

Christ's Crucifixion, Death and Resurrection

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The Bible tells us about the life and the teaching of Jesus. It contains the main record of how he was crucified and died on the cross. It states the story of his burial and resurrection on the third day. It also tells us about his appearances to his followers and his ascension and says that one day he is going to return to this earth as the mighty judge.

The Qur'an, however refers to the crucifixion only once and can be interpreted as denying both the crucifixion of Jesus and his death on the cross by the hands of the Jews. Muhammad is said to have received this revelation in response to a boast of the Jews that they had killed Jesus Christ. It states:

"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." (Surah 4:157-158).

The substitution theory

The majority of our Muslim friends follow the substitution theory. In the light of this one verse, they believe that Jesus was never put on the cross. God made someone else look like Jesus and it appeared to the Jews that they had crucified him. The words, 'Allah took him up unto Himself' are often taken to mean that Jesus was raised alive to heaven without dying (Moududi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, p.390). Muslims have several different names for the one who substituted Jesus. Some say Judas Iscariot was slain in his place; others say Simon of Cyrene. There are Muslims who suggest that Jesus was lifted up while he was asleep and that God caused him to die a spiritual death to all worldly desires. Yet others say that Jesus died in some sense for a few hours, 3 or 7 depending on which tradition you follow. He was then resurrected and taken into heaven.

The swoon theory

Although it is used by modern Muslim apologists like Ahmad Deedat to discredit the crucifixion of Jesus, his death and resurrection, the swoon theory is part and parcel of some of the doctrines of the Ahamdiyya sect of Islam. According to the movement the Qur'an (Surah 4:157-158) 'does not

deny the fact of Jesus being nailed to the cross, but denies his having died on it.' (Farid (ed.), *The Holy Qur'an, The London Mosque*, 1978).

In their opinion, after escaping from the cross, Jesus received divine healing by the application of a special ointment. He then left Palestine and travelled to Syria, Persia and later came to India, where he stayed in Kashmir to preach the gospel to the lost tribes of Israel. According to the founder of the movement, Ghulam Ahmad, Jesus died in Kashmir at the age of 120.

This is indeed a deviation from orthodox Islamic belief that Jesus was taken up to heaven by divine intervention at the cross, without having suffered crucifixion at all. This theory initially suggested that Jesus revived after being taken down from the cross and spent some time in an Essene community. It was first mooted, it appears, by K.F. Bahrdt towards the end of 18th century and taken up by K.H.Venturini early in the 19th century. Its best-known expression is in "The Brook Kerith" by George Moore in 1916, but it is avowedly a work of fiction, and fiction is the realm to which all such ideas belong.

The "Swoon" theory was refuted by David, Fredrick Strauss in his book "Life of Jesus" (1835, reprinted 1973), but Strauss himself was an unbeliever, and his own account of the matter is equally wrong.

The Ahmadiyya idea of Jesus' travel to Kashmir comes from a Russian, Nicholas Notovich, who in 1894 published a book 'Vie inconnue de Jesus-Christ'. Later that

year the book was translated into English under the title 'The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ'. Notovitch claimed that during his tour of Ladakh in India in 1887, he had found an ancient manuscript in a Buddhist temple in Leh, which stated that Jesus had travelled to India in his youth. Though his claim was proved to be an outright lie, it influenced the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement and led him to write his book, *Masih Hindustan Main, Jesus in India*.

Biblical perspective

The plain teaching of the Bible is that Jesus came to give up his life and that he died on the cross. Yet to prove his survival on the cross, Muslim friends interpret some passages of the Bible in their own way. There are Muslims who do not believe that Jesus was ever crucified, but in their criticism they follow the Ahmadiyya position: "He was crucified but did not die." When reminded that this is not the orthodox belief, they try to get around this difficulty by suggesting that to crucify means to kill on a cross. If a man is put on the cross but does not die on it, he cannot be said to have been crucified. For both the Ahmadiyya sect and orthodox Muslims, the death of Jesus on the cross is a defeat. However the Bible interpreted the death of Jesus, together with his subsequent resurrection, as a victory (2 Timothy 1:10).

The Sign of Jonah

Most Muslims quote very often the following argument and objection based

on Bible verses. Let us examine and respond.

Jesus said: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). In interpreting this text, Ahmadiyya friends claim that Jonah "entered the belly of the whale alive, and remained therein alive and came out thereof alive. Thus, Jesus prophesied that he would enter the heart of the earth alive, would remain there alive and would come out thereof alive." (Zafrullah, Deliverance from the Cross, p.25). The same argument is brought up by those Muslims who do not believe in the swoon theory at all and yet to discredit the plan of salvation they go to this extent. The best example is of two books written by a Muslim protagonist, Ahmad Deedat: "Crucifixion or Crucifiction?" and "What was the sign of Jonah?"

In their argument they pick out one aspect of the story of Jonah, that as he was alive in the stomach of the fish, so Jesus would be. However, we cannot ignore several other statements made by Jesus. We must come to the conclusion that the similarity Jesus pointed out was that, as Jonah was swallowed by the fish, he would be swallowed by the tomb. The comparison is not between being alive or dead.

On another occasion Jesus said: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). We can see that Jesus is drawing an analogy. We have a pattern: "As Jonah was ... so shall the

Son of Man be" and "As the serpent was... so must the Son of Man be." By this comparison we can see that when Jesus gave Jonah's example he meant he would be swallowed by the earth. When he gave the example of Moses lifting up a brass serpent on a pole, Jesus referred to his crucifixion.

If the main point of the first comparison was the state of Jonah being alive, then in this case the comparison will be with the brass serpent, a lifeless object. If one were to follow the Ahmadiyya method of argument, then one would be forced to conclude that Jesus was dead, even before he was crucified.

Although Jesus did not explicitly predict on this occasion that he would be put to death, he did so on many other occasions. For example, in Matthew 17:22-23, Jesus said to his disciples: "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day" (cf. Matthew 16:21 and Mark 10:33-34).

The Jews remembered such predictions about his death and resurrection and therefore, on the day after his death, they went to Pilate and said: "Sir, we remember that, while he was still alive, that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead" (Matthew 27:62-64).

It is obvious that the Jews did not doubt that Jesus had died. There was no reason for them to believe that he had

escaped death. Their words "while he was still alive" could only mean that Jesus was no longer living. They wanted to seal his tomb, not because Jesus might recover from his wounds, but because they feared that his disciples might steal his body and spread the rumour that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Not only before, but also after his resurrection, Jesus reminded his disciples: "This is what I told you while I was still with you; everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the

Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. ... This is what is written: 'The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,' and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:44-47).

In conclusion, there is a wealth of evidence in the Gospels to support the argument that Jesus knew that he was going to die on the cross. To argue and draw some other conclusion from his words therefore is a serious misrepresentation of the Scriptures.



PO Box 112, OLDHAM
OL1 3FQ, UK
UK Reg. Charity No. 1082032