

demned as heretical by popular Islamic orthodoxy. However, given the popular use of this theory by Deedat, and more recently by Muslim apologist Shabir Ally, we will look at whether Jesus actually died on the cross, or whether he just “swooned.” We have seen that it is historically necessary to admit that it was indeed Jesus on the cross, so what happened to him on the cross?

The immediate context of Jesus’ crucifixion was life-draining. He was deprived of sleep the whole night before, he was beaten, and, dripping with blood, he carried his own heavy cross outside the city to the place of execution. Aside from this, the scientific exactitude required for crucifixion tells us that the instrument itself assures death. In 1968 a tomb was found outside Jerusalem of a young man who was crucified in approximately 70ad. Analysis of this example has allowed scholars and scientists to know the exact method of crucifixion. They have told us that crucifixion does not kill the victim by asphyxiation, as was commonly thought. It was the combination of loss of blood (being scourged and with head punctures), exhaustion with shivering, severe sweating, and seizures would follow. In fact, Jesus may have entered a state of shock even before being hung on the cross. Finally, when Jesus was nailed to the cross with square iron nails, the damage to the nerves would have caused every twitch of seizure to bring intolerable pain. Death would come from extreme shock due to a combination of exhaustion, pain, and loss of blood. The Journal of the American Medical Association concludes, “interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge” (21 March 1986).

Why describe such awful events in such stark detail? Only to show that it is degrading and simplistic it is to uphold to the swoon theory. Whether it was Jesus or someone else who experienced this torture, we must at least give that person the respect of historical honesty.

Biblical Foundation

Both Old Testament and New Testament prophesy that the Messiah would be crucified and killed. In the Old Testament, the Messiah is said to save the world by his redemptive death (Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 53:5-10; Daniel 9:26; Zechariah 12:10). Jesus fulfilled these and more than 100 other Old Testament prophesies about the Messiah.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus predict his own death many times (Matthew 12:10; Mark 8:31; John 2:19-21). In fact, Jesus tells us that this is the reason why he came into the world in Mark 10:45, “the son of man came...to give his life as a ransom for many.”

This tells us that the Bible is consistent with history and absolutely reliable. Furthermore, it tells us what history doesn’t, the divine plan behind the death and resurrection of Christ. He died as the lamb of God, the final sacrifice for the sins of the world, as predicted hundreds of years in

advance, and fulfilled entirely.

Furthermore, the Qur’an itself tells us that “no one can bear the burden for another” (Sura 17:15), and yet many Muslim traditions assert that someone, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, was crucified in Jesus’ place. We have seen that this is not consistent with history, and is philosophically unreliable. It is in fact, dangerous, and unworthy of God.

What is the Object of God’s Mercy?

Christianity, like Islam, worships a God of infinite mercy. He is Al-Rahman. But Christianity, unlike Islam, defines mercy as an activity coming forth from a disposition. Mercy is not an arbitrary overlooking of wrong, but an active redemption. Mercy requires action. Something must change. How is God merciful? What has He done to show His mercy?

Christianity, like Islam, teaches that God is also absolute Justice, as well as absolute Mercy. Absolute Justice must be satisfied, as God cannot overlook sin; which is contrary to justice itself. Forgiveness is not arbitrary, as God Himself is not arbitrary. The debt of unrighteousness must be paid, either by oneself or another. Either the demands for forgiveness are met according to the demands of Justice, or Justice will hold sway and punish wickedness.

Abdalati tells us the issue is that God’s sovereignty would never allow one of His prophets to suffer like this. In this case, however, God’s sovereignty is not restricted but elevated, as this event was predicted, and Christ Himself was vindicated in resurrection. I challenge you to not limit God by forbidding Him to meet the demands of Justice by His absolute Mercy on your behalf. You can try to explain away the crucifixion, or cover it up, or blame it on someone else. But the testimony of history and reason require us to deal with the evidence.



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If thou wert in doubt as to what We
have revealed unto thee, then ask
those who have been
reading the Book from before thee....
(Surah 10 verse 94)

WHO WAS ON THE CROSS?



The death and resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of the Christian faith. The central message of Christian teaching is that Jesus died a sacrificial death on behalf of unworthy sinners, and rose again victorious over death and evil to present his followers blameless on the day of judgment. If it came to light that Jesus did not die on the cross, then Christianity is a hoax and we sinners are left in our shame without a saviour.

The easiest way to discredit the Christian faith is to deny the crucifixion of Jesus. Islam has done exactly this by saying that Jesus did not die, as God would never allow one of his holy prophets to suffer public disgrace, and instead someone was put in Jesus' place. In fact, Muslim theologians have gone so far as to label belief in the crucifixion "demonic" (Ibn Taymiyya) and fundamentally polarizing Christians and Muslims such that "no amount of logical discourse could bring the two sides nearer" (Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani). These highly-charged positions tell us that we are discussing a centrally important question.

What cannot be denied is that someone was on the cross, as both the Bible and the Qur'an attest. If it was not Jesus, then billions of people are deceived. If it was Jesus, then billions of others are being deceived. So the all-important question at hand is, "was Jesus on the Cross?"

Qur'anic Foundation

The idea that Jesus did not die on the Cross stems from variant readings of Sura 4:157-159, although there appear to be other Sura's referring to his death (3:144, 19:33, 3:55, 5:117). What is more, there has historically been opposing readings of this passage within Islam, suggesting that the meaning of the passage itself is quite vague. There are Muslim positions that tell us it was Judas or someone else who died, but as we can see, this finds no basis in the Qur'anic text. For Muslims to make such strong denials about the crucifixion, surely it must be supported. And yet this is the only reference in the Qur'an to someone else dying on Christ's behalf, and it is unclear. Let us then look at the traditional interpretations and traditions to gain a more full picture.

Traditional Muslim Understanding

The earliest Qur'anic commentator, al-Tabari (d. 923) lists for us two kinds of reports for what is supposed to have happened to Jesus on the cross:

1. Someone volunteered to take Jesus' place. One of Jesus' followers volunteered to be killed in his place and had the "likeness" of Jesus cast upon him. (this is supposedly the earliest report, found in six traditions).
2. God puts Jesus' likeness on someone else. Traditions don't agree as to who it was or how it happened. Tabari then reviews these two reports, saying that the first report is inconsistent with 4:158 as Jesus' followers wouldn't have been duped as the Qur'an states. He

finds the second view more consistent, but doesn't tell us who Jesus' likeness was cast upon.

Today there are many popular traditions circulating in popular Islam about who was on the cross. Some of the most common:

1. A Jew named Judas (not Iscariot)
2. Simon of Cyrene
3. Judas Iscariot
4. A Jewish watchman set to guard Jesus
5. A form, but not a person, was substituted
6. One of Jesus' friends (promised paradise to do so)
7. Titawus, a Jew sent to arrest Jesus

In 1209 the Muslim commentator al-Razi rejected all theories that suggest God put Jesus' likeness on someone else, as they would open the gate for a sophistry wherein nothing could ever be trusted. This would abolish all interpersonal relationships, as we would never know who we're talking with. According to al-Tabari there is only two options about who was on the cross: voluntary or involuntary. Tabari then tells us that the voluntary options are unreasonable. Al-Razi tells us that the involuntary options are unreasonable. Can't we see the way an ambiguous verse causes problems in interpreting an historical event? There has always been an attack on the cross of Christ. The Qur'an doesn't tell us where these interpretations come from, so where do they come from?

Early Substitution Legends

Challenges to the biblical account of Jesus' crucifixion are not new with Islam. Although, Islam picks up some of these older challenges and puts them in an Islamic framework.

Even though there are a plethora of first-century accounts of Jesus' death, as early as the second century alternative explanations were on offer. The first appears to come by Basilides, a second century Gnostic (Christian heresy), who taught that Simon of Cyrene was put in Jesus' place on the cross. This was promoted because Gnosticism denied any physicality of Jesus, denying possibility of bodily death. The second alternative was presented by Mani of Persia (founder of Manichaeism) in the third century, who taught that the son of the widow of Nain who Jesus resurrected from the dead, was put in Jesus' place. And according to another Manichaean tradition, it was the devil himself who was victim of the switch.

What must be seen is that none of these stories are based in first century documents of an eye witness. While on the other hand, in the gospels, we have four accounts collected by and from eyewitnesses.

Historic Reliability of Jesus' Crucifixion

We agree with al-Razi that all substitution legends are not credible, but on historical grounds in addition to philosophical ones. Dr. Norman Geisler tells us that "the evi-

dence for Christ's death is greater than that for almost any other event in the ancient world."

1. Substitution theories contradict the records of *eyewitness testimony* that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified (Matthew 27, Mark 14, Luke 23, John 19)
2. Jesus' crucifixion was discussed by extra-biblical Jewish, Roman, Greek, and Samaritan opponents of Christianity: Tacitus (Roman, 55ad), Josephus (Jew, 70ad), Lucien (Greek 100ad), Julius Africanus (Samaritan, 211ad), and the Jewish Talmud. In addition, ancient historians such as Pliny, Thallus, Herodotus, Suetonius, Mara bar Serapion, and Philo all discussed events directly related to Jesus' crucifixion and death. Furthermore, there is an unbroken chain of witness within the early church from John the Apostle (sabaha) to his disciple Polycarp (tabi'un), to his disciple Ignatius (tabi'un), to Justin Martyr.
3. There is not a single shred of first-century testimony to the contrary.
4. Substitution demands stupidity of Jesus' followers who witnessed the event, and...
5. Demands ignorance of the Roman executioners, who were trained in killing criminals. Whose lives would be taken from them if the criminal was not executed.
6. There is no way to explain the many resurrection appearances (1 Cor. 15) and public ascension of Christ (Acts 1)
7. Contradicts a third century reference of a letter written from the Roman governor Pilate to Tiberius Caesar that confirms Jesus' death and burial (Tertullian).
8. Logic tells us that the most simple solution is likely the correct one. The only solution to all of this testimony is to say historically, as well as philosophically, that Jesus died on the Cross. Otherwise we end up playing word games with intellectual dishonesty. It happened in history whether we embrace it or not.

Did Jesus Die?

The idea that Jesus was not on the cross is an outright denial of accepted philosophical and historiographical inquiry. Because of the incredulity of the 'substitution theory' a few Islamic writers, like Ahmad Khan of India, and Ahmed Deedat of South Africa, propagate the theory that Jesus was indeed crucified, but did not die on the cross. Instead he swooned to unconsciousness, was taken down off the cross, later came to life, pushed a thousand pound stone out of the way, fought off twelve armed Roman soldiers, went to Kashmir, India and died there. This is the accepted view of the Islamic sect, the Ahmadiyyas, con-