from the country, and they placed the torture stake upon him to bear it behind Jesus. (Luke 23:26)

•• What Does The Greek Reveal About The Shape Of The Instrument Of Jesus' Death

- Most Bible translations say Christ was **crucified** rather than **impaled**. This is because of the common belief that the torture instrument upon which he was hung was a **cross** made of **two pieces of wood instead of a single pale, or stake**.
- **Tradition**, not the Scriptures, also says that the condemned man carried only the crossbeam of the cross, called the *patibulum*, or **antenna**, instead of both parts. In this way some try to avoid the predicament of having too much weight for one man to drag or carry to Golgotha.
- Yet, what did the Bible writers themselves say about these matters? They used the **Greek** noun *stau-ros'*, 27 times and the verbs *stau-ro'o*, 46 times, *syn-stau-ro'o*, the prefix *syn*, meaning with, 5 times, and *a-na-stau-ro'o*, *a-na'*, meaning again, once.
- They also used the **Greek** word *xy'lon*, meaning wood, 5 times to refer to the **torture instrument** upon which Jesus was nailed.
- *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, as might be used for a fence, stockade, or palisade. Says Douglas' New Bible Dictionary of 1985 under Cross, page 253: The Greek word for cross, *stauros*, verb *stauroo*, means primarily an upright stake or beam, and secondarily a stake used as an instrument for punishment and execution.

- The fact that Luke, Peter, and Paul also used *xy'lon* as a synonym for *stau-ros'* gives added evidence that Jesus was impaled on an upright stake without a crossbeam, for that is what *xy'lon* in this special sense means.
- The God of our forefathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew, hanging him upon a stake. (*Acts of Apostles 5:30*)
- And we are witnesses of all the things he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem, but they also did away with him by hanging him on a stake. (*Acts of Apostles 10:39*)
- When, now, they had accomplished all the things written about him, they took him down from the stake and laid him in a memorial tomb. (*Acts of Apostles 13:29*)
- Christ by purchase released us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse instead of us, because it is written: Accursed is every man hanged upon a **stake**. (*Galatians 3:13*)
- He himself bore our sins in his own body upon the **stake**, in order, that we might be done with sins and live to righteousness. And, by his stripes you were healed. (*1 Peter 2:24*)
- *Xy'lon* also occurs in the *Greek Septuagint* at;
- And by me an order has been put through that, as for anybody that violates this decree, a timber will be pulled out of his house and he will be impaled upon it, and his house will be turned into a public privy on this account. (*Ezra 6:11*)
- Where it speaks of a **single beam or timber** on which a lawbreaker was to be **impaled**.
- The *New World Translation*, therefore, faithfully conveys to the reader this basic idea of the *Greek* text by rendering *stau-ros'* as **torture stake**, and the verb *stau-ro'o* as **impale**, that is, to fasten on a **stake**, or **pole**.
- In this way there is no confusion of *stau-ros'* with the traditional ecclesiastical crosses. The matter of one man like Simon of Cyrene bearing a **torture stake**, as the Scriptures say, is perfectly reasonable, for if it was 15 centimeters (6 inches) in diameter and 3.5 meters (11

feet) long, it probably weighed little more than 45 kilograms (100 pounds).

- Also, they impressed into service a passerby, a certain Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, that he should lift up his torture stake. (Mark 15:21)

See Also TORTURE STAKE

- Note what W. E. Vine says on this subject: *STAUROS* 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.
- Greek scholar Vine then mentions the Chaldean origin of the two-piece cross and how it was adopted from the pagans by Christendom in the Third Century C.E. as a symbol of Christ's impalement. [Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 256]

See Also STAUROS

- Significant is this comment in the book *The Cross in Ritual, Architecture, and Art*; It is strange, yet unquestionably a fact, that in ages long before the birth of Christ, and since then in lands untouched by the teaching of the Church, the Cross has been used as a sacred symbol. The Greek Bacchus, the Tyrian Tammuz, the Chaldean Bel, and the Norse Odin, were all symbolized to their votaries by a cruciform device.[By G. S. Tyack, London, 1900, p. 1]
- The book [The Non-Christian Cross, by J. D. Parsons London, 1896], adds: There is not a single sentence in any of the numerous writings forming the New Testament, which, in the original Greek, bears even indirect evidence to the effect that the stauros used in the case of Jesus was other than an ordinary stauros, much less to the effect that it consisted, not of one piece of timber, but of two pieces nailed together in the form of a cross.
- It is not a little misleading upon the part of our teachers to translate the word stauros as cross when rendering the Greek documents of the Church into our native tongue, and to support that action by putting cross in our lexicons as the meaning of stauros without carefully explaining that that was at any rate not the primary meaning of the word in the days of the Apostles, did not become its

primary signification till long afterwards, and became so then, if at all, only because, despite the absence of corroborative evidence, it was for some reason or other assumed that the particular stauros upon which Jesus was executed had that particular shape. [Pp. 23,24. The Companion Bible, 1974, Appendix No. 162]

·· Figurative Usage

- Not only do the Scriptures bear thorough witness concerning the physical **impalement** of the Lord Jesus Christ
- The Christ exists divided. Paul was not **impaled** for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (**1 Corinthians 1:13**)
- But we preach Christ **impaled**, to the Jews a cause for stumbling but to the nations foolishness. (**1 Corinthians 1:23**)
- For I decided not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him impaled. (**1 Corinthians 2:2**)
- True, indeed, he was **impaled** owing to weakness, but he is alive owing to God's power. True, also, we are weak with him, but we shall live together with him owing to God's power toward you. (**2 Corinthians 13:4**)
- And their corpses will be on the broad way of the great city which is in a spiritual sense called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was also impaled. (**Revelation 11:8**)
- But they also speak of **impalement** in a figurative, metaphoric sense, as at;
- I am **impaled** along with Christ. It is no longer I that live, but it is Christ that is living in union with me. Indeed, the life that I now live in flesh I live by the faith that is toward the Son of God, who loved me and handed himself over for me. (**Galatians 2:20**)
- Christians have put their old personality to death through faith in the **impaled** Christ.
- Because we know that our old personality was impaled with him, that our sinful body might be made inactive, that we should no longer go on being slaves to sin. (**Romans 6:6**)

- Deaden, therefore, your body members that are upon the earth as respects fornication, uncleanness, sexual appetite, hurtful desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (**Colossians 3:5**)
- Do not be lying to one another. Strip off the old personality with its practices. (**Colossians 3:9**)
- And clothe yourselves with the new personality, which through accurate knowledge is being made new according to the image of the One who created it. (**Colossians 3:10**)
- Moreover, those who belong to Christ Jesus **impaled** the flesh together with its passions and desires, Paul writes, adding that through Christ, the world has been **impaled** to me and I to the world.
- Moreover, those who belong to Christ Jesus **impaled** the flesh together with its passions and desires. (**Galatians 5:24**)
- Never may it occur that I should boast, except in the torture stake of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been **impaled** to me and I to the world. (**Galatians 6:14**)
- Apostates in effect, **impale** the Son of God afresh for themselves and expose him to public shame, doing so by their Judas-like rebellion against God's arrangement for salvation.
- For it is impossible as regards those who have once for all been enlightened, and who have tasted the heavenly free gift, and who have become partakers of Holy Spirit. (**Hebrews 6:4**)
- And who have tasted the fine word of God and powers of the coming system of things. (**Hebrews 6:5**)
- But who have fallen away, to revive them again to repentance, because they **impale** the Son of God afresh for themselves and expose him to public shame. (**Hebrews 6:6**)