

Crucifixion or Crucifiction?!

Crucifixion is an ancient method of execution, in which the victim was tied or nailed to a large wooden cross (Latin: *crux*) and left to hang there until dead. Thus, crucifixion does not necessarily guarantee the death of a victim. It could also be a means of severe torturing.

The mainstream Christians today strongly believe in the crucifixion of Jesus. The standard account of what historically is claimed to have happened during the crucifixion of Jesus in today's Christianity, is based on the accounts in the four canonical gospels although their authors are generally regarded as anonymous.

In these accounts, Jesus was crucified, died on the cross and buried outside of Jerusalem during the thirty third year of his life. Then he arose from the dead and he was raised up to heaven.

Contrary to this Christian account, however, the Quran strongly states that Jesus was not crucified or killed, but instead God raised him unto Himself. As we shall see there is no statement in the Quran more explicit, emphatic and uncompromising in rejecting the dogma of a faith than this. Why?

I have been asked by many Christians and some new reverts as to why the Quran so strongly denotes the dogma of the crucifixion of Jesus? What is the big deal about it? Many Prophets have been tortured to death in the past. Prophet Yahya (John the Baptist) was historically the closest prophet to Jesus who was beheaded and died as a martyr. Thus, what is wrong if Jesus was also killed by his enemies?

The answer is, firstly, the holy Quran contains '*The true story of Jesus*' as well as other prophets. Thus, any distortion ought to be corrected. According with the Quran the accusation of the crucifixion of Jesus is as grave as the false charge they uttered against Mary in terms of illegal sexual intercourse.

Secondly, the crucifixion of Jesus is not a mere historical event in today's Christianity. It is of fundamental importance to the theology of most contemporary Christians. Thus, the cross has become the primary symbol of Christianity. '*Atonement*'; The dogma of reconciliation between God and humans by the redemptive life and death of Jesus, lies under the cross of Jesus.

To them, Jesus died on the cross so that the sins of those who believe in him can be forgiven and thus they can gain salvation. They regard the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus with the conviction that all took place *'According with the scriptures'*. (1 Cor. 15:3–5)

According with the teachings of Paul (not Prophet Jesus) without crucifixion, resurrection of Jesus becomes irrelevant and without resurrection Christianity itself is rendered meaningless. Paul in his first letter to Corinthians claims: *"But if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching amounts to nothing and your faith is futile."* (1 Cor 15:14)

Therefore, the extra emphasis of the Quran on denouncing the dogma of crucifixion means more than a mere historical correction. It aims at denouncing the illogical dogma of *'Atonement'*.

The Holy Quran and the Crucifixion

The holy Quran in its unique style denounces the crucifixion of Prophet Jesus, in Chapter 4 (Surah al-Nisa). Almighty Allah does so, along with the reasons why the Jews were reproached by Allah, as follows:

***"And because of their saying: We killed Messiah, Jesus; Son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah, but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For, surely, they killed him not. But Allah raised him up unto Himself. And Allah is Ever All-Powerful, All-Wise."* (4: 157–158)**

Nearly every single word in the above Ayah contains an emphasis on the issue. Almighty Allah has even denounced both *'The killing'* and *'The crucifixion'* in separate terms to leave no room for any type of claim for the killing of Jesus, whether by crucifixion or execution or hanging as claimed by the anonymous author of Acts of Apostles 5:29–30.

The Jews and the Christians believe that Jesus was crucified yet they disagree in that Christians maintain that Jesus was resurrected three days after his crucifixion. Thus, the Quran states:

***"Those who differ therein are full of doubts"*. (4: 157)**

According with the above Ayah it was *'So appeared to them'* to think that they killed Jesus. Imam Baqir (a.s) in an authentic Hadith narrated from him states:

"Verily, in the night that Allah had promised to raise Jesus to Him, Jesus invited his disciples, who were twelve men, to a house. Jesus came out to them from a corner of the house whilst he was drying his head from water. He then said: Surely, Allah revealed to me that He will raise me this time to Him and will clear me from the Jews, so which one of you is willing to have my image cast upon him to be killed and crucified and he will be with me in the hereafter? A young man from among them said: I (will accept)

O Ruhullah! Jesus replied: So, you will be the one.”¹

Does the Quran Contradict Itself?

Some Christians claimed that the Quran is contradicting itself when it gives the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. They usually refer to two references in the Quran to prove the death of Jesus. In the following I shall deal with them separately.

1. ***“And when Allah said: Jesus! I will take you (Motawafiyaka) and raise you to Myself.” (3:55)***

They assume that the term ‘Motawafiyaka’ in the Ayah equals ‘Death’. The term ‘Wafat’, which is the root of the term ‘Motawafiyahka’, means to collect something thoroughly. When a creditor collects all his money it is said in Arabic “Tawaffa Daynah”. Similarly, regarding sleeping, the Quran states:

“It is He Who takes (Yatawaffa) your souls by night (when you are asleep), and has knowledge of all that you have done by day.” (6:60)

Thus, the term ‘Tawaffa’ does not by itself mean death. Moreover, to avoid any misinterpretation Almighty Allah has coupled the term under consideration with the phrase ‘And raise you to Myself’ which is an explanation for ‘Motawafiyaka’.

2. ***“And Salam (peace) be upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!” (19:33)***

The above Ayah is part of a Quranic quotation from Jesus when he miraculously spoke in the cradle. Quoting the above Ayah some Christians claim the Ayah confirms the death of Jesus (On the cross) and his resurrection (After three days).

Interestingly, a very similar Ayah is repeated in the same Chapter about Prophet Yahya (John the Baptist).

“And Salam (peace) be on him (Yahya) the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he will be raised up to life.” (19:15)

Undoubtedly, there has never been any claim for the resurrection of Prophet John in this world after his death. Thus, the meaning of ‘Will be raised’ in both the statements refer only to the Day of Resurrection in hereafter. The verb in ‘The day I die’ (Not the day I died) is for the future which indicates an action yet to happen. Moreover, Christians do not believe in the natural death of Jesus whereas the Ayah quoting from Jesus states: “The day I die”, not the day I will be killed or crucified.

Crucifixion of Jesus in the Gospels

All the present four Gospels, although with some differences, have narrated the fiction of crucifixion. Nonetheless, the testimony of none of them can be accepted in any court of law for the following reasons:

1. Unfortunately none of the authors of the Gospels are living for cross examination of their narrations. Hence, we can only refer to their texts available to us as their affidavit.

The main problem of the present Gospels is their authors are anonymous. As we discussed in the previous chapters, the authors, the date and the language of the Gospels are unknown. Thus, as Ahmed Deedat adequately expressed, *'No civilized court of law would pay any heed to the present gospels as attested documents.'*

2. None of the anonymous authors of the gospels were eyewitnesses of the crucifixion. So, where did they get their information from? For instance, it is believed that Mark had been the disciple of Peter; the chief disciple of Jesus. Nonetheless Mark says that at the time of the arrest of Jesus *'All his disciples forsook him and fled.'* (Mark 14:50) So, either we have to agree that Mark is lying or *'All disciples'* including Peter had left Jesus.

Then again who narrated the arrest and the crucifixion of Jesus to Mark? Yes, Mark narrates that Peter followed Jesus from a distance, but then again to safeguard himself he stayed outside the entrance of the court, even blaspheming so that people would not accuse him of being one of the disciples.

Thus, Peter was not an eye witness either. Thus, Mark could not even be an *'Ear-witness'* to the scene. Thus, his Gospel is more of a community gossip. As a matter of fact, the present gospels are technically less reliable than a history book such as *'The History of Tabari'*. For, Tabari at least mentions the chain of the narrators through whom he narrates the historical events, a process which enables scholars to examine and verify the authenticity of the narrations.

3. Gospels narrate different phrases for the last words of Jesus. The last word of Jesus according with John was *'It is finished'*. (John 19:30) Luke on the other hand narrates: *"With a loud voice Jesus cried: Father, into Your hands I entrust my spirit! And with these words he died."* (23:46)

The last words Mark narrates from Jesus is *'My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?'* (Mark 15:34, Matt. 26:14–16) Keep in mind the fact that that the reason why the narrations of Mark and Matthew are practically the same is due to Matthew's narration depending largely upon that of Mark's. Thus, it should not be treated as a separate historical source.

4. It is very unlikely for a Messenger of Allah to have expressed such a complaint, as narrated by Mark, in the last minutes of his life, questioning Allah as to why He had forsaken him.

Narrations of other Gospels

As discussed in the previous chapters, the present four canonical gospels are not the only existing gospels. Once upon a time there had been many gospels. The present four gospels were the only ones acknowledged by the Roman Emperor Constantine and his successors following the triumph of the Trinitarian branch of Christianity.

One of the historical gospels which is available today, though in fragments, is the gospel according with Peter. If he be Peter the disciple, then he is Simon whom Jesus called Peter. Biblically, he is the first disciple that Jesus chose and he is the chief disciple.

The gospel of Peter was used by the church at Rhossus and often quoted by Christian writers during the latter part of the second century. The fragments of the gospel of Peter were found in a Christian monk's grave in Egypt in 1886 and were published in 1972. They have been dated to the late second or early third century. (i.e. around 200 C.E)²

The Gospel of Peter was eventually branded as heretical, if for no other reason, because it seemed to deny the suffering of Jesus on the cross. The account of the gospel of Peter suggests that Jesus was not killed. Chapter 5 verse 5 reads: *“And the Lord cried, saying: My power, my power, you have abandoned me. When he said this, he was taken up. And at that moment the veil of the Jerusalem temple was torn into two.”*

The phrase *‘He was taken up’* as it could mean death; it can also refer to *‘Ascension into heaven’* which is very close to what the Quran states, although the Quran even denounces the crucifixion.

Independent Sources

Is there any non-Christian and non-Biblical source that has narrated the crucifixion of Jesus?

Flavius Josephus who lived from 37AD to about 100 AD was a Jewish historian. His book *‘Antiquities of the Jew’* is the account of Jewish history from its early beginnings to the revolt against Rome in 66AD. His book is generally considered a reliable source and the nearest to the time of Jesus.

Fortunately, his book is available today even on the internet. In Book 18 Chapter 3 he mentions Jesus with high praise. Although he touches upon the issue of the persecution of Jesus, he does not mention anything about his crucifixion.

Book 18 Chapter 3 Paragraph 3 of his book reads:

3. *“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was (the) Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of*

the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, (9) those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; (10) as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."³

¹. (Tafsir al-Qomi, vol.1 p.111)

². For more information about the gospel of Peter visit: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/gospelpeter.html> [1]

³. <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/ant-18.htm> [2]

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