



The Crucifixion¹

They said (in boast), “We have killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allaah” – But they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but (another) was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it and follow only conjecture. And they did not kill him, being certain (of his identity)

{an-Nisaa (4): 157}

The Qur'aanic statement that Jesus was neither slain nor crucified and that another was killed whom they assumed was Jesus, stands very much in favour of the divine origin of the Qur'aan. Many argue that had Muhammad been a forger, the crucifixion would be the last detail he would 'change.' However, further study reveals that Christians during the pre-Islamic era followed just as diverse doctrines as they do today. Amongst these beliefs were that Jesus was not crucified and many early Christian sects denied that the

¹ A chapter from the unpublished *Da'wah* book *Before Nicea* by Tim Bowes ('Abdur-Rahmaan) and Paul Addae ('Abdul-Haq) written by the two during their studies at the *School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*.

crucifixion even occurred. This begs the question as to why they denied the crucifixion of Jesus?

H.M. Gwatkin in *Early Church History* states **"The stumbling block of the age of early Christianity was not so much Jesus' divinity, but his crucifixion."**²

Some of the first groups that followed the way of Jesus and also several other historical sources other than the Qur'aan confirm that Jesus did not die on the cross. John Toland in his work *The Nazarenes* mentions that Plotinus who lived in the 4th century stated that he had read a book called *The Journeys of the Apostles* which related traditions of Peter, John, Andrew, Thomas and Paul. Among other things, the book stated that Jesus was not crucified, but rather another in his place, and therefore Jesus and the apostles had laughed at those who believed Jesus had died on the cross.³ Also similar to the belief of Basileides and his followers/students who were known as the *Basildians*.⁴

H. Lincoln, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh in their controversial and critically acclaimed *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* mention an historical text, *The Nag Hammadi Scrolls*⁶ and state that these

² Volume 1, p.11

³ John Toland, *The Nazarenes* (1718), p.18 - It can be found at the *British Library*.

⁴ J. Stevenson (ed.), *A New Eusebius - Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to AD 337* (London: SPCK, 1957), p.82

⁵ (1982), p.409

manuscripts contain a manuscript entitled '*The Treaties of Seth.*' Here it is mentioned that Jesus was not crucified even though a crucifixion did take place, Simon of Cyrene was the victim and not Jesus.

J. Stevenson, a *Cambridge University* lecturer of divinity, notes that Irenaeus describes the teachings of Basileides. While Basileides and his followers believed that Jesus was the god of the Jews and other strange things about the creation of the universe, with regards to the crucifixion of Jesus they said "He appeared, then, on earth as a man, to the nations of these powers, and wrought miracles. **Wherefore he did not himself suffer death, but a certain Simon of Cyrene, being compelled, bore the cross in his stead. Simon was transfigured by him, so that he might be thought to be Jesus, and was crucified, through ignorance and error.**"⁷

Cerinthus⁸, a contemporary of Peter, Paul and John, also denied that Christ died on the cross and that Christ did not suffer because he was a spiritual being.⁹ The '*Carpocratians*' also believed that Jesus did not die on the cross but another person that resembled him.

⁶ Discovered in December 1945 in the town of Nag Hammadi in the cliffs that skirt the Nile through Upper Egypt by an Egyptian farmer named Muhammad 'Ali. The scrolls were studied by the French scholar and antiquities dealer Jean Doresse who was working in Cairo for an antiquities dealer.

⁷ *A New Eusebius*, pp.81-82

⁸ His followers were known as the '*Cerinthians.*'

⁹ *A New Eusebius*, p.96

Also the early community of Christians called the *'Docetae,'* held that Jesus never had a real physical body, only an apparent or illusory body. Therefore, the crucifixion was *apparent*, not real.¹⁰

In the *Gospel of Mark* (15: 21), the Greek word translated as *'to carry,'* where Simon of Cyrene *'carried'* the cross, should actually be translated as *'to bare.'* There are some who argue that this indicates that Simon of Cyrene *bore* the cross and was crucified not Jesus in fact.

This of course puts it in agreement with the beliefs of the other early groups that followed the way of Jesus. Simon of Cyrene is not mentioned anywhere else in Biblical tradition and a study of Greek is therefore necessary.

All of these notions of the crucifixion differ from the 'orthodox' Christian understanding, illustrating that there were indeed varied beliefs amongst the early followers of Jesus. These would later be deemed as 'heretics,' by 'orthodox' Christians with beliefs much further away from the teachings, belief and practice of Jesus, *peace be upon him.*

¹⁰ Leonard George, *The Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics* (1995) and *A New Eusebius*, pp. 47-48, 96, 101-102 and 152

Another interesting piece of evidence from the *Gospel of Mark*, chapter 15, is the passage that informs of Pontious Pilate, finding no fault with Jesus, saw fit to release him. **“Following a Passover custom unknown outside the gospels, Pilate offered to free a Jewish prisoner and suggested Jesus, but the crowd...demanded that Pilate release Barabbas and crucify Jesus.”**¹¹

In the earliest Greek manuscripts, Barabbas was referred to as *Jesus Barabbas*.’ This is particularly interesting as Gregory Shaw writes: **“Outside the Gospels nothing is known of Barabbas. His name is Aramaic and means *“son of the father”* (*Abba), ironically denoting the status given exclusively to Jesus.”**¹²

From this then, it is unclear as to who was actually crucified, since both characters had exactly the same name! In fact, the one who was released could more strongly be identified with the one whom Christians insist was crucified. As if this was not enough, it would otherwise indicate that *“son of the father”* was *not* an exclusive title, as some Christians claim with reference to the word *‘Abba.’*

¹¹ Bruce Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford University Press: 1993), p.74

¹² *ibid*

There has been the argument that because the crucifixion is mentioned by the historians Josephus and Tacitus this therefore proves that Jesus was crucified. However, it should be noted that Josephus and Tacitus merely state that a pious worshiper of God called Jesus lived, taught and was later crucified. Their accounts are not eye-witness accounts but most probably hearsay accounts due to the massive uproar in the area at the time from the impact of Jesus with the Jews and Romans. It is in fact the case that Josephus was only born circa 38 CE indicating that he was an historian and not an eye witness. Geza Vermes of Oxford University has shown that the works of Josephus have been altered by the later Christians who inserted their own version of events into the writings of Josephus.