

The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ: a Historical Fact

I. Introduction

A key point of difference between Islam and Christianity is the Bible's testimony that Jesus was executed on a cross and rose from the dead. Often with differences between religions the differences are matters of personal opinion or interpretation. There are, though, areas that are more than opinion or interpretation, that put themselves into the realm of fact. Both Islam and Christianity pride themselves on being historical religions. They both hold that at a specific time and place, God intervened and acted in human history, and that one can still investigate these events through the historical evidence that has been left. This facet of these two religions takes their historical claims out of the realm of personal opinion into the realm of historical fact. Islam is based on the historical evidence surrounding the claims of Muhammad to prophet-hood and his receiving the Qur'an. Christianity is based on the historical evidence concerning the claims and life of Jesus the Messiah. As concerns this discussion, Christianity explicitly stakes its validity on the historical fact of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle Paul stated:

"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:17 NASB)

This lecture will present the historical evidence that supports 1) that Jesus was crucified and died from this torture, and 2) that Jesus rose from the dead in the same body in which He died. It will also consider the major Islamic objections to Christ's crucifixion.

II. Evidence for the death of Jesus on the cross

This lecture is built on the premise that the Bible is a historically reliable document and that its statements of historical fact can be accepted as true. This was demonstrated in the earlier article on this site, "The Bible: Corrupt or Unchanged." From a historical standpoint, the New Testament is the reliable testimony of the companions of Jesus as to what they personally observed of the events of His life, of the character of His life, and what they heard Him teach. Being Jesus' close companions for three years, they are the best witnesses of what occurred in Jesus' life. The Gnostic documents that concern Jesus are the only early documents with a claim to call the New Testament records into question. The article on this site, "The Historical Reliability of the Gnostic Gospels" explains why these records are not reliable historical records of the life of Jesus Christ. Upon examination, these documents show themselves to be greatly inferior to the New Testament as far as their historical reliability.

A. The Biblical evidence of the crucifixion of Jesus

We need to now turn to the Gospel accounts from the Bible. They record the earliest information available concerning Jesus. Not only is this information early, it is historically reliable. The four Gospel accounts in the New Testament were written by either disciples of Jesus or the companions of Jesus' disciples who had access to the very earliest written materials concerning Jesus and the people who were intimately acquainted with Jesus. An excellent book which presents the historical value of these Gospel accounts is Paul Barnett's Is The New Testament Reliable? A Look At The Historical Evidence (ISBN 0-8308-1834-0).

Here is some of the testimony to Jesus' death on the cross from the New Testament:

1. The Disciples: It is the unanimous testimony of the disciples of Jesus that they knew He died on the cross. This can be observed by reading any of the following gospel accounts:

- a. Matthew 27:33-50
- b. Mark 15:22-37
- c. Luke 23:33-46
- d. John 19:16-30

Note: This testimony includes Mary, Jesus' mother (John 19:25-27), many woman disciples (Matthew 27:55), many other followers (Luke 23:49), and the Apostle John, one of Jesus' closest disciples (John 19:26-27). Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus actually handled the body of Jesus after He had died, wrapped it in grave clothes and laid it in a tomb (Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-42).

Other disciples, while possibly not observing the crucifixion, knew it to be a fact:

- e. Peter: John 20:1-7; Acts 2:23,36; 1 Peter 2:24
 - f. Thomas: John 20:24-29
 - g. The rest of the twelve apostles: Acts 1:13-14,21-26; 2:14 Two unnamed ones: Luke 24:20.
2. The Roman authorities: The Romans, as the ruling authority in Palestine at this time, were legally responsible for Jesus' death. Pontius Pilate, the governor, decreed His death after a series of religious and civil trials. The Romans were very efficient in executions and saw to it that Jesus was dead when He was taken

down from the cross. The Centurion and soldiers made sure Jesus was dead: John 19:33-34, and Pontius Pilate made sure Jesus was dead: Mark 14:44-45.

3. The Jewish authorities: The Jews were morally responsible for Jesus' death. They rejected Him as their Messiah and plotted and succeeded in having Him executed by the Romans. They made sure Jesus was dead and that their schemes had succeeded. The Jewish leaders observed Jesus die, made sure the Romans killed Him and knew it was fact that he had died: Matthew 27:41-43, 62-66; Mark 15:31-32; John 19:31.
4. Jesus' own predictions of His death by crucifixion.

Jesus predicted His own death many times. The Gospels record Him predicting His death on at least 21 separate occasions. Many of these predictions record the details of His death; that He would die in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover celebration, suffer at the hands of the chief priests, and be killed by crucifixion. Here is a list of the references where Jesus predicts His own death listed by separate occasion:

- a. Matthew 12:39-40
- b. Matthew 16:4
- c. Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22
- d. Matthew 17:12
- e. Matthew 17:22,23; Mark 9:31; Luke 9:44
- f. Matthew 20:18,19; Mark 10:33,34; Luke 18:31-34
- g. Matthew 21:33-39; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19
- h. Matthew 23:37
- i. Matthew 26:2
- j. Matthew 26:12
- k. Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24
- l. Matthew 26:31,32
- m. Mark 10:45

- n. Luke 12:50
- o. Luke 13:34, 35
- p. Luke 17:25
- q. John 3:14
- r. John 6:51
- s. John 10:15-18
- t. John 12:30-32
- u. John 16:16

Note: These predictions of Jesus' death confirm that He is a true prophet according to the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 18:22) in that what He predicted came about in exactly the same way and at exactly the same time He predicted it.

5. Old Testament prophecies concerning the death of Christ:

Jesus was not only a prophet in His own right by predicting future events, He also fulfilled events that had been predicted concerning the Messiah's death at least 700 and 1000 years earlier.

- a. David: David as a prophet in his psalms 1000 years before Jesus predicted details of the death of the Messiah. Psalm 22:16-18 states:

"For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me. They divide my garments among them, and my clothing for lots."

- b. Isaiah: Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus, predicted many aspects of the Messiah's death. Isaiah 53:5-10 states:

"But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before his shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment, He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned to be with wicked men,

yet with a rich man in His death; although He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering..."

- c. Daniel: Daniel, 400 years before Jesus, stated this concerning the Messiah in Daniel 9:26:

"Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing..."

- d. Zechariah: Zechariah, 400 years before Jesus, said this in Zechariah 12:10:

"And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; ..."

Note: These specifically mention piercing Messiah (John 19:34) and piercing His hands and feet (John 19:18), dividing up His garments by using lots (Matthew 27:35), He did not fight His torturers or cry out because of the injustices being done to Him (Matthew 26:50-56,62,63; 27:14), He was unjustly tried and condemned (Luke 22:54-23:25), and He was killed with criminals but buried among the rich (Matthew 27:38,57-60). Also note that the Isaiah 53 prophecy even predicts why the Messiah would die, to be a guilt offering for sin (Mark 10:45).

Note also that these are only a few of the many prophecies in the Old Testament of the Bible concerning the Messiah. Jesus' life and ministry as recorded in the gospel accounts of the New Testament fulfill these prophecies. They do not point to anyone else. Many books are available on this topic and a paper is available at the book table.

6. Medical evidence that Jesus was killed by the crucifixion:

Medical evaluation of the historical accounts of the Biblical Gospels have concluded that Jesus died as a result of the effects of the scourging He received and the crucifixion. Note this quote from an article from the Journal of the American Medical Association:

"Thus, it remains unsettled whether Jesus died of cardiac rupture or of cardio-respiratory failure. However, the important feature may not be how he died but rather whether he died. Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge. (1)

The Romans practiced crucifixion to kill. They were expert, well-practiced executioners. They knew how to use this form of torture and they made sure it killed their victims.

7. Conclusions on the Biblical Material

The Bible, taken as a historical document, is unequivocal as to the reality of Jesus' physical death. Its testimony is consistent in that everyone who observed the crucifixion or knew it took place knew that Jesus was crucified and knew that He truly died. This is true for those who were friends and followers of Jesus as well as His enemies. The government authorities made sure of His death as also did the Jewish religious authorities. The eyewitness accounts of His death also fully agree with the proven medical effects of such torture. Also, all of this testimony is in full agreement with Old Testament predictions of the Messiah's death and with Jesus' own predictions of the place, time, and manner of His death. According to the Bible, Jesus truly died by crucifixion.

B. Evidence from outside the Bible - secular testimony to the death of Jesus Christ by crucifixion

1. Non-Jewish and non-Christian sources:

- a. Tacitus, a Roman historian, in his *Annals*, c. AD 115, describes the Roman Emperor Nero's actions after the great fire of Rome, c. AD 64:

"...Nero fabricated scapegoats-and punished...Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilatus." (2)

- b. Lucian, Greek satirist, second century AD, alludes to Christ:

"...the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world.... Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws." (3)

- c. Thallus, a Samaritan-born historian, c. AD 52, quoted by Julius Africanus, c. AD 221:

"Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness [at the time of the crucifixion] as an eclipse of the sun- unreasonable, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was the time of the pascal full moon when Christ died." (4)

- d. Letter of Mara Bar-Serapion, after AD 73 (this letter resides in the British Museum):

"What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished....But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given." (5)

2. Jewish sources:

- a. Josephus, Jewish historian (AD 37-100) wrote of Jesus:

"At this time there was a wise man called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. Many people among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have reported wonders." (6)

- b. The Jewish Talmud (Centuries of Jewish oral tradition committed to writing between AD 200 and AD 500):

"On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (of Nazareth) and the herald went before him for forty days saying (Yeshu of Nazareth) is going to be stoned in that he hath practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel. Let everyone knowing aught in his defense come and plead for him. But they found naught in his defense and hanged him on the eve of Passover." (7)

See John 11:57 for confirmation of this.

1. Conclusions from the non-biblical sources:

All available sources recognize Jesus' death by crucifixion as fact. Both the Romans and the Jews believed Jesus died by crucifixion exactly as the Gospels relate. Jews even to this day don't doubt that Jesus died on a cross. They just don't recognize Him as the Messiah and that He rose from the dead.

B. Conclusions

The historical evidence overwhelmingly points to the reality of Jesus' death on the cross. The Bible's testimony agrees fully with the testimony of the Romans and Jews; people who set themselves up as enemies of the Christians. The Old Testament prophets predicted the Messiah's death in detail and Jesus, as the Messiah, fulfilled it to the last detail. All credible historical evidence also supports this. No one has ever presented

credible historical evidence that Jesus did not die on the cross. Also, it must be noted that the death of Jesus by crucifixion is a historical event on which the whole of the New Testament is based. The Gospels have the events of the crucifixion and the following resurrection as the climax of the accounts of Jesus' life. They are not incidental events in the biblical accounts; they are the greatest events that all of Jesus' miracles and teaching led up to.

III. The resurrection of Jesus the Messiah from the dead

The point of all the biblical accounts of Jesus' crucifixion is to show that He truly died to then set the stage for His resurrection from the dead. All four Gospels state that Jesus died on the cross:

- Matthew 27:50 states, "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit."
- Mark 15:37 states, "And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed His last."
- Luke 23:46 states, "And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.' And having said this, He breathed His last."
- John 19:30 states, "And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit."

Some have recognized that Jesus was put on the cross, but then have denied he died there. These theories, though, do not have any basis in documentary evidence. There is not any written evidence that states that Jesus swooned, or left the cross unconscious and alive. Such theories are speculations by people who do not want to believe that Jesus died on the cross. They are the inventions of people who for other reasons do not want to accept that Jesus died on the cross.

There is no historical evidence that Jesus left the cross alive. The Romans and the Jews made sure he was dead. The disciples who handled Jesus' body knew He was dead.

As with Jesus' death, so all the gospels are unanimous that Jesus rose from the dead in the same body in which He was crucified:

- Matthew 28:5,6 states, "And the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.'"
- Mark 16:6 states, "And he (the angel) said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him.'"

- Luke 24:5-7 states, "...the men (angels) said to them, 'Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'"
- John 20:9 states after Peter and John saw Jesus' empty tomb: "For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead."

Also note that just as Jesus predicted His own death by crucifixion, so He predicted His resurrection. Of the 21 recorded occasions where Jesus predicted His death, on 8 of those occasions He also predicted His resurrection from the dead:

1. Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22
2. Matthew 17:9
3. Matthew 17:23
4. Matthew 20:19
5. Matthew 26:32
6. Mark 9:9
7. Mark 9:31
8. John 2:18-22

The Old Testament predicted the resurrection of Jesus in David's God-inspired statement:

"For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol; neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay." (Psalm 16:10 NASB)

Also, the unreserved, unwavering testimony of the rest of the New Testament is that Jesus rose from the dead. All of the disciples saw Jesus after He had risen from the dead. The Apostle Paul writing in about AD 55-57 records this concerning Jesus' resurrection:

"For I delivered to you as of first of importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." (1 Corinthians 15:3-8 NASB)

The unwavering testimony of Jesus, the earliest disciples, and the Church since the Apostles, indeed of all who take the Bible seriously, is that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. In fact, in the Bible, and in Christian usage through the ages, the phrase "the gospel" refers to the message of Jesus' death and resurrection to save us from sin. The word "gospel" means "good news" and the Gospel message of the New Testament is the good news that Jesus has conquered sin and death by His death and resurrection.

Also, Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the only credible explanation for the following facts: The empty tomb of Jesus, the dramatic change in Jesus' disciples from fear and despair to fearlessness and great feats of faith, and the dramatic start and continuation of the Christian Church. The evidence that these three facts provide is too lengthy for this paper but may be pursued easily through many books published on the subjects.

IV. Islamic objections to the death of Jesus the Messiah on the cross

I have met with only three major objections to the death of Jesus on the cross. The view of Jesus being crucified but not dying is not included because there is no real evidence for it. It is a classic example of arguments supported by theological prejudice, not historical evidence. The three major objections to be dealt with are:

1. First, is that their book, the Qur'an, denies it happened. Muslims believe since it was revealed it must be true regardless of other evidence, whether historical or logical. This is a theological reason for belief, not a historical one.
2. Second, Muslims seem to find it unthinkable that God would allow one of His holy prophets to suffer the shame of an undeserved public execution. This is also a theological reason, based on assumptions of the character of God and His treatment of prophets.
3. Third, and perhaps most important is this: if Jesus died on the cross and rose again, then the Christian doctrine of salvation only through Jesus' atoning death is upheld, which contradicts the Islamic view of salvation through repentance. If the Islamic view of salvation is to be upheld then Jesus' death on the cross cannot be believed. Again, this is a theological reason for objecting to the biblical account.

These three will be treated in turn.

A. Someone else was crucified.

This view is based on the Qur'an verses 157,158 of Surah 4:

"And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger -- They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them;

and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain, But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise." (Pickthall's trans.)

Muslims accept this verse as revelation. Their attitude is often, since Allah has revealed it to be this way then the other historical records are wrong. I understand this view, and I commend the attitude to accept what God reveals and believe it and obey it. But we should not be ashamed or afraid to allow our books to be scrutinized in light of history. The Bible claims to be revelation and claims to be based on historically verifiable events. As these events have been examined the historical records only confirm the Bible. The Qur'an, however claims to be revelation, and it claims to have been given in history, but it makes claims which go against historical documentation. The Qur'an makes a bold statement here concerning Jesus' crucifixion but does not give a historically credible alternative. If one is to accept the Qur'an's version of the event they must realize that the historical evidence supports the Bible rather than the Qur'an.

Also, this verse leads to some very difficult conclusions as to the behavior and character of God. If Allah did crucify another man in Jesus' place, that man having been made to look like Jesus, then God acted unjustly in at least four ways:

1. First, God acted unjustly toward the person crucified in that he was crucified for crimes he did not commit.
2. Second, God acted unjustly toward Jesus' own mother, His closest companions, and all the other disciples who had followed Jesus so loyally for years. They sincerely believed Jesus died on that cross. According to the Islamic view, Allah fooled them. Why? They had sincerely followed Jesus, many of them giving up property, homes, and families.
3. God acted unjustly toward Christians for six centuries until Muhammad recited Surah 4:157. God did not leave any credible evidence for those six centuries that Jesus did not die on the cross. And, with this verse from the Qur'an, Allah did not reveal any new historical evidence or proof to correct the centuries-old view of the Christians.
4. God has acted unjustly toward us, Christians and Muslims today, in that he has not left more credible historical evidence that Jesus did not die on the cross.

Also, and I don't say this lightly, this view makes God the author of perhaps the biggest lie in history. All of the world's population is eternally affected by who really died on that cross. This is the most important event in history as far as eternal salvation is concerned. By fooling everyone present at the event and not leaving credible historical evidence that Jesus did not die, the Muslim view makes God the an enormous liar. Surely that is not worthy of God.

The Islamic view of the crucifixion only has only the conflicting, insufficient evidence of the Gnostics for the historical support for its view. Not only is this evidence inadequate, it also contradicts the Islamic views of Jesus in that they often portray anti-Qur'anic views of Jesus. This is in addition to being anti-Biblical. A simple reading of any encyclopedia entry on "Gnosticism" will show the religion to be anti-Islamic as well as anti-Christian. Let me restate the historical evidence for the Islamic view again to show its inadequacy and its contradictions with Islam.

- Basilides the Gnostic, @AD 150, taught that, "at the crucifixion He [Jesus] changed form with Simon of Cyrene who had carried the cross. The Jews mistaking Simon for Jesus nailed him to the cross. Jesus stood by deriding their error before ascending to heaven." (8)
- This version conflicts with the earliest Gnostic views on Jesus' death (those of Cerinthus) that said Jesus did die on the cross. Basilide's view is also part of a Gnostic view of God and the cosmos that is anti-Qur'anic as well as anti-Biblical. Basilides also thought that Jesus' body died and did not ascend to heaven. Also, the thought of Jesus deriding those who were trying to crucify him is contrary to the teaching and example of Jesus in both Islam and Christianity. It is an undignified and vengeful act.
- Mani of Persia, AD 200's, head of the Manichaen movement "taught that the son of the widow of Nain whom Jesus raised from the dead was put to death in his place." (9)
- Another Manichaen tradition has the devil himself being the victim of the crucifixion.(10) Manichaeism was actually not a Christian sect but a gnostic religion in its own right. Mani combined Christian teachings with many other religions. The greatest influences discernible in his system are Christianity, Gnosticism, and Zoroastrianism. Influences of Buddhism and Hinduism are also discernible. It's teachings are anti-Qur'anic as well as anti-Christian and in the early years of Islam, Manichaeans were persecuted and driven out of Islamic realms.

Neither of these provides credible historical evidence that someone else was crucified instead of Jesus for the following reasons: (12)

- Both are contrary to the existing testimony of eyewitnesses of the event, friend and foe alike, who unanimously state Jesus was crucified. There is no eyewitness testimony or even first century testimony that someone other than Jesus died on the cross.
- These stories are all contrary to the earliest existing secular testimony of Jesus' death, whether Jewish, Roman, or Samaritan.

- These stories are inventions stemming from certain theological prejudices. They are motivated by heretical religious views that are abhorrent to Christian and Muslim alike. They are also highly improbable and they disagree among themselves. They also demand total ignorance on the part of those closest to Jesus as to what actually happened as well as those who watched the crucifixion itself. This would include Jesus' mother and the disciples, and also the Roman executioners, the Jewish leaders, and the great crowd that assembled to watch the crucifixion.
- They involve Jesus in a huge lie and cruelty contrary to His teaching and complete manner of life.

Conclusion: That someone else was crucified instead of Jesus cannot be supported historically. All credible evidence supports the view that Jesus was the one who died on the cross. Also, having someone else die on the cross involves God in lies and cruelty that are quite contrary to His justice and love.

B. Crucifixion is not fitting for a prophet of God

The second major argument I have encountered against Jesus' crucifixion is not a historical argument but a theological one. It is the conviction that God would not allow one of His prophets to be humiliated or defeated. This assumes two things:

- (1) it is contrary to God's character to allow His servants to suffer in this way, and
- (2) it is contrary to God's plan or way of working to allow his servants to be put to death in a humiliating way.

Both of these assumptions are motivated by a conviction that God would never do such a thing; that it is beneath His honor and majesty. But first let me ask, who are we to tell God what He can and cannot do? Let us not presume to tell God how He should act. True, the thought of a holy prophet being so humiliated and tortured surprises and revolts our natural thoughts and feelings, and with good reason. A holy life should not be rewarded with injustice. It surprised and revolted the Jews and even Jesus' closest disciples, too. But, we should not let our feelings and thoughts get in the way if God is doing something greater than we can imagine. God says to us in Isaiah 55:8,9:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

We should accept what God reveals humbly, and seek to see how it matches His character and demonstrates His plan. We should look to see how it magnifies God and brings Him praise and honor.

That the cross doesn't violate the character of God or the plan of God may be demonstrated separately as follows:

1. God's character is not violated or degraded by such a death:

Jesus' death on the cross is presented in the Bible as the supreme demonstration of God's love to His creatures. In it, God takes initiative and draws near to His creatures to share their grief's and pain, and especially to bear the judicial guilt of their sins on Himself. This is an act of supreme love in that God reveals that no one may adequately pay for their sins' guilt except by an eternity in hell (Romans 6:23). God vindicates His own standard of justice in that He bears the guilt of everyone's sin. He then loves in offering complete forgiveness for sins to all who will believe in The Messiah's death for them.

- a. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16 NASB)
- b. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23 NASB)
- c. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23 NASB)

By the cross, God is showing us a love higher than our thoughts while maintaining the standards of His pure, holy, perfect, incredibly exacting justice. The cross also magnifies the sovereignty and power of God above our thoughts in that God is seen as predicting this event centuries before it happened, and then carrying it out with incredible precision, while allowing for the full exercise of evil men's schemes and actions.

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power." (Acts 2:22-24 NASB)

God reveals in the Bible how great His love, justice, and mercy really are in showing that even He was willing to suffer for us to the greatest degree to show His love. And in doing it shows He is fully worthy of our trust, our devotion, our obedience, and our worship.

2. God's plan, or way of working is not compromised by the cross:

The Muslim objection in this regard is based on the notion that God does not allow His choice servants to suffer humiliation, but instead shows them to be strong and victorious. The Bible, however, records the stories of many prophets that suffered humiliation and rejection. Abel was killed by his brother Cain (Genesis 4). The Israelites insulted and rebelled against Moses, threatening to overthrow him (Numbers 16:1-3 is one example of many). Sampson was captured, maimed, and enslaved by his enemies (Judges 16). King Saul despised plotted against, and tried to kill David on many occasions (1 Samuel 18 for some examples). Jeremiah was constantly insulted and persecuted (the book of Jeremiah). John the Baptist was beheaded by a cruel, weak king (Matthew 14:1-12).

Even the Qur'an acknowledges that the Jews mistreated their prophets. Surah 5:73 says,

"We took the Covenant of the Children of Israel and sent them apostles. Every time there came to them an apostle with what they themselves desired not--some (of these) they called imposters and some they (go so far as to) slay." (A. Yusuf Ali translation)

In all of the Biblical accounts, God had the final victory over His opponents but He often had His servants endure great hardship and humiliation before they were vindicated. The same is true with Jesus and in an even greater way than any of the previous prophets. Not only did He suffer the most humiliating rejection and death, He experienced incredible vindication in His resurrection from the dead. And He will experience complete vindication when He comes again!

"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:8-11 NASB)

C. If the Islamic view of salvation is to be upheld then Jesus' death on the cross cannot be believed.

Concerning this third reason, I can say this. The Old Testament and the New Testament are in agreement that God in His holiness, that is His uncompromising moral purity, must punish sin with death. Second, God has revealed in both the Old and New testaments that sin, conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional, can only be forgiven through the required atoning sacrifice. Third, God's love is the motive that moved Him to plan and carry out the only sufficient sacrifice for the whole of mankind's sin.

These verses reveal God's uncompromising moral purity:

- *"Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor."* (Habakkuk 1:13 - One of the Jewish prophets, NASB)
- *"The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. For the Lord is righteous; He loves righteousness; The upright will behold His face."* (Psalm 11:4-7 NASB)
- *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:23 NASB)
- *"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy (Leviticus 11:44).'"* (1 Peter 1:14-16 NASB)
- *"And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."* (1 John 1:5 NASB)

These verses reveal the necessity of an atoning sacrifice for our sins and that Jesus is the ultimate, complete sacrifice for mankind's sin:

- *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.... For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life."* (Leviticus 17:11-14 NASB)

Note: The entire book of Leviticus in the Torah of Moses is about the necessity of blood sacrifices for covering sin. Chapter 4 in Leviticus gives the sacrifices for unintentional sins. Chapter 6 gives them for intentional sins.

- *"By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. And every priest (Jewish) stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God."* (Hebrews 10:10-12 NASB)
- *"And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him."* (Hebrews 9:27-28 NASB)

- *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:45 NASB)
- *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10 NASB)

These verses reveal God's heart of love: (**Note:** The word for love here is the Greek word "agape." This denotes a love that is greater than romantic love or love for family and friends. It is used in the New Testament of love that loves in spite of resistance, rejection, or injury. It even embraces enemies. It is not based on impulse or feeling but on a choice of the will to love. Where it is used of God in the Bible it is the deep, constant love of a perfect, infinite Person towards entirely unworthy, unlovely, people.)

- *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16 NASB)
- *"And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'"* (Luke 23:33,34 NASB)
- *"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 NASB)
- *"And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."* (1 Peter 1:17-19) NASB

The Old Testament and the New Testament are in agreement on these fundamental truths. The Qur'an disagrees on these issues and instead presents a view that is in complete opposition. The Qur'an's view does not have the supporting evidence of any existing previous revelations or even historical evidence to under gird its claims to be the final truth given to mankind.

V. Final conclusions

From the above evidence, it should be seen that there is no credible historical evidence that Jesus did not die on the cross, but that instead, the evidence clearly supports that He did die and rose from the dead as He and the prior scriptures predicted. The Islamic objections do not provide any historical evidence for believing someone else was crucified, or sufficient theological reasons for rejecting it. Even if theological reasons or other kinds of opinion are used to reject the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, they

must be maintained as personal opinion, not as historical fact, and they can only be held in the face of the prevailing historical evidence that Jesus did die on the cross.

I would urge any Muslim rejecting the crucifixion of Jesus to please consider the evidence, and base their conviction on firm evidence, not unsupported assertions, for their eternal salvation.

Everyone is responsible for themselves to seek the truth. Our eternal destinies depends on it. Please consider these matters and do not shut your hearts and minds to consider what has been presented. Please give these issues a fair hearing and then make your decision.

Prepared and submitted by Keith E. Small, 30 May 1996

VI. Endnotes

(1) Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), March 21, 1986-- Vol. 255, No. 11, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ" by William D. Edwards, MD; Wesley J. Gabel, MDiv; Floyd E. Hosmer, MS, AMI, p. 1463.

(2) Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, Penguin Books, c. 1965, reprint ed. 1966, p. 354.

(3) Lucian, "On the Death of Peregrine", quoted in Christian Apologetics, by N. Geisler, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, c. 1976, p. 323.

(4) Ibid., p. 324.

(5) Ibid., p. 324.

(6) P. Maier, In the Fullness of Time, HarperSanFrancisco, c. 1991, p. 200.

(7) The Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a, "Eve of Passover," Quoted in Christian Apologetics, by N. Geisler, pp. 324, 325.

(8) N. Geisler and A. Saleeb, Answering Islam, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, c. 1993, p. 280.

(9) Ibid., p. 280.

(10) Ibid., p. 280.

(11) Ibid., p. 280.

(12) Ibid., p. 280-282.

Note: all Bible quotations are from the New American Standard translation of the Bible, copyright 1975, abbreviated as NASB.