

# Easter Story found in the Quran?

*'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, Yunus, verse 94)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In much of today's decadent Western world Easter is mainly associated with a few more days off and tasty chocolate eggs. However, for practising Christians it marks the biggest, most breath-taking celebration of the year! The festival of Easter reminds them that Jesus died on a cross to pay the punishment for the sins of the world and of his subsequent resurrection. The purpose of this article is to examine what the Quran has to say on the profound truth that has changed the lives of countless millions of people.

## 2. QURAN ON JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION

In Surah 19, Maryam, verse 33, Jesus is described as saying shortly after birth:

*'So Peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)'*

Identical words are used a few verses earlier to describe the life of the prophet Yahya who died a violent death through beheading.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Surah 4, Al Nisa', verse 159, also mentions the death of Jesus. However, interpreters are not agreed as to the exact meaning. There are a number of other verses in the Quran that confirm the death of Jesus:

Behold! Allah said: 'O Jesus! I will take thee (Arabic: 'mutawaffika') and raise thee to Myself...' (Surah 3, Ali 'Imran, 55, also Surah 5, Al Ma'idah, verse 117)

The translation of 'mutawaffika' in this verse is disputed among Muslim scholars. The word and its derivation are found over 25 times in the Quran.<sup>2</sup> In all but two places they imply death, or are associated with it. In the two exceptions<sup>3</sup> the context reveals that 'mutawaffika' figuratively means slumber. This is not the case in the two verses that speak about the death of Jesus!<sup>4</sup>

If Jesus did not die on the cross, Surah 19, Maryam, verse 31 would not make sense. There Jesus is reported to have said,

*'...and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity so long as I live:'*

According to the traditional Muslim view, Jesus was taken up to heaven alive. But nobody can seriously believe that he still gives alms up to this day!

The following Hadith about the day of judgement, collected by Al-Bukhari is further proof that Jesus died:

On the authority of Ibn Abbas: The Prophet of Allah said, '... I will then say what the Pious Slave Jesus, the son of Mary said: 'And I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst

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<sup>1</sup> Surah 19, Maryam, verse 15

<sup>2</sup> Surahs: 2:234,240; 3:55,193; 4:15,97, 5:117; 6:61; 8:50; 10:46,104; 12:101; 13:40; 16:28,32,70; 22:5; 32:11; 40:67,77; 47:27.

<sup>3</sup> Surahs 6:60; 39:42

<sup>4</sup> Surahs 3:55; 5:117)

them; when You did take me up, ('tawaffaytani') You were the Watcher over them, and You are a Witness to all things . . . '5)

Since Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) referred to himself with the same phrase ('tawaffaytani') Jesus is said to have used in Surah 5, Al Ma'idah, verse 117 it becomes clear that the prophet of Islam, who died, confirms that Jesus also died!

A further confirmation is found in Surahs 10, Yunus, verse 46, 13, Al Ra'd, verse 40, and 40, Ghafir, verse 77 where basically the same term that is used for Jesus' last moments, 'natawaffayannaka' meaning, 'we indeed cause you to die' is applied to Muhammad (p.b.u.h.)

From our study so far, we can say with certainty that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a fact, even in the Quran. Now we need to ask another important question:

### 3. WHEN DID JESUS DIE ACCORDING TO QURAN?

Islamic scholars are in disagreement about this question. The Quran which professes to be, ". . . a clear guidance that contains no doubts . . ."6

is apparently silent regarding this question which, according to the Torah and the Injeel is of the utmost importance for mankind!7 The way to a fulfilled life here and now, to absolute assurance of forgiveness and of paradise, totally depends on when and why Jesus died.

This is the greatest dividing issue between the two most numerous religions, Christianity (2.6 billion) and Islam (2.2 billion). Therefore, it is unthinkable that it would not be clearly addressed by God in his revelation, preserved in his Scriptures, as he has done so in the previous books.

Unfortunately, Muslims are left only with the Hadith in trying to answer these two crucial questions. Sunni and Shia Islam believe in different hadiths. They have been compiled between about 100 to 240 years after the death of Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). Therefore, Muslim scholars, like Dr Yassir Khadi, and all other Academics consider them unreliable.8

In the light of these facts, it is understandable if the attentive reader tries to get an answer to the questions, 'When and why did Jesus die' only from what is commonly known as the holy Books themselves. There is only one reference in the Quran that appears to say when Jesus did not die.

*That they said (in boast) 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah' - But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for a surety they killed him not- Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise- And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Judgement he will be a witness against them.'*

(Surah 4, Al Nisa, 157-159)

This passage is unclear, like all the others concerning the end of Jesus' life on earth in the Quran. It is not surprising therefore, to find a number of interpretations concerning it. However, to say that the crucified one 'was somehow or other taken for Christ'9 would turn

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<sup>5</sup> <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3447>

<sup>6</sup> Surah 2, Al Baqarah, verse 2; Surah 5, Al Ma'idah, verse 16

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 53; Matthew 26:26-28; John 3:16

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8HCi284FhA> For more details on other collections see:

<https://www.pfandercenter.org/blog/articles/ybnyykuhzi85q7vdw0r3aiosf42onj>

<sup>9</sup> 'The Meaning of the Quran' by Maududi, Islamic Publications, Pakistan, 1992, commentary on Surah 4, Al Nisa', verse 157

the Holy and Righteous God into the greatest deceiver of all! From a Christian point of view, it is totally unacceptable to think that He would be responsible for misleading 2.3 billion people who call themselves Christians today! Some Muslims will say, ‘Allah can do whatever He wants. If it pleases Him, to mislead all the Christians, He has the right to do so!’ However, they are not willing to use the argument of God’s sovereignty, when they study the Christian concept of the Trinitarian God who sent Jesus to die on the cross for sinners.

Muslims like Ahmad Deedat<sup>10</sup> and the Ahmadiyyas give new meanings to a number of verses from the Biblical account on the death and the resurrection. According to them Jesus was crucified but he did not die on the cross, he only swooned. By coming up with these unsubstantiated theories they actually contradict Surah 4, Al Nisa’, verse 157 which is traditionally interpreted to mean that he was not crucified:

*...But they killed him not, nor crucified him...*

To justify their position, they say that the words in the Quran ‘...nor crucified him...’ mean that Jesus did not die as a result of the crucifixion.<sup>11</sup> They think that to be crucified means to be killed and since Jesus only swooned, he was not crucified in the sense that he did not die from it.

However, primary sources need to be consulted to determine the meaning of such phrases. When proper academic research methods are followed, it becomes clear that verses from the Injeel, like the one in Acts 2,23 prove them wrong. There we read that the words ‘to crucify’ (=to nail on a cross) do not necessarily mean ‘to kill.’ If it was not so why would Peter, a follower of Jesus, have been inspired by God to say:

*‘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.’*

If the words “nailing him to the cross” would be equal to “death” there would be no need for one or the other!<sup>12</sup> In retrospect it is truly amazing how people like Ahmad Deedat who even contradict their own Quran are still tolerated by the Muslims community in general to represent their religion in debates and in literature.

How then should we interpret Surah 4, Al Nisa’, verses 157-159 in the light of what has been said so far? In Muhammad’s (p.b.u.h.) time Muslims were commanded to seek advice in a particular question from those who possess the previous Scriptures, the Jews and the Christians.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is surely right to do it in this case as well.

The Jews were boasting THEY had crucified and killed Jesus because they were convinced, he was a false prophet. Against their arrogance verse 157 says, ‘THEY slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them.’ The Biblical accounts tell us that Jesus was not killed by the Jews in the last instance, but because God brought about his deliberate and well-thought-out plan. Again, in Acts 2:23 we read:

*‘This man (Jesus) was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked man, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.’*

It only appeared to the Jews that they successfully killed Jesus whereas in reality God, in his sovereignty, even used those wicked people in order to bring about his purposes. The emphasis is not that the Jews killed Jesus but that God allowed them to do so! Verse 157 seems to speak out against this wrong, boastful emphasis only, not against the fact that Jesus was killed.

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<sup>10</sup> See, ‘Crucifixion or Crucifixion?’, H.M Bageel: ‘Christian Muslim Dialogue’

<sup>11</sup> See the Ahmadiyya version of the Quran with footnotes, Volume 2, page 583.

<sup>12</sup> See also Acts 5:30

<sup>13</sup> Surah 16, Al Nahl, verse 43; Surah 21, Al Anbiya, 7

Verse 158 speaks about the ascension of Jesus, when he was taken up to be with God which is well documented in the Injeel<sup>14</sup> and undisputed by both Muslims and Christians. However, Muslims who believe that Jesus was just a messenger, will have to answer the following question: ‘Mere men may only be able to go to Paradise. Since it is created Allah will not be there because he is completely separate from his creation according to Islam. Does not the fact that ‘Allah raised Jesus up unto himself’ proof that Jesus was more than just another prophet?’

Verse 159 seems to say that none of the Jews will believe in Jesus before they die and on the day of resurrection it will be too late for them to change their minds. The Torah, Zabur, and the Injeel agree unanimously that Jesus died for our sins on a cross nearly 2000 years ago and that he was raised up to life again!<sup>15</sup> That Jesus was doing good and died are historical facts, also recorded outside the Bible and held by the consensus of all scholars. They too confirm that the grave was empty.<sup>16</sup>

## 4. WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE AND RISE AGAIN?

Why does God not simply forgive man when he committed sin? This is probably the most important question of all. If we can understand why Jesus had to die, it will be easier for us to believe that He did so.

The Old Testament, known as the Torah by Muslims, tells the wonderful story of how God created Adam and Eve and later the Israelites to be his people. We learn how he loved them like a father loves his children. Time and time again, however, we read with great sadness how his chosen ones break his commandments, how they become guilty of lawlessness. Even more disturbing is the fact that their rebellion is only a fruit of a conscious rejection of the Almighty God. His own people spit in his face and bring shame upon him before the very nations they were supposed to be witnessing of his honour and glory. To make matters even worse, they were not ashamed of themselves:

*‘Therefore, the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains have fallen. Yet you have the brazen look of a prostitute; you refuse to blush with shame. Have you not just called to me (God): ‘My Father, my friend from my youth, will you always be angry? Will your wrath continue for ever?’ This is how you talk, but you do all the evil you can.’*  
(Jeremiah 3:3-5)

The people of old did as they pleased because they had lost a sense of shame. While their mechanical, outward ritual acts may still have been in place they were not concerned about God’s honour at all. Repentance, the turning round from one’s evil ways, was later expressed in terms of recognition of shame and disgrace. (Jer. 31:19) Likewise, our disloyalty to God, our resistance against his work among us is known and is exceedingly shameful. We too deserve to be punished ever so severely. Since God is pure, completely removed from all evil, man’s sin has cut off, effectively killed, the relationship between the two. The warning given to Adam and Eve became a frightening reality:

*And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’*

(Gen 2:16-17)

*‘For the wages of sin is death, . . . ’ (Romans 6:23)*

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 24:50-51, John 6:62, Acts 1:9-11, 1 Timothy 3:16

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, Matthew 26:26-28; 27:50

<sup>16</sup> <https://christianityexplained.net/to/all/resurrection-reason/>

Only through death God's honour will be restored. Consequently, God introduced an elaborate sacrificial system to the Israelites through Moses. Shame could be removed by getting forgiveness for sins, but only if an animal would die in their place.

*'...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.'*  
(Hebrews 9:22)

This all-important truth is also reflected in 'Qisas' the Islamic law of retaliation.<sup>17</sup> It consists in doing to the person who has committed a crime the very same thing they have done. The life of someone who is wilfully killed demands the murderer's life in retaliation. However, the next of kin can accept a financial compensation instead. According to Surah 5, Al Maida, verse 45, retaliation for inflicted wounds is also necessary. A nose for a nose and so on. If a member of the body which is to be cut off in revenge is defective, a compensation will be accepted.

From God's perfect perspective animal and all other sacrifices are defective. They cannot take away sins but were only serving as a cover and a shadow of Jesus, the Messiah, the perfect sacrifice to come.<sup>18</sup> He, being without sin, by taking our shame upon himself through his death on the cross, restored the honour of God in a most profound and just way.

God revealed Himself in Jesus and died on the cross for our sins. In Jesus God met the requirements of His justice and of His love! His justice demands punishment of sinners. His love demands forgiveness. On the cross Jesus met both requirements on our behalf. In Deuteronomy 21:23 anyone who hangs on a tree is described as being sinful and under God's curse. Galatians 3:13 explains that Jesus, himself without sin, became a curse for us because he took our sin on himself. After paying the penalty for sin through His death, Jesus rose again.

The reason why Jesus the perfect sacrifice was raised to live again on the third day is found in the word 'perfect.' Animal sacrifices were imperfect. They just pointed to the perfect one. That is why they had to be offered again and again. That is also the reason why they were not raised to life again. However, Christ being the perfect, sinless sacrifice only had to die once. Since he paid the punishment for sin, namely death by his own death, the latter no longer became a reality! That is precisely why God raised Jesus to live again.

Jesus defeats the death that came as a result of sin! As the first fruit he has been raised to life. Therefore, those who believe in his perfect sacrifice will most certainly follow his example once they die physically.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Throughout this study it has become clear that the Quran agrees for certain with the Bible and with secular history that Jesus dies at some stage and is definitely alive today! Furthermore, we found possible evidence in the Quran that Jesus indeed died on the cross and rose again which confirms the clear accounts of the Bible (Torah, Zabur, Injeel) and of secular history. We therefore have four reliable witnesses in favour of the Easter story and one that is at least partially certain (Quran). It is now left to the reader to come to a decision regarding this crucial matter. Please pray for God's guidance as to who Jesus really is!

If you wish to discuss this most important matter please contact:

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<sup>17</sup> Surah 2, Al Baqarah, verses 178-179

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 10:1-18