

AN EXAMINATION OF THE QUR'ANIC DENIAL OF JESUS'
CRUCIFIXION
IN LIGHT OF HISTORICAL EVIDENCES

Mark Pierson

Abstract. The Qur'an claims Jesus was never crucified, but the New Testament asserts the exact opposite. This discrepancy is regarding historical fact, and does not depend on religious biases or presuppositions. Hence, this essay examines which text has the historical evidences in its favor concerning this one specific point. First, the credentials possessed by each for providing accurate information about Jesus are assessed. It is shown that the twenty-seven documents of the New Testament were composed in the first century by those associated with the person, place, and event in question, whereas the Qur'an is one manuscript composed six centuries later, with no direct connection to any of Jesus' contemporaries. Thereafter, ancient non-Christian sources mentioning Jesus' death are cited, easily dispelling the notion that the crucifixion is a Christian invention. Thus, the conclusion that Jesus died on a cross is based on history, which is in line with Christianity, not Islam.

The underlying stimulus for the seemingly multifaceted conflicts that have plagued Christian-Muslim relations perpetually since the seventh century is, at its core, an irreconcilable disagreement regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ. *Prima facie*, this diagnosis may appear to relegate arguments concerning these contradictory tenets to the realm of abstract, unprovable, religious dogma. Were this the case, debates between Christians and Muslims might consist of little more than deciding which presuppositions regarding the nature of God ought to be adopted *a priori*,¹ or which faith is better suited to provide pragmatic results that meet the perceived needs of its adherents. However, since Jesus Christ is a historical figure, a point on which both Christianity and Islam agree, the records of his life are open to historical investigation as is the documentation of any chronicled individual. This crucial elucidation precludes attempts to differentiate between an epistemology of history and an epistemology of religion, as if

¹ A convincing demonstration of the futility of such an approach is John Warwick Montgomery's essay "Once Upon an A Priori: Van Til in Light of Three Fables" in his book *Faith Founded on Fact* (Newburgh, Indiana: Trinity Press, 1978).

the two fields were helplessly sealed off from one another, sharing no mutual ground. And while both Christianity and Islam posit a variety of interpretations about Jesus that could be considered outside the realm of historical inquiry, both religions have traditionally frowned upon reducing him to the product of an existential faith, with his actual character and mission either remaining forever shrouded in mystery or being pointedly incongruous with the creeds proffered about him. Put simply, Jesus' life either did or did not consist of the events that are found in the New Testament and in the Qur'an; and the claims of each can be evaluated on their historical merit alone, regardless of any seemingly religious significance bestowed upon them. The present essay will focus on which manuscripts have the historical evidence in their favor regarding one point of disagreement between Christianity and Islam concerning the life of Jesus—namely, the crucifixion.²

Christianity and Islam on the Crucifixion

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ has always been at the forefront of Christian proclamation. Not only is it impossible to locate a time within the church's history when it remained an unknown or obscure fact, but despite the various interpretations it has received for nearly two millennia, there has been unanimous affirmation of the reality of the event itself from all voices within Christendom. In fact, the cause of Jesus' death has been resolutely and fastidiously engrained in the Western mindset such that not even the most ardent opponents of Christianity from either the Enlightenment or Modernity denied that Jesus was nailed to a cross. Additionally, most Westerners currently living in

² Although the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and the resurrection are likewise claimed to be brute facts of history, and are equally crucial points of disagreement between Christianity and Islam, an assessment of the crucifixion is far less likely to solicit accusations that the conclusions were influenced by supernatural biases or faulty axioms.

so-called Postmodernism, who have neither succumbed to the inane notion that all truth is relative, nor adopted the unscholarly position that primary sources need not be consulted before reaching accurate conclusions about historical figures, persist in their opinion that Jesus' life was ended by crucifixion.

Thus, many are shocked to learn that Islam, a major, monotheistic religion that claims to be an Abrahamic faith along with Judaism and Christianity, fervently denies that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.³ Islam has unswervingly held to this claim since its inception; and, not unlike Christians having different understandings of the crucifixion's theological significance, the disparate nature of Muslims' proposals for what ultimately happened to Jesus has not served to sway them from their common conviction that the crucifixion is not a historic fact. However, there is a difference here: Christians are divided regarding their interpretations, but accept the bare history of the matter as it is found in the New Testament and in virtually all other ancient documents relating to Jesus; whereas Muslims are forced to deny all historical documents that disagree with the Qur'an, even in the face of contrary evidence, which has resulted in incongruous attempts to construct alternate histories.

Due to the resoluteness with which both religions have generally viewed their sacred texts as being authoritative sources, an examination and comparison of the claims about Jesus' crucifixion as found in the New Testament and in the Qur'an will commence shortly. It is not necessary here to provide a case for the historicity of the entire content

³ Sura 4:156-159 states: "Allah set a seal upon them owing to their unbelief, so they shall not believe except a few. And for their unbelief and for their having uttered against Marium a grievous calumny. And their saying: Surely we have killed the Messiah, Isa son of Marium, the apostle of Allah; and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so (like Isa) and most surely those who differ therein are only in a doubt about it; they have no knowledge respecting it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for sure. Nay! Allah took him up to Himself; and Allah is Mighty, Wise. And there is not one of the followers of the Book but most certainly believes in this before his death, and on the day of resurrection he (Isa) shall be a witness against them."

of the New Testament,⁴ for only one piece of information that it reports is under scrutiny; likewise, since Islam's challenge of this claim alone is under examination, a comprehensive analysis of the historical accuracy of the Qur'an is outside the scope of this essay. Nonetheless, conclusions about the manuscripts in question obtained by utilizing established methods of historiography will prove helpful in determining which stance is more probable based on the available evidence.

There cannot be an infinite number of options: Jesus was either crucified or he was not. Moreover, it is a logical impossibility to assert that both the New Testament and the Qur'an can be correct on this issue, for they blatantly contradict each other, which necessitates the exclusion of one claim as false upon the acceptance of the other as true. After a weighing of the evidence, then, the religion left backing a faulty rendition of history would seem to be left in a rather perilous position: its members would either be forced to admit the error and amend their creeds, or would opt for persisting in their belief, presumably by employing endless qualifications that serve to remove it from the empirical, testable world.

A Comparison of the Historicity of the New Testament and of the Qur'an Concerning Their Claims on the Crucifixion

It is imperative to refrain from viewing the New Testament as a single book, despite the uniformity of its message, but rather as twenty-seven separate documents about Jesus Christ, compiled later and arranged by their presumed genre. This considerably increases the number of testimonies which mention the crucifixion as fact.

⁴ For an introduction to this issue, see Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), and John Warwick Montgomery, *History, Law, and Christianity* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy, 2002).

The four gospels profess to be historical accounts of Jesus' life,⁵ each one constantly directing the reader to the culminating and climactic event of the crucifixion (albeit, coupled with the resurrection). The book of Acts records the early Christians' decimation of the good news that Jesus was crucified.⁶ Virtually all theology found in the thirteen Pauline epistles is predicated on Jesus' death on a cross, with frequent reminders of the historicity of the incident itself.⁷ Though the content of the remaining epistles and of Revelation may appear less cohesive or lucid, each either makes direct reference to the crucifixion or alludes to it.⁸ These various witnesses far outnumber that of the Qur'an, a single book, presumably with a single author. However, conflicting historical claims cannot be solved by quantitative comparisons alone, but require an evaluation of each claim's accuracy.

Although historiography and literary criticism lack a definite consensus regarding which methods of analysis are best suited for determining the reliability of ancient records, there is nonetheless a general agreement on the importance of establishing essential data about the texts in question. Among these are the date and authorship of the document, the textual reliability of the extant copies and their level of congruity with one another, and if the document's content is confirmed or denied by tangible artifacts and contemporary writings. Each criterion will be considered solely for the purpose of comparing the New Testament with the Qur'an on the crucifixion, with particular emphasis given to the virtual unanimous testimony found in other ancient documents. It is again observed that this approach eliminates the need to produce a fully developed

⁵ E.g., Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1-4.

⁶ E.g., Acts 2:36, 4:10, 5:30, 7:52, 10:39, 13:29.

⁷ E.g., 1 Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 3:10-14.

⁸ E.g., Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 2:23-24; Revelation 11:8.

apologetic for the probable veracity or apparent mendacity of either text as a whole and on its own merit. Similarly, a text's claim of divine origin or of infallibility is immaterial when judging its historicity alone.

The virtual cornucopia of suggested dates for the New Testament documents that characterized previous eras of scholarship has been displaced by the now general agreement that all twenty-seven were composed by the end of the first century A.D.⁹ Admittedly, an assortment of views remain: some have dated certain Pauline epistles and one or more of the synoptic gospels as early as the 40's, while others have even challenged the prevailing standards by placing elements of the Johannine corpus as late as c. A.D. 110.¹⁰ However, such discrepancies are inconsequential when considering the interval between the claimed event of Jesus' crucifixion (traditionally dated c. A.D. 30) and the composition of the reports. The first written reference to the crucifixion cannot be dated later than the 60's A.D. with any reasonableness.¹¹ This yields a maximum interval of 30-40 years, with the anomalous dating of A.D. 110 for a Johannine text sanctioning an extreme interval of roughly 80 years for the last writings of the New Testament. The range of 30-80 years separating each book from the event they purport to convey truthfully may appear problematic, especially to those now living in the so-called information age. However, when compared with the rest of antiquity, this interval is commonplace and even minimal, hardly constituting grounds for any document's dismissal. Additionally, the texts themselves reveal three points worthy of further

⁹ The distinguished archaeologist and scholar William Albright claimed in 1955 that there was no longer any solid basis for dating a single New Testament book later than A.D. 80.

¹⁰ For a comparison of early and late dates within this range, see J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000) and Elaine Pagels *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004). Pagels suggests a date of A.D. 110 for the Gospel of John.

¹¹ This is the latest possible date for the composition of the first New Testament document, with a decade or two earlier being far more likely.

consideration. Firstly, there is no indication that an apologetic was ever needed to defend the crucifixion as having occurred, despite the authors' frequent employment of what they deemed reasonable arguments defending Jesus' identity and resurrection.¹² Secondly, the crucifixion itself was used to defend the perceived proper interpretation of the Old Testament, a rather precarious gamble if it never happened. Finally, certain Pauline passages clearly serve to reaffirm the message of Jesus' crucifixion which had been established as a central tenet *prior* to the epistles' formation,¹³ which necessitates granting an even earlier date to the first declaration of the crucifixion as fact. Thus, a compelling case can be made that the crucifixion was not only proclaimed but readily accepted within a generation of the event, with plenty of eyewitnesses still living who could have pointed out the erroneous nature of Christianity's central article, and yet such protests are nonexistent.

The Qur'an was written and compiled sometime in the seventh century, approximately six hundred years after the time of Jesus, postdating the entire New Testament by at least five hundred years. Were this the first report of Jesus' fate, the lengthy interval itself could raise questions as to its authenticity, particularly since there is no indication it can be traced to an oral tradition of the first century. But the task of supplanting the established claim of the New Testament, as attempted by the Qur'an, requires a convincing presentation of historical evidence to the contrary. Instead, the Qur'an presumes to override the New Testament with nothing more than its self-

¹² E.g., Matthew reports the Jewish claim that the disciples stole Jesus' body, but never indicated the Jews had doubts about the crucifixion; in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul vehemently defended the resurrection, but viewed the crucifixion as an accepted fact; writing c. A.D. 150, Justin Martyr appealed to the Roman records of the crucifixion as if they could easily be obtained and checked by the Emperor.

¹³ E.g., 1 Corinthians 2:2, 11:23-26; Philippians 2:4-11. It should also be noted that the Christian practices of communion and baptism could only have significance if it was believed that Jesus actually died. Cf. Romans 6:1-8 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

proclaimed inherit authority, with individual Muslims left with the difficulty of offering alternate theories to the crucifixion.

Closely related to the dating of the manuscripts is the establishment of their authorship, an issue that finds far more disunity among contemporary New Testament scholars. Rejection of traditional authorship runs rampant, in spite of the following: many of the documents themselves claim to be composed by an eyewitness of Jesus,¹⁴ or by one who had direct contact with such eyewitnesses¹⁵; these claims were often corroborated by individuals who knew either the author or the author's acquaintances.¹⁶ Notwithstanding the dissimilar conclusions reached about their identity and their knowability, there is general accord on two points: each author was convinced of the reality of Jesus' crucifixion, and attempted to relay to others either the news of its occurrence or an interpretation of its meaning; no author was removed from the time, places, and people associated with Jesus to the extent that possessing inaccurate information about something as crucial as his death is probable.

It is debated whether the Qur'an was created by Muhammad alone, was written by scribes at his command, or was produced by his followers after his death, presumably basing the content on his ideas and sayings.¹⁷ However, once the options are limited to Muhammad and those associated with him in seventh century Arabia, further inquiry becomes extraneous, for not even a tenuous link to people or reports from first century

¹⁴ E.g., John 19:35; 2 Peter 1:16.

¹⁵ E.g., Luke 1:2; Hebrews 2:3

¹⁶ E.g., see the testimonies of Papias and Irenaeus as preserved in *Eusebius: The Church History*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1999).

¹⁷ To become familiar with such debates, see the three following essays in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): "The Historical Context" by Fred M. Donner; "Creation of a Fixed Text" by Claude Gilliot; and "Alternative Accounts of the Qur'an's Formation" by Harald Motzki. Also see Mondher Sfar, *In Search of the Original Koran: The True History of the Revealed Text*, trans. Emilia Lanier (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2008).

Palestine can be established. Clearly, the New Testament authors occupy the superior position for offering reliable information on Jesus' death.

The meticulous methods and unbiased findings of textual criticism have been invaluable in establishing the trustworthiness of the New Testament text. Aside from contemporary attempts to intermingle higher criticism, ongoing scholarship has only served to amplify the verdict of this discipline due to frequent new discoveries and refined techniques. The sheer number of extant manuscripts, the early dates they possess, and the dependability of their transmission provide ample support for John Warwick Montgomery's assertion:

To express skepticism concerning the resultant text of the New Testament books (as represented, for example, by Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece*) is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documentation of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament."¹⁸

Historians and classicists would be aghast at the thought of discarding all historic claims of the Greco-Roman era prior to an ousting of those found in the New Testament; yet the evidence (and honest scholarship) requires that if the crucifixion is denied, the exploits of Alexander the Great, the means by which Julius Caesar met death, and the governance of Marcus Aurelius should receive no less a fate.¹⁹

The application of textual criticism to the Qur'an has been late in coming, perhaps due in part to a noteworthy inhibitor for determining facts: the third Muslim caliph, Uthman (d. 656), fearing the possibility of divergent Qur'ans, demanded a recall of all versions, commissioned an official revised edition for distribution to the masses, and

¹⁸ Montgomery, *History, Law, and Christianity*, 27-28.

¹⁹ Montgomery, having majored in the classics himself, brought up this very point in a debate with a professor of philosophy. The philosopher agreed to throw out all knowledge of antiquity, to which the chairman of the classics department blurted out; "Good Lord, Avrum, not that!" For the insightful and humorous account, see Montgomery, *History, Law, and Christianity*, 105-122.

summarily commanded the destruction of all previous copies. This incident immensely restricts inquiries into the formation of the original Qur'an and the faithfulness of its transmission. Moreover, it provides probable grounds for suggesting that Uthman's fears and motives were not baseless, but that conflicting Qur'anic texts both existed and were recognized as problematic by not a few Muslims.²⁰ If this dilemma alone is considered, a contrasting of the Qur'an with the New Testament regarding the accuracy of their extant manuscripts positively favors the latter and the claim therein: Jesus was crucified.

Extra-biblical Sources Citing the Crucifixion as Fact

External corroboration adding credence to the New Testament's account of Jesus' crucifixion is manifold. The works of non-Christians can be particularly helpful in this regard, for although each source is secondary rather than primary, it would be difficult to claim the authors were either sympathetic or indifferent toward the Christians' cause. We will here consider the witness of pagan reports, Jewish writings, and heretical, pseudo-Christian accounts of Jesus.²¹

Tacitus (c. A.D. 56–c. 117) is the chief Roman historian who mentioned Jesus' death. Recounting the Emperor Nero's encounter with Christians due to the fire in Rome, we read:

. . . 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 under the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, . . .²²

²⁰ Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1993), 91-92, 191-194.

²¹ For a comprehensive survey of ancient, non-New Testament evidences for Jesus from both Christian and non-Christian sources, see Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus, Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1996).

²² Tacitus, *Complete Works of Tacitus*, ed. Moses Hadas, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: Random House, Inc., 1942), 380.

It is difficult to understand the phrase “suffered the extreme penalty” as referring to anything other than crucifixion, especially since Pilate’s role is also mentioned.

An account of a more sardonic nature is found in the words of the Greek rhetorician Lucian of Samosata (c. A.D. 125–c. 180). Christians, he observed, come “after him whom they still worship—the man who was crucified in Palestine for introducing this new cult into the world.” Lucian understood the Christian concept of brotherhood to be based on “worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living according to his laws.”²³

Perhaps the earliest pagan reference to the crucifixion is the now lost work of Thallus, a Roman historian writing around A.D. 52. In the early third century, Julius Africanus referenced it while discussing the phenomena that occurred while Jesus hung on the cross: “In the third book of his *Histories*, Thallus calls this darkness a solar eclipse. In my opinion, this is nonsense” because Jesus died at the time of a full moon, which necessitates a “wonderful sign,” or miracle, instead.²⁴ The cause of the darkness is of lesser importance here than is the possibility that the crucifixion was known by a pagan historian within twenty-five years of its presumed occurrence, details included.

There also exists a Syriac manuscript dated sometime after A.D. 73 in which a man named Mara bar Serapion encouraged his son to pursue wisdom, as did Socrates, Pythagoras, and Jesus. The calamities that visited those responsible for each individual’s death were identified as the result of their unjust deeds: “What advantage did the Jews gain by executing their wise King? It was just after that that their kingdom was

²³ Lucian of Samosata, *Lucian: Selected Dialogues*, trans. Desmond Costa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 76-77.

²⁴ Julius Africanus, *Iulius Africanus: Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments (Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller Der Ersten Jahrhunderte)*, ed. Martin Wallraff, trans. William Adler (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2007), 277.

abolished.”²⁵ While the method of execution is unnamed, stoning and crucifixion are the most reasonable assumptions for a Jewish execution, with the latter being confirmed by the testimonies that follow.

The greatest Jewish historian of antiquity is unquestionably Flavius Josephus (c. A.D. 37–100). Amid his prolific literary output, one finds a particularly short yet infamous passage on Jesus:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.²⁶

Controversy is inescapable regarding this text due to frequent charges of interpolation; however, among the miniscule segments that remain unscathed by such accusations is Jesus’ crucifixion resulting from the Jews’ instigation of Pilate. Thus, even if later scribes made alterations, Josephus nonetheless provided admissible testimony on the death of Jesus.

The Babylonian Talmud consists of reports, traditions, and commentaries produced by rabbis of the Tannaitic period (A.D. 70–200), with its references to Jesus considered the most reliable of those found in rabbinic literature.²⁷ The following account has been noted for its remarkable conformity with the New Testament:

On (Sabbath eve and) the eve of Passover Jesus the Nazarene was hanged. And a herald went forth before him 40 days (heralding): Jesus the Nazarene is going

²⁵ Quoted in F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 31.

²⁶ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18:63 in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whinston and Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1999) 590.

²⁷ Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, 55.

forth to be stoned because he practiced sorcery and instigated and seduced Israel (to idolatry). Whoever knows anything in his defense, may come and state it. But since they did not find anything in his defense, they hanged him on (Sabbath eve and) the eve of Passover.²⁸

Not only do the charges listed against Jesus match those found in the gospels, but the initial strategy of stoning him and its replacement by crucifixion is reiterated as well.²⁹

An abundance of documents long-considered heterodox, including alternate “gospels,” additional “acts,” various “epistles,” and numerous “apocalypses,” have received superfluous attention over the past few generations.³⁰ These range from complete Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi to virtually unreadable fragments that have been discovered sporadically over time. Many are utilized to form hypotheses and offer conjectures that challenge the traditional views of Jesus. However, although a textual analysis of the writings reveals problems—namely, each being composed at least as late as the second century by those far too removed from Jesus or his followers to be considered historically reliable, especially when contradicted by the New Testament—they unanimously affirm that Jesus died by crucifixion. While not every document mentions Jesus or his death, most either recall it specifically or assume its past occurrence by introducing Jesus in his resurrected state.

²⁸ Quoted in Peter Schaeffer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 64.

²⁹ For the charges against Jesus of sorcery (that is, performing supernatural acts by the power of Satan) and idolatry (that is, Jesus’ claim to deity), and attempts to stone him for these perceived crimes, see Luke 1:14-20; John 5:18, 8:48-58, 10:19-33.

³⁰ The impetus for this focus in New Testament studies can be traced to Walter Bauer’s thesis of 1934, claiming that what is now called orthodoxy was one of many competing views on Jesus found in early Christianity, with “favorable circumstances” allowing this view to prevail more than did its truthfulness. See Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, 2d German edition, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel, trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins (Mifflintown, Pennsylvania: Sigler Press, 1996). Subsequent scholars spearheading this school of thought have been Helmut Koester and Elaine Pagels.

The frequent appeal by Muslims to the so-called Gospel of Barnabas deserves special mention here. In certain editions, Jesus exchanged his appearance with that of Judas Iscariot, resulting in Judas's crucifixion while the crowds assumed they were killing Jesus. But an examination of the text easily dispels any notion that it contains the truth of the matter. First, while a Gospel of Barnabas is named in the fourth century, it is impossible to know if this is the same one often cited by Muslims, for the earliest known text still in existence is from the fifteenth century and is written in Italian. Second, any hope of deciphering the original content has long vanished: blatant variants between most of the existing manuscripts produce irreconcilable differences on both the historical and doctrinal levels; alteration and insertions to the text are readily evident due to their distinct resemblance to written venerations that are exclusive to the medieval era. Finally, it is clear that the canonical gospels have been heavily relied on for presenting information about Jesus, indicating that this so-called Gospel of Barnabas cannot be the original report on his death.³¹

Conclusion

The claim that Jesus was crucified clearly has the evidence in its favor, as determined by an examination of the historical reliability of the New Testament and of the Qur'an. This leads one to wonder what more it would take to convince a Muslim of the fact of the crucifixion. How many more documents, both Christian and non-Christian, must be presented that affirm it? It is speculated that such a question is futile, for the issue is ultimately decided based on the assumption that the Qur'an contains the

³¹ Norman Anderson, *Islam in the Modern World* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 223-234. The so-called Apocalypse of Peter is sometimes assumed to be in accord with the claim that Jesus was not crucified as found in some editions of the so-called Gospel of Barnabas, due to both texts referring to Jesus as laughing during the crucifixion. It is clear, however, that in the so-called Apocalypse of Peter, Jesus laughed because it was merely his flesh that was being nailed to the cross, not his spirit.

truth of Allah, and is not decided by historical investigation. A parting question then must be asked: If nothing presented from the objective, tangible, historic world will be accepted as disproof of the Qur'an, how does what Muslims call a belief that Jesus was never crucified, but about whom all reports and evidences are to the contrary, differ from having a belief that is not connected to reality at all, but exists only in one's imagination?

Selected Bibliography

Anderson, Norman. *Islam in the Modern World*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990).

Bruce, F.F. *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.

Geisler, Norman and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1993.

Habermas, Gary R. *The Historical Jesus, Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*. Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1996.

Montgomery, John Warwick. *History, Law, and Christianity*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy, 2002.

Either way, the Qur'anic rejection of Christ's death by crucifixion has to swim against a torrent of historical evidences as well as the view of nearly every mainstream scholar in the field. This is certainly a difficult task and one that is unlikely to be achieved on historical grounds. Modern medical interpretation of the historical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead when taken down from the cross. The substitution hypothesis is also popular for Muslims, and claims that it was not Christ who was crucified but someone who "appeared" like him to the Jews and who was killed in his place. These views expressed by many Muslim interpreters of the Qur'an are confronted by numerous (insurmountable) obstacles on historical grounds.