WAS JESUS CRUCIFIED?

The Bible, the Qur’an, and History

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INTRODUCTION

Was Jesus crucified? This is a question that Christians and Muslims often discuss. Christians are taught from the Bible and history that Jesus was publicly crucified and killed on a Roman cross around AD 33. His death on the cross is a central part of the Christian faith. Muslims, however, are taught that Jesus only appeared to be crucified and killed. Muslim leaders give a variety of explanations as to what happened to Jesus, and these can be categorized into four types: no one was crucified; someone else was crucified in Jesus’ place; Jesus was crucified; we cannot know what happened to Jesus.

Therefore, since there are these different views between Christians and Muslims, and between Muslims themselves, we will need to understand each view, examine the evidence for it, and then make a decision as to which is best. This is what we will do in this booklet. First, we will consider which explanation of the crucifixion in the Qur’an makes the best sense. Then, we will consider the evidence from the Bible; then the evidence from history outside of the Bible. After this we will be able to make an informed decision and answer the question, was Jesus crucified?

This booklet has the following chapters:

• The Qur’an and the Crucifixion
• The Bible and the Crucifixion
• History and the Crucifixion

If you are a Christian you should not assume you know what your Muslim friend believes about the crucifixion. Instead, ask them what they believe happened to Jesus. You may like to read this booklet with them and discuss the ideas in it.

If you are a Muslim, please read this booklet and work out for yourself which explanation of the Qur’an makes the best sense. Then consider the evidence from the Bible and history. If you want a Bible to check the references just ask your Christian friend or look online.
THE QUR’AN AND THE CRUCIFIXION

What does the Qur’an say about the crucifixion of Jesus? Muslim leaders and scholars give a variety of answers to this question. In this chapter we will consider these answers. Then we will read the verses ourselves and evaluate which answer makes the most sense.

Islamic Explanations of the Crucifixion

Explanation 1. No one was crucified. It was a vision.

In this explanation, there was no historical crucifixion. People saw an illusion or communal vision of Jesus being crucified and thought it was real.¹

Explanation 2. No one was crucified. It is a myth.

Nasir al-Din al-Baydawi suggests the crucifixion story is a myth or a false report that developed over time.² There was no historical crucifixion. The crucifixion only appeared to have happened because people started saying it happened.

Explanation 3. Someone was substituted for Jesus.

The substitute theory is that there was a real crucifixion, and it appeared to be Jesus, but it was someone else. Many classical Islamic scholars hold this view.³ The idea of a substitute does not come from the Qur’an or from an explanation attributed to Muhammad, but from other interpreters of the Qur’an. Al-Tabari records eleven such explanations which differ widely in detail.⁴ Some say the substitute was a volunteer disciple, or that the Romans mistakenly crucified Barabbas or Simon of Cyrene, or that it was Judas, who was being punished for betraying Jesus.

Explanation 4. We do not know what happened.

This view says we cannot know any more than what the verses in the Qur’an say, and the verses only say that the Jewish leaders did not crucify or kill Jesus, even though it appeared they did. What exactly happened we do not know. This view is held by the significant 20th century commentators Abdul A’la Maududi and Sayyid Qutb.5

The Qur’an explicitly states that the Jews did not succeed in putting Jesus to death and that Allah raised him to Himself, but it is silent about the nature and details of the matter and does neither say explicitly whether Allah raised him body and soul together from the earth to some place in heaven, nor that he died like other mortals and only his soul was raised to heaven. Therefore, on the basis of the Qur’an neither aspect can be definitely denied or affirmed.6

Explanation 5. Jesus was crucified by the Romans, not the Jewish Leaders.

The Qur’an says that the Jews did not crucify or kill Jesus; it never says “Jesus was not crucified or killed.” This observation has led some to suggest that the Qur’an is not denying the historical crucifixion of Jesus, but denying that it was the Jews who did it. They say it was the Romans who crucified Jesus and it only appeared to be the Jews.7

Explanation 6. Jesus’ body was crucified, but his soul was taken without death.

This explanation says that Jesus’ soul left his body without him dying and only his body was crucified, so he appeared to die.8 This idea is based on a teaching in the Qur’an that says God takes our soul not only at death but also when we are asleep, without death.

God takes the souls at the time of their death; and in their sleep those that have not died. (Qur’an 39:42)

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5 Sayyid Qutb, In the Shade of the Qur’an, Surah 4, p. 318
https://tafsirzilal.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/an-nisa-eng.pdf
8 Jesus’ death according to the Quran, accessed March 7, 2018,
quran-islam.org/main_topics/quran/new_information/jesusand039s_death_(P1261).html
Therefore, Jesus’ soul was taken, without death, even though it appeared he died.

Explanation 7. Refuting the Jewish Talmud

This explanation says the Qur’an is refuting the death of Jesus as it is presented in the Jewish Talmud. The Talmud says that Jesus was stoned and then crucified. The Qur’an is said to be correcting this by saying he was not stoned and then crucified this way. Thus the Qur’an is rejecting the Jewish account in the Talmud but not the Christian account in the Bible.

Explanation 8. Jesus was crucified but survived.

Ahmadiya Muslims believe that Jesus was crucified, he fainted and appeared dead, but survived. Shabir Ally suggests this explanation too. Therefore, the crucifixion only appeared to be successful at killing him.

When teaching the Qur’an, Ahmed Deedat refused to give an explanation of what happened to Jesus. However, he repeatedly claimed that the Bible teaches Jesus was crucified but survived.

Explanation 9. Jesus was crucified, and the Qur’an is describing him as a martyr.

This explanation is that the Qur’an is denying the death of Jesus in the same way it denies the death of any martyr. This is based on the Qur’an’s teaching that martyrs only appear to be dead (2:154, 3:169) and their souls have been taken up to Allah (3:158). Therefore, the Qur’an is describing the unseen realities of the crucifixion.

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12 Ahmed Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* Durban, RSA: IPIC, no date, p. 88.

13 Ahmed Deedat, pp. 31, 36, 42, 45, 68-69.

Explanation 10. Jesus is the Word of God, and God’s word can never be killed.

This explanation notes that the Qur’an gives Jesus the title of ‘Word of God’ (3:39, 4:171), and that those who fight against the message and word of God never succeed even though it may appear that they do.

The Qur'an, as we have already argued, does not deny the death of Christ. Rather, it challenges human beings who in their folly have deluded themselves into believing that they would vanquish the divine Word, Jesus Christ the Messenger of God.\textsuperscript{15}

Conclusion: It is surprising to see how diverse the explanations are, and how many of them involve Jesus being crucified. If you are a Muslim, which explanation do you believe?

Understanding the Qur’an Correctly

We have now surveyed ten Islamic explanations for the crucifixion and it is time to read the Qur’an ourselves. But how do we interpret the Qur’an properly? Islamic scholars tell us that the most important method of interpreting the Qur’an is to let the Qur’an explain itself.

The Qur’an is considered to be a unified whole with a unity of purpose. This means that difficult sections or verses of the Qur’an are clarified in another part of the text ... The explanation of one verse by another is called interpretation of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, and is considered by many exegetes to be the best and most authoritative form of interpretation.\textsuperscript{16}

And this is what the Qur’an claims for itself.

[We] have sent down to you the Scripture [the Qur’an] as an explanation of everything. (Qur’an 16:89)

Therefore, we have to let the Qur’an explain itself. Only if the Qur’an does not explain itself sufficiently should we consult the Hadith.\textsuperscript{17} In the case of the

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\textsuperscript{15} Mahmoud Ayoub, “Towards and Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion”, \textit{The Muslim World}, vol. LXX, April 1980, p. 106.
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\textsuperscript{17} The Hadith are the collected sayings and actions of Muhammad and his companions.
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crucifixion, the Qur’an does explain itself sufficiently, and there is no hadith attributed to Muhammad explaining it.  

**Reading the Qur’an Ourselves**

The crucifixion, death, and taking of Jesus are described in verses 4:157-158. God taking Jesus is described in 3:55 and 5:117; and his death and resurrection are described in 19:33-34. We must consider all these verses to get a complete understanding, and will begin with 4:157-158.

They [the Jews] said, “We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God”; but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ about this are full of doubts, with no knowledge, but only assumption to follow, for of certainty they killed him not. Rather, God raised him to himself. (Qur’an 4:157-158)

What are these verses affirming and what are they denying? Notice that they do not say, “Jesus was not crucified or killed”, instead, they say the Jews did not crucify or kill him. Is this difference significant? Next, they say that Jesus did, however, appear to be killed and crucified. But what does this mean? Then they say it appeared this way to the Jews. But what about the disciples and Romans? Did it appear the same to them or something different? Finally, the verses say Jesus was raised up to God, but do not specify if it was both body and soul or just his soul, therefore, in what sense was he raised to God? It is because of these questions that Muslim scholars have different opinions as to what the verses mean and what happened to Jesus.

We will now go through these verses section by section and see how the rest of the Qur’an explains these ideas, and which of the explanations makes the most sense. Here is the first section.

*They said, “We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God”; but they killed him not, nor crucified him. (Qur’an 4:157a)*

What does it mean to boast of killing someone and then be told you did not kill
them? How does the rest of the Qur’an understand this idea? The Qur’an has a similar idea in the following verse.

You did not kill them. God killed them. (Qur’an 8:17)

This verse is speaking to the jihadists/mujahadeen who were boasting of killing Muhammad’s enemies. They were told that they did not kill them. There is no doubt that at the battle of Badr the jihadists did kill people, but the Qur’an interprets it differently and says they did not kill them. This is similar to how the Qur’an speaks about the crucifixion: the Jews are boasting of having killed Jesus, but the Qur’an says they did not.

To understand this further we must understand the Islamic concept of life and death. In the Qur’an, God is the only one who truly gives and takes life.

No soul may die except by God’s permission, according to a fixed record. (Qur’an 3:145)

It is We who give life and cause death and to Us is the journeying. (Qur’an 50:43)

That is, according to the Qur’an, you cannot boast of giving or taking life because only God does that. Therefore, when the Qur’an denies that the jihadists killed Muhammad’s enemies, and that the Jews killed Jesus, it seems to be speaking about this idea and not denying the historical reality.

The next section is the following.

but so it was made to appear to them (Qur’an 4:157b)

What does it mean that someone only appears to be dead? How does the rest of the Qur’an understand this idea? Consider these verses:

Do not say of those who are killed in the way of God, “dead”. No, They are living, but you do not perceive that. (Qur’an 2:154)

Do not reckon those who were killed in God’s way as dead: No! They are alive with their Lord. (Qur’an 3:169)

These verses are referring to the martyrs of Islam who have died for the cause of Allah. Notice what is said about them: they are not dead, though it appears
they are. Instead they are alive in paradise with God. The Qur’an is revealing the unseen reality of the martyr. Therefore, Muslims are not allowed to speak of the martyrs as dead. They are “living” even though it appears they are dead. Sayyid Qutb explains this.

To all intents and purposes, those people [the martyrs] may very well appear lifeless, but life and death are not judged by superficial physical means alone ... According to Islamic tradition, people who are killed “for the cause of God” are not washed or prepared for burial in the conventional way, but buried in the clothes they happen to be wearing, because they are considered clean and pure, and because in reality they are not dead. ... But who are the living martyrs? They are those killed in God’s cause, and in God’s cause alone.19

The Qur’an’s description of the crucifixion seems to be describing Jesus this way: His death is denied, though he did appear to be dead.

The next section is the following.

and those who differ about this are full of doubts, with no knowledge, but only assumption to follow, for of certainty they killed him not.  
(Qur’an 4:157c)

What does it mean to be full of doubts, with no knowledge but only assumption to follow? This idea is spoken of many times in the Qur’an. The Qur’an sees itself as the source of true knowledge because it reveals the seen and the unseen.

[Allah is] Knower of the unseen and the witnessed. (Qur’an 13:9)

Those who reject the Qur’an reject this knowledge. They only see the appearance of things, and do not know the unseen realities. Therefore, when the Qur’an is describing the crucifixion it is claiming to reveal the unseen realities of what happened to Jesus, not the things that only appeared to happen.

The last section is,

Rather, God raised him to himself. (Qur’an 4:158)

The verses finish with God raising Jesus to himself. What does this mean? Again, we see a similar idea spoken of elsewhere in the Qur’an.

If you are killed or die in God’s way, pardon and mercy from God are better than what they collect. If you die or are killed, you will be gathered up to God. (Qur’an 3:157-158)

Do not reckon those who were killed in God’s way as dead: No! [They are] alive with their Lord. (Qur’an 3:169)

That is, the souls of the martyrs are immediately taken up to be with God in paradise. This is the unseen reality. 4:158 does not say that Jesus’ body was taken, but simply that he was raised up to be with God. According to the Qur’an, this is what happens to the soul of a martyr. God gives martyrs special treatment, and Jesus seems to be an example of this.

So far we have only considered 4:157-158, but what do the other verses show about the crucifixion? We will now consider 3:55 and 5:117.

And when God said to Jesus, I am going to take you and raise you to Me. (Qur’an 3:55)

I [Jesus] was a witness over them [the Jews] as long as I was among them. When You took me, it was you who were the watcher over them. (Qur’an 5:117)

These verses describe God taking Jesus at the crucifixion. The Arabic word used here for take/took is mutawaffi. This is the standard word used in the Qur’an for when God takes someone in death, and it is used in 3:55 and 5:117 to describe God taking Jesus to himself. This seems to indicate that God took Jesus in death on the cross, and there are Islamic translations of the Qur’an that translate it this way.

Recall when Allah said, O Isa [Jesus] surely I shall make thee die and am lifting thee to Me. (Qur’an 3:55, translated by Shaykh Abdul Majid

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Lo! God said: O Jesus! Verily, I shall cause thee to die, and shall exalt thee unto me. (Qur’an 3:55, translated by Muhammad Asad)

When Allah said: O Jesus, I will cause thee to die and exalt thee in My presence. (Qur’an 3:54, translated by Maulana Muhammad Ali)

The final verses are 19:33-34 which give the summary of Jesus’ life.

Peace be on me the day I [Jesus] was born, the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive. That is Jesus, the son of Mary. (Qur’an 19:33-34)

This summary has no mention of Jesus avoiding death, and it has the same sequence of events as that given for John the Baptist.

Peace on him [John] the day he was born, the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive. (Qur’an 19:15)

And Muslims and Christians agree that John died as a martyr.

Before we finish this chapter we need to ask, are there other verses we need to consider? In particular, are there verses that say Jesus will return and die at another time, and not on the cross? The answer is no.

Firstly, there is no verse in the Qur’an that says “Jesus will return”, as Mustafa Akyol explains.

There is certainly no passage that unambiguously states that Jesus will come back to earth at the end of times. Rather, Qur’anic exegetes [teachers] have inferred that promise from a few ambiguous verses.

These verses are 4:159 and 43:61. Let us consider 4:159.

Rather, God raised him [Jesus] to himself, and God is mighty, wise. And

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there is none from the people of the book [Jews] but that he will surely believe in him before his death. (Qur’an 4:158-159)

It is claimed that “before his death” refers to the death of Jesus after his return. However, the verses make no mention of Jesus’ return; and it is not clear who “before his death” is referring to. Is it referring to Jesus or to the Jews who are subject of this sentence? It is not clear, and Muslim scholars acknowledge this. 26 4:159 does not show that Jesus will return and die.

Regarding 43:61,

- It/he is knowledge concerning the Hour. Have no doubt about it, but follow Me. This is a straight path. (Qur’an 43:61)

Muslim leaders claim that the pronoun, ‘It” or ‘he’ at the start of this verse is referring to Jesus, and therefore the verse is saying that Jesus is a sign of the Hour of judgement, and therefore, Jesus must come again to fulfil this role. Again, the verse does not say Jesus will come again; and Jesus does not need to come again to be a sign of the Final Hour. His life and teaching are already a sign of this. The pronoun seems to be referring to the Qur’an rather than Jesus because it is the Qur’an which gives knowledge, and in which Muslims are not to doubt, and is the straight path.

Yet neither this verse nor others that are taken as evidence for Jesus’ descent during the end of times are explicit. They all depend on how you interpret them. Therefore, it is not possible to say that the Qur’an is clear cut on this issue. 27

Secondly, as we have seen earlier, when the Qur’an gives a summary of Jesus’ life (19:33-34) it does not say he will return.

Finally, the Qur’an says Muhammad is the final prophet (33:40). If it was saying that Jesus will return, then Jesus would be the final prophet not Muhammad. The Qur’an never gives any indication that Jesus will return.

Therefore, in this chapter we have considered all the relevant information the Qur’an has about the crucifixion, death, and taking of Jesus and they give us

27 Mustafa Akyol, p. 186.
Conclusion

In this chapter we saw that verses 4:157-158 do not say, “Jesus was not crucified or killed”, instead, they say the Jews did not kill or crucify him, although it appeared that they did, and God raised him to himself. We looked at ten different explanations as to what this means. Then, we looked at all of the other verses that speak about the crucifixion, death, and rising of Jesus, and saw that together these verses give us a sufficient explanation. This explanation is, that it was God who caused Jesus to die on the cross, not the Jews, and God took Jesus to himself, most likely in the way he takes a martyr. In this way John the Baptist and Jesus are the similar. That is, the Qur’an claims to reveal the unseen realities of the crucifixion.

In view of all this evidence, I find explanation 9, that the Qur’an is describing Jesus as a martyr, to be the most convincing. This explanation was suggested in The New Encyclopedia of Islam. You may or may not agree with this explanation, but if you don’t you need to offer a better explanation that takes into account all of the verses.

To say that Jesus is a martyr honours him in Qur’an. Not only is he a prophet, the Messiah, and Word of God, but he is also a martyr. No one else in the Qur’an is honoured with all these titles.

FAQ

1. **Muslim**: Jesus was not crucified because Allah would never let one of his prophets be treated this way.

   **Christian**: The Qur’an says that prophets were mistreated and killed.


2. **Muslim**: Judas was made to look like Jesus and crucified in his place.

   **Christian**: Where does the Qur’an say this? It never does. We must let the Qur’an explain itself.
THE BIBLE AND THE CRUCIFIXION

Reading the Bible Ourselves

Jesus spoke of his death on many occasions.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (Matthew 16:21)

Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man [Jesus] will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (Matthew 20:17-19)

The Son of Man [Jesus] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:27-28)

I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. (Revelation 1:18)

All of the Gospel accounts record that Jesus was crucified.

When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. (Matthew 27:34-35)

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. (Mark 15:22-24)

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals - one on his right, the other on his left. (Luke 23:32-33)
Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others - one on each side and Jesus in the middle. (John 19:16-18)

The Apostles of Jesus and their companions speak of his crucifixion and death.

This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. (Acts 2:23-24)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (Romans 5:6)

We preach Christ crucified. (1 Corinthians 1:23)

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. (Hebrews 6:6)

Now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Hebrews 9:15)

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the
sheep. (Hebrews 13:20)

The Bible says again and again that Jesus was crucified and died. Anyone who reads the Bible for themselves will see this.

**Ahmed Deedat, Zakir Naik, and Others**

Even though the Bible is clear that Jesus was crucified, people like Ahmed Deedat and Zakir Naik teach Muslims that this is not the case. We will consider three of their common claims.

**No Witnesses**

In his famous book, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction*, Ahmed Deedat says the disciples of Jesus were not witnesses to the crucifixion and so the whole story in the Bible is just hearsay.\(^28\)

However, this is false and shows that Ahmed Deedat did not read the Bible. The Bible says Jesus’ disciples and mother were witnesses of the crucifixion.

> When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. (Luke 23:48-49)

> Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25-27)

> We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. (Acts 10:39-40)

Ahmed Deedat, and those like him, ignore what the Bible clearly teaches.

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\(^{28}\) Ahmed Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?*, pp. 7-8 & 55.
Ahmed Deedat is famous for teaching about the sign of Jonah. He claims that just as Jonah was alive in the fish, so too Jesus said he would be alive on the cross and in the tomb. Therefore, Jesus only appeared to be dead like the Qur’an says.  

However, whether Jesus is dead or alive is not the question. The question is, *was Jesus crucified?* and Ahmed Deedat has actually shown that Jesus was crucified. Firstly, Jonah did not appear to be in the whale, he was in the whale; therefore, Jesus did not appear to be crucified and in the tomb, he was crucified and in the tomb. Secondly, Jonah was in the whale, not someone who looked like Jonah; therefore, Jesus was crucified and in the tomb and not someone who looked like him. The sign of Jonah actually proves that Jesus was crucified!

The sign of Jonah was first used by Ahmadiya Muslims to show that Jesus did not die on the cross. They believe he was crucified but survived. Ahmed Deedat has used their argument not realising it actually shows that Jesus was crucified. Not only does Ahmed Deedat not read the Bible carefully, he does not understand the Muslim arguments he is using.

*Psalm 91*

Abu Zakariya refers to Psalm 91 and claims this Psalm is a prophecy that the Messiah will not suffer, and therefore, Jesus was not crucified.  

Psalm 91 certainly does promise God’s protection to the servant of God; and this *is* the relationship the Messiah has with God the father. However, we must read all of the Psalms and not just one. Psalm 22 is one of the most famous Messianic Psalms, and it says,

*My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my*

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29 Whether Jonah was alive in the fish is debatable. Jonah says he is the grave, the place of the dead. See Jonah 2:2.

30 Ahmed Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?*, p. 68.


I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. (Psalm 22:15-18)

Psalm 22 says that the Messiah will suffer and be laid “in the dust of death”; and it describes the crucifixion very accurately. So how can the protected Messiah be the Messiah who suffers this way? The answer is that when the Messiah comes he does not come for himself, instead, he comes to save God’s people, and he does this by voluntarily laying aside his protection for the sake of others. We see this perfectly in the life of Jesus: He had the protection of Psalm 91 when he was a child (Matthew 2:13, 2:19); and the care of Psalm 91 after his temptation in the desert (Matthew 4:11); but he voluntarily laid this aside as he offered himself on the cross in fulfilment of Psalm 22.

Do you think I [Jesus] cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” (Matthew 26:53-54)

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life - only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. (John 10:17-18)

Conclusion

When we read the Bible we see it is clear that Jesus was crucified: Jesus said he would be crucified, the Gospel records that he was, and his disciples testify that he was. This is what the Bible says. To deny that the Bible says this is dishonest.

33 “they have pierced my hands and my feet” can also be translated as “like a lion at my hands and feet”. Either way his hands and feet are pierced.
HISTORY AND THE CRUCIFIXION

The king is familiar with these things ... I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. (Acts 26:26)

When the Romans crucified someone it was done in public and was publicly known. In this chapter we will look at the evidence for the crucifixion of Jesus from outside of the Bible, and consider what historians conclude from it.

History Outside of the Bible

We begin with the Jewish leader and historian, Josephus. He wrote around AD 90, and was not a Christian. He records what was publicly known in Jerusalem. He writes about John the Baptist.

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism. (Josephus, Antiquities 18:5:2)

Josephus writes about Jesus’ brother, James.

Festus was now dead, Albinus was but upon the road; so he (Ananus) assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned. (Josephus, Antiquities 20:9:1)

And Josephus records that Jesus was crucified.

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and from the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he appeared

to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly he was perhaps the messiah of whom the prophets have recounted wonders. (Arabic reading: Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:3:3)\(^{35}\)

The famous Roman historian Tacitus (AD 56-120) was not a Christian. In his history of Rome he records that Jesus was executed.

Christus, the founder of the name [Christians], had undergone the death penalty in the reign of [emperor] Tiberius, by the sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate. (Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44)\(^{36}\)

The Jewish Talmud preserves the history of the Jews who rejected Jesus. It gives their account of the death of Jesus and says he was “hanged,” that is, hung on a cross.

Yeshua [Jesus] was hanged on the Passover Eve. Forty days previously the herald had cried, "He is being led out for stoning, because he has practised sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them to apostasy. Whosoever has anything to say in his defence, let him come forward and declare it." As nothing was brought forward in his defence, he was hanged on Passover Eve. (*Babylonian Talmud*, Sanhedrin 43a)

Therefore, history from outside of the Bible agrees that Jesus was crucified.

**What Historians Say**

[Jesus] was executed on the orders of the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate ...

Early on Friday, 15 Nisan, Jesus and two others were taken outside the city walls, nailed to crosses and left to die. (EP Sanders)\(^{37}\)

It was not on a Jewish religious indictment, but on a secular accusation that he was condemned by the emperor's delegate to die shamefully on a

\(^{35}\) This reading comes from, Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version of the Testimonium Flavianum and its Implications*, Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1971, pp. 9-10. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:9:3 records that Josephus wrote in Greek and Aramaic, and the Aramaic may be the source of this reading.


\(^{37}\) E.P. Sander, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London: Allen Lane, 1993, pp. 11 and 274.
Roman cross. (Geza Vermes)\textsuperscript{38}

He was betrayed by the Jews and crucified. Allah lifted him to the heavens. (Prof. Masud ul-Hasan)\textsuperscript{39}

I am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was physically crucified and died on the cross. That is rock-bottom certain in my books. (Bart Ehrman)\textsuperscript{40}

He was flogged and then his body was nailed to a tall cross-shaped structure of timber, with two common criminals placed on smaller but similar crosses on each side of him. (Geoffrey Blainey)\textsuperscript{41}

His main scene of activity was in Galilee and the neighbouring districts of north Palestine, from which he went to Jerusalem, where he was crucified. (Dictionary of World History)\textsuperscript{42}

In this chapter we have considered history from outside of the Bible and have seen that it agrees that Jesus was crucified. All historians agree about this. There is no reason to doubt it; it is considered a historical fact.

\textbf{FAQ}

Do historians use the Qur'an to learn the history of Jesus? No.

I do not think that the Qur’an has any particular insights about the historical Jesus that are to be taken as independent reports by historical scholars. Neither does any other historical scholar that I know (or anyone who works seriously on the historical Jesus). (Bart Ehrman)\textsuperscript{43}

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CONCLUSION

In this booklet we have considered the question, *Was Jesus crucified?* To answer this, we first examined ten Islamic interpretations and saw that they vary greatly. Some say he was not crucified, others that he was, and others that we cannot know. Then, we looked at all of the verses that speak about the crucifixion, death, and rising of Jesus and saw that together they say it was God who caused Jesus to die on the cross, not the Jews, and God took Jesus to himself, most likely in the same way he takes a martyr. In this way John the Baptist and Jesus are similar. That is, the Qur’an claims to reveal the unseen realities of the crucifixion. In view of this, the explanation that the Qur’an is describing Jesus as a martyr is the most convincing.

Next we saw that the Bible is clear that Jesus was crucified, and so too is history.

Therefore, having looked at all the evidence we can conclude that, yes, Jesus was crucified, and there is no reason to doubt this.

Why not read about Jesus for yourself? I recommend you start with a gospel from the Bible called *Matthew.*

[https://biblehub.com/niv/matthew/1.htm](https://biblehub.com/niv/matthew/1.htm)
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