

## WHY I AM NOT A MUSLIM Pt 2

Regularly in a trial I find myself cross-examining a witness whose story has changed. Don't be shocked, but rarely, if ever, has it changed in a way that hurts the witness's case. It always seems to have changed in ways that help the case.

An example might help.

I am trying a case about "metal-on-metal" hip implants. These are artificial hips where the ball rubs against a liner and both are made of metal. The rubbing causes incredibly small toxic metal debris to come off and sit in the tissues around the hip. The debris is smaller than the human cell, and billions of pieces are emitted from simple tasks like daily walking. This debris not only infects local cells, but it also ionizes, sending toxic metal ions around the body where it can deposit in other tissues and organs. The body is able to excrete some portion of the ions, but they regenerate with each step and motion of the hip.

In the case, there is an issue of whether the company reasonably knew about the problems before it began manufacturing and selling the implants. I had a document we call a "smoking gun." It was a memo prepared by the PhD who was in charge of the hip development program, written within five years of the FDA clearing the device for sale.

In this memo, the company man explained that the company would be making a mistake trying to manufacture and sell a "metal-on-metal" hip device because that technology had been tried before and had failed miserably. The suggestion that more modern manufacturing techniques might produce a success where the past had been a failure was not born out by the tests that were done. This man said to do what the company ultimately chose to do would be to build on a past failure.

In spite of what the company man wrote, the company went forward, made and sold the hips for a decade, and then pulled them from the market because of problems. Of course, this man's memo became somewhat prophetic, and it was a key piece of evidence for me in the case.

Eventually, I got to cross-examine the gentleman who wrote the smoking gun, and in spite of what he wrote, he testified differently. He testified that the company was sure that there would not be any problems with the metal-on-metal implants. I pulled out the memo and showed it to him. We went through it line by line. I pointed out that the story he was giving under oath about what the company was thinking twenty years before differed tremendously from what he had written at the time. His memory had changed in ways that benefited his company in court, but it was in stark contrast to his recorded thoughts *long before* litigation was conceived.

It raised the question: should we believe his recollection from twenty–years later, as given in his recently broadcast, self-serving statements or should we believe what he recorded back at the time in question?

The general rule is, absent some expressed reason why it wouldn't hold true, the recollections closer in time to the actual events are more reliable than those recollections that are days, weeks, months, years, decades, and especially centuries later. A related rule is that the bias of someone in changing a story must weigh into the consideration of what really happened. In other words, it benefited the man's job and position tremendously for him to have the new story. To adhere to the older documented version would have been to him and his employer's detriment.

This brings me to this section of analysis on why I am not a Muslim.

Because Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are history-based religions, we should carefully read their Scriptures to determine their accuracy, tracing them back in time in an effort to determine reliability.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share three important traits that I focus on in this section. First, as already referenced, each is a history-based religion. All three are premised upon actually historical events that are recorded in the holy writings of each. Second, each considers their holy writings to be Scripture, something delivered from God through prophets into a form we have today. Third, many of the same historical figures feature prominently in the various Scriptures. In the Old Testament, which is Scripture to both Judaism and Christianity, we read of multiple characters and storylines found also in the Qur'an, which is Scripture to Islam. The New Testament, which for the Christian is Scripture along with the Old Testament, also has multiple characters and teachings found in the Qur'an as well.

With these three important traits, we might expect the faiths to be similar, and they do share certain similarities. However, the stories, the characters, the corresponding teachings differ significantly, producing not only fundamental differences in views of God, humanity, sin, righteousness, and judgment, but the differences also produce a major question. Which Scriptures have it right?

To assess this and to bring an answer that I can find not only satisfactory and reliable, requires some careful research and consideration. Having worked through this for some time, I am convinced that I could never be a Muslim because when looking at the significant differences, I cannot find substantial reason to believe in the Qur'an where it stands in conflict with the Old and New Testaments.

My analysis is set out in two parts. First, I consider a core historical teaching in both the New Testament and the Qur'an. I will follow this with available information on how the

Scriptures came to be, including the authenticity of the copies we have today and the veracity of the ancient manuscripts.

Before I can give either of those two sets of analysis, however, it is essential that we consider the background information of how the Bible and Qur'an came to be, and how they are considered "Scripture" by each faith.

## **THE COMPOSITION OF THE BIBLE AND QUR'AN AND THEIR ROLES AS "SCRIPTURES"**

### *The Bible*

The Bible is a collection of 66 different writings that were composed over a period of 1,500 years and selected by the church as Scripture. The church has divided the Scriptures into two sections, an Old and a New Testament.

The Old Testament is the collection of writings that formed the Jewish Scriptures. It has many different types of writings. There are narratives that set out history, narratives that set out laws and teachings, poetry that express a full range of human emotions, wisdom literature that gives principles for life, prophetic writings that speak of God's involvement in history (past, present, and future), and even a love-drama between a husband and wife.

The New Testament is a collection of historical accounts of the life of Christ and the early church. There are letters written about certain situations and concerns in the early church. These letters are written from apostolic authority, meaning from the pens or teachings of the apostles.

These writings, Old and New Testament, are special because they are inspired by God. God used them to show the human condition and God's redemptive plan and action to redeem people from that condition. They also serve to teach, train, rebuke, and correct the readers, leading them to a better, more fulfilled life.

The Bible teaches that God did not magically dictate all of these Scriptures, but often worked through the pens and lives of human writers, to bring about the words and teachings that truly reflect God's message to humanity. For example, the apostle Paul was shepherding churches in Galatia (modern Turkey) that had some very specific problems. Paul wrote to address those problems. The church quickly recognized that these writings were inspired by God and for the use of the larger church, not simply those in the region of Galatia. Even before the pages of the New Testament close, we read of the church referencing Paul's writings as "Scripture" (2 Pet. 3:16).

Early Christian teaching also believed that the Old Testament Scriptures were entrusted to the Jews first, then to the church as well, for securing and maintaining. People copied and transmitted the writings, leaving the fingerprints of human errors in the process, but never at the expense of God's overarching message. Similarly, the Bible has been translated from the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into many other languages, not ever securing all the nuances of the original writings, but always able to capture the thrust of God's redemptive message and good news for all people.

Christians do not worship the Bible. To do so would be to create an idol out of Scripture. Christians worship God alone. Scripture points to Jesus as the incarnated Word of God, meaning that in Jesus God spoke fully and finally, and as incarnated God, Jesus is worshipped as God should be. But, venerated and valuable as it is, the Bible is not an object of worship, and to make it so is wrong.

### *The Qur'an*

The Qur'an is "a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds" (26:192).<sup>1</sup> It is believed to have been "sent down to Muhammad" (47:2) through the Holy Spirit working in his heart "in a clear Arabic tongue" (26:193-195). For this reason, many Muslims believe that the Qur'an is to be read in Arabic, and explained by those who understand it in its original tongue. Translations are not valued in the same way as the original text.

Muhammad was given the revelation in bits and pieces (25:32) over several decades and, rather than being in chronological order, is collected in the order dictated by Allah (the Muslim God) (75:17). Traditional Muslim teaching is that "The text of the Holy Qur'an has thus been safeguarded from all alterations or corruptions in accordance with the Divine promise contained in one of the earliest revelations."<sup>2</sup> Each word and each letter is considered divine and without equal, having been preserved by Allah.

Reading Muslim works on the Qur'an, typical claims are like those below.

"We have presented above indisputable proof that the Qur'an is the word of God. The reality is that Muslims are the only ones who even claim to have an authentic scripture from God, in its original form, of which not a single letter has been changed. Most other religions admit that their scriptures are in fact human writings... If we are of the view that God would not leave us without a reliable Revelation, then the mere fact that Muslims are the only

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<sup>1</sup> The translation I am using is from Itani, Talal, "Quran In English. Modern English Translation" (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Ali, Maulana Muhammad. "Holy Quran" (Ahamadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam 2002) 7th revised ed.

ones who even claim to have an authentic revelation could attest to the truthfulness of their claim.<sup>3</sup>

As the actual words of God, in the language of God's choosing, the Qur'an is also viewed as the perfect history in its recounting of events. While the Qur'an explains that the Jews and Christians were also given Scriptures by God, evidently God never insured that those Scriptures would be safeguarded from corruption. The Muslims teach that other Scriptures were corrupted, and it is the Qur'an that fixes or is the reliable historical account. One notable Qur'an translator explains,

The Qur'an is thus not only a verifier of the sacred books of all nations as stated above; it is also a guardian over them. In other words, it guards the original teachings of the prophets of God, for, as elsewhere stated, those teachings had undergone alterations, and only a revelation from God could separate the pure Divine teaching from the mass of error which had grown around it. This was the work done by the Holy Qur'an, and hence it is called a guardian over the earlier scriptures.<sup>4</sup>

This premise sets up a core and simple reason for why I am not a Muslim. I would have to set aside common sense to believe that the Qur'an is presenting more reliable history than that of the Bible and other ancient writings. Furthermore, if the Qur'an is not perfect in its recitation of history, the Muslim faith self-destructs. If there is error in the Qur'an, Islam implodes.<sup>5</sup>

## MEASURING THE QUR'AN'S HISTORICAL TEACHINGS

In the pages of the Qur'an, we read of a number of historical figures ranging from the Old Testament notables Adam and Abraham to Mary and Jesus from the New Testament. While many of the stories and accounts of these people are worthy of examination to determine the accuracy of the Qur'an, perhaps the most constructive one to consider is

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<sup>3</sup> Peace Vision, *Who Wrote the Qur'an* (eBook at Peacevision.com).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Some may want to say the same against the Christian faith; however, the same is not true. The Christian faith teaches that God entrusts his Scriptures to people for copying, securing, etc. (Rom. 3:1-2). Thus in the Christian Scriptures, we will see copy and transmission errors, people rewriting and adjusting certain passages to suit their theology, and more. As a result, there are even Christian fields of study dedicated to trying to reconstruct the "autograph" or original Scriptures from the thousands of early manuscripts available today. Of course, Christians believe that the core message of the Bible has always been maintained, and God has not let the human entrustment of Scriptures endanger the message he has revealed within its pages.

Jesus. The Qur'an's historical teaching on the death of Jesus is a clear example of a history that defies common sense.

The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was not crucified. In 4:157 we read,

And for their saying, "We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the Messenger of God." In fact, they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them as if they did. Indeed, those who differ about him are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it, except the following of assumptions. Certainly, they did not kill him.

There are various Muslim approaches to what happened to Jesus in relation to the cross. The primary view is that God somehow switched out another and disguised that person as Jesus so that Jesus was spared from even being crucified. Typically, this "other" is seen to be Simon the Cyrene. Another view is that Jesus was in fact crucified, but not unto death. He was still alive when taken down from the cross.

Jesus did not die on the cross, nor was he killed as were the two thieves, but to the Jews he appeared as if he were dead.<sup>6</sup>

This Muslim teaching, recorded nearly 600 years after the events must be weighed against the accounts of pagan, Jewish, and Christian historians who wrote hundreds of years earlier. We can isolate out those accounts written within a hundred years of the events, and we see a very stunning different history. Before we handle the Muslim explanation for the other historical accounts being wrong, let us consider those accounts.

### ***Pagan Historians***

An early historian born about twenty years after the death of Jesus was a Roman named Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus (c. 56-120AD). Many accord Tacitus as Rome's greatest historian. He worked for the Roman government in a number of high positions including proconsul of Asia (a part of modern Turkey).

The pinnacle of Tacitus's work is his *Annals*. These carefully written historical accounts of the era of Imperial Rome are recognized by many as the best histories of the period available today.

In one section of his *Annals*, believed to be written about 116AD, Tacitus was giving the account of the big fire that consumed much of Rome in 64AD. Nero was the emperor at the time, and the fire just happened to have destroyed an area of Rome which Nero wanted

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<sup>6</sup> Ali, at 431 (elec. ed.).

destroyed so he could build himself a new palace. The populace blamed Nero for the fire, and Nero worked hard to escape personal accountability.

To stop the rumors that he had personally ordered the fire, Nero blamed the Christians in Rome. Tacitus wrote up this history and gave an account that is diametrically opposed to that of the Qur'an, written some five hundred years later.

To destroy this rumour Nero supplied as perpetrators, and executed with elaborate punishments, people popularly called Christians, hated for their perversions. (The name's source was one Christus, executed by the governor Pontius Pilatus when Tiberius held power. The pernicious creed, suppressed at the time, was bursting forth again, not only in Judaea, where this evil originated, but even in Rome...)<sup>7</sup>

Tacitus records Jesus suffering capital punishment from the hands of Pontius Pilate and the Roman establishment. The ideas that the crucifixion was a fake or was inadequate seem a reach, but will be considered later in the analysis after looking at other sources.

A later source from Tacitus, but still centuries before the Qur'an is a Greek traveling lecturer named Lucian of Samosata (c.125 - c.180). In his satire called, *The Death of Peregrinus*, the main character takes advantage of Christian charity before finally self-immolating at the Olympic games. Lucian wrote of the Christian faith,

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.<sup>8</sup>

Later Lucian refers to Jesus as the “crucified sophist.” Importantly, Lucian was not writing as a Christian believer. He mocked the Christians, and was writing derisively of the faith. Yet even in his derisive writings, he does not deny the truth of the events surrounding Jesus' death. Notably, it would have better served his purposes to point out that the Christians were worshipping a false event, that the crucifixion itself was a fiction. Yet that is not done. At that point in time, the Crucifixion was factual, not subject to a rewrite of history.

These early pagan references to Christ crucified and killed do not exist in a vacuum. They combine and fit naturally with that of the Jewish historian Josephus.

## ***Josephus***

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<sup>7</sup> Tacitus, Annals 15.44 (trans'd by Cynthia Damon).

<sup>8</sup> Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, translated by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata* (Oxford 1949).

Titus Flavius Josephus (37 – c.100) was born less than a decade after the death of Jesus. He had a distinguished pedigree and education, having been born in Jerusalem from a father with priestly lineage and a mother claiming royal blood. Initially Josephus fought against the Romans in the Jewish rebellion, but later became a Roman citizen after being captured and serving the emperor.

Josephus is famous today for his historical accounts of Jewish history, as well as the Roman wars. In his recounting of Jesus, Josephus wrote,

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 amongst 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 had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.<sup>9</sup>

Many, if not most, scholars believe that there may well be Christian insertions into this history recorded by Josephus. The insertions would likely include the comment “if it be lawful to call him a man” as well as the affirmation that Jesus “appeared alive again the third day.” But neither of those are relevant to this discussion.

The resurrection and the Lordship of Jesus are issues worthy of debate, and will be covered in other places in this book, but they don’t press on the issue of whether Jesus was crucified. We see here an early Jewish affirmation of the crucifixion, the event denied by Muhammad’s Qur’anic revelation some five hundred years later.

Perhaps one of the most important, and certainly the earliest Jewish writer to proclaim the crucifixion and death of Jesus was a scholar alive at the time of Jesus. This Jewish rabbi was well-trained, lived in the Jerusalem Jewish community, was connected at the highest levels of temple life, and at first, was no friend to the Christians. After his encounter with Jesus, his views changed, so he actually fits into our consideration as both a Jewish and a Christian source. We know him by his Hebrew name, Saul, and his Roman name, Paul.

### ***Christian Sources***

We can consider the Christian sources as historical writings, before we launch into a discussion of whether they are inspired or of divine origin. A close examination of the

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<sup>9</sup> Titus Flavius Josephus. *The Antiquities of the Jews*, “The Complete Josephus Collection.”



writings of Paul give an excellent perspective of the historical data as close to contemporary as one might wish.

In a letter written around 15 years after the death of Christ, Paul addressed churches in a region of modern Turkey known then as Galatia. In this letter called “Galatians,” Paul wrote of Christ crucified (Gal. 3:2). It was his core message. It was the reason his life was different. Paul changed his entire world because of his deep conviction that Jesus was crucified (and resurrected). He would repeat this message over and over as he went through the mission field setting up churches. Consider these assertions from Paul, all written within twenty years of the death of Jesus:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified (Gal. 3:1-2).

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us— for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Gal. 3:13).

While others might not have thought that Christ on the cross was a powerful message, or even a matter of importance, to Paul, it was the seminal historical event upon which he lived his life and for which he faced his death. Paul told the Corinthians, again within twenty years of the events themselves,

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:17-18).

This *was* Paul’s message. No more, no less.

We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor. 1:23-25).

Paul’s message was inextricably linked to Jesus dying on the cross as well as his resurrection. This was no fake death. A fake death merited people nothing. There is a core difference in Islam and Christianity in this. For Islam, God accepts into his paradise those who follow his will. For Christians, God is too perfect for that. God’s will cannot be followed by humans, we all err and sin. God’s perfection is so great, that the smallest human imperfection is worse than spray painting the Mona Lisa. Sin mars the beauty of God and sinners cannot dwell in his presence.

So the Christian understanding of God has to punish sin and sinners. The issue is how. One way is to consign all sinners to their fate of destruction and hell. A second option is for God himself to pay the price of sin. That is *why* Christians understand Jesus died as he did. The Muslim faith has no need for Jesus to die, no need for a sacrifice. Hence it fits the Muslim faith for Jesus not to die, but that is not the recitation of facts as Paul delivered them. He wrote,

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God (Rom. 6:6-9).

Of course the gospels also contain accounts of Jesus crucified. Those accounts also predate Muhammad's Qur'an, but even without examining the gospels, we have contemporary accounts from Paul that must be recognized for their historical information, even if one does not accept the position of faith from which he writes.

In other words, Paul would have a hard time asserting such historical data as accurate, especially in a way that causes countless people from countless backgrounds to radically change their lives and ascribe to the belief. We can set aside whether we agree with Paul's interpretation. We can even set aside for now whether we believe his confident assertion that Jesus was resurrected. Simply viewing the facts that he recorded makes it really difficult to decide Jesus was not crucified.

Now some might wish to think that the crucifixion did not result in Jesus' death and that he somehow faked the death, but again, that defies the common sense of the events and the record. From the events, the crucifixion was a death sentence. No one walked away from a crucifixion. In fact, Jesus, like many others, barely walked *to* the crucifixion.

The gospels do record him having trouble carrying his cross all the way. This is not surprising since the crucifixion was often preceded by a flogging, something Jesus endured. A Roman flogging was a torture technique. It was done with a *flagellum*, a leather whip that had bones and metal built into it. The process killed many and left others maimed.<sup>10</sup> We read this from a number of Roman historians, both before Christ (Livy c.59BC-c.17AD) and after (Seutonius c.69AD -c.140AD). Reading ancient Roman accounts, one finds disfigurement, flesh ripped off in such abundance that blood loss alone killed the victim. The idea that one could endure such a torture, could then carry a heavy wooden cross, falling under its weight in light of the previous torture, could then be nailed to a cross,

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<sup>10</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: Acts* (Eerdmans 1988) at 420.

impaled by a spear into the side, and somehow live through the ordeal, recovering after three days rest in the tomb really does defy common sense.

The Muslim concept that Jesus was not crucified is not one that I could ever accept in light of the evidence, unless I had already decided that the obvious truth must be wrong. In other words, if I was already a Muslim, if I was convinced that the Qur'an was letter by letter dictated by God through Muhammad, then I would have to accept it, even if it said red was blue. But if instead, I was to reason and accept the obvious truth of historical writings, I would have to deny the validity of the Qur'an as a perfect recitation of history.

*To be continued...*

### POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13).*

This is a provocative statement worthy of more attention next week. It contains the *reason* for the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus was afflicted on our behalf. The Muslim concept of God cannot conceive of God being punished or hurt, yet the Christian faith teaches otherwise. God chose to redeem humanity, and that came at a great cost. It cost God, not us. God does not simply have a moral eraser that allows him to erase sin on a whim. Sin is a course of action that brings about death. That is reality. God as a real God worked in that reality to satisfy both justice and exhibit his mercy. The cross is what it took to do both.

I should not let my life exhibit anything less than great thanks and appreciation to our God who loved me more than I can understand.

2. *“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:17-18).*

This is the root of the Christian faith. It is the power of the Christian faith. May it be so then for me. May I stand firm on the truth of Jesus being dead on the cross, saving me. May that power allow me to face whatever storms come, knowing I am in service to one who has faced worse, and secured my eternity in the process.

3. *“If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Rom. 6:5).*

As Christians, we believe that Jesus not only died, but was resurrected in an awesome display of God's power. Not only God's power over death, but God's power over sin as well. God conquered the grave and the sin that sends us there. This is the power that is at work in me. There is nothing that God wants to do in my life, that he is unable to do, if only I give my life to him.