

That's a Good Answer: The Death of Christ

By I.L.

We all know that Muslims deny that Christ actually died. I usually try to avoid answering this point directly, preferring first to take people through the Old Testament. After they have seen the need for a sacrifice in the Exodus, Isaiah 53, etc, they are more ready to accept that Christ died, because they see the necessity. With most people, though, we will never get the time to show these things from the Scriptures. With *The Passion of the Christ* film bringing Christ's death as a subject of conversation, it is time to review some possible replies to the Muslim denial of the facts.

Surveying the different replies, we find the following types of argument.

1. Presentation of historical and documentary evidence that Jesus did, in fact, die in the way the Gospels explain. Much of the literature on this subject includes this material. It is also home ground for most of us.

Finlay has a useful summary of these arguments (I have conflated a few for brevity):

- The Bible teaches it, including the prophecies of the Old Testament.
- No one in the first century ever denied that Christ died; they only deny he rose again.
- Pagan historians agree with the facts presented in the Bible.

This material is worth having ready. Some Muslims declare themselves as atheists or agnostics; such people are often ready to consider the objective evidence.

2. Direct discussion of the Qur'an: the weakness of the argument, and the contradictions, both in the various Muslim viewpoints and in the Quranic evidence. The Call of Hope material does a good job of summarising these. But unless you are an expert in Arabic and Islam, such discussion is often difficult and even counter-productive. I do not like it when Muslims tell me how to interpret the Bible, so I do not reciprocate. In addition, I try to avoid either attacking the Qur'an, or getting involved in any discussion which becomes a battle between religions.

3. Material specifically geared to the arguments raised by Deedat, as encountered in places like South Africa. Gilchrist's booklets (in English and Arabic, available at the websites below) deal specifically with this. If people you know are influenced by these questions, you will find Gilchrist useful. Where I write from, the material is not relevant.

4. Various logical answers. These include:

- It is blasphemy to suggest that God who is Holy and Just would be a deceiver and a liar, and therefore would leave us with the impression that Jesus died when he did not. Are you saying that God deceived? If so, how can I believe the Qur'an?
- It is unbelievable that the early Christians were ready to suffer and die for a lie.

- How could the gentle words of Jesus on the Cross have come from another man wrongly nailed there?
- Jesus went to considerable lengths after the resurrection to prove to people that it really was himself who had died. Take for instance, his appearance to Thomas. Why did he do this if he had not really been crucified?

The trouble with all these answers is that they do not address the core issue: most Muslims believe Christ did not die. They believe that the Qur'an says this (and attempts to show them differently are not treated kindly, since only a Muslim can interpret the Qur'an); therefore, that is the end of the matter. This is similar to the classical Christian position: The Bible says it, I believe it, so that is the end of it. We Christians can have all the arguments we want; all must be false. So all the arguments so far presented are usually to no avail. Somehow, we need to get over this hurdle.

5. Quick answers that may open the crack. These all rely on trying to agree with the Muslim, then adding something more. Some of them hinge on the key verse, *Surah* 4:157.

- Who are 'they'? The Christians? The Jews? You are right: 'they' did not kill Jesus—the Romans did. This is confirmed by *Surah* 8:17. A variant of this with some is to say 'we killed him' because Jesus died for the whole world. It was not only 'them' who killed him.
- No one killed Jesus. Jesus chose to die. Then quote John 10:18:

No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again.

Also Luke 23:46:

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said that, he gave up the Ghost.

Note that the Arabic is conveniently closer to a literal translation than versions like the NIV. The beauty of this answer is that a few short phrases can be memorized, and it is always good to quote scripture. In addition, the incidents are shown in the film; and the passage in John, in the context of the Good Shepherd, is an excellent passage with a story line to it that explains why Christ died.

6. Supplementary related questions.

- Many Muslims will say that any evidence presented from the Bible that does not correspond with the Qur'an or with what they believe (the two are not always the same) must, by definition, mean that the Bible has been changed and corrupted. At that point, the arguments reviewed in the last edition of *Seedbed* can be used. In addition, in this context, it is very interesting that the Jews, who firmly deny that Jesus is the Messiah, still did not dare to alter their Scriptures. They still transmitted passages like Isaiah 53, which clearly speak of a suffering Messiah. Is this not evidence that the Old Testament, at least, is not corrupted?
- We bring shame upon God by saying that he allowed such an important

prophet to die this way. Perhaps you have good answers to this point. I know of four. If you have others, please do send feedback via the editor.

a. You are right; it was a shameful event. If that was the end of the story, we agree with you. But the story did not end. God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him the place of highest honour in heaven above all other prophets. Jesus will come back again one day; in fact, he will come back in triumph and victory and will judge each one of us. The story ends with honour.

b. But the Jews repeatedly rejected and killed their prophets; what is so different about Jesus?

c. Do you know more than God? Are you wiser than God?

d. For a great person to get dirty and messy in public is a shameful thing. But doctors routinely get covered in blood and extremely messy as they operate and try to save lives. They see parts of the body that are shameful to see. They do so because of the result—healing people. Jesus died a shameful death in order to receive the greater honour.

• **The swoon theory**, that Jesus did not really die, but only lost consciousness. Some say as evidence, that when the soldier pierced the side of Jesus and blood came out, this proves that he was still alive. If people use this argument, they need to hear the

medical answer. Blood does not congeal immediately inside dead bodies, and the 'blood and water' that flowed out showed that the red blood cells had separated out from the serum—a sign of traumatic death. Jesus did not just swoon: He issued a cry of triumph, then dismissed his Spirit, his heart ruptured, and he died immediately—to the great surprise of the onlookers.

References:

1. MH Finlay. *Face the Facts*. English and Arabic.
2. Iskander Jadeed. *The Cross in the Gospel and the Quran*. Call of Hope, English and Arabic.
3. Faris al-Qayrawani. *Was Christ really crucified?* Call of Hope, English and Arabic.

Websites:

Call of Hope publications: www.light-of-life.com and www.al-nour.com.

Most of the printed materials are available here for download, either as html files or as booklets reformatted as three columns on A4 paper.

Various documents on www.answering-Islam.org. In particular, see the pages www.answering-Islam.org/cross/shame.html and www.answering-Islam.org/morin/crucifixion.html, as well as the articles by M. Anderson, 'Jesus the Light and the Fragrance of God', found under www.answering-Islam.org/mna/frag*.html.

Note: this whole site is available on CD for cost-free distribution.