

## **The Crucifixion of Christ: Was It Actual or Imagined?**

By [Billy C. Sichone](#)

*Central Africa Baptist University*

### **Introduction**

The Lord Jesus Christ remains a controversial figure in history. Aspects of his life are hotly debated and in some cases even fought over. The death of Jesus is one such one. While the synoptic gospels assert in no uncertain terms that Jesus actually physically died, Islam, select spurious gospels and several cults reject this idea preferring to take the claimed death as a phantom crucifixion or a misinterpreted event. So when a film like *'The Passion Christ'* hits the big screens from the Christian perspective, many Muslims get seriously offended. Why should this be? After all, Jesus is one of Islam's revered Prophets. What is the Christian to make of this? What are Christians to believe or hold? This paper touches on some salient points that pundits argue over.

### **Was Jesus Ever Crucified?**

According to the Bible and historical records, Jesus the Christ is said to have been crucified on the cross. Evidence from the scriptures states clearly that Jesus was crucified the death of a criminal (according to Roman law), a capital punishment of sorts and one can visit the actual sites mentioned in the scriptures. A contemporary Jewish historian Josephus also records that Jesus and not another, was crucified for his convictions (such as some political activism or even an attempted coup). However, some circles deny this fact claiming that Jesus never actually died but what has been documented in the Gospel narratives are concocted stories by people with an agenda to advance. They further claim (i.e. some sections of Islam) that another person was crucified in the stead of Christ, who himself escaped or was taken up to Heaven. Proponents hold such positions for various reasons including defending their own turf exploiting teachings probably sourced from the Gnostic gospels or some other such literature. The Qur'an gives varying positions over this matter but it predominantly teaches that Jesus (*Isa*) was not crucified but "*appeared to have been crucified*".

### **What the Qur'an Teaches About Jesus the Prophet**

The Qur'an does acknowledge Jesus as one of the prime prophets sent by Allah just before the final prophet in the person of Muhammad came to seal the truth. He is portrayed as a unique human Prophet preceding and in a sense preparing the way for the final Prophet. In over 90 instances (Geisler 2004), allusions to *Isa* or Jesus exist within the Islamic corpus all alluding to some aspects of *Isa's* Ministry, in the process revealing what Islam believes.

### **Why Some Object to the Crucifixion**

For Islam, it is inconceivable for a Prophet of God to die in the manner Jesus is claimed to have died. In the Qur'an, Jesus is revered as one of the Major Prophets though subservient and inferior to the final Prophet Muhammad. Thus, if this suggestion of his crucifixion were to be entertained, then it would go against what the Qur'an has stated in some places. Second, some of the Gnostic gospels suggest that Jesus never died (e.g. gospels of Barnabas & Thomas) subtly opening the door to suggestion that another was in his stead. This is known as the substitution theory. Still others claim that the Christ descended on Christ at Baptism (John 1:32) and then left just before the crucifixion (John 19:30), thus ensuring that the Christ never died or was crucified. It would appear the Prophet Muhammad must have had access to these defective gospels in forming his edition of the *Ingil* (or gospel) so much that when the correct version of the Gospel is presented, it is clearly at variance with what is taught in the Qur'an. That explains why Muslims claim that the Bible has been tampered with, corrupted (i.e. *tafsir*). The interesting thing is that not only are there variations between the Qur'an and the New Testament but in the Old Testament as well. Thus, from the aforementioned premises, Muslims would naturally strongly object to the idea that Jesus was physically killed though they can allow for him having been badly injured, fainted but resuscitated and escaped.

### **If Jesus did not die, what are the implications?**

Either way, if Jesus died or did not die, one side is bound to be affected. If he died, then the Qur'an and the spurious Gnostic gospels will be proved false. However, if he did not die, then the synoptic gospels will be proved false. A further implication would be that Jesus did not atone for the sins of the world after all, so all of us are therefore still under sin. From the foregoing, it is evident that the death of Christ has grave implications, a double edged sword.

### **What Others Have Said About Jesus' Crucifixion**

Many have undertaken to write on this emotive subject propelled by different motives. Some of them support the fact of the crucifixion of Jesus while others

out rightly reject this suggestion. Among those rejecting the crucifixion, offering alternative suggestions is a Muslim cleric called Deedat. He makes many claims including statements such as: Jesus was an insurrectionist who was clamped down in his tracks, punished but never crucified, he was tied to the cross, escaped death, fooled people and went away as predicted. Deedat presents many inconsistent and at times incoherent arguments to disprove the crucifixion of Christ, alleging that the gospel narratives are a fluke and full of errors. This Muslim apologist has maintained a sustained attack on the Biblical account, in the process contradicting the Qur'an which he first set to defend ending up on the heretical side. John Gilchrist however holds (with evidence) that Jesus was in fact actually crucified on the cross and rose again. He proves first that Deedat's claims and multiple writings are biased, not factually based or even objective. For instance, Gilchrist proves that Deedat intentionally and purposely quotes scripture out of context, manipulates it to fit into his theory or out rightly gives false statements that are not only misleading but demonstrate a serious lack of scripture appreciation or content. The debate rages on.

### **Key Lessons Gleaned from this Consideration**

1. Some suggest that Jesus planned a fouled coup plot.
2. Ideally, Muslims respect Jesus as a prophet who did miracles
3. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was never crucified and never died on the cross.
4. By taking the position in point #3 above, the Qur'an denies the atonement or any matter related to blood atonement.
5. Deedat is a heretic belonging to the Ahamadiyya cult, rejected by main line Islam as well as by the Christian faith. This same Deedat has repeatedly been condemned by some authentic Muslim associations within South Africa, stating that Deedat's approach to controversy is not approved.
6. Some Muslim scholars/apologists spend more time talking against other religions rather than presenting a positive view and image of Islam. There is need to present Islam objectively.
7. The Bible itself gives ample evidence of the crucifixion, death and resurrection. Take John's account as a sample, so much detail is meticulously recorded to prove the death and resurrection of Jesus. Other accounts even demonstrate Jesus death by the issue of separated serum and clotted blood at his pierced side (John 19:34). Yet another proof is the inspection of soldiers of the crucified before breaking their legs (if the

victim was still alive; John 19:32; Mark 15:44) but Jesus are not. The burial and 'three day rest' in the grave proves that Jesus was for dead for real. Lastly, without mentioning the throng of eye witnesses to the event, though not exhaustively, the presence of Roman Soldiers around the crucifixion narrative lends the necessary proof. We can thus conclude that sufficient evidence is present within the Biblical text.

## Conclusion

Jesus Christ was indeed crucified (and died on the cross, later rising from the dead, in sync with the sign of Jonah) as historical evidence proves. He was physically nailed to the cross and rose again on the third day. He and not another was crucified contrary to what some pundits have attempted to suggest. The probably were exposed to the Gnostic gospels which at times suggested wrong things in keeping with their agenda. If Jesus did not die on the cross, then there is no atonement for any one today. Thankfully he did. The death of Christ is fact, not fiction.

## Bibliography

Gilchrist J. (n.d.). *The Crucifixion of Christ: A Fact, not fiction*, answering-islam.org

Mcdowell J.(). *Evidence that demands a verdict*.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

### Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).