

WAS JESUS CRUCIFIED?

The Bible, the Qur'an, and History

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Engaging
with
Islam

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INTRODUCTION

Was Jesus crucified? This is a question 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 it means that Jesus only *appeared* to be crucified and killed, these include that no one was crucified; someone else was crucified in Jesus' place; Jesus was crucified but survived; or we cannot know what happened to Jesus.

How can we know which understanding is true? To answer this, we need to understand each view, examine the evidence for it, and then make a decision. 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 what he or she believes 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 search 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 made up by Christians.

Nasir al-Din al-Baydawi suggests the crucifixion story is a myth or a false report that Christians 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.

¹ Cyril Glasse, "Jesus", *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, Maryland, U.S.A: Rowman & Littlefield, 4th ed., 2013, p. 268.

² Mahmoud Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion", *The Muslim World*, vol. LXX, April 1980, p.101.

³ Ismail Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir ibn Kathir* (Abridged), ed. Abdul Malik Mujahid, et al., Riyadh, KSA: Darussaleem, 2000, vol. 3, p. 28.

⁴ Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an - A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, London, England: Oneworld, 2013, p. 71.

Explanation 4. We do not know what precisely 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 from the Qur'an. 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 in sleep.

This explanation says that Jesus' soul left his body without him being killed 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 sleep.

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

⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, U.K: Islamic Foundation, vol. 3, Surah 4, 2009, verse 4:157, p. 318; tafsirzilal.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/an-nisa-eng.pdf

⁶ S. Abdul A'La Maududi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, Lahore: Islamic Publications, 2007, fn 195 for Q4:157, vol. 1, p. 399.

⁷ Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017, p. 154.

⁸ *Jesus' death according to the Quran*, accessed March 7, 2018, [quran-islam.org/main_topics/quran/new_information/jesusand039s_death_\(P1261\).html](http://quran-islam.org/main_topics/quran/new_information/jesusand039s_death_(P1261).html)

Therefore, when Jesus was on the cross, he fainted and was asleep due to exhaustion, and his soul was taken by God and not returned. It appeared to the unbelievers that they had killed Jesus him but they had not.

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.⁹ 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.

Ahmadiya¹⁰ Muslims and Shabir Ally¹¹ believe that Jesus was crucified, he fainted and appeared dead, but survived. 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.¹² However, he repeatedly claimed that the Bible taught Jesus was crucified but survived.¹³

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 that martyrs are dead. 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).¹⁴ Therefore, the Qur'an is describing the unseen realities of the crucifixion.

⁹ Dr. Ali Ataie, *The Crucifixion and The Qur'an: An Exegetical and Historical Inquiry Into Surah 4:157-158*, Zaytuna College, <https://youtu.be/09-JthSnyic>, published on May 23, 2019. Also, Ian Mevorach, "Qur'an, Crucifixion, and Talmud", *Journal of Religion & Society*, vol. 19 (2017), pp. 1-21.

¹⁰ Hadrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Jesus in India*, Punjab, India: Islam International Publications Ltd, 1908, reprinted 1995, pp. 17ff.

¹¹ *Let the Quran Speak*, published on Jan 13, 2016. Accessed Oct 17, 2018. <https://youtu.be/FxJEZI8Tp5s>

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

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

¹⁴ Cyril Glasse, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 4th ed., 2013, pp. 90 & 268.

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 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.¹⁵

Explanation 11. Jesus was crucified, died, and then raised up to God.

According to Ibn Humayd - Ibn Ishaq - an impeccable authority - Wahb b. Munabbih al-Yamani: God allowed Jesus, the son of Mary, to die at three o'clock in the day; then He took him unto Himself. (Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, U.S.A., New York: SUNY, vol. 4, p. 122)

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 and it is time to read the Qur'an ourselves. The Qur'an invites everyone to read it, but how do we interpret it 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.¹⁶

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

¹⁵ Mahmoud Ayoub, "Towards and Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion", *The Muslim World*, vol. LXX, April 1980, p. 106.

¹⁶ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an - Towards a Contemporary Approach*, Oxon, U.K.: Routledge, 2006, p. 43.

[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 first. After this we may consider other sources like the Hadith.¹⁷

Reading the Qur'an ourselves

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

Verses 4:157-158

They [the unbelievers] 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)

These verses are usually understood to be a denial of the crucifixion, but what are they affirming and denying? Notice that they do not say, "Jesus was not crucified or killed", instead, they say it appeared to the unbelievers that they killed and crucified Jesus, but he did not. This is something different. The verses are saying what it appeared like to the unbelievers, not what it appeared like to everyone.

Secondly, 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 explanations as to what happened to Jesus. So what do the verses mean? We will now go through these verses section by section and see how the rest of the Qur'an explains these ideas. 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)

¹⁷ The Hadith are the collected sayings and actions of Muhammad and his companions.

What does it mean to boast of killing someone and then be told by God 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.

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 unbelievers killed Jesus, it seems to be speaking about God's control over life and death, and not denying the historical reality.

There is another aspect to life and death that the Qur'an teaches, and that is that when you sleep God takes your soul.

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

Sleep is considered a form of death in Islamic theology.¹⁸ According to Islam, God can take your soul without you being killed. Therefore, it is plausible that the Qur'an is saying that God took Jesus' soul when he slept from exhaustion

¹⁸ `Umar S. al-Ashqar, *The Minor Resurrection - What happens after death in the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah*, Islamic Creed Series 5, translated by Nasiruddin al-Khattab, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: International Islamic Publishing House, 2005, p. 34.

on the cross, and so Jesus' soul was taken without him being killed.

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. The Qur'an claims to reveal the unseen reality of the martyr: To the unbeliever, the martyrs appear dead, but to the believer they are alive. Believers and unbelievers see the events of this world differently. 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.

The next section is the following,

And those who differ about this are full of doubts, with no knowledge, but

¹⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, U.K.: Islamic Foundation, 2009, Sura 2:154, pp. 164-167; <https://tafsirzilal.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/al-baqarah-eng.pdf>

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, 68:37)

Those who reject the Qur'an reject this knowledge. They only see the appearance of things, and do not know the unseen realities. They follow what they assume is true. 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. In what sense was Jesus raised to God? 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. Verse 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.

In summary, we have seen that verses 4:157-158 do not say, "Jesus did not die", instead they say that it appeared to the unbelievers that they killed and crucified Jesus but they did not. The verses also do not say that God raised Jesus physically to himself. To understand the verses we looked at where the Qur'an teaches similar ideas and saw that God taking Jesus' soul in sleep, or

Jesus being a martyr, are both plausible explanations. But are these explanations confirmed by the other verses in the Qur'an which speak about the crucifixion? We will now consider verses 3:55 and 5:117.

Verses 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, emphasis added.)

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, emphasis added.)

These verses describe God taking Jesus at the crucifixion. The Arabic word translated as take/took is *tawaffa*. This word only means God taking your soul in death. To prove this, here is every other reference to the word *tawaffa* (the 5th form of the verb) in the Qur'an. The underlined word or phrase shows how the one word, *tawaffa*, has been translated.

And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind. (Qur'an 2:234, translated by Saheeh International)

And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind. (Qur'an 2:240)

Our Lord, so forgive us our sins and remove from us our misdeeds and cause us to die with the righteous. (Qur'an 3:193)

And if they testify, confine the guilty women to houses until death takes them or Allah ordains for them [another] way. (Qur'an 4:15)

Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves. (Qur'an 4:97)

And it is He who takes your souls by night and knows what you have committed by day. (Qur'an 6:60)

He sends over you guardian-angels until, when death comes to one of you, Our messengers take him. (Qur'an 6:61)

Our messengers come to them to take them in death. (Qur'an 7:37)

Our Lord, pour upon us patience and let us die as Muslims (Qur'an 7:126)

And if you could but see when the angels take the souls of those who disbelieved. (Qur'an 8:50)

And whether We show you some of what We promise them, [O Muhammad], or We take you in death, to Us is their return. (Qur'an 10:46)

I worship Allah, who causes your death. (Qur'an 10:104)

Cause me to die a Muslim and join me with the righteous. (Qur'an 12:101)

And whether We show you part of what We promise them or take you in death. (Qur'an 13:40)

The ones whom the angels take in death. (Qur'an 16:28)

The ones whom the angels take in death. (Qur'an 16:32)

And Allah created you; then He will take you in death. (Qur'an 16:70)

And among you is he who is taken in [early] death. (Qur'an 22:5)

Say, The angel of death will take you who has been entrusted with you. (Qur'an 32:11)

Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die [He takes] during their sleep. Then He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others for a specified term. (Qur'an 39:42)

And among you is he who is taken in death before [that]. (Qur'an 40:67)

And whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We take you in death. (Qur'an 40:77)

Then how [will it be] when the angels take them in death, striking their faces and their backs? (Qur'an 47:27)

As you can see, on every occasion this word means taking the soul in death.

The word is not used for any other purpose.²⁰ This is confirmed by Imam Bukhari and Ibn Kathir, who said, “Ibn Abbas said *mutawaffika* is referring to death”;²¹ and this is the word used in verses 3:55 and 5:117 to describe the crucifixion. Therefore, these verses indicate that God took Jesus’ soul 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 Daryabadi)²²

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)²³

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)²⁴

Therefore, verses 3:55 and 5:117 confirm what we concluded about verses 4:157-158, that God took Jesus’ soul either as a martyr or in his sleep on the cross.

Verses 19:33-34

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 returning, 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

²⁰ Verses 6:60 and 39:42 refer to sleep but sleep is considered a form of death in the Qur’an where the soul is taken.

²¹ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, ‘Kitab al-Tafsir’, on verses 5:103-117, after hadith 4622. Imam Bukhari gives this definition to introduce hadith 4625; vol 6, bk 60, no 149, in which Muhammad quotes Qur’an 5:117 and applies it to himself. For Ibn Kathir see, *Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-Dhim Ibn Kathir*, surah Al-Imran verse 55 (Arabic, unabridged).

²² Shaykh Abdul Majid Daryabadi, *Tafseer e Majidi* (English), Islamic Research and Publications: Nadwatul, Lucknow: India, 3rd edition 2007, vol. 1, p. 232.

²³ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*, Gibraltar, Dar Al-Andalus, 1984.

²⁴ Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur’an*, Lahore, Pakistan, 1951.

raised up alive. (Qur'an 19:15)

And Muslims and Christians agree that John died as a martyr.²⁵ Therefore, verses 19:33-34 are consistent with the view that Jesus died on the cross either as a martyr or in his sleep.

Other verses?

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.²⁶

These verses are 4:159, 43:61, 3:46, and 5:110. Let us consider them.

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

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 in context it is referring to a Jew who rejects Jesus their whole life. Verse 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 fulfill this role.

²⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Stories of the Prophets*, Riyadh, KSA: Darussalam, 2003, p. 537.

²⁶ Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017, p. 184.

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 is referring to the Qur'an rather than Jesus because it is the Qur'an which claims to give *knowledge*, and in which Muslims are not to *doubt*, and is the *straight path*.

Regarding 3:46 and 5:110,

He [Jesus] will speak to the people in the cradle and in maturity. (Qur'an 3:46 repeated in 5:110)

Neither of these verses say Jesus will return. They simply say that Jesus spoke in the cradle and when mature. They do not suggest that Jesus will return and speak when he is old.

Also, as we have seen earlier, when the Qur'an gives a summary of Jesus' life in verses 19:33-34 (and also 3:33-60) it does not say he will return.

Finally, the Qur'an says Muhammad is the final prophet (Qur'an 33:40). If it was saying that Jesus will return, then Jesus would be the final prophet and not Muhammad. Therefore, there are no verses in the Qur'an that say 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 one consistent picture.

Evaluating the different Islamic explanations

Having read the Qur'an ourselves, we are now in a better position to evaluate the different Islamic explanations given at the start of this chapter.

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

There is no indication in any of the verses that it was a vision. Verses 3:55 and 5:117 affirm that Jesus was on the cross.

Explanation 2. No one was crucified. It is a myth made up by Christians.

Verses 4:157-158 are not about Christians; they are about the unbelieving Jews and what they are saying. There is no mention of a myth and verses 3:55 and 5:117 affirm that Jesus was on the cross.

Explanation 3. Someone was substituted for Jesus.

There is no mention of a substitute anywhere in the verses of the Qur'an. The origin of this idea is well known. It comes from the Greek philosophy of the Docetics and Gnostics.²⁷ They believed that God cannot touch the physical. They also believed Jesus was God. Therefore, they concluded that Jesus was not physical but only appeared to be physical. Some said that a physical substitute was crucified in Jesus' place. While not accepting this philosophy, there are hadiths which accept the Docetic substitution story. Al-Tabari records eleven such hadiths which differ widely in detail.²⁸ 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. None of these hadiths are from Muhammad or are in the main collections of hadiths. However, there is a hadith attributed to Muhammad in which he quotes verse 5:117 and says he is like Jesus.

Narrated Ibn `Abbas: Allah's Messenger delivered a sermon and said ... [regarding Judgement Day] I will say, "O my Lord! (They are) my companions!" Then a reply will come (from Almighty), "You do not know what they did after you." I will say as the pious slave (the Prophet Jesus) said: And I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them. When You took me up. You were the Watcher over them and You are a Witness to all things. (Q5.117). (*Sahih al-Bukhari* 4625; vol 6, bk 60, no 149)

Muhammad says his experience is the same as that of Jesus in verse 5:117. Muhammad died, and if he is like Jesus, then Jesus died too according to this hadith.

There is also this intriguing hadith.

Narrated 'Abdullah: As if I saw the Prophet talking about one of the prophets whose nation had beaten him and caused him to bleed, while he was cleaning the blood off his face and saying, "O Allah! Forgive my nation, for they have no knowledge." (*Sahih al-Bukhari* 3477; vol 4, bk 56, no 683).

These are the words Jesus spoke on the cross.

²⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Docetism> (Accessed December 17, 2022); *Ignatius to the Magnesians* 11.

²⁸ Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an - A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, London, England: Oneworld, 2013, p. 71.

And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. (Luke 23:33-34)

Explanation 4. We do not know precisely what happened.

We can know what happened because there is enough information when we consider all of the verses of the Qur'an.

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

There is no mention of the Romans in any of the verses of the Qur'an.

Explanation 6. Jesus' body was crucified, but his soul was taken in sleep.

This explanation is plausible because in the Qur'an God takes a person's soul when they sleep and they are considered dead without having being killed. This understanding fits well with the description of the crucifixion in the Qur'an.

Explanation 7. Refuting the Jewish Talmud

This may be possible, but there is no reference to Jesus being stoned in the verses of the Qur'an which is a feature of the Talmudic account.

Explanation 8. Jesus was crucified but survived.

This explanation may be possible but is doubtful, because the verses say that Jesus' soul was taken to God. If he survived the crucifixion when he would still be alive in the normal sense, but it seems that his soul was taken to God.

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

This explanation is plausible because the Qur'an's description of a martyr only appearing to be dead, and their soul being taken to God, fits well with the description of the crucifixion in the Qur'an.

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

There is no indication that Jesus is the Word of God in any of the verses about the crucifixion.

Explanation 11. Jesus was crucified, died, and then raised up to God.

This explanation fits with the idea of God taking Jesus' soul and him being a martyr.

Therefore, when we evaluate the different explanations, Jesus having his soul

taken in sleep or being a martyr are the best explanations.

Conclusion

In this chapter we saw that verses 4:157-158 do not say, “Jesus was not crucified or killed”, instead, they say that it appeared to the unbelievers that they crucified and killed Jesus, but they did not; rather, God raised Jesus to himself. We then looked at verses 3:55 and 5:117 and how they say God took Jesus’ soul in death on the cross. From this we can conclude that the Qur’an is saying that it was God who caused Jesus to die on the cross, not the unbelievers, and God took Jesus to himself, most likely in the way he takes a martyr or the soul in sleep. This is how the Qur’an explains itself.

You may disagree and think the Qur’an is saying something different. If that is the case, you need to offer a better explanation that takes all of the verses into account.

I am not asking Christians to believe what the Qur’an says about Jesus, but I am asking Muslims to acknowledge that this seems to be the best explanation.

Frequently asked questions

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.

[The unbelievers] did not believe in the signs of God and wrongfully killed the prophets. (Qur’an 2:61, 2:87, 2:91, 3:21, 3:112, 3:181, 4:155, 5:70)

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. This is an idea from Greek philosophy. 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)

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9)

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 ... (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 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.²⁹ However, this is false and shows that Ahmed Deedat did not read the Bible carefully. 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.

²⁹ Ahmed Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?*, pp. 7-8 & 55.

The Sign of Jonah

Ahmed Deedat is famous for teaching about the sign of Jonah. He claims that just as Jonah was alive in the fish,³⁰ 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.³¹

However, whether Jesus is dead or alive is not the question. The question is, *was Jesus crucified?* and Ahmed Deedat has inadvertently 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 Ahmadiya³² Muslims to show that Jesus did not die on the cross. They believe he was crucified and survived. Ahmed Deedat has used their argument without 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.³³

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

³⁰ Whether Jonah was alive in the fish is debatable. Jonah says he is the grave, the place of the dead. See Jonah 2:2.

³¹ Ahmed Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?*, p. 68.

³² Hadrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Jesus in India*, Punjab, India: Islam International Publications Ltd, 1908, reprinted 1995, pp. 17ff.

³³ Abu Zakariya, *Jesus - Man, Messenger, Messiah*, London, England: IERA, 2017, p. 124.

band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.³⁴ 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 fulfillment 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.

³⁴ “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)³⁵

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

³⁵ Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus: New Updated Edition*, U.S.A.: Massachusetts, 1991.

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. (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:3:3, Arabic reading.)³⁶

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)³⁷

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 practiced sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them to apostasy. Whosoever has anything to say in his defense, let him come forward and declare it." As nothing was brought forward in his defense, he was hanged on Passover Eve. (*Babylonian Talmud*, Sanhedrin 43a)

Therefore, the historical sources outside of the Bible say Jesus was crucified.

What historians say

There is a consensus among historians that Jesus was crucified.

[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)³⁸

It was not on a Jewish religious indictment, but on a secular accusation that

³⁶ 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 Tacitus, *The Annals* (translated by John Jackson) London England: William Heinemann Ltd., vol. 4, 1956, p. 283.

³⁸ E.P. Sander, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London: Allen Lane, 1993, pp. 11 and 274.

he was condemned by the emperor's delegate to die shamefully on a Roman cross. (Geza Vermes)³⁹

He was betrayed by the Jews and crucified. Allah lifted him to the heavens. (Prof. Masud ul-Hasan)⁴⁰

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)⁴¹

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)⁴²

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*)⁴³

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)⁴⁴

Conclusion

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.

³⁹ Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew - A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*, London, UK: SCM Press, 1989, p. 37.

⁴⁰ Prof. Masud ul Hasan, *History of Islam*, Delhi, India: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2002, vol. 1, p. 29.

⁴¹ Bart Ehrman, <https://ehrmanblog.org/weekly-readers-mailbag-february-18-2016/> accessed September 29, 2020.

⁴² Geoffrey Blainey, *A Short History of the World*, Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books, 2000, p. 177.

⁴³ GMD Howat, et al., *Dictionary of World History*, Ontario, Canada: Thomas Nelson, 1973, 'Jesus Christ', p. 769.

⁴⁴ Bart Ehrman, <https://ehrmanblog.org/weekly-readers-mailbag-february-18-2016/> accessed September 29, 2020.

CONCLUSION

In this booklet we have considered the question, *Was Jesus crucified?* First, we examined ten Islamic interpretations. Some said no one was crucified, some that Jesus 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 unbelievers, and God took Jesus to himself, most likely in the way he takes a martyr or the soul in sleep. The Qur'an is claiming to reveal the unseen realities of the crucifixion.

Next we saw that the Bible is clear that Jesus was crucified, and so too is extra-biblical 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>



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