

## **Study Guide for Easter: The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus**

To be used along with the video of the same name on [www.ChristianfromMuslim.com](http://www.ChristianfromMuslim.com)

### **Summary and Notes:**

In a reality segment filmed in the early spring, we find Dr. Cynthia and Huda surrounded by mustard flowers. The branches of the walnut orchard are bare. Dr. C points to the bright yellow flowers and mentions how they faithfully return every year as spring begins. This faithfulness reminds her of **God's Faithfulness**. Even when everything seems to be going wrong, God is with us and cares.

Huda shares with us an example from her week of how it seemed like all her friends had abandoned her, but she was glad to know that God never would. We should always rejoice in God's faithfulness and presence.

### **The Crucifixion and Easter**

Muslims have tremendous respect for Jesus Christ. They agree with the virgin birth. They agree that he performed miracles – far more than Mohammed – and that he lived a sinless life. They even agree that he is coming back again, albeit to a different end than Christians foresee.

However, one of the Big Four objections that Muslims have to Christianity is the crucifixion. (*The other three are God having a Son, the Trinity, and the integrity of the Bible. These are addressed in other lessons.*) Where there is strong disagreement is on whether Jesus was crucified, died and subsequently arose from the dead. This lesson takes on these big challenges.

Most non-Christians, and nominal Christians, have no problem accepting that Jesus died on the cross. They accept the Biblical and historical evidence without challenge. The task with them is to prove that Jesus arose from the dead. Perhaps surprisingly, Muslims have no problem that Jesus arose to heaven. But they think that it was directly from the cross! They don't think that Jesus actually died on the cross, so the task we have with them is to prove that he did.

In order to address the challenges, Dr. Cynthia gathers experts to the table. Dr. Mike Licona is a top Christian expert on the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. He will put authority behind our explanations. Rev. Bob Siegel is also interviewed. Bob is a Jewish background believer who is now a pastor, and radio apologist. Both guests have written several books and are personable speakers.

### **Did Jesus die on the Cross?**

The Bible says that Jesus died on the cross. The Qur'an tells us Jesus is a very great prophet. But according to Islam he did not die on the cross. Can we determine which is historically true?

Mike Licona discusses the evidence that Jesus died on the cross. Licona explains that the death of Jesus on the cross is one of the best attested facts of the ancient world, and mentions non-biblical sources, like the Roman historian Senator Tacitus, and Syrian philosopher Mara Bar Serapion.

Historically, says Mike, we can show that Jesus actually did predict he would be taken by authorities, be killed, and rise again. In Mark 8:31-33, Peter rebukes Jesus for saying this. Then Jesus rebukes him back saying, “Get behind me Satan!”

For historians, even for those who are not Christian believers, this would be accepted as something that really happened because of the “*criterion of embarrassment*.” What happened between Peter and Jesus is rather embarrassing to Christianity. Invented claims flatter the cause they promote. Jesus’ and Peter’s conflict is not something that would be made up because it not flattering to the Christian cause.

If Jesus did not die and resurrect as he predicted, he is not a great prophet, which the Qur’an calls him. If he did die on the cross, then the Qur’an is wrong.

### **Did Jesus only Appear to Die?**

The standard Muslim interpretation of the Qur’an is that Jesus only appeared to die on the cross (*Qur’an Surah 4:157*). Most feel Allah cast Jesus’ image upon someone else, probably Judas, and that Jesus himself was taken to heaven directly from the cross, without dying. Some say he just looked dead, but did not actually die (the “Swoon Theory”).

So, in contrast to the secular world, which accepts that Jesus died on the cross but doubts the resurrection; Muslims accept a resurrection of sorts to heaven, but deny that Jesus died on the cross. They say that it only appeared that he did. Dr. C directly asks Licona for his opinion of the possibility that Jesus only appeared to die.

If Jesus did not die on the cross, Licona says, God deceived the Christians and everyone else who was watching the crucifixion. According to Muslim doctrine, Jesus’ persecutors and followers alike were tricked into thinking that Jesus had died – for nearly 600 years – until Mohammed brought a different message.

Jesus’ followers are called Muslims in the Qur’an (*Surah 3:52*). If it were not until the time of Mohammed that Allah clarified this misunderstanding, it would mean that God had deceived his true followers for six hundred years. That would make God a deceiver.

Dr. C points out a deceiver is exactly what the Qur’an calls Allah (*Surah 3:54 Note: translations in English tend to soften this*). Not only that, the Qur’an says that God, actually Allah, told Jesus he would make Christianity prosper above other religions. This means Allah himself promoted a falsehood into the world’s most common religion (*Surah 3:55*). Whereas, the Bible says that God can not lie (*1 Samuel 15:29*).

So, Muslims are left believing in a God that deceives his sincere followers by making them believe that Jesus died, when he only appeared to die, and then God promoted that falsehood throughout the world.

If Jesus did not die on the cross, then Jesus is a false prophet and God is a deceiver. We believe that the truth of the crucifixion is found in the Bible, and confirmed by historians. Jesus did die on the cross. God is not a deceiver.

### **Historical evidence of the Crucifixion**

Apologist Bob Siegel adds new light to the discussion of Good Friday and Easter with historical evidence of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Bob is from a Jewish background. Perhaps for this reason he has spent time researching the ancient Jewish historical texts from the time of Jesus, as well as the Roman ones, which are better-known.

Bob tells us that the crucifixion is well documented by sources outside of the Bible. He mentions that the Jewish histories and commentaries admit that Jesus did fantastic miracles, but attributed them to sorcery. They also said he was put to death for blasphemous statements, like claiming to be God.

### **Why is the crucifixion important?**

Siegel explains to us that the crucifixion is important because through it, Jesus not only fulfilled his prophecy that he would die and arise again; but that the crucifixion is important because Jesus' death was a blood sacrifice in our place. He quotes the apostle Paul about the essential importance of this doctrine in Christianity (*1 Corinthians 15:14*). The crucifixion is important because without it, the Christian hopes of forgiveness and resurrection from the dead are without basis.

### **Former Muslim Huda's first Easter**

In this episode we also view the exciting reality of a former Muslim's first Easter! We see Huda experience Easter for the first time as a Christian, in church with other Christians. We hear part of the sermon by Dr. James Anderson on the hope we have in Easter. Because of Easter, even if life is hard, he tells us that the power of God and the hope of the resurrection give us a new perspective.



Easter celebrates Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The earth comes back to life in the spring, reminding us of the birth into new life experienced by someone who has become Christian from Muslim. Pastor Jim congratulates Huda on her first Easter as a Christian. Join us in singing along with the subtitles to *Christ the Lord is Risen Today!*

### **Scripture References for this Lesson:**

II Corinthians 5:17

I John 1:9

Philippians 1:6

Psalms 23

Matthew 16:21-23

I John 3:16

Romans 1:4

I Corinthians 15:14

John 20:31

Hebrews 13:5

I Samuel 15:29

Qur'anic references:

Surah 4:157

Surah 3:52-55

### **Study Questions:**

1. The reality section of today deals with faithfulness. Dr. Cynthia follows Jesus' practice of teaching from everyday things, especially nature. While standing in a field of mustard with Huda, she relates the faithfulness of the return of spring to God's faithfulness.

- In I John 1:9, what is God faithful to do?
- Philippians 1:6 gives us a message of God's faithfulness which is especially encouraging to those beginning a new walk with the Lord, or starting a new endeavor for him. What is it?
- Huda tells a story about God's faithfulness in a certain aspect of her life when she was feeling alone and rejected. What was it?

2. Sometimes Muslims tell us that it would be unfair for God to make a prophet die for someone else, and so he would not have Jesus do it. But consider, according to the Bible, Jesus is God.

- So, when Jesus dies on the cross, who is suffering in our place?
- Note: this same argument is good with Jews who claim that in Isaiah 53, the "suffering servant" is not Jesus, but the Jewish people.

3. Mike Licona encourages us that there are secular sources outside the Bible that document Jesus death by crucifixion.

- Why is this especially important to know when discussing the topic with current or former Muslims?
- How does knowing this impact your faith?

4. Bob Siegel, a Jewish background believer, refers to the *Talmud*, Jewish commentaries held in as high esteem as the Old Testament with many sincere Jews. He tells us that the Talmud documents that Jesus lived and was executed for apostasy and sorcery.

- Why is this important information when dealing with unbelievers?
- Why was Jesus considered a sorcerer?

5. Licona also says that Matthew 16:21-23 is an important passage in dealing with Jesus' death and resurrection.

- What does Jesus say in this passage that time will prove if he is a real or false prophet?
- What aspects of the account would tend to support it as authentic, even from a secular historian's point of view?
- What problem does this create for Muslims and others who:
  - claim Jesus is a prophet if he didn't die and rise again?
  - claim the Qur'an's account is true, if Jesus prophecy about himself was correct?

6. Consider the character of God.

- Do Christians consider God is a deceiver? (see I Samuel 15:29)
- Jesus followers are called Muslims in the Qur'an. If God deceived the "Muslims" of that time into believing that Jesus died upon the cross when he did not, what does that say about the character of God?
- Do you like this: Dr. C finds that a good challenge to give Muslims and converts to Islam from Christianity is, "The Qur'an says that God deceived his people for 600 years, until Mohammed came to reveal that Jesus did not die on the cross? I don't believe God would deceive his followers. Do you?"
- What does that say about the possibility that Muslim's God is currently deceiving them? (If the setting is right and you are feeling very bold, you might consider asking your Muslim contacts this question. But ask it in love, not sarcasm.)

7. While still a Muslim, a Saudi student friend of Dr. C's loved the traditional hymn sung in today's video, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today." She first heard in church on Easter Sunday when she attended with Dr. C, and afterward, she kept telling Dr. C how she loved it. The Saudi pushed Dr. C to sing it, and recorded it for her ring tone. (Note: this friend is not Huda.)

- How do you think that this song about the death and resurrection of Jesus could have influenced this student during the more than five years between her first hearing it and her conversion to Christianity?
- Does this true story give you courage to invite a Muslim to church with you for next Easter?

8. How important is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus to the Christian faith?

- Siegel quotes 1 Corinthians 15:14-17 on this topic. Do you agree with it?

9. Siegel claims that Jesus fulfillment of his prophecy about his death and resurrection validates beyond that those events. What does he claim it validates?

10. The Qur'an teaches a distinctive view of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It says, "They did not kill him, it only appeared to them that they did." (*Qur'an Surah 4:157*)

- If Jesus didn't die on the cross, who did? What two theories are mentioned in the video?
- Sophisticated Christian apologists sometimes argue that in a way, that technically the Qur'an is right "they did not kill him," even from a Christian perspective. In John 10, Jesus said that no one could take Jesus life from him: he would lay it down of his own will.
  - This is not usually a tact we recommend for beginners. Why do you think that is?

11. Licona makes a brief reference to women being the first to testify to Jesus' resurrection. He is claiming that this is unusual. Unfortunately, like shepherds at Jesus' nativity, women then were not treated as reliable witnesses. To historians this is considered an "embarrassment," an unflattering detail. They say the story therefore more likely to be true, because if Jesus followers were making up a story, they would pick more "reliable" witnesses.

- Do you think this is significant?

What does the women at the tomb say about women's relationship to Jesus?