

My Questions to Muslims

Historical Reality

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.

I have spoken to you of earthly things
and you do not believe;
how then will you believe
if I speak of heavenly things?

-- Gospel according to John 3:1,2,11,12

Perhaps the most substantial question I have towards Islam is its seemingly blatant disregard for historical reality.

There are several issues in this area, but the biggest one is, that Muhammad comes along 600 years after the event of the Crucifixion and just declares this event to be a "non-event".

The crucifixion is arguably the best documented fact of history in the time of antiquity. There are to my knowledge no serious scholars of history who doubt this. The resistance is against the Resurrection but the Crucifixion is basically uncontested. In this short article I obviously cannot present the comprehensive proof for this. My recommendation for the serious inquirer is the book by

Gary R. Habermas
The Historical Jesus
Ancient Evidences for the Life of Christ
College Press Publishing Company, Joplin, Missouri, 1996,
ISBN 0-89900-732-5

This book examines over 10 non-Christian historical documents mentioning the event of the crucifixion and also the Biblical historical sources. The whole of the Biblical message is based on the historical reality of crucifixion and resurrection so much that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:

14

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

15

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

16

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.

17

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

The Apostle Paul states in no uncertain terms, that all of Christianity crumbles and is nonsense if the resurrection never happened. And, for sure, if no death, then no resurrection, but since the death of Jesus was not questioned, Paul did not have to discuss it here in any detail. But he mentioned earlier on in his letter that the center of his message is "Christ as the crucified one" (1 Cor 2:2).

Yet Islam thinks it just can disregard all that and declare it a figment of imagination, an illusion.

This article is rather long, so let me give at this point a summary of my argument. According to all standards and methods of scholarship in the field of historical research the following are facts:

1. Jesus was crucified (see above)
2. The early Christians not only believed the Crucifixion and Resurrection and testified to it as eye-witnesses but made these events the very center of their message.
3. The early Christians put a strong emphasis on the necessity that these accounts are historical to be of any meaning. They knew and stressed the difference between history and fables.

One might disagree whether they were correct in their belief but it is unquestionable that this was their belief, message and emphasis.

And the problem for Islam is not only to deny the first of these points but that in denying the first it makes nonsense of the others as well. Taking away the crucifixion and resurrection there is then no explanation for the reality of the faith of the early Church. It would be similar to suggest that Muhammad never lived. This would create more questions than it would solve. Where did Islam come from if Muhammad was never a reality? Why would the "companions" believe in the prophethood of a man that didn't exist and fight for it? This would leave the origin of Islam hanging over empty space. This would be illogical. In the same way, the denial of the Crucifixion and Resurrection leaves the reality of the early Church hanging unexplained in history.

For claim 1. I have given above a reference to an up-to-date scholarly book. In the following I want provide the evidence for my statements under 2. and 3.

In Biblical understanding there cannot be any basis for faith, if God never really intervened in history. A set of "ideas" or "rules" (commandments) could be invented by anybody. How do we know they are from God? It is always God who takes the initiative, who proves himself to be real, and then invites us to respond. This is the pattern throughout scripture. Biblical faith is "historical faith".

For example, God ties His Ten Commandments to a historic event:

And God spoke all these words:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt out of the land of slavery

You shall have no other gods before me...." Exodus 20:1-2

It is the historical act by the hand of God in which the people are liberated from slavery and it is this intervention of God which is the basis on which God calls them to worship him as their God and liberator.

In this same pattern it is the historical (f)act of the death of Jesus on the cross, being an atoning death for sin because of who it was on this cross, which is the basis for calling us to worship Jesus as the one who took away our sins, and liberated us from the bondage of sin.

Assurance for a hope beyond the grave, depends entirely on the historical event of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. If he hadn't risen from the dead in real space and time of history, why would we have reason to believe his promises about our resurrection?

In this way, most Biblical doctrines are connected to historical events, to reality, because that gives the confidence that God is true to his word. The foundation of all of Biblical faith is that God *has* acted in history and because He *has* shown Himself trustworthy in His promises before, therefore we can trust Him in the promises He made for the future.

[What is Islam basing its hope on? Do Muslims just believe because God (?) says so without first proving Himself trustworthy? Or even giving evidence for his very existence for that matter? How do you know it was God in the first place who said these things you believe in?]

One of the tests for the truth of the Bible is that we can prove that most of the Biblical events can be verified from secular history and archeology. Nearly every year there are new discoveries which confirm again and again the truth of the Biblical reports. Sure, there are still a few unverified events, but to my knowledge none which has conclusively shown that the event reported in the Bible is contrary to our secular archeological and historical knowledge.

But the following is what God himself declares to be **His** proof:

Isaiah 42:

8 "I am the LORD; that is my name!
I will not give my glory to another
or my praise to idols.
9 See, the former things have taken place,
and new things I declare;
before they spring into being
I announce them to you."

And even clearer in Isaiah 48:

1 "Listen to this, ...
3 I foretold the former things long ago,
my mouth announced them and I made them known;
then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.
4 For I knew how stubborn you were;
the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze.
5 Therefore I told you these things long ago;
before they happened I announced them to you
so that you could not say,
'My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.'

6 You have heard these things; look at them all.
Will you not admit them?
"From now on I will tell you of new things,
of hidden things unknown to you.

7 They are created now, and not long ago;
you have not heard of them before today.
So you cannot say, 'Yes, I knew of them.'

14 "Come together, all of you, and listen:
Which of [the idols] has foretold these things?

And there are several more passages similar to this where God asks us to test him if he is not going to do what he announces. **That** is **THE** proof and decisive difference between the idols and the true God.

The Qur'an in the contrary seemingly expects to be believed without evidence that it is God who has given it.

At least no hard evidence. Provable evidence, not something 'arbitrarily subjective' like the [eloquence of the Qur'an](#) which no non-Arabic speaker can verify for himself, and which not even native Arabs agree upon.

In Islam it is claimed that the same God of the earlier prophets also spoke through Muhammad, yet he seems to not only no longer give any evidence to his prophet's claims, but even worse Islam seems to be disregarding historical facts, and demands that we believe Muhammad's pronouncements for our eternal destination even though we can't even trust it in its "earthly" statements about history.

Jesus says to Nicodemus: how will you believe me if I tell you of heavenly things if you don't even believe me for earthly ones?

Indeed, how can I? Not in regard to Jesus or the Bible which give us lots of facts to check and they hold up to scrutiny, but how can I believe the Qur'an and Muhammad?

Realizing that the Qur'an gets the facts wrong that we know, (see the above book on Jesus, particularly the crucifixion, but also a number of issues in the later articles), how can I believe this book in those parts which necessarily have to be in the realm of faith because they are still in the future like the way God will decide on heaven or hell for us on Judgement Day, and things that are 'by principle' not possible to be tested like the nature of God?

Ten days after the ascension, 50 days after the resurrection, Peter, the leader of the Apostles who has been with Jesus for 3 years, preaches on the crucifixion and resurrection (Acts 2).

In Acts 1 it is made clear that to be an Apostle one must have been with him from the beginning and be an eyewitness of his resurrection **to make sure** everything is based on first hand knowledge and not on imagination and hearsay. That is the basis for the election of the twelfth apostle to replace Judas the traitor.

Also later, when the Apostle Paul is called by Jesus himself, it is important that Paul is a witness of the living risen Christ, who met him (in a vision) on the Damascus road and commissioned him to be a

messenger. But still, this is "not enough". Paul also meets with the leaders of the Apostles and gets their approval for his mission and message which he is going to take to the gentiles, so that all can be sure, it is the one and true Gospel that is preached by all Apostles equally.

The early Church took great pains to make sure their faith was based on solid historical truth. They exposed heresy as soon as it came up from some people. All this is very clear from the records we have.

The Apostle Peter says (in 2 Peter 1):

12

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are **firmly established in the truth** you now have.

13

I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body,

14

because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

15

And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

16

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **we were eyewitnesses of his majesty**.

The Apostles took great pain to make sure that their followers are firmly established in the truth and the true teaching was repeated and rehearsed over and over again. And it is foremost on his mind that the Christians KNOW that all this was not invented stories [fables] but that all of it is based on their personal eyewitness account of Jesus life [and death and resurrection].

The Apostle John writes (in 1 John 1):

1

That which was from the beginning,
which WE have HEARD,
which WE have SEEN with our eyes,
which WE have LOOKED AT
and our hands have TOUCHED --
this WE proclaim concerning the Word of life.

2

The life appeared;
WE have SEEN it
and testify to it,
and we proclaim to you the eternal life,
which was with the Father and has APPEARED to US.

3

We proclaim to you

what WE have SEEN
and HEARD, ...

Can we miss the emphasis John puts on the fact that they [the Apostles] have intimate first hand knowledge? "Heard, ... seen, ... touched, ..."

And also the Apostle Paul, much maligned by the Muslims, stresses exactly the same point (in 1 Corinthians 15):

1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel
I preached to you,
which you received and on which you have taken your stand.
2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word
I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.
3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance:
that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
4 that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
5 and that he appeared to Peter,
and then to the Twelve.
6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers
at the same time, most of whom are still living,
though some have fallen asleep.
7 Then he appeared to James,
then to all the apostles,
8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.
9 For I am the least of the apostles
and do not even deserve to be called an apostle,
because I persecuted the church of God.
10 But by the grace of God I am what I am,
and his grace to me was not without effect.
No, I worked harder than all of them --
yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.
11 Whether, then, it was I or they,
this is what we preach,
and this is what you believed.

If anybody would change the gospel - that would make the faith invalid, then believing would be in vain (verse 2). It is important that it is the exact gospel. And this was a gospel which Paul has not "invented himself" but he has **received** it (verse 3) and only passed it on faithfully. And what is this gospel? Verses 3 and 4 give the summary. It is Jesus' death for our sins, and that he was raised from the dead. And not just the "event in itself" but it was of uttermost importance that these events are **according to the Scriptures**. Why? Because that is what we have already read above. That is how God authenticates. He gives prophecy for all major acts he does. He announces them beforehand so that nobody will mistake

God's acts for anything else.

God announced it [in the Scriptures through the earlier prophets] and he brought it to pass. But we do not only believe it because it is predicted. Anybody can claim that something that is predicted has happened. How do we know? Because we do have many eyewitnesses who stand for this truth. Over 500 people who have witnessed the risen Christ are ready to be questioned. Most of them still alive at the time Paul writes this letter (about 55 A.D. = 25 years after the resurrection). This is an absolute solid case. At least 250 eyewitnesses are available. Some of which were not even believers in Jesus before he appeared to them [James, the brother of Jesus for example].

And, this is not just what Paul preaches, it is the exact same thing that all the other apostles also preach (verse 11).

Whether you believe the meaning of the Crucifixion or not, the historical evidence for the event of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection is rock solid.

And then, Muhammad comes along and just claims: It never happened. And he thinks, no explanation necessary. You just believe. And if not, if you have doubts, then you are just of those who have no knowledge (Qur'an 4:157).

Historical fact is the basis of Christian faith. My impression is that Islam goes the other way around. History is defined to be what the 'sacred texts' say, no matter what the factual evidence says.

My impression is that many Muslims seem to happily "just" believe it when the Qur'an says that Jesus was not crucified, that he didn't die, and that he (consequently) didn't rise from the dead. Historical evidence? Who cares!

In addition, I see the problem that the Qur'an says that the disciples of Jesus were sincere and truthful [helpers of Allah and Muslims] but that they on the other hand have clearly preached the death and resurrection of Jesus for the atonement of sin. For this there is as well lots of absolutely solid evidence and on the other hand there is no evidence at all for the Qur'anic ideas about the disciples of Christ. No doubt, the central message of the first followers of Christ was his crucifixion and resurrection.

How then do we judge the truth of the Qur'an?

What can be valid criteria to find out whether the Qur'an is right? Where is the God-given proof for its truth? And if there is no "objective" proof (at least as strong as the historical evidence for early Christianity), then how do we know it was God? God has so far always given evidence enough to show the authentication of his messages. This is the hallmark of all Biblical revelation.

Based on these observations, entrusting myself to Islam would be **blind** faith for me. It would be faith **against** evidence. I cannot do that. From the earlier prophets I see that God has never expected blind faith in his message. Especially since we are warned over and over again against false prophets and teachers. Why would God change his methods without warning or announcements? God is unchanging.

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When I am talking about theology in the next couple of questions, then this will not be in contradiction to my announcement in the introduction where I stated that I will focus on the "earthly things" over against the "heavenly realities". The discussion whether God is one in the Muslim Unitarian or Christian Trinitarian sense that is a debate about a transcendent question and I will not touch upon that. But if I discuss what was the official teaching of the Jews or the Church at a certain time (whether right or wrong) then that is an "earthly thing", something we can decide on the basis of historical data. It is in this same way that I was talking about the fact of the Trinitarian Christian Church in the 6th Century in my last article. And it is this historical fact of the teaching of the Jews and the Christians which leads me to wonder that the Qur'an seems to display much

Confused revelation.

Just as Christianity and Judaism, Islam confesses belief in an *omniscient* God, i.e. that God knows everything.

Muslims believe and proclaim that the Qur'an was given as a (new) last revelation partly because the Jews and the Christians have messed up the earlier ones. And to a certain extent this belief can be found in the Qur'an.

Sura An Nahl 16:63-64 reads:

By God, We (also) sent (Our apostles) to peoples before thee; but Satan made, (to the wicked) their own acts seem alluring: he is also their patron today, but they shall have a most grievous penalty.

And We sent down the Book to thee **for the express purpose, that thou shouldst make clear** to them those things in which they differ, and that it should be a guide and a mercy to those who believe.

The Book [Qur'an] seems to be sent down for the "express purpose" to make clear those things on which there are different opinions (verse 64) between those who have received apostles (and books) at an earlier time (Jews and Christians) but to whom their own acts (and desires) were more alluring than God's word (verse 63) (and who therefore changed [corrupted] the earlier message).

Especially, it is to clear up the areas of difference between the Jews and the Christians. In this article I want to investigate whether this claim is met or whether the Qur'an confuses the issues even more.

Also Sura Yusuf 12:111 (see also 16:89) reads:

There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It (the Qur'an) is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it (the earlier scriptures),- a detailed exposition of all things, and a guide and a mercy to any such as believe.

Even if one doesn't want to stretch this verse (though some Muslims appearantly do so) that the Qur'an literally explains EVERYTHING, the context makes clear that the Qur'an supposedly gives a detailed exposition of all things **that might not yet be clear from the earlier revelation**. Is that a fair interpretation? I think so. Tell me if not and show me from the text why it means something else if you disagree with it.

There are a number of doctrinal issues where we have to ask if the Qur'an gives the promised clarification or does only add to the perceived confusion.

The Cross: I already pointed out the problem of the denial of the crucifixion as a historical reality. Now I want to look at it from the aspect of meaning. Both Jews and Christians are in agreement that the crucifixion happened. There was absolutely no disagreement and no confusion about this. The Qur'an is producing confusion where there was none before. The Qur'an denies the crucifixion but does not give any evidence for what happened. It does not give any explanation. The one and only Quranic passage on this issue reads:

4:157. That they said (in boast)
"We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary the Apostle of Allah";
but they killed him not nor crucified him
but so it was made to appear to them
and those who differ therein are full of doubts
with no (certain) knowledge but only conjecture to follow
for of a surety they killed him not.

4:158. Nay Allah raised him up unto Himself;
and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.

4:159. And there is none of the People of the Book
but must believe in him before his death;
and on the Day of Judgment He will be a witness against them.

Since I cannot see any evidence why God would be the author of the Qur'an I will assume in the following that Muhammad is this author. But it could be any other source other than God himself and the observations below would still make sense.

The one thing the Jews and Christians agree upon is the historical fact of the crucifixion. And this is what the Qur'an denies. But the Qur'an does not give **any** explanation or clarification as promised in Sura 16:64, nor is it *confirming the earlier scriptures* as mentioned in Sura 12:111. The Qur'an denies instead of confirming and is confusing instead of clarifying. And seemingly, in order to protect himself from difficult questions he couldn't answer, the author also inserted the phrase "and those who differ therein are full of doubts with no (certain) knowledge but only conjecture to follow" (this sounds very much unlike God to me) but then continues to claim "for of a surety they killed him not" as if repetition would make it any more impressive. If the author of the Qur'an is so sure about it why has he not disclosed some information as to give us certainty and clarity as the Qur'an promised to?

Somehow Muhammad seems to try to incorporate arguments from Jews and Christians into one theory. He takes from the Christian side that God is victorious (Colossians 2:15 speaks of triumphal victory through the cross!) combined with our faith that he is the Messiah, i.e. sent by God, and from the Jewish side that the cross means a curse from God and defeat (Deuteronomy 21:23, but see Galatians 3:13!). Combining "he is the Messiah" (Christians) and "because he was crucified he cannot be the Messiah" Muhammad comes up with the solution "because he is the Messiah he could not have been crucified," claiming away the one piece that was not even in question. He claims the cross couldn't have happened

but doesn't know how to explain why both parties believe it did happen. In order to not have to explain the unexplainable, the approach is to ridicule those who might ask questions on the issue. And in all the 1450 years of Islamic history, Muslims still have not found a satisfactory solution to this problem. As I said before, this is one of the major questions I have towards Islam. In the light of the above promise of clarification, the response that "God intended it to stay as a mystery" is rather unsatisfactory for this central issue of Christian belief.

The Messiah: One of the most contentious points between Jews and Christians is the question on whether Jesus is the promised Messiah or not. How does the Qur'an fare in clarifying this issue? The Qur'an affirms the Christian that Jesus is indeed the Messiah by calling Jesus "al-Masih Isa." But on the other side, the Qur'an takes away all the meaning that the concept of "Messiah" has in the Bible, both Old and New Testament. The Qur'an retains the title but does not know its implications. Could it be that God suddenly forgot all that he had given through prophecy about the Messiah earlier on? Had Muhammad known what the concept of the Messiah means, he would have understood that Jews and Christians cannot accept him as a prophet from this same God who made the Messiah the focal point of Biblical prophecy.

The ignorance about the central Biblical concept of the [Messiah](#), who is the culmination of all Biblical prophecy is a strong sign that the author of the Qur'an is not the same as the author of the revelation of Torah, Prophets, Psalms and Gospel.

The clearest verse giving evidence that the Qur'an has no understanding for the title of "Messiah" but uses the word instead as an ordinary name is Sura 5:75:

The messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger, messengers (the like of whom) had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat (earthly) food.

The crucifixion is one prime event and reason that keeps the Jews from recognizing Jesus as their Messiah and which separates Jews and Christians. The Qur'an confuses the part that was clear before (the event of the cross) and trivializes (or is just ignorant about) what is the central issue between Jews and Christians, i.e. the identity of the Messiah.

And there is yet another strong indication in the verse denying the crucifixion that the Qur'anic author was very ignorant about the Jews and the meaning of Messiah in the Jewish faith. In Sura 4:157 we read:

That they [the Jews] said (in boast), "We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of Allah"; yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, ...

No Jew would ever boast that he killed the Messiah. This statement is a complete impossibility. The very reason that the Jews killed him was that they believed him NOT to be the Messiah, and the fact that they were able to crucify him, is sign to them that he **could not** have been the Messiah. All Jews look forward to the coming of the Messiah as the fulfillment of all their hopes. This verse again shows that Muhammad did not understand the controversy between Jews and Christians and especially did not know that "Messiah" is a title that has such a crucial significance and that **it is not something like a surname for Jesus** and especially that no Jew (if he has not become a Christian) would ever have called him the Messiah. And those Jews who have come to believe in Jesus and do call him Messiah are surely not those who would boast about having killed him. Any way you look at this, it shows the basic ignorance and confusion on this issue.

There are more issues of doctrinal confusion. The discussion of the Trinity is worth discussing in an article by itself and hence will be the next topic we will ponder.

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