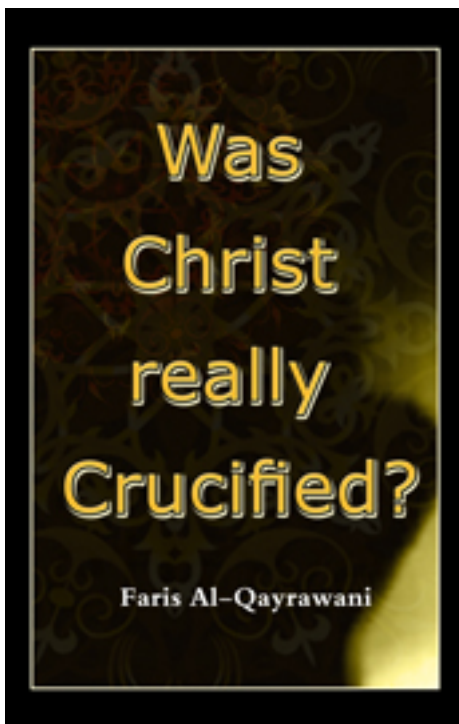


# Was Christ Really Crucified?

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## 1. Introduction

It is not the purpose of this study to kindle any flame of rancour or anger between Christians and Muslims in a world already polluted with fury, hatred, segregation, prejudice, racial conflict, violence and fanaticism. Our main intention is to examine a complicated issue: the crucifixion of Christ. We believe that this event is the central issue of dispute between the two faiths. In the light of the historical, religious and other logical data available to us, we will endeavour to focus objectively on the Biblical record to expose the divine truth as revealed to us in the Gospels. We would also like to help remove the cloud of doubt and rejection that has shrouded the minds of our friends, the Muslims. We will appeal primarily to reason, but we hope also to provide an effective tool that will nurture and deepen the faith and hope of Christian believers.

No doubt, the cross is the core of the Christian faith. The Bible clearly indicates that the eternal destiny of man depends totally on the atoning death of Christ on the cross.

This is what Christianity teaches.

This is what Christians believe.

Islam rejects the whole concept of the cross. Muslims allege that it is against reason to claim that God, the Omnipotent, would not forgive man's sins without the cross. To say so is to limit God's power. When repentance, they say, is combined with God's mercy and forgiveness, it becomes sufficient to award the penitent all the pleasures of the paradise promised in the Quran.

The contrast between the two perspectives is similar to the contrast between East and West. A Christian who believes in Christ as the Son of God, and in His atoning death, finds the sure guarantee of eternal life in the cross. God has embodied His love, grace, mercy and justice on the cross. The source of this certainty is Christ's promises. Jesus said, "Whosoever believeth in me...has everlasting life." (John 3:16, NKJ) A Christian can rest well-assured that he has indeed been granted eternal life on the basis of Jesus' promises. Such phrases as "if God wills" or "that depends on God's mercy" cannot be part of that assurance. These phrases fail to provide any sense of security in the life of any believer, because he would lack the certainty he needs for a fruitful, solid faith. This does not mean that a person can indulge in sin believing that the death of Christ has secured for him the pardon of his transgressions in advance. Anyone who seeks everlasting life has to live a

Christ-like life to meet the moral demands of the Christian faith. A person whose life does not attest to the new creation in him may still be under the condemnation of God's wrath.

Salvation in Islam is based on a continuous effort to obtain God's favour, which would be bestowed in the form of blessings, joys, and the pleasures of paradise, if He wills. This requires constant exertion in the hope of pleasing God. A Muslim can never be sure that he really has pleased God and secured His approval.

Good deeds in Islam are an exigency for obtaining God's reward, while good works in Christianity are the fruit of love and faith. To Christians, good works are not a means of earning some present or future reward. Everlasting life has already been guaranteed by the merit of the redemptive act of Christ on the cross. It embraces **whoever believes in Him as Lord, Redeemer and Saviour**. This is an inescapable condition. When this condition of faith is met, Christian life bears fruit -- that is, good works -- naturally. There is no need to strive to be good because you are already a new creature, a new person. But there is a great need to grow in faith and to broaden your Christian spiritual influence as a good witness to Christ.

A rose fills the air with its scent naturally. It does not strive to do so. It is its nature to produce sweet aroma; but the entire bush has to grow in order to continue to yield more beautiful roses. Likewise it is the Christian nature to bear good fruit as the natural expression of the new life of the true Christian, and not to obtain some reward or to secure everlasting life (which

already has been secured through the blood of Jesus Christ).

In this study we will employ all the available historical documents and recognised references to establish the reality of the crucifixion as an historical event that took place almost 2,000 years ago, and the fact that the crucified one was none other than Jesus Christ Himself. We believe that all other claims are invalid and contradict the historical evidence.

It is our fervent desire that our Muslim friends would read this book with an open mind, heart and spirit, since the motive behind the writing is to make known the truth of the cross as an historical and spiritual event. We do not ask them to agree with us, but rather, we hope to stimulate in them the interest to investigate the veracity or fallacy of Christian belief. Had the founder of Islam been resigned to accept the religion of his ancestors without questioning its authenticity he would have been content to worship the idols of Mecca instead of the god of the Quran. Therefore, we invite our Muslim friends to scrutinise this brief study thoroughly before they resolve to deny or to accept the authenticity of the cross.

## 2. Chapter One

### Reasons for the Crucifixion

The redemptive act of Jesus Christ on the cross for the salvation of the human race is an essential tenet of the Christian faith. It was neither planned nor implemented by people, but has been carried out by God Himself. Therefore man cannot claim any credit for it.

Since the inception of Islam in the seventh century A.D., the death of Christ on the

cross and His resurrection have been disputed issues between Muslims and Christians. Muslims deny that Jesus was crucified, or even that He died a natural death (although some of their scholars are inclined to say that Jesus suffered a natural death and then God raised Him up to heaven). On the other hand, Christians maintain that Jesus was crucified for the salvation of mankind. Both sides quote their own holy scripture to prove their point of view, implying their disbelief of the other's scripture.

Muslim denial of the crucifixion of Christ aims at negating the whole concept of atonement, or even the need for a saviour. To them salvation could be achieved without shedding blood, that is, without the atoning act that took its final and eternal form on the cross in the person of Christ. In one reference to the crucifixion, the Bible says:

...without shedding of blood there is no remission. (Hebrews 9:22, NKJ)

This is the very thing all Muslims strongly denounce. Muslims believe that both repentance and good deeds are sufficient to save people from their iniquities because forgiveness always depends on God's mercy and his will.

[1](#) Muslims also do not believe that there is a need for an intercessor between man and God. They claim that man is born innocent. He deviates from the straight path, not because of his inherited fallen nature, but because of his weakness and deficiency. I would like to point out a brief study of *The Fallen Nature of Man in Islam and Christianity*

[2](#), in which the author convincingly refutes these claims, citing both Islamic and Christian sources.

The reasons Christians firmly believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross and was resurrected on the third day are presented briefly within the context of this study.

## 2.1. Logical Reasons for the Crucifixion

In their absolute denial of the death of Christ, Muslims rely on one verse in the Quran, Sura al-Nisa 4:156--157:

"...and for their saying (in boast), 'We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God' -- yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty -- no indeed; God raised him up to Him; God is All-mighty, All-wise."

On the basis of this solitary verse which denies the death of Christ (though this verse is subject to various contradictory interpretations), Muslims assert that the crucifixion of Jesus did not take place and that the story of Christ's death and resurrection is the innovation of the early Christians. Such a charge prompts us to call attention to the following:

### 2.1.1. Judge for Yourself

First, assume that you are a judge and a case similar to the case of Christ's crucifixion is presented to you. How would you react to such a case when it is corroborated by various authentic historical documents and actual texts of the trial? What would you say if these documents included dialogue that took place between Christ and Pilate, the

Roman governor; details of the debate between Jesus and the Jewish leaders in the Sanhedrin; the testimonies of the eye witnesses; the list of names of those who were present during the trial; and an account of the events that occurred before, during and after the crucifixion? How would you respond to someone who comes along after six centuries and by one uncorroborated statement claims that the death of Jesus has never happened and all that is recorded in the Gospel accounts about this story is the product of the imaginations of the early church fathers? Would you as a just judge accept his testimony against all the other proven facts? Some may claim that the above verse was revealed to Muhammad by God and that God does not lie. If this is so, then it is the claimant's duty to prove conclusively that it is inspired by God.

We are here confronted by two facts. First, we have two books, the Quran and the Bible, and each one of them is regarded by its followers as a revelation from God. Apparently this cannot be true because they contradict each other in some of their most basic doctrines. This being the case, one of them must have come from a source other than God. It is of no avail to charge that the People of the Book, as Islam calls the Jews and the Christians, have perverted the Bible because all objective studies -- not studies based on speculation or imagination -- have proven the authenticity of the Bible as we currently have it.

The second fact is that historical documents corroborate the Gospel text, while no historical evidence is available to attest to the veracity of the Quranic text concerning the crucifixion of Jesus. When history confirms the Biblical text but not the Quranic text, then the advantage is

with the Bible and not with the Quran.

In addition, Christians believe that their Book is inspired by God. Thus, every text is divinely revealed. When the text is supported by dozens of prophecies which have been fulfilled literally in the person of Christ, and Christ Himself quoted them and applied them to his person, then the Christian claim has the greater weight. It becomes incumbent on the Muslim to refute and disprove the authenticity of these historical, archaeological and Biblical facts. To do so he has to present stronger and more conclusive proof to outweigh the Christian evidence.

### **2.1.2. Die for a Lie?**

Second, if the death of Christ was just an ancient myth, would all Jesus' disciples, with the exception of John, have sacrificed their lives for it? The Quran itself testifies to the faithfulness, goodness and devoutness of the disciples, and calls them examples to be followed. Such people would not fabricate a tale about their Master. A man may sacrifice his life for a noble end or for a cause in which he believes, but no one would offer his life knowingly for a lie or a myth. It is especially difficult to believe that God-fearing men like the disciples would die to promote a lie.

### **2.1.3. Eye-witnesses**

Third, from Christ's resurrection and up to the last moment of their lives, the disciples continued to preach the Gospel of salvation. Most often, their preaching during the first period of their ministry was among the Jewish circles who witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus and knew the story of his resurrection. Despite

that, not a single Jew or any of their religious leaders who conspired against Christ accused them of lying. Ten days after the Ascension of Christ the apostle Peter confronted a large crowd of Jews in Jerusalem and told them bluntly:

Him, being delivered by the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death; (Acts 2:23, NKJ)

On a similar occasion Peter declared to the Jews:

But you denied the Holy One and the Just...killed the Prince of Life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. (Acts 3:14--15, NKJ)

The New Testament is crowded with similar testimonies that bear witness to the death of Christ and His crucifixion at the hand of the Jews contemporary with the disciples. Had these charges been invalid, the Jews would have denied them and the disciples would not have sacrificed their lives for a lie or a myth.

[3](#)

#### 2.1.4. Logical Evidence

Fourth, there is also a quantity of other logical evidence that is difficult to ignore. One of the most compelling historical accounts is the human drama whose stages were the courts of the Sanhedrin, the praetorium of Pilate and the palace of Herod along with the horrifying hill that is known in history as Golgotha. In his book *Who Moved The Stone?* the British author **Frank Morrison**

[4](#) examined the story of the crucifixion of Christ and his resurrection with the critical mind of a skilled, experienced lawyer who was determined to refute the Christian

allegations. The outcome of his intensive study was unexpected and took Morrison by surprise. Instead of writing a refutation against the myth of the cross as he intended to do, he produced a document that slapped the face of the sceptic.

The documents available to us indicate that Jesus' trial lasted all night and part of the next day. It was not a secret trial, but a trial attended by the general public, the Jewish leaders and the members of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish authority in Jesus' time. This fact creates an unresolved dilemma for the Muslims who allege that the crucified one was not really Jesus but another person, perhaps Judas Iscariot. This claim is erroneous, and lacks historical proof. It does not fit into the nature of the events. Could not the crucified substitute complain loudly and vigorously during his public trial that he was not Jesus? Actually the response of the defendant when He declared that He was the Son of God was sufficient to sentence Him to death. Is it reasonable that a substitute who was mistakenly arrested would ascribe to himself so grave a claim under such circumstances? All the historical documents at our disposal do not record any remonstrance, or semi-remonstrance expressed by the *Shabih* (the one who allegedly resembled Christ). I do not believe that Judas Iscariot --- if he was the crucified one as Muslims claim --- would not have seized such a golden opportunity to save himself from an atrocious death.

On the other hand, the Gospel records for us a sublime attitude that could not emanate from any person other than Christ. In His last hours while He was still nailed to the cross He forgave His killers and enemies with a heart full of love. This

act cannot originate from the heart of a person like Judas Iscariot who betrayed his Lord and delivered Him to His enemies.

Furthermore, we should not ignore the role of Mary, Jesus' mother, and the rest of the women who accompanied her to the cross along with the beloved disciple, John. They were eye-witnesses to the crucifixion. Those devout, faithful followers of Christ attest to His actual death and crucifixion. Even more, John tells us that Jesus Christ, in spite of His excruciating pain, turned His face towards His mother and told her, "Woman, behold your son." Then He turned His face to His faithful disciple and said, "Behold, your mother!" (John 19:25--27, NKJ). Was not Mary able to distinguish between her son's voice and the voice of an impostor, the *Shabih*?

There is also another important issue that Muslim commentators failed to resolve: the case of Jesus' body. Muslims claim that the *Shabih* resembled Jesus in his face only. His body was not subject to any change. They said, "The face is the face of Jesus, but the body is not His [body]." [5](#) They made this statement in the context of their interpretation of Sura al-Nisa 4:157:

Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise;

If this statement is true, how then did Mary fail to recognise the difference between the body of her son and the body of the *Shabih*?

Moreover we have other tangible evidence that is hard for any objective researcher to overlook. In the context of the crucifixion

story it is stated that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin and a secret believer in Jesus, were able to obtain official permission from the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, to lay Jesus in a tomb that Joseph had prepared for himself. If the crucified one was the *Shabih* and not Jesus, how did these two men fail to distinguish between Jesus' body and the body of an impostor? Did Judas have, for instance, the same height, weight and skin colour of Jesus? Did he have the same hair and other visible characteristics of his holy Master? Actually Joseph's act was a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah about Jesus: "His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet he was with a rich man in his death" (Isaiah 53:9).

#### 2.1.4.1. Six Ambiguities

In his commentary on Sura Al Imran 3:55 al-Fakhr al-Razi summarises in six points the problems that resulted from the theory of the *Shabih*. These six points are of great importance since they are based on sound logic, insight and accurate observations. When he tried to refute them he presented some unconvincing answers that created additional problems for the readers.

In order to realise the significance of these problems, it is appropriate to quote them literally. That would help us to comprehend the complexities of the theory of the *Shabih*. It seems, however, that al-Razi was, indeed, convinced of their validity:

#### [6](#)

- **The First Ambiguity:** If we allow the likeness of one person to be cast on another that would entail sophistry. For if I see my son (the first time), then I



see him again, it becomes possible that the one I see for the second time is not my son but just an impersonation. That will eliminate the trust in the perceptible concrete things. Likewise, the Companions of Muhammad who saw him instructing and prohibiting them could not have been certain that he was the same Muhammad, because of the possibility that his likeness may have been cast on somebody else. This will entail the collapse of the laws. The pivotal theme in the chain of the oral narration is that the first narrator has related what is perceptible. If making an error in perceptible visual things is possible, then making an error in relating orally an incident is more probable. In summary, opening such a door is the beginning of sophistry and its end is the nullification of prophecies entirely.

- **The Second Ambiguity:** God, the Most High, ordered Gabriel, peace be upon him, to accompany (Jesus) most of the time. This is what the expositors indicated as they interpreted his saying: "As I upheld thee with the holy spirit." (Sura al-Maida 5:110) Also, the edge of one of Gabriel's wings was sufficient for taking care of mankind. How then was that not good enough to protect (Jesus) from the Jews? Furthermore, since (Jesus), peace be upon him, was capable of raising the dead, and of healing the blind and the leper, how did he fail to inflict those Jews who intended to hurt him, with death, or afflicting them with ailments, chronic illnesses, and paralysis, to render them incapable of confronting him?
- **The Third Ambiguity:** God, the Most

High, could have saved (Jesus) from his enemies by lifting him up to heaven. What then is the use of casting his likeness on somebody else? Would not this cause an unfortunate person to suffer death for no reason?

- **The Fourth Ambiguity:** If he cast his likeness on another person and then was lifted up to heaven, people would think that the *Shabih* is Jesus when in fact he was not. That would make them a subject of deception and obscurity. This is incompatible with God's wisdom.
- **The Fifth Ambiguity:** Multitudes of Christians in both Eastern and Western hemispheres, despite their extreme love to Christ, peace be upon him, and their excess exaltation of him, reported that they saw him slain and crucified. If we deny this, that would be a discrediting of what was verified by oral transmission. The discrediting of the oral transmission demands the discrediting of the prophethood of both Muhammad and Jesus and even the (denial) of their historicity and the historicity of the rest of the prophets. This is futile.
- **The Sixth Ambiguity:** By virtue of the oral transmission, (we are told) that the crucified one survived a long time. If he were not Jesus but another person, he would have become frightened and said: "I am not Jesus. I am another person." He would have made every effort to announce this fact. Had he mentioned that, it would have become well known among the people. Since none of this happened, we knew that the matter is not as you claimed.

#### 2.1.4.2. Al-Razi's Responses



After al-Razi stated the above ambiguities, he attempted to respond to them. However, his refutations proved to be brief and illogical. In order to maintain the same level of objectivity, an attempt will be made to quote these responses literally. This will help the reader to examine them and to form his own opinion. Al-Razi said:

- **The First Response:** Anyone who believes in the only Omnipotent admits that God is able to create, for instance, another person in the image of Zayd. Such similarity does not necessitate the above uncertainty. This is the answer to what you mentioned.
- **The Second Response:** If Gabriel, peace be upon him, defended (Jesus Christ) or if God enabled Jesus, peace be upon him, to repel his enemies, his miracle would have been achieved by force of constraint (*had al-ilja*). This is not admissible.
- **The Third Response:** If God had lifted Jesus up and did not cast his likeness on another, that miracle would have been achieved by force of constraint (*had al-ilja*).
- **The Fourth Response:** Jesus' disciples were present, and they were aware of the circumstances which surrounded the event. Thus, they would remove that ambiguity.
- **The Fifth Response:** Those who were present at that time were few. It is possible for the few to be deluded. After all, when oral transmission is handed down to the few it would become useless for knowledge.
- **The Sixth Response:** One probability is that the one who bore the likeness of Jesus, peace be upon him, was a Muslim (that is, a believer in him) and

accepted to be his substitute. In this case it is possible that he would not disclose the truth of the matter. In short, the questions they mentioned are subject, from some aspects, to many probabilities. Since the irrefutable text attests to Muhammad's reliability in all that he reported, it would be impossible for these contingent questions to contradict the infallible text, and God is the possessor of guidance.

These have been the responses of the scholar sheikh, the orator of Rayy, al-Razi, to the most profound dogmatic issue disputed in the dialogue between Christianity and Islam. They are characterised by naivete and superficiality. It seems also that al-Razi realised, in advance, the unfeasibility of refuting them. Thus, his last conclusive and emphatic statement: "Since the irrefutable text attests to Muhammad's reliability in all that he reported, it would be impossible for these contingent questions to contradict the infallible text." That was his only way to evade the truth.

In this case we cannot but reflect on al-Fakhr al-Razi's responses to dispel the dark shades of doubts by which he attempted to shroud the truth.

#### 2.1.4.3. Our Response to al-Razi

- For his **first response** we agree that it is true that God is able to create as many people as he wishes to resemble each other. But in the case of Christ, there was no need to do so. Christ did not endeavour to avoid crucifixion. He came, in the first place, for the redemption of mankind. It is a task He elected to accomplish by His own will.

If Christ really tried to evade crucifixion either through cowardice or apathy He would be evading a responsibility He took on Himself to fulfil. This is not a characteristic of the Christ who is the **Word of God**. In this case there was no need at all for God to perform the miracle of the *Shabih*.

- **Second**, Christ never needed the Angel Gabriel to rescue Him from the hands of his enemies. Jesus was not defenceless. The miracles that He performed before His death were even more wonderful and far surpassed the alleged rescue operation. The facts recorded in the Gospel are examples of His unlimited power. When His enemies came to arrest Him, He threw them down to the ground by the powerful word of His mouth. He could have gone on His way safely. That was not the first time in which the Jews conspired against Him, but each time He slipped away from among them. None of them dared at that time to hurt Him. But when His appointed time came Jesus willingly delivered Himself to His foes to accomplish what He came for. Al-Razi and all those like him should have studied Christ's purpose for His incarnation. That would have helped them to perceive that forgiveness of sin through death on the cross was the main reason for Christ's incarnation and virgin birth.
- **Third**, did God really need to cast Jesus' resemblance on anybody? Some claimed that the purpose of the resemblance story was to penalise Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed his Master. But the Gospel account presents us with all the facts about the suicide of the ignominious Judas.

Besides, why should refraining from casting the likeness of Jesus on the *Shabih* be regarded as a forced constraint? Lifting Jesus up to heaven before the eyes of the Jews would dispel any doubt that surrounded the person of Jesus Christ. Both the religious and political Jewish leadership would realise then what a grave error they had perpetrated against the Word of God.

- **Fourth**, it is true that Jesus's disciples and some of His followers were present in that horrible night and witnessed what happened to their Master. Thus by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they accurately recorded the details of the crucifixion on the pages of the Gospel accounts. The Gospel's narration, corroborated by tangible references and documents, disagrees with the Quranic text, the various stories of the Islamic Tradition and the many fantasies of the Muslim expositors. The Gospel has preserved for us even the minute details of this important event.
- **Fifth**, al-Razi contradicts himself as he states in his fourth response: "Jesus' disciples were present, and they were aware of the circumstances which surrounded the event. Thus, they would remove that ambiguity." Now he claims that the disciples were few and "it is possible for the few to be deluded. After all, when oral transmission is handed down to the few it would become useless for knowledge." What a contradiction! When al-Fakhr al-Razi realised that quoting the disciples would serve his purpose he resorted to them as eye-witnesses who could dispel the

ambiguity. Then suddenly those eye-witnesses become subject to the influence of the illusion. The fact is, if we examine the chain of authorities for any sound Islamic Tradition we rarely find any tradition supported by a chain of twelve authorities at one time. Actually those who witnessed the event of the crucifixion and those to whom Christ appeared after His resurrection and gathered together to watch Him ascending to heaven were more than 500 persons. Therefore the disciples' record of the crucifixion is no doubt authentic.

- **Sixth**, according to the contrasting Islamic episodes, with one or two exceptions, the *Shabih* was never a believer in Christ. Most Muslim expositors are inclined to believe that the *Shabih* was one of Jesus' enemies. Thus it is unlikely that he would resort to silence and would not vigorously shout that he was not Christ, or "that he would not disclose the truth of the matter in that case." A person who is erroneously accused and whose life is at stake would do everything possible to save himself unless he is dying for a noble cause. Also if al-Razi utilises the truthfulness of Muhammad in all that he reported in support of the Islamic version of the crucifixion story, we also resort to the credibility of Christ and His disciples for all the information found in our infallible Gospel. Besides, one verse uttered six centuries later in the Quran cannot discredit the authentic historical documents available to us.

Muslim scholars also disagreed on the identity of the *Shabih*. Muslim narrators have related many imaginary stories to us,

and they have been quoted by many Muslims expositors without any inquiry into their validity. These are not based on any historical document, archaeological proof or authentic text. No Muslim was able to provide any concrete evidence to prove the veracity of any of these fantasies concerning the *Shabih*. In his booklet *The Cross in The Gospel and The Quran* [7](#), Iskander Jadeed was able to collect most of these stories from their original sources. They contradict each other in details such as names, the order of events and occasions. That is not surprising since they are based on sources fabricated by the narrators' imagination as they attempt to comment on an inexplicable verse or to prove a case incongruous with the Gospel's account at the expense of the truth.

The historical resources inform us that the myth of the resemblance as indicated in the Quran is not a novelty. During the first six centuries and before the inception of Islam, this false teaching was widespread among Christian heretics. **Basilides, the Gnostic**, claimed that Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross for Christ when He became weary, consented to be crucified in His stead, thus God cast on him the likeness of Christ and he was crucified.

The **Docetists** said that Jesus was not crucified at all but that it seemed or appeared so to the Jews. Actually the word "Docetic" is derived from a Greek verb that means "to seem" or "to appear". It sums up their general doctrine on the crucifixion.

Throughout the course of church history the heresy of the *Shabih* has never disappeared. From time to time it reappeared among the Christian communities in the East, preached by

scattered groups of heretics. In the year A.D. 185 a heretic sect of the descendant of the priests of Thebes who embraced Christianity claimed that "God forbids that Christ should be crucified. He was safely lifted up to heaven." Also in the year A.D. 370 a hermetic Gnostic sect that denied the crucifixion of Jesus taught that He "was not crucified but it seemed so to the spectators who crucified Him." Again, in the year A.D. 520 Severus, bishop of Syria, fled to Alexandria where he encountered a group of philosophers teaching that Jesus Christ was not crucified but that it only appeared so to the people who nailed Him on the cross. In A.D. 560 the monk Theodor denied Christ's human nature and thus denied His crucifixion. About A.D. 610 Bishop John, son of the governor of Cyprus, began to proclaim that Christ was not crucified but that it only seemed so to the spectators who crucified Him.

## 8

Among those who preached the theory of the *Shabih* is the Persian self-proclaimed prophet Mani (A.D. 276). He said that Jesus was the son of a widow, and the one who was crucified was the son of the widow of Nain whom Jesus raised from the dead. In another Manichaean tradition we read that Satan was the one who sought to crucify Jesus but he failed and was crucified in His place.

It is obvious from this brief historical summary that Islam has adopted the teachings of the *Shabih* and the denial of Jesus' crucifixion from the Christian heresies. We believe that these heresies were widespread among the Gnostic sects in the Arabian Peninsula during the era of Muhammad

9. History books and bibliographies inform

us that the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 380) commissioned Bishop Gregory of Nyssa "to visit churches in Arabia and Jerusalem where disturbances had broken out and schism threatened."

10 These sects did not construct their beliefs on historical evidence or official documents but followed their own conceptions and imaginations and focused primarily on the nature of Christ's human body.

### **2.1.5. God's Treachery**

Fifth, if we assume, for the sake of argument only, that the story of the *Shabih* is true, then we would be attributing perfidy and trickery to God. Accordingly the disciples who preached fervently about Christ's crucifixion and resurrection would have been, in fact, preaching about the death and the resurrection of the *Shabih*. That would mean that the church, which followed the footsteps of the disciples, would have also been deluded for over six centuries---until the inception of Islam. In this case, who would be blamed? Who would have been the source of this perfidy? Why would the almighty God not reveal the truth to the disciples of His prophet and messenger but instead keep them in complete darkness? Why would God allow the church to believe in such a grave lie for six centuries? Who would be responsible for the millions of souls who went astray and believed in a lie? It would seem that God was in the centre of this confusion. He would be the one who created the heresy of the crucifixion and made everyone believe that Jesus was the one who was crucified. In this case God would not be better than the gods of Greek mythology who enjoyed deceiving each other and their own worshippers as well.

But we know that we cannot attribute any of these detestable characteristics to God. He is a holy God who will never contradict His holy divine nature and act fraudulently.

### 2.1.6. The Resurrection: the Power of the Church

Lastly, the resurrection has become the focal point of the Christian faith. The resurrection was not an ordinary event that left no mark on the history of the church and its development. On the contrary, the resurrection is the secret of the constant power of the church and its growth. If the crucifixion is the essence of salvation, the resurrection is the secret of the church's triumph and victory. The crucifixion without the resurrection is insignificant; the resurrection without the crucifixion is meaningless.

But the resurrection also attests to the reality of Christ's death. After His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples and hundreds of His loyal followers assuring them that He was indeed crucified and then raised from the dead. For the last 40 days of His earthly life, He continued to explain to them the meaning of that spiritual and historical event and its impact on humanity. Maybe the most remarkable incident we can cite in this respect is the reaction of the apostle Thomas, who was famous for his realistic approach and suspicious mind. He refused to believe what other disciples told him about the appearance of Jesus. It seems that he thought that the disciples who were mourning the death of their Master had lost their minds. Therefore he challenged them saying:

...Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails,

and put my finger in the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe. (John 20:25, NKJ)

Eight days later the disciples were together again. Though the doors were shut for the fear of the Jews, Jesus appeared to them and stood in their midst. After greeting them, he said to Thomas:

Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing. (John 20:27, NKJ)

This passage reveals that the incident of Jesus' crucifixion has been subjected to a very careful scrutiny and investigation even by the most loyal friends of Christ, His disciples. It is not acceptable, therefore, to disregard the Biblical text and claim without any solid evidence that the story of the crucifixion of Christ is the invention of the early Christians. Needless to say, the historical credentials are in favour of the Gospel's account.

## 2.2. Biblical Reasons for the Crucifixion

As Christians it is incumbent on us to refer to our holy book as the main source of our belief. Both the historical and archaeological evidence strongly supports the Biblical claims. These provide us with substantial facts that we need to present to a sceptic or a Muslim who does not accept our Biblical record alone. Let us also examine some of the Biblical references pertaining to our theme.

### 2.2.1. Atonement

First, the concept of atonement has never been a Christian novelty. It has been an

essential part of religious practices even among the heathens. According to the Old Testament, these practices were primarily divinely ordained rites enacted by God after the fall of Adam and Eve. As they confessed their sins and realised that they violated God's law, God took an animal, skinned it and made garments for Adam and Eve to clothe them (Genesis 3:20). Linguistically, the word *atonement* means "to cover or to hide". Thus, according to Scripture the entire concept of atonement began with God as the result of man's failure to live up to God's standard. Evidently this ordinance persisted in religious rituals and worship. Abel and Cain both offered their sacrifices to God, but God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's because Cain's sacrifice was based not on blood but on his own deed. Likewise, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all offered animal sacrifices as God ordained. Later, during the time of Moses, these ceremonial sacrifices became a written law. Biblical scholars affirmed that those sacrifices were ritual symbols to the great and final sacrifice, that is, the crucifixion of Christ.

[11](#) Pagan nations took these liturgies from the devout men of God and offered them to their idols. They distorted their purpose, though basically they continued to be a symbol for expiation.

Atonement in Islam is founded on good deeds. Charity and good work obliterate offences. Also, the performing of the five pillars, fighting for the cause of Allah and the reciting of the Quranic chapters purchase the forgiveness of sins.

[12](#)

But there is another theme in Islam that is worth examining before we conclude this part of our study: the theme of ransom.

Maybe the most outstanding reference to this subject is found in Sura al-Saffat 37:107, in the context of the story of Abraham and his son who consented to be offered as a sacrifice:

And we ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice.

Al-Baydawi illustrates this verse by saying: "that is, by what is sacrificed instead of him, thus the act by that is fulfilled."

In his exposition of this verse, al-Razi cites a tradition: "The Suddi said: 'Abraham was called out, he looked around and all of a sudden he saw a ram intermixed with white and black, descending from the mountain. He got up from beside him (his son), took the (ram), slaughtered it and freed his son. He said: "My son, today you were given to me as a gift."...it was said that the (ram) was called momentous for its great status since God...accepted it as a ransom for Abraham's Son."

How was the son given to Abraham as a gift? That black and white ram was slain as a ransom for Abraham's son. It was the substitute. Thus he was given a new life. Also the ram was great, firstly, because God was the one who prepared it, and secondly, because it was a symbol for the greatest and the final sacrifice, that is, Christ the Redeemer of all humanity. He is the one about whom John the Baptist said: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, NKJ)

In his book *Ihya' of `ulum al-Din*, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, the greatest Islamic theologian who ever lived, states:

[13](#)

But be informed that slaughtering the sacrifice is

(a means) to draw nearer to God...by way of obedience. Therefore perform the sacrifice and hope for God to liberate from hell by each part of it, a part of you. For as thus came the promise: The bigger the sacrifice is and the more numerous its parts are, the more fully your redemption from hell is.

In this same book al-Ghazali urges Muslims to seek God's nearness by sacrificing an animal. He says:

>Seek nearness of God by sacrificing an animal. Try to sacrifice an animal which is strong and stout...the Prophet said: "Nothing is dearer to God on the Day of Sacrifice out of the actions of men than the sacrifice of an animal. It will come on the resurrection day with its hoofs and horns and its blood falls in a place near to God before it falls on the ground. So purify your soul by sacrifice." There is in Hadith (Prophet's Tradition): "There is reward for every hair of the sacrificed animal and for every drop of blood, and it will be weighed near God. So give good news. The prophet said: Sacrifice a good animal, as it will be your carrier on the Resurrection Day."

[14](#)

### 2.2.2. Prophecies

Second, the Old Testament is full of prophecies concerning Jesus' death and resurrection. It is enough to have a general look at the Book of Isaiah to realise that Old Testament prophets were aware of this great event and looked forward to it. Since we do not have sufficient room to point to the ample references predicting Christ's death, agony and resurrection, I would like to refer the reader to some helpful sources pertaining to this theme.

[15](#)

### 2.2.3. Jesus' Testimony

Third, Christ Himself talked about His

death and His resurrection. The Gospel accounts are crowded with verses where Jesus predicted His crucifixion and suffering. In this case when He talked about His death He was either a liar, insane and confused, or an honest person who declared the truth. Indeed, neither Christ's mortal enemies nor any Muslim dared or would dare to accuse Him of lying or insanity. It remains for us to say that Jesus was truthful in all that He preached and ascribed to Himself. It is futile here to claim that all the information recorded in the Gospel about Jesus' death are the invention of the disciples or the fathers of the early church. The integrity and honesty of Christ's disciples have never been questioned or doubted. John the Evangelist ascertains in his first Epistle 1:1--2, NKJ:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of Life--the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life, which was with the father and was manifested to us--

The rest of the disciples reiterated the same testimony, especially the apostle Peter. All of them are honest eye-witnesses.

[16](#) But the greatest testimony we cite in the context of this study is Christ's testimony about Himself. Jesus quoted the prophecies of the Old Testament and applied them to Himself. He also expounded them in lucid language to dispel any doubt that may cloud the minds of His audience. He was accustomed to say, "That the scripture may be fulfilled," or "As it is written," or something similar.

[17](#) As He quoted Old Testament



prophecies, He would explain to the disciples, along with the multitudes who gathered together to hear Him, how these prophecies were fulfilled in Him. For instance, in one speech to His disciples He said:

"These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things concerning me must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled..." Then He said to them, "Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day." (Luke 24: 44-46, NKJ)

The above verses include two important facts. First, the prophecies in the entire Old Testament refer to Jesus and not to any other prophet. When Jesus pointed to the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, He covered the whole Old Testament with the exception of the historical books. He documented all His claims by quoting these familiar prophecies and explained them to the astonished disciples. It is very interesting to see how Muslims selected some of these prophecies which Christ ascribed to Himself to prove to the Jews that he was the Messiah, and applied them to Muhammad. In the opinion of the author, based on the interpretations of Jesus and the disciples, the Islamic claims are invalid and deceptive.

Second, Jesus Himself made it clear to the disciples that He had to be crucified and die, and then be raised from the tomb on the third day. Jesus here attests to His crucifixion and defies any other claim that denies or rejects this historical fact. It is very hard for the sceptic to look Jesus in the eye and say to Him, "You are a liar."

## 3. CHAPTER TWO

## The Historical Documents

There are many historical documents attesting to the death of Christ. His crucifixion is mentioned in pagan, Jewish, Gnostic and Christian literature. The evidence of Christ's existence and mode of death is multiple yet consistent. We will examine the crucifixion of Jesus through the writings of various historians.

### 3.1. The Pagan Documents

The pagan documents play an eminent role in the story of the crucifixion, primarily because the authors do not belong to any Christian sect and do not take its side. The relevant passages quoted from such literature are more in contempt of Christianity rather than in praise, especially in the first era of church history.

Most pagan documents available to us are the product of the first two Christian centuries. They attest to events that took place in the life of Christ and during His time.

It is worthwhile to analyze the testimonies of these political writers and chroniclers in the light of the political and religious events of the age.

Among those outstanding authors who documented and shed light on the crucifixion of Jesus are:

**Cornelius Tacitus**(ca. A.D. 55--120), a Roman historian famous for his integrity and goodness. He outlived six emperors and was called the greatest historian of ancient Rome. His best known books are the *Annals* and the *Histories*. The *Annals* is composed of 18 books and the *Histories* of 12 books. Tacitus held the offices of Praetor in A.D. 88, Consul in 97 and

Proconsul in 122

[18](#). F.F. Bruce indicates that Tacitus might have received his information about Christ and Christians from the official records to which he had access.

[19](#) In his two major historical works, Tacitus recorded three references to Christ and Christianity. The most important one is found in his *Annals*:

Consequently to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

[20](#)

It is obvious from this historical document that Christianity derived its name from Christ, and that the procurator Pontius Pilate is the one who sentenced Jesus to death. The mischievous superstition or the evil rumour to which Tacitus alluded was doubtless the resurrection.

**Thallus**(ca. A.D. 52) was also one of the great ancient Roman chroniclers who reported the death of Christ. This author wrote a book about the history of the eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War to his own time.

[21](#) Only a few fragments of this historical work are preserved in the quotations of other authors, among them Julius Africanus. It seems that Julius was familiar with Thallus' work. In the context of his report about Christ's crucifixion and the darkness that enveloped the land when Jesus entrusted his spirit to the hands of

his Father, Julius referred to a statement made by Thallus concerning this incident. He said:

Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun---unreasonably, as it seems to me.

[22](#)

Julius rejected this explanation in A.D. 221 on the basis that a solar eclipse "could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Pascal [Easter] full moon that Jesus [was crucified]."

[23](#)

Thallus was not the only one who mentioned this darkness. Several other ancient authors also reported it. Dionysius the Areopagite said when he saw this darkness, "Either the god of nature is meditating now, or he is lamenting someone dying." In the second century, Philopone, the astrologer, pointed to it, saying, "The darkness that occurred when Jesus was crucified, nothing like it happened before...." The Muslim chronicler **al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir** referred to it in his book *al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya* [Vol. 1, p. 182].

[24](#) In his *Annals*, Ibn al-Athir recorded it on the authority of the narrators and expositors.

[25](#)

**Lucian the Greek**, a prominent Greek satirist of the second century, commented derisively on Christ and Christians. Since he followed the Epicurean philosophy, he failed to comprehend the true nature of the Christian faith. He could not understand the readiness of Christians to die for the sake of their beliefs. He regarded them as deluded people who yearned for the hereafter instead of enjoying the pleasures

of the present world. He said:

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day--the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account...and then it was impressed on them by their original law-giver that they are all brothers, from the moment they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.

[26](#)

It is evident from the above quotation that the crucifixion of Christ was not a disputable issue even among the heathens who ridiculed the Christian faith. To them it was an historical event and not a myth. They never had a trace of doubt as to who the crucified one was.

### 3.1.1. Acts of Pontius Pilate

In his **First Apology**, **Justin Martyr** (ca. A.D. 150) affirmed that Christ's crucifixion could be confirmed by Pilate's report. He also referred to Jesus' miracles and acts of healing, and added: "And that he did those things, you can learn from the Acts of Pontius Pilate."

[27](#) Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200) also pointed to the same document.

[28](#)

Another ancient author who mentioned the crucified Christ is **Suetonius**, the chief secretary of Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-138). His office allowed him to inspect the official records and to become well acquainted with the different reasons that led to the persecution of the Christian communities, specifically their faith in Christ's crucifixion, death and resurrection. [29](#) Also among the governmental officials who became interested in the status of the Christian community was **Pliny the Younger**, the governor of Bithynia in Asia

Minor. In his tenth book (A.D. 112), he referred to Christ as a deity worshipped by Christians.

[30](#) Another Epicurean philosopher, **Celsus** (ca. A.D. 140), who was a mortal foe of Christianity, attested the fact of the crucifixion in his book, *The True Discourse*, though he derided its purpose. He said, "Christ endured the anguish of the cross for the welfare of humanity."

[31](#)

**Mara Bar-Serapion**, in a letter sent to his son from prison, said:

What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king?... Nor did the wise king die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given.

[32](#)

It seems that this letter was written sometime between the late first century and the third century. Naturally the pagan Mara viewed Christ as one of the philosophers, like Socrates and Plato, as the rest of the letter revealed.

In all these writings there is no mention of the *Shabih* as the Muslims claim. The authors of these pagan documents recognised that the crucified one was indeed Jesus of Nazareth.

### 3.2. The Jewish Documents

The Jewish documents have a special significance despite their negative tone. It was very natural that the Jewish political and religious leaders would harbour a hostile attitude toward Jesus. They were the ones who compelled the Roman procurator to crucify Him. They realised that His revolutionary teachings threatened their political and religious status. Despite this, these documents are proof of the

credibility of the crucifixion record as it is reported in the Gospel. In this part of our study, we intend to examine them as historical testimonies of the authenticity of the greatest event in human history.

**Josephus**(A.D. 37--97): In his *Antiquities*, which was written about A.D. 90--95, Josephus recorded a passage pertaining to the crucifixion of Christ. This historical piece created a heated debate among the paleographers. Some believed that zealous Christians might have interpolated some phrases which could not have been said by a Jew about Christ. But in 1972 an important Arabic manuscript was discovered and later published, which scholars believed to be a very close translation of the original text.

[33](#) Josephus said:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And 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 recounted wonders.

[34](#)

Josephus' testimony preceded the testimonies of most pagan authors. Though he presented his report from a Jewish perspective, he proved to be objective and realistic in his approach. As we consider it, it becomes apparent to us that this is a reliable piece of historical evidence.

### 3.2.1. The Talmud

The Talmud is divided into two main bodies: the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara*. The

*Mishnah* is the oral traditions handed down from one Jewish generation to another until the time they were first recorded in the second century A.D. The *Gemara* is the compilation of the ancient commentaries on the Mishnah. The material in the Talmud concerning the disputed legal questions is known as the *Halakah*. The legends, anecdotes and other sayings used to illustrate the traditional laws are called the *Haggadah*.

[35](#) In Tractate Sanhedrin, it is stated:

Jesus was crucified one day before the Passover. We warned him for 40 days that he would be killed because he was a magician and planned to deceive Israel with his delusions. We asked whoever wished to defend him, to do so. When none did, he was crucified on the eve of the Passover. Does anyone dare to defend him? Was he not the stirrer of evil? It is said in the prophets, Deuteronomy: 13:8: "To a person such as this do not listen, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you conceal him, but you shall kill him."

[36](#)

Evidently the Talmud identifies the crucified person as Christ Himself. We do not find any trace of doubt about His identity in this testimony.

There is another Jewish hostile manuscript called *Toledoth Jeshu*. This manuscript does not refer to Jesus only, but it also relates to us a fictitious story about what happened to his body after His death. Its author claimed that Jesus' disciples plotted to steal Christ's body, but a certain gardener, whose name was Judas, discovered the conspiracy. He came secretly and removed the body from Joseph's tomb and relocated it in a newly-dug grave. When the disciples came to the original tomb and found it empty, they proclaimed that He had risen from the dead. Soon after, the Jewish leaders also

approached Joseph's tomb and found it empty. The gardener then took them to the newly dug grave and showed them Jesus' body.

[37](#)

Though this tradition was not compiled before the fifth century A.D., it undoubtedly echoed an earlier Jewish tradition that was widespread among the Jewish circles after the resurrection of Christ (Matthew 28:11-15). This manuscript, despite its hostility to Christianity, is strong evidence for Christ's crucifixion, death and resurrection, because it is the testimony of an avenging foe.

In his book, *Biography of Jesus the Nazarene*, Yohanan Bin Zakkai, a disciple of the famous Rabbi Hillel, wrote:

The king and the Jewish rabbis had condemned Jesus to death because he blasphemed when he claimed that he was the Son of God...and God.

Then he added:

When Christ was on his way to death the Jews shouted in front of him, 'May You destroy Your enemies, O Lord!'

[38](#)

### 3.3. The Gnostic Documents

The word "gnosis" is a Greek term for "knowledge". Gnosticism is a religious philosophical movement including under its umbrella diverse groups who may agree or disagree on any number of principles. Knowledge was the main concept on which this movement built its religious doctrine.

We have already mentioned the theory of the *Shabih* as was taught by some of the

Gnostics, the Ebionites and the Docetists. We also believe that their teachings had great impact on shaping the Islamic view of crucifixion. Yet the teaching of the likeness theory in Gnosticism stemmed from the controversy about the two natures of Christ. Gnostics believed that Jesus was God incarnate, thus He could not be subject to crucifixion because His body was a divine body unlike ours. So, they asserted that the one who was crucified could not be Christ but somebody else.

Islam does not deny the crucifixion but it denies that Christ was crucified, not on the basis of His divine nature, but because the whole concept of redemption has no place in Islamic theology. Muslims believe that man is born innocent, therefore there is no need for a saviour or a cross. According to Islam, God lifted Jesus up to heaven alive before His enemies could arrest Him; then God cast His likeness on somebody else who was crucified instead.

But not all the Gnostics believed in the theory of the *Shabih*. It seems that the early religious and literary work of the Gnostics attested to the veracity of the Gospel record. They provide us with more evidence supporting Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, especially *The Gospel of Truth* (A.D. 135-160), *The Apocryphone of John* (A.D. 120--130) and *The Gospel of Thomas* (A.D. 140--200). Though these apocryphal gospels are not inspired by God and are regarded by the church as pseudo-Christian scriptures, they all referred to Christ as the Logos and as God and Son of Man. In *The Gospel of Truth*, for instance, we read the following paragraph:

Jesus was patient in accepting suffering...since he knew that his death is life for many...he was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the



father on the cross.... He draws himself down to death through life...eternal clothes him. Having stripped himself of the perishable rags, he put on imperishability which no one can possibly take away from him.

[39](#)

We also read in *The Secret Book of James*

The Lord answered and said: "I tell you the truth: no one will be saved who does not believe in my cross, for the kingdom of God belongs to those who believe in my cross."

[40](#)

So the cross and the crucifixion were in the centre of the Christian faith, even among the heretical sects of the early phase of the church.

### 3.4. The Christian Documents

The Christian religious, literary and historical documents are generally accurate records that reflect the deep faith of the early fathers of the church. They unquestionably believed in all the teachings and information they received from the disciples, either by way of transmission or authorised tradition, or the written word. Some of them were even the disciples' pupils, such as Clement of Rome (A.D. 30-100), Ignatius (A.D. 35-107), Papias (A.D. 60-130) and Polycarp (A.D. 65-155). The writings of the early fathers of the church are conclusive evidence of the authenticity of the Gospel's events and doctrines, especially those pertaining to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as these two events occupied a large part of the New Testament, they were also the focal point of the writings of the fathers of the early church.

Indeed these manuscripts emphasise the many prophecies related to the death of

Christ and His resurrection, as does the Bible. By studying the writings of the early church since the first century and compiling their quotations from the New Testament, the entire text of the New Testament, with the exception of only seventeen verses, can be reconstructed.

[41](#) These texts do not differ from the texts of the New Testament we possess, particularly the passages relating to Christ's divinity, death and resurrection. In addition to that there is no other book in the world (even the Quran) which is supported by thousands of ancient manuscripts as the Bible is. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has further added to the credibility of the Scripture.

Among the writings of the early fathers of the church are the two epistles of Clement, Bishop of Rome, and the two short letters written by Ignatius which he delivered to churches and individuals during his trip from Antioch to Rome before his martyrdom. "The Didache", or "The Teaching of the Apostles", is an early handbook that deals with practical matters concerning Christian ethics and church order. There is also a letter ascribed to Barnabas in which he criticised those who do not reinterpret the Jewish law "in light of its fulfilment in Christ." In the Shepherd of Hermas the main character claims that he "received visions, commands and parables of Christian doctrines from an angel of the Lord."

[42](#) In the Apologies of Justin Martyr, he stated several Gospel facts, especially about the person of Christ, His earthly life, crucifixion and resurrection; the historian Eusebius quoted selections from Quadratus' Apology (2nd Century A.D.) as he addressed the emperor Hadrian. Among those selections is the following:

The deeds of our Saviour were always before you, for they were true miracles; those that were healed, those that were raised from the dead, who were seen, not only when healed and when raised, but were always present. They remained living a long time, not only whilst our Lord was on earth, but likewise when he had left the earth. So that some of them have also lived to our times.

[43](#)

Some of the early church writers were students trained under the auspices of the disciples. They undoubtedly received the indisputable facts from the disciples and may also have witnessed some of the miracles performed by the disciples in the name of Christ.

It is quite obvious from all these writings that those fathers of the early church, who were ready to sacrifice their lives for their faith, did not believe in a myth.

### 3.5. Additional Evidence

In addition to the writings we have already discussed, early church history and archaeology can be examined. This would provide more significant evidence of the beliefs of the first century Christians about the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Drawings and inscriptions of the cross can be seen in the catacombs and vaults of Rome. These underground locations were the secret meeting places where early Christians gathered together to worship, away from the surveillance of the government's spies.

Early Christians also began to engrave the emblem of the cross on their tombs to distinguish them from the pagans' tombs. Had these Christians not been sure of Christ's crucifixion they would never have adopted the cross as their emblem. Though

the cross was a symbol of shame to both the Jews and the Romans, after the crucifixion of the righteous Christ it became a symbol of hope and faith to the Christians. If the cross was not a fact deeply-rooted in the faith of these Christians, they would not have endured all the sufferings of persecution, even death, for the sake of their Saviour.

Some of those martyrs were eye-witnesses of the crucifixion. Others received these facts from the disciples or through the written words of the Gospel accounts and the Epistles which were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The ordinances of the Lord's Supper and Baptism are also historical evidence of Christ's death and resurrection. On the night in which Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus, He Himself performed this first ordinance and requested His disciples to continue it in His memory (Matthew 28:19). Since then the Lord's Supper has occupied an important place in the practices of the church through the ages. The real significance of this ordinance, as Christ interpreted it, is that it is a symbol of His crucifixion and death. When Christians exercise this ordinance, they always commemorate His death (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; First Corinthians 11:23-27).

The same thing could be said about the ordinance of Baptism. It is a symbol of the Christian's death to the old life and resurrection with Jesus Christ. These two ordinances were practised by the disciples in compliance with Christ's commandment and are still practised by the church until this very day.

## 4. CHAPTER THREE



## Christ's Crucifixion in Islam

In previous pages we discussed the issues of the *Shabih* and atonement in Islam. In order to do justice to this study it is necessary to examine a few Quranic verses that Muslims traditionally misinterpreted and thus evaded the inevitable fact of the crucifixion and resurrection.

The Quran does not deny that some prophets have been subjected to death. Several Suras indicate that:

and whensoever there came to you a Messenger with that your souls had not desire for, did you become arrogant and some cry lies to, and some slay? (al-Baqara 2:82)

...and their slaying the Prophets without right, and We shall say, "Taste the chastisement of the burning" (Al Imran 3:178)

Those same men said, "God has made covenant with us, that we believe not any Messenger until he brings to us a sacrifice devoured by fire." Say: "Messengers have come to you before me bearing clear signs, and that you spoke of; why therefore did you slay them, if you speak truly?" (Al Imran 3:179-180)

So, for their breaking the compact, and disbelieving in the signs of God, and slaying the Prophets without right, and for their saying, "Our hearts are uncircumcised" -- nay, but God sealed them for their unbelief, so they believe not, except a few -- (al-Nisa 4:154)

These Quranic verses acknowledge that prophets had been slain for one reason or another. God does allow that to happen to some of His messengers. Since the Holy Gospel proclaims that Christ came by His own choice and in obedience to the wish of the heavenly Father to redeem humanity, why then do Muslims refuse to accept His crucifixion?

Still, the Quran contains other references to the death of Christ and His crucifixion. Let us examine the following verses:

When God said: "Jesus, I will take thee to Me, and I will raise thee to Me," (Al Imran 3:47)

And I was a witness over them, while I remained among them; but when Thou didst take me to Thyself, Thou wast Thyself the watcher over them; (al-Maida 5:117)

The Messiah, the son of Mary, was only a Messenger; Messengers before him passed away; (al-Maida 5:79)

In one of the Quranic references to Himself, Jesus is quoted as saying:

Peace be upon me, the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive! (Mary 19:34)

This is the same statement Jesus uttered about Yahya (John the Baptist):

Peace be upon him, the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive! (Mary 19:15)

Muslim expositors endeavoured to interpret these verses on the basis of their pre-conceived idea that Jesus neither was crucified nor died. They explained the Arabic word *mutawaffika* to mean "to end your term". This explanation does not agree with the general context of these verses. Many exegetes who were closer to the age of the Quranic language understood it to mean "to cause you to die". We will examine these verses and study the term *wafat* ("death") and its derivations as they are stated in the above texts.

### 4.1. Opinions of Muslim Expositors

Muslim scholars fail to agree on the meaning of the term *mutawaffika*. Consequently, they are divided into two groups. **Al-Razi** was able to compile together the various opinions of these scholars in the course of his interpretation of the verse Al Imran 3:45, "I will cause thee to die." In fact al-Razi refrained from expressing his personal opinion concerning this term, and he resorted to presenting the opinions of other scholars without committing himself to any point of view. Apparently, al-Razi's attitude, despite its elusiveness, was safer for him in a society which does not permit such an outstanding religious scholar to infringe on the consensus of Muslim opinion on such a serious issue. Thus, he resorted, as it seems, to compiling and editing the various views, leaving to the Muslim reader the freedom to embrace the opinion which best fit his religious background.

The contradictory opinions which al-Razi set forth as interpretations for the term *mutawaffika* are:

**End your term:**that is, "I end your term on earth, so I do not leave you to your enemies, the Jews, to kill you."

**Cause you to die:**this is a statement made on the authority of Ibn Abbas, the expositor of the Quran, and Muhammad b. Is-haq. They said that the purpose was not to let His enemies, the Jews, to kill Him. Then after that (God) honoured Him (Jesus) by raising Him up to heaven. From this point on, Muslim scholars differed in three ways: a) Wahb said: He died for three hours, then was raised up; b) Muhammad b. Is-haq said: He died seven hours then God quickened Him and raised Him up; c) al-Rabi ibn Anas said: God caused Him to die when He raised Him up

to heaven; for God said (in the Quran): "God takes the souls at the time of their death, and that which has not died, in its sleep;" (al-Zumar 39:44)

**The waw ("and") regulates the word order:**Since Jesus is alive, that means that God has raised Him up to heaven first; then He will descend to kill the anti-Christ. After that God will cause Him to die.

**The spiritual interpretation:**This is the opinion of Abu Bakr al-Wasity. ("I cause you to die") of your lusts and the desires of your soul. Then He said: "I raise you up to Me" because unless He dies to what is not but God He would never reach the place of the knowledge of God. Also, when Jesus was raised up to heaven, He became like the angels: free of lust, anger and reprehensible dispositions.

Obviously, this mystic interpretation is incongruous with the Islamic principle of the infallibility of the prophets and their sublime characters. We also see here the influence of the Ebionites who claimed that Jesus became the archangel in His ascension.

**The complete ascension:**That is, Jesus, son of Mary, was raised up whole in both body and spirit, not only in spirit as some may think. What supports this interpretation is God's saying: "They would not cause You any harm."

**I make you as if you died:**Raising Jesus up to heaven, the eradication of any physical trace of Him from this earth, and the obliteration of His reports would make Him as if He really died. "Applying the name of one thing to another if they share similar properties and qualities, is permissible."

**Grasping:** which means to repay or be repaid as when receiving in full a sum of money which you are owed. Either way, snatching Him out of the earth and ascending Him to heaven is a payment for Him.

**Compensation for the work:** That is, God "has announced to Him the glad tidings of accepting His obedience and His deed. He revealed to Him (Jesus) the troubles and the toils He would suffer from His enemies as He spread His (God's) religion and law. He (God) would not forfeit His compensation or waste His reward."

Al-Razi adds, "These are the total said views of those who interpreted the verse according to the literal meaning."

Other commentators say: "The verse must have *meaning-inversion* without a need for *word-order-inversion* (to be stated); they reiterated that His saying 'and I will raise thee to Me' implies that he raised Him (Jesus) up alive and the *waw* does not necessitate *word-order-inversion*. It remains to be said that it has a *meaning-inversion*. Thus the meaning is: I will raise you to Me and I will purify you of those who believe not. And I will cause you to die after I send you down to the world. Such inversions in the Quran are numerous." To those al-Razi responds:

Be informed that the many views which we presented are sufficient to free (us) from the obligation of contradicting the apparent meaning, and God knows better.

[44](#)

The two supplication verses mentioned in Sura Mary 19, request the peace of God to be upon Jesus and Yahya (John the Baptist) the day they were born and the day they die and the day they will be

raised from the dead.

[45](#) These failed to incite Muslim scholars to examine thoroughly the story of Christ's death. It is believed among Muslims that the phrase "the day I die" alludes to Jesus' death after His second coming and the destruction of the anti-Christ.

Other Muslim commentators such as al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, Zamakhshari and Baydawi did not provide better information to illuminate the obscurity of these verses. In many ways they were dependent on each other except in rare cases.

[46](#)

#### 4.1.1. Conclusion

What can be concluded from al-Razi's survey of the commentators' opinions of the word *mutawaffika*?

**First**, apparently al-Razi was merely a compiler of opinions who seems to have intentionally refrained from interacting with or reacting to these opinions. A reader cannot help but feel that this rationalistic scholar could not be content with the expositors' interpretations. On the other hand, as a religious Muslim scholar it would be almost impossible for him to suggest a new interpretation that would stand in contrast to the general consensus of the Islamic theology concerning the death of Christ.

**Secondly**, the contradictory opinions and interpretations of Muslim scholars have only created more confusion and perplexity in the minds of the fact-finders, and did not help them to unveil the truth. These expositors and narrators held noted academic status in Islamic history and were frequently quoted by students of

religion and researchers. Thus these contrasting speculations only increase the objective Muslim's bewilderment and fill him with agonising frustration. He may wonder what the right interpretation is. Why did Muslim scholars differ in their interpretations of a certain commonly used word? What type of explanation should he accept or reject?

One sign of the sense of loss among Muslim scholars is the use of the phrase "God knows better" each time they try to explore a disputed issue or opinion. This was al-Razi's concluding phrase after he exhausted the current opinions of other Muslim scholars. Such an attitude shows the sense of uncertainty in the author's mind.

**Third**, in the verses pertaining to the death of Christ, the main purpose for the ambiguity is to veil the interpretation of the word *mutawaffika*. This vagueness is ascribed to the contentious view of Muslim commentators who persistently evade admitting its true meaning, "death". Muslim consensus on this meaning would demand them to seriously examine the case of crucifixion and resurrection in a new light, which they emphatically refuse to do.

#### 4.2. The Correct Interpretation

In order to be freed from the unnecessary ambiguity of the Muslim scholars as they attempt to interpret the word *mutawaffika* without resorting to futile sophistic methods, one should study the connotations of this word as it is stated in the Quran.

The word *mutawaffika* and its derivations have been mentioned in the Quran over 25

times.

47 With the exception of two places, they all allude to or are in some way associated with death. In these two verses, the context makes it clear that it figuratively means slumber. One verse reads:

It is He who recalls you by night, and He knows what you work by day; (al-Anam 6:60)

The other verse is found in al-Zumar 39:42:

God takes the souls (of men) at the time of their death, and that which has not died, in its sleep;

A study of the two verses that pertain to the death of Christ will show that there is no evidence in the context to suggest that the word *mutawaffika* has a figurative meaning. The word means "death", regardless of whether that death was a natural death or crucifixion. On the other hand, an examination of the verse "but when Thou didst take me to Thyself, Thou wast Thyself the watcher over them" (al-Maida 5:117) will reveal that the task of watching over Jesus' followers has become God's responsibility. This implies that after His death Christ had no control over His followers. However, if we accept the Islamic point of view that Jesus did not die but had been raised up to heaven, body and soul, then He would still be able to watch over them and to witness against them or for them. But according to the above verse, when Jesus said, "And I was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them," He was referring indirectly to His death. In reality He was saying, "Now after You caused me to die I am not able to watch over them. Everything now is in Your hand because You are the living eternal God." This same rule could be applied to His saying: "He

has enjoined me to pray, and to give the alms, so long as I live." (Mary 19:31) Thus, since Jesus is still alive in flesh and blood in heaven, does He still offer His alms as He was ordered to do?

[48](#)

In more than one place the sound Hadith attests to this fact. In *The Sahih* of al-Bukhari we read:

On the authority of Ibn Abbas: The Prophet of Allah said, "You will be gathered (on the Day of Judgment), bare-footed, naked and not circumcised," then he recited "As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it: A promise We have undertaken; truly we shall do it"(al-Anbiya 21:104). He added: "the first to be dressed in the Day of Resurrection will be Abraham; and some of my companions will be taken to the right side and the left side, and I will say: 'My companions!' It will be said: 'After you left them they regenerated (from Islam).' Then I will say as the pious slave Jesus, son of Mary, said:" "and I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them. When you caused me to die You were the watcher over them, and You are a witness to all things. If You punish them, they are Your slaves; and if You forgive them You are indeed the All-Mighty, the All-Wise."

Evidently Muhammad quoted the Quranic verse that Jesus uttered. We also know that Muhammad died, and no Muslim claimed that he was raised up to heaven. Therefore, when he cited the above Quranic verse and used the term *tawaffaytani* ("caused me to die"), he indeed referred to his own death and not his being raised up to heaven. It is not permissible to play with the interpretation of these terms at the expense of the truth. So this word ("caused me to die") applied both to Jesus and Muhammad. The difference between the two is that Christ rose from the dead on the third day and He will come back, not to die -- because He has already died and risen from the dead -- but to judge the

living and the dead, as the infallible Bible states.

In addition to the Quranic texts in which the term *wafat* ("death") indicated the common meaning as used by ancient Arabs, we found that the sound Islamic Tradition utilises this same term to mean "death". On the authority of Anas it is said that:

The Apostle of God said:... "no one should wish for death because of any misfortune that befalls him. If he had to do so let him say: 'O, Allah keep me alive so long as life is good for me; and (author's italics) *cause me to die (tawaffani)* if death is better for me.'"  
[49](#)

It is also indicated in another tradition:

On the authority of Ibn Abbas...that Ali Ibn Abi Talib came out of the chamber of the Apostle of God...during his last illness *of which he died....(author's italics)*  
[50](#)

In the Quran there are three verses in which the term *natawaffayannaka* ("we indeed cause you to die"), is used (Yunis 10:46, al-Rad 13:40 and Ghafir 40:77). These verses are addressed to Muhammad by God. God promised His apostle that He would punish the disbelievers during His lifetime, or He would take the apostle to Himself before them and they would be punished in the hereafter. The above term does not differ in its use or meaning from the same term when used for Christ's death. It is very interesting to note that Muslim expositors did not take the trouble to comment on this term as they did with the term *mutawaffika* when they interpreted the verses related to Jesus' death. They took it for granted that this term means "to cause you to die".

Thus, the normal meaning of the term *wafat* as it is expressed in most Quranic verses and the Islamic Traditions, unless contextual evidence indicates differently, is "death". The sophistry that Muslim scholars mastered failed to veil the historicity of the crucifixion. It only succeeded in creating confusion in the minds of many Muslims and drawing them away from the truth.

Some may wonder how we can reconcile between the above and the verse of al-Nisa 4:157:

and for their saying (in boast), "We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God" -- yet they did not slay Him, neither crucified Him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning Him surely are in doubt regarding Him; they have no knowledge of Him, except the following of surmise; and they slew Him not of a certainty

The meaning of this verse has been shrouded in obscurity. Even modern Muslim scholars have failed to liberate themselves from the impact of the traditional interpretations of narrators and expositors. In my view, the problem lies in the lack of documentation and historical evidence for these traditional interpretations. Let us scrutinise some of these important facts:

The verse states, "they did not slay Him, neither crucified Him." This does not disprove that Jesus may have died a natural death. It denies that He was killed or crucified, if taken at its face value. This consideration is congruent with what was alluded to before about the term *mutawaffika*, especially if one frees himself from the sophistry of the expositors. Many expositors found a threat to all their proclaimed interpretations and

beliefs in the historicity of Jesus' death. Christ's death itself refutes the claim that He will die after He returns. Consequently, the Quranic verses confirm the Christians' teaching about the death of Christ. If Jesus really did die, then He cannot die again since His death on the cross was to redeem man from his fateful condition. He has paid the price once for all.

In the phrase "for they slew Him not of a certainty" there is an indirect emphasis on Jesus' crucifixion because it follows the preceding statement: "They did not slay Him, neither crucified Him, only a likeness of that was shown to them." What was the source of that certainty that "they slew him not of a certainty"? We have proven conclusively that Christ was crucified. The crucifixion was only the first phase on the road to redemption. The second phase was crowned with the resurrection. The source of certainty is the resurrection that defeated the conspiracies of Christ's foes. So in His resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared as if He was not crucified because He came out of the battle victorious.

Jesus said that His life was not taken from Him, but He laid it down voluntarily (John 10:17--18). Thus, those who boasted that they killed Him did not, in fact, because He offered Himself freely. Had He not done so, they would never have been able to ever touch Him or hurt Him. It may have appeared to wicked men that they killed Jesus by their own power, but they did not, for He freely gave His own life.

The denial here is not a denial of the killing or of the crucifixion, but rather a denial of the fulfilment of the objectives of Christ's foes. They thought that they got rid of Him forever, but what really

happened was the opposite. Christianity flourished and grew, even in the era in which the heroes of the conspiracy lived. The resurrection and the growth of Christianity were the arrows that hit them at their most vulnerable spot.

The phrase "only a likeness of that was shown to them" has connotations that demand our scrutiny. We must examine it on two levels -- the Quranic level and the interpretative level --- in order to comprehend its meanings within its intellectual and religious timeframe.

It seems that the purpose of this verse is to expose the conspiracy of the Jews and to reveal their impotency in the face of the divine volition which willed contrary to their will. Sura Al Imran 3:55 states, "And they (the Jews) devised and God devised, and God is the best of devisers." This verse unveils the Jews' attitude towards Christ. It also preceded His saying, "-- When

[51](#) God said: 'Jesus, I will take Thee to me and raise Thee to Me.'" This word *when* is a conjunction that connects the two verses. Despite their brevity, they manifest the unequal struggle between God's will and Christ's enemies' will. In his valuable book *al-Quran wa al-Masihiyah*, Professor Haddad states:

The clarity of the text and its evidence make it an official testimony used by Christian authority that the Jews had devised against Christ, killed him and crucified him; but God's device against them was better than their device for he resurrected Jesus after he was killed and crucified.

[52](#)

The Jews conspired and planned to destroy Christ, and their plot succeeded for a while. But God's device was better than

theirs because Jesus was resurrected from the dead on the third day, and then after 40 days he ascended to heaven. Evidently God's device against the Jews was not to rescue Jesus from their hand and raise him up to himself. Such an interpretation contradicts the historical facts, the logical arguments and the Quranic evidence from which we drew our proofs. God's plan was to resurrect Jesus. This is how God devised against them and defeated their plot after they thought -- *and this is the true meaning of "it appeared to them"* --- that by killing Jesus and crucifying Him, they had gotten rid of Him forever. Christ's resurrection was not only a victory over the Jews' conspiracy, but it was also a victory over death.

In his interesting book, *Qiss wa Nabi* ("A Priest and a Prophet"), Abu Musa al-Hariri refers to the heresies of some Ebionites who claimed that:

Christ by His own will changes from one image to another. He cast His own likeness on Simon who was crucified in His place, while He ascended to heaven alive to the one who sent Him; deluding all those who have conspired to arrest Him, because He was invisible to all.

[53](#)

Thus it becomes clear that Christ's resurrection on the third day, as He indicated about Himself and as it is written in the prophecies, was the fatal blow to the conspiracies and plots of the Jews.

On the interpretative level, the phrase "it so appeared to them" became "it was likened to him". Since that time Muslim expositors have concerned themselves with the identity of the *Shabih*. This is the main difference between the Quranic text and interpretations of the commentators who did not find sources other than the



heresies to quote from. They used the writings of the Docetists, the Ebionites and the Gnostics to explain their concept about Christ and His crucifixion. They received their information from former heretics who were converted to Islam, or directly from the adherents of these heresies. Muslims did not have other historical, archaeological or religious documents on which to rely in their interpretations of these verses. This is not a hollow claim since we have sufficient Islamic sources to confirm this point of view.

Maybe the best example we can quote here is what was related on the authority of Wahb Ibn Munabbih (A.D. 647--733) who was an authority on the People of the Book and regarded among the Successors.

[54](#) It seems that his information did not go beyond the literary work of the Christian heretics, the apocryphal books and the Talmud. His knowledge of the Bible was definitely superficial. This transmitter of information relied heavily on the opinions and episodes of these sects, a combination of Biblical texts and the speculations of the heretical scholars. Arab historians quoted him excessively "about the accounts of the prophets, peoples, and narratives of the Children of Israel." Among the information al-Thaalabi cited on his authority is the account of the darkness that enveloped the land upon Christ's crucifixion. He said:

They took Him (Jesus) and verified His identity. They tied Him with a rope and dragged Him saying, "You used to raise the dead and to heal the blind and the leper, why don't you untie yourself from this rope?" They spat at Him and put thorns on Him. Then they erected a post to crucify Him on it. When they brought Him to the post the land grew dark and God sent His angels to bar them from reaching Him. Jesus' likeness then was cast on the one who led them (Jews) to Him, whose name was Judas the

Iscariot, and was crucified in His place, thinking that He was Jesus. God caused Jesus to die for three hours, then He raised Him up to heaven. That is His saying --- He may be exalted ---: "I will cause Thee to die and raise Thee to Myself and clear Thee from the disbelievers." When the *resembler* of Jesus was crucified, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and another woman for whom Jesus prayed and healed of her insanity came to bewail beside the crucified person. Then Jesus approached them and asked: "Over whom are you bewailing?" They said: "Over You." He said: "God, the Most High, has raised Me and nothing but good befell Me. And this man so appeared to them (to be like Me)."

[55](#)

Also Wahb Ibn Munabbih used to say: "I have seen 92 books which all came from heaven. Seventy-two of them are found in the churches and in the hands of people, and twenty are only known to the few."

[56](#) No doubt that 66 of the books were the books of the Bible but the rest were apocryphal and Gnostic books with which Wahb, as it seems, was well acquainted. These books were Wahb's sources of information that he used to explain some of the Quranic verses.

In his famous commentary, al-Tabari records a similar story on the authority of Wahb, with a slight variation in the text in which he claimed that Jesus waited seven hours before the two women came.

It is amazing, however, that not one sound Prophetic Tradition dealing with the issue of the *Shabih* has been mentioned to illustrate the Quranic account, though the problem of the cross is one of the major differences between Christianity and Islam. All that was transmitted were reports based on the allegations of the expositors and the narrators who were enchanted with anything that was strange and exciting. If the sources of these stories

were traced, their origins would be found in the legends of former nations or in some of the current material of the age. Maybe the best book to demonstrate this fact is *The Sources of Islam* by W. St. Claire Tisdall, who was able to trace most stories and commentaries of the narrators and expositors related to the Biblical events to their original sources. So why did the Prophetic Tradition neglect to explain these obscure verses? We know that Islamic biographies and collections of Traditions have recorded a host of interpretations and teachings by which Muhammad instructed his followers concerning clearer verses than these.

What can be inferred from this evidence?

- **First**, the heresies of the Christian religious sects that flourished during the inception of Islam had great impact on the views of Muslim commentators, who received their information and knowledge about Jewish and Christian beliefs from scholars whose expertise was limited to the heresies of these sects. It is evident that Wahb was well acquainted with the teachings and beliefs of the Docetists, Ebionites and Gnostics.
- **Second**, some narrators, such as Wahb Ibn Munabbih, embraced Islam and carried with them the seeds of their early beliefs. They may have tried to reconcile those beliefs with the teaching of Islam. Wahb's narrative stories appear to be the nearest thing to the Christian doctrines. Maybe he sought to accomplish a conscious reconciliatory act intended to bridge the wide gap between the contrasting points of view.  
[57](#)
- **Third**, in the narrative of Wahb there

is another historical confirmation of the authenticity of the Gospel's story about the darkness. This fact contradicts the view of direct ascension as related in the Quran. One of the sound Prophetic Traditions recorded by both Muslim and Bukhari states:

On the authority of Abdullah Ibn Masud...who said: "(I recollect) as if I am still looking at the Apostle of God narrating about a prophet who was beaten by his own people until he was bleeding profusely, yet as he was wiping away the blood from his face he said, 'O God, forgive my people for they know not.'"

[58](#)

Who was the prophet who spoke these words? On which occasion were they spoken? Anyone who searches the entire Bible will never find such a prophet in the Old Testament. But surely he will find an adequate report about Christ's excruciating agony and the abuse He suffered from His own people and His crucifixion. There, on the cross, in the last moments of His life, He said:

Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do. (Luke 23:34, NKJ)

This is the full text of Jesus' supplication on the cross, in the most crucial moment of his life. In fact, this Tradition is another indirect proof of the authenticity of the Bible. It also contradicts the allegation of the direct ascension which omits any mention of Jesus' sufferings either in the Quran or in the interpretation of the expositors.

The two verses recorded in Sura Mary 19, about Jesus and Yahya and the invocation for peace to be upon them the day they were born, the day they die and the day

they will be resurrected are, in my opinion, further evidence of the death of Christ, for two primary reasons:

- **First**, all Muslim scholars agree that Yahya died and the verse, "Peace be upon him the day he was born, and the day he dies and the day he is raised up alive," (Mary 19:15) which was said about Yahya, is similar in its linguistic structure to the verse uttered by Jesus about Himself: "Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive!" In fact, both verses have been uttered by Jesus Christ Himself. Why then do Muslim expositors refuse to apply to Jesus the same interpretation they apply to Yahya? Why do they pervert the interpretation of these two verses according to their biases? Why do they claim that the first verse really alludes to the death of Yahya, but then allege that the expression "I die" in the second verse refers to the future death of Christ after His second coming?
- **Second**, the historical documents, the Quranic evidence and the logical reasons that were cited from the authoritative sources and references prove that the term "I die" mentioned in the above verse points to the death of Christ in the immediate future. Besides, Ibn Abbas, who was known as the interpreter of the Quran, and other expositors who were closer to the current language of the time understood the expressions *wafat* and *mutawaffika* as hints to His immediate future death, regardless of whether the death was for three days or seven hours.

Dr. Mahmud Shaltut, the late Rector of

al-Azhar University said:

The expression *tawaffaitani* [sic] is entitled in this verse to bear the meaning of ordinary death.... There is no way to interpret "death" as occurring after His (Jesus) return from heaven in the supposition that He is now alive in heaven, because the verse very clearly limits the connexion of Jesus to His connexion with His own people of His own day and the connexion is not with the people living at the time when He returns.... All that the verses referring to this subject mean is that God promised Jesus that He would complete for Him His life-span and would raise Him up to Himself.

[59](#)

Or, as Parrinder states, "there is no futurity in the grammar of the Quran of verse [Mary] 19:34 to suggest a post millennial death. The plain meaning seems to be His physical death at the end of His present human life on earth."

[60](#)

Another modern Muslim writer says that in Sura Al Imran 3:47, God is addressing Jesus and says, "Truly I am He who calls You to death," or "It is I who am causing You to die."

[61](#) The construction of this Quranic phrase "is in the active participle with the pronoun (object) attached to it."

[62](#)

In his book, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, Neal Robinson states:

The three *ayat* [verses] about Muhammad and the two about Jesus are the only ones where the verb is used in the active voice with God as the subject, and with one of His prophets as the object. Moreover in both sets of *ayat* [verses] there is a similar emphasis on God's witnessing man's actions and on man's return to Him for Judgment.

[63](#)

It is important now to examine the Quranic

statement, "It so appeared to them." The question is: to whom? Undoubtedly, those intended by "them" in the Quranic text are the Jews and the Romans who executed the death penalty. But what about Jesus' disciples, His mother and the rest of His followers? Were they really deceived and "it so appeared to them" also? The Qu'ran keeps silent and does not mention them. It is obvious that they were not among those who were deceived. In other words, the disciples who were present there did not fall into the trap of "it so appeared to them." They were sure that the crucified one was Christ Himself and nobody else. Maybe the most significant proof is that all the disciples' teachings and their inspired epistles are centred on the death of Christ and His resurrection. **We say this though we know that there is no historical or documentary evidence to prove that the Jews and the Romans had any shade of doubt concerning the identity of the crucified one.** Judas Iscariot had already committed suicide, and his corpse was found and buried, probably in the Potter's Field. The darkness enveloped the land after Jesus, as the Son of Man, delivered His soul on the cross into the hands of the Father and not before He was crucified, as some Muslim narrators claim. Mary, the mother of Jesus, and some of His disciples were present when He was crucified. Christ's body was wrapped with spiced linen cloth by those who knew Him well. The Roman soldiers, who oversaw His crucifixion and divided His clothes among themselves and pierced Him with a spear, did not question the identity of the crucified. In the darkness, when the earthquake terror seized all those who were watching the crucifixion, the centurion who was standing right in front of Jesus, said: "Truly, this man was the

Son of God." Furthermore, the empty tomb is the strongest proof of the identity of the crucified person. If the crucified person was other than Christ would He be able to rise from the dead and then to appear to the disciples and to His followers for 40 days?

Needless to say, the authentic historical documents strongly refute any claim that the crucified person was a *Shabih*. What excuse do the sceptics still have?

The last phrase from Sura al-Nisa 4:157 is:

Those who are at variance concerning Him surely are in doubt regarding Him; they have no knowledge of Him, except the following of surmise; and they slew Him not of a certainty--

This passage is shrouded in obscurity. If the text is examined at its face value, it becomes apparent that it does not fit in the general context of the incident. It was demonstrated above that Christ's disciples did not fall into the trap of the *Shabih* and that there is no proof that the Romans and Jews were unsure of the identity of the crucified person. Who then were those who had "no knowledge"?

The answer is simple: those who had no knowledge were the various Christian sects dispersed all over the Arab Peninsula. It is true that the Quran was talking about the crucifixion of Jesus, but at the same time it was reflecting the heretical religious movements and theological trends of that time. The Docetists, Ebionites and other heretical sects who taught and preached the concept of the *Shabih* were constantly in disagreement with Biblical Christianity, which asserted the reality of Christ's crucifixion and did not believe in the myth of the *Shabih*, which contradicted the

Biblical report.

[64](#)

It is apparent that the Quran has strongly endorsed the teachings of the heretical sects and joined them in their struggle against Biblical Christianity. It is the opinion of this writer that the main reason for the Quranic attitude is that Muhammad acquainted himself with the beliefs of these sects only. Certainly those beliefs left a deep impression on Muhammad's mind and on his religious tendencies. Besides, a number of the followers of these sects embraced Islam because, in most cases, their tenets are not inconsistent with the Quranic teachings. The Quranic contradictory attitudes towards the Christians can be explained in the light of this proposition. Those who were exalted were the **adherents of the resemblance theory** among the Christians; but those who were reproached and attacked were the **people of the Gospel** who believed in the crucifixion and death of Christ. Perhaps the episode of Muhammad's dialogue with the people of Najran and his disagreement with them about the divinity of Christ is the most striking example of this fact.

It is not a secret that some of the People of the Book were accustomed to reading the Hebrew Torah and interpreting it in Arabic to the Muslims, which sometimes irritated Muhammad, so that he cautioned his followers to be careful in accepting or rejecting what they heard from them.

[65](#) In spite of that, Muhammad himself used to hold dialogue sessions with Christians and Jews from time to time, and even to visit the Jewish synagogue in Medina.

[66](#) Islamic biographies attested that Muhammad developed a strong

relationship with one of the most famous Christian scholars in Mecca.

[67](#) His name was Waraqa Ibn Nawfal, the cousin of Khadija, Muhammad's first wife. In *Sirat Ibn Hisham* it is stated that Muhammad made the acquaintance of Waraqa Ibn Nawfal at an early age.

[68](#) Waraqa was the one who presided over Muhammad's wedding.

[69](#) Moreover, when Muhammad related to his wife, Khadija, his vision or experience in the cave of Hara, the first thing she did was to take him to her cousin Waraqa to consult with him. No doubt Muhammad, who refused to worship the idols of Mecca, found in Waraqa the best counsellor to share his earnest doubts and spiritual crises. When Muhammad married Khadija, he was 25 years old. During the next fifteen years and before the claim of the prophethood, Muhammad, it seems, was constantly inquiring and searching for the truth. What better source could he get than Waraqa, who was well-acquainted with both the Hebrew and the Arabic languages, and monotheism? It was said that Waraqa, as the head of the Christian community of Mecca, occupied himself with the translation of the Gospel to the Hebrews, which was used by the Ebionites, into Arabic.

[70](#) Besides, some scholars believe that Waraqa was the bishop of Mecca and he belonged to the Ebionite sect.

[71](#) If this is true --- and there are solid indications that this claim is true --- Waraqa's theological tendencies had great impact on Muhammad's concept of Christ's nature, crucifixion and incarnation.

[72](#)

Among Muhammad's Companions were several former Nasara and Jews who



embraced Islam for one reason or another, such as Abdullah Ibn Sallam, Tamim al-Dari, Abdullah Ibn Suriyya and Bilal al-Farisi who converted from Paganism to Judaism to Christianity and then to Islam. Besides, some of Muhammad's wives and concubines were Christians and Jews, who indeed conveyed to him many folk religious episodes and legends about the prophets of the Old and New Testaments.

Other Companions, on the authority of the People of the Book, transmitted without any discernment a collection of folkloric stories as they were in vogue among the masses. Among those Companions were Abdullah Ibn al-Abbas the interpreter of the Quran, Abdullah Ibn Amru Ibn al-As and Abu Hurayra. Most of the information they transmitted had no basis in the Bible itself.

It can also be inferred from available reports that Muhammad, in many cases, did not prohibit his followers from reading the Torah and the Gospel. These reports are inadequate because they do not state what part of the Torah or the Gospel they were allowed to read and for what reasons. Other reports negated that the Apostle permitted the Muslims to read any other religious book than the Quran.

[73](#)

In his *Sahih*, the Imam al-Bukhari, on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Amru Ibn al-As, related that the Prophet said, "Convey (to the people) on my behalf even if it is one verse and pass on (what you heard) from the children of Israel without objection...."

[74](#)

Al-Hafidh al-Thahabi records that Abdullah Ibn Sallam came to the prophet and told him, "I have read the Quran and

the Torah (last night)." He answered him, "Read this one night and that another night."

[75](#)

A very interesting story is found in *Sahih of Muslim*. On the authority of Fatima, daughter of Qays, who said that after the congregational prayer on Friday, the Prophet asked the people to stay, then he said, "By Allah I have not made you assemble for exhortation or for warning, but I detained you here because Tamim al-Dari, a Christian who came and accepted Islam, told me something which agrees with what I was telling you about the Dajjal (anti-Christ)."

[76](#)

The story to which Muhammad referred is most probably a distorted version of the episode of the Beast mentioned in Revelation 13. Perhaps Muhammad's interest to cite the testimony of Tamim was to bestow credibility on his prophethood in the eyes of both Muslims and Christians.

It is obvious from these reports that Christian and Jewish folkloric stories, myths and legends permeated the Hadith and the interpretations of the Quran, and even the verses of the Quran itself. Studies in comparative religions show how the Quran drew much of its information from the apocryphal and Christian-Jewish folklores.

[77](#) It is no wonder then that the Islamic interpretation of the crucifixion was distorted by these unreliable legends.

There are two other verses in the Quran that would shed additional light on the meaning of *mutawaffika*. These two verses are:

The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a Messenger; Messengers before him passed away. (al-Maida 5:75)

and also:

Muhammad is naught but a Messenger; Messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? (Al Imran 3:144)

If these two verses are examined on the basis of their relation to the destiny of all previous prophets it would be obvious that all of them have one thing in common: **they all died.** Jesus and Muhammad, according to the Quran, faced the same end. They are like the rest of the prophets who passed away before them. Neither Jesus nor Muhammad was exceptional. It is difficult for the researcher to assume that the Quran that includes Jesus among the deceased prophets would exclude him from the same destiny. As Muhammad died, Jesus died also.

Grammatically, there is no difference between these two verses. They have the same meaning. When former Muslim scholars attempted to interpret the meanings of these two verses they were very careful not to mention the death of the previous prophets when comparing Jesus to them. It is true that the Quran was reproaching Christians who attributed divinity to Christ and His mother, but as it compared them to the prophets who passed away before them, it intended to emphasise their humanity in every aspect, particularly that they were also subject to death. This is also evident in Muhammad's case. Sura Al Imran 3:144 refers to the battle of Uhud in which Muhammad was almost killed. It is apparent here that the bottom line of the comparison was to

ascertain the humanity of Jesus who was subject to human experience, even death.

### 4.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this is a brief study in which I attempted to deal with a complicated subject. Yet I believe that this theme is the most significant theme in our Christian faith. While we do not find any reliable text, historical evidence, archaeological proof or authenticated document that corroborates the Quranic denial of the crucifixion of Christ and his death, there are a wealth of textual evidence and original documents available to any Christian that confirm the veracity of the Bible's record.

Therefore, as Christians, we reject any text found in the sacred books of other religions that contradicts the accounts of our infallible Book. Also, we certainly do not care about what the Christian heretical sects believe or teach. Our faith is based on what is revealed to us by God's holy divine inspiration, because all the Scriptures are inspired by God. Any teaching that contradicts God's Book is not acceptable.

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## 6. QUIZ

### Was Jesus Really Crucified?

Dear Reader, if you have studied this book carefully, you will be able to answer the following questions.

1. What does man's eternal destiny depend on, according to the Bible?
2. What is salvation based on, according to Islam?
3. What does the author of this book use to prove that Jesus is the one who was crucified for man's sin?
4. What is the aim of the Muslim denial of Christ's crucifixion?
5. On what do Muslims base their denial of Christ's death?
6. Why is the claim that Judas Iscariot died in Jesus' place erroneous?
7. How does Jesus' behaviour before His death contrast with Judas' behaviour?
8. What are the six ambiguities about the crucifixion presented by al-Razi? List them.
9. How does al-Razi respond to each of the six ambiguities?
10. How does the author answer each of al-Razi's responses?
11. What other people propounded a teaching of someone who resembled Christ and was crucified in His place? What has happened to them since then?
12. Contrast a God who deliberately allowed His people to believe a lie for over 600 years with a God who keeps His promises and stands by His Word. Which would you rather serve?
13. What was the first act of atonement? What was its purpose?
14. What is the connection between the Islamic theme of ransom and Biblical atonement?

15. What did Jesus say about Himself and what does this prove?
16. What can be learned from the references to Christ's death in the pagan documents?
17. What facts about Jesus do the Jewish documents agree on?
18. Why is the witness of the early fathers of the church important?
19. What can be deduced from the Bible quotations found in the writings of the early church fathers?
20. What other evidence is there of the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus?
21. What do the passages in the Quran say about the prophets? Was Jesus a prophet?
22. Why did al-Razi only compile the opinions of Muslim commentators without analyzing them?
23. Give some examples of the contradictions found in the different interpretations of *mutawaffika*.
24. What does the expression "God knows better," which al-Razi adds to the end of his compilation, tell us?
25. What is the meaning of *mutawaffika* as it is used in the Quran?
26. What is the meaning of Sura 4:175, according to the author?
27. What was the original purpose of Sura 4:157 and how does Sura Al Imran 3:55 relate to it?
28. What is the true meaning of the phrase "it appeared to them" and how did it receive its present, incorrect interpretation?
29. How did the Docetists, Ebionites and other heretic Christian sects influence Islam in its early phases?
30. In Sura 4:157, who are the ones who "have no knowledge of Him" and what have they done?

Copy and paste all questions into the contact form and write the answer below each question.

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