

The Crucifixion of Christ: a Fact, not Fiction

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Scripture quotations taken from the New King James Version, Holy Bible, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Qur'an quotations taken from *The Koran Interpreted*, by Arthur J. Arberry

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The Crucifixion: Fact, not Fiction

The Bible is an anvil on which many hammers have been broken, yet its enemies never tire of attempting to make some impression on it. Ahmed Deedat of the Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban made little headway with his booklet *Was Christ Crucified?* even though over a hundred thousand copies were eventually distributed. But instead of abandoning his project he has published a new attack on the Christian faith in the form of his booklet *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction?*

The whole theme of this publication is that Jesus was a man of weak temperament and character who plotted a coup in Jerusalem, was not successful and who survived the cross fortuitously. This theory has no Biblical foundation and is contradicted by the Qur'an which teaches that Jesus was never put on a cross (Sura al-Nisa' 4:157). It is promoted only by the Ahmadiyya cult of Pakistan, which has been declared a non-Muslim minority sect. Only Deedat knows why he

continues to espouse the cause of a discredited cult and why he advocates a theory that is anathema to true Christians and Muslims alike.

In this booklet we shall set forth a refutation of Deedat's publication, concentrating solely on the subject at hand without dealing with many issues in his treatise, where he goes off at a tangent or writes purely rhetorically.

1. Did Jesus Plan A Coup?

Deedat constantly employs a theme in the early part of his booklet to the effect that Jesus planned a coup during his last week in Jerusalem, which eventually had to be aborted. Under the heading An Aborted Coup he says "...his high hopes did not materialise. The whole performance fizzled out like a damp squib..." (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction?* p.10). It must come as a surprise to all Christians and Muslims to hear a new argument, first conceived nearly twenty centuries after the event, that Jesus was planning a political coup. For the one thing Jesus constantly avoided was any involvement in the politics of his day. He refused to be drawn into debates on the merits of paying taxes to the Roman oppressor (Luke 20:19-20), withdrew from the crowds when they wanted to make him a political leader (John 6:15), and regularly taught his disciples not to be like those who sought political power (Luke 22:25-27).

The Jews did everything they could to convince Pilate, the Roman governor, that Jesus was advocating a revolt against Caesar (Luke 23:2) and yet even Deedat, in an unguarded moment, is constrained to admit that this charge "was absolutely false" (p.27). It is thus of great significance to find that Deedat even acknowledges that Jesus "did not look like a Zealot, a political agitator, a subversive person, a terrorist!" (p.27) and goes on to say in his booklet:

His was a spiritual kingdom, a ruler to rescue his nation from sin and formalism. (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction?* p.27)

It is therefore all the more remarkable to find him attempting to prove elsewhere in his booklet that Jesus was indeed plotting a political coup to deliver the Jews from their overlords. His comments on page 27 of his booklet unwittingly pull the carpet right out from underneath his own thesis! He admits that Jesus was not planning a revolution.

The theory is in any event absurd as appears from an analysis of some of Deedat's arguments in its favour. We shall briefly consider these to prove the point. We begin with his treatment of Jesus' statement just before his arrest that those of his disciples who had no sword should sell their garments and buy one (Luke 22:36). He interprets this to mean that Jesus was calling them to arms and to prepare for a *jihad*, a "holy" war, whatever that might be. What followed on this statement of Jesus' is of great significance. His disciples said:

"Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough." Luke 22:38

Two swords would hardly be "enough" to stage a revolution and it is obvious that Jesus meant "enough of that", that is, your misunderstanding of what I am saying.

Nevertheless, because he is trying to convince his readers that Jesus was planning a coup, he is at pains to argue that two swords would have been enough to overthrow the whole Jewish hierarchy in Israel and immediately thereafter their Roman overlords! As is to be expected, his argument is hardly persuasive. He resorts to further flights of fancy in suggesting that Jesus' disciples were "armed with sticks and stones" (p.13) like some riotous mob. There is not a shred of evidence in the Bible to support this claim raised by Deedat purely to try to explain the strange anomaly that Jesus would consider two swords sufficient to stage a major revolt! At another place Deedat says:

The disciples of Jesus always misunderstood him. (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Crucifixion?* p.23)

The word "always" is in bold print in this quote in his booklet. Once again Deedat has unwittingly contradicted himself, for, if Jesus intended that his disciples should arm themselves to the hilt, as Deedat suggests, then his disciples understood him perfectly, for this is precisely what they took his statement to mean. But he is right in saying that the disciples regularly misunderstood him - here as much as at any other time. We need to consider what Jesus said just after saying that they should purchase swords to get a better understanding of this matter. He said:

"For I Tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfilment." Luke 22:37

The scripture he quotes is from Isaiah 53, a prophetic chapter written about seven hundred years beforehand in which the prophet Isaiah foresaw the suffering of the Messiah on behalf of his people for their sin (Isaiah 53:10). The whole verse from which Jesus quoted reads as follows:

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:12

Jesus plainly stated that this prophecy was about to be fulfilled in him and its meaning is abundantly clear. He would "pour out his soul to death" the following day on the cross and would be "numbered with the transgressors" (he was duly crucified between two thieves - Luke 23:33). Yet he would "bear the sin of many" as he atoned for the sins of the world on the cross and would "make intercession for the transgressors" (he prayed for his murderers from the cross - Luke 23:34). Because of this gracious work God would grant him to "see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11) and would give him "the spoil" of his victory - a clear prediction of his resurrection.

Deedat ignores the full statement of Jesus because it contradicts his purpose, but it is surely clear that Jesus was anticipating his crucifixion, death and resurrection as the Saviour of the world and was not planning a coup as if he were a common upstart. The imminent events would take Jesus away from his disciples, and his exhortations to buy purses, bags and swords was a colloquial way of advising them to prepare to earn their own living once he had gone.

Central to Deedat's theme of an abortive coup is the argument that the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem a week earlier among a crowd of disciples hailing him as the Messiah was a march on Jerusalem. He uses these exact words when he says:

The march on Jerusalem had fizzled out. (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* p.21)

Under the heading March into Jerusalem Deedat acknowledges that Jesus expressly rode into the city on a donkey. Surely this was a most unlikely vehicle of conveyance for a coup! Jesus clearly chose it because donkeys symbolise peace and docility, and he wished to show Jerusalem that he was coming in peace and was fulfilling this promise of God recorded in another prophecy centuries earlier:

Rejoice, greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass. Zechariah 9:9

He came in humility and peace on a beast which symbolised his purpose. "He shall command peace to the nations", the prophecy continues (Zechariah 9:10). It is grossly absurd to suggest that Jesus was heading a "march" or that he was instigating a violent "armed struggle" as people would say today.

Deedat conveniently overlooks the fact that just as Jesus was about to be arrested, the same night his disciples cried out, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (Luke 22:49). One of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear, but Jesus immediately rebuked him and healed the man who had been injured. All the evidence shows that he was not planning a destructive coup at all but was preparing for the supreme gesture of love he was to exhibit to the world in his pending suffering and death on the cross for the sins of men. In the same book quoted above we read that God once promised:

I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. Zechariah 3:9

That day had just arrived, and Jesus was making himself ready to "secure an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12) by taking away the sins of the world on that fateful Friday for he had come.

The theory that Jesus was planning an abortive coup is a gross injury to his gracious dignity and a shocking caricature, which one does not expect from a man who is supposed to believe that Jesus was one of the greatest men who ever lived.

Deedat has never done military training and his ignorance in this field is exposed on page 14 of his booklet, where he suggests that Jesus took Peter, James and John with him into the Garden of Gethsemane as an inner line of defence with eight more guarding the gate. He boldly suggests that this was a masterly tactic "that would bring credit to any officer out of 'Sandhurst', a leading military academy in England (p.14). A former officer in the British Army once commented on this claim by saying to me that he had never heard such things taught at Sandhurst! Deedat says of the eight disciples that Jesus left at the gate:

He positions them strategically at the entrance to the courtyard; armed to the hilt, as the circumstances would allow. (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* p.14)

He goes on to say that he took Peter, James and John, "these zealous Zealots (the fighting Irishmen of their day)" (p.14), to prepare his inner defence. This argument flounders on closer analysis. Peter, James and John were peaceful fishermen from Galilee (Jesus had only one Zealot among his disciples and it was none of these three - Luke 6:15) and they were his closer circle of disciples throughout his ministry. On the occasion of his transfiguration these same disciples alone went up the mountain with him while the rest mingled with the crowds below (Matthew 17:14-16). Likewise, when he raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, he again took the same three disciples with him into the house (Luke 8:51). He often took these three disciples, Peter, James and John, into his closest confidence on appropriate occasions and this shows clearly that Jesus was not planning a masterly defence in Gethsemane when he took them with him into the inner part of the garden. Rather, he was seeking their close fellowship on yet another of those important occasions when he desired only the intimate companionship of his closest disciples. All this shows quite conclusively that there is no substance in the argument that Jesus was planning a coup.

2. The Image of Jesus in Deedat's Booklet

One of the strangest things about Deedat's booklet is the caricature he presents of the person of Jesus Christ. Strange, indeed, because Muslims are supposed to honour Jesus as the Messiah and as one of the greatest of God's prophets. One or two statements in his booklet are considerably offensive to Christians and must surely injure sincere Muslims who have learnt to respect Jesus as a man of honour and dignity. It is hardly surprising that Deedat's booklet was at one time declared "undesirable" by the Director of Publications in South Africa (early in 1985). In one place he says:

Jesus had failed to heed the warning of the Pharisees to curb the over-exuberance of his disciples (Luke 19:39). He had miscalculated. Now he must pay the price of failure. (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* p.10)

On another page he says that "Jesus had doubly miscalculated" (p.19) in that he thought he could rely on his disciples to defend him and that he would only have to deal with Jews. As if such allegations were not sufficient to defame Jesus, he goes on to speak of the "hot and cold blowings of Jesus" and fills up the measure of his slanders in saying:

It can be claimed with justification that Jesus Christ (pbuh) was the "Most unfortunate of all God's Messengers". (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* p.23)

We are sure that even Muslims must find such statements extremely offensive. Christians do not hesitate to regard them as blasphemous. Nevertheless it is not

our desire to express emotional indignation but to show how fatuous Deedat's claims are.

It requires only a cursory analysis of those last hours in the life of Jesus before his crucifixion to see that there can be no substance at all in the claim that Jesus had "miscalculated" or that he ever blew "hot and cold". For the one thing that characterises everything Jesus said on the last night he was with his disciples was a total awareness of all that was to befall him and his willingness to undergo it.

He knew that Judas Iscariot would betray him (Mark 14:18 - he had known this for a long time in fact as appears from John 6:64) and that Peter would deny him three times (Matthew 26:34). He predicted that he would be apprehended and that all his disciples would desert him (Mark 14:27). We just cannot find any ground at all for Deedat's claim that Jesus hoped his disciples would fight for him and that he had "miscalculated". For these passages show quite plainly that Jesus had calculated exactly what was going to happen, for his disciples all did precisely what he said they would do.

He constantly told them that last fateful night that he was about to be parted from them (John 13:33; 14:3; 14:28; 16:5) and that they should not lose heart for his sufferings would be entirely in accordance with all that had been predicted in the prophecies of the former prophets (Luke 22:22). When the Jews finally came to arrest him, far from preparing any kind of defence, he walked straight into their hand. We read:

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. John 18:4-5)

Jesus came forward, *knowing all that was to befall him*. He knew that he was about to be crucified and killed, but he would rise on the third day, as he had so often predicted in plain language (Matthew 17:22-23; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 18:31-33). In fact there was no need of a showdown with the Jews at all. If Jesus had wanted to avoid arrest, all he needed to do was to leave Jerusalem. Instead he went to the very place where he knew that Judas Iscariot would lead the Jews to look for him (John 18:2) and when they came, he voluntarily gave himself over to them. Furthermore he hardly needed the valiant efforts of eleven disciples to defend him for he plainly testified that he could have called on twelve legions of angels to help him if he had so wished (Matthew 26:53). Just one angel had the power to destroy whole cities and armies (2 Samuel 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35) and one shudders to think what twelve legions of angels could have done to protect him.

There is just simply no substance in Deedat's claim that Jesus was plotting and scheming, and that he became a failure through his miscalculations. On the contrary, it is quite remarkable to see how he knew precisely what was to happen to him. Far from being a "failure", he became the most successful man who ever lived - the only man who has ever raised himself from the dead to eternal life and glory. Muhammad failed to conquer death and it brought his life to nothing in Medina in 632 AD and holds him to this day in its grip. Jesus, however,

succeeded where Muhammad had failed. He is "our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). He triumphed over death and ascended into heaven where he ever lives and reigns. So much for Deedat's insult that he was supposed to be the "most unfortunate" of all God's messengers. The truth is that he was the greatest man who ever lived.

It has become apparent, and will become more so as we proceed, that Deedat's booklet is nothing but a distortion of the Scriptures. He perverts the meaning of texts that he feels can be tortured into serving his purpose and simply suppresses others that refute his theories completely.

3. Did Jesus Defend Himself At His Trial?

On page 28 of his booklet Deedat attempts to discredit the Gospel records of Jesus' crucifixion further by contesting a prophecy in Isaiah 53:7, which predicted that he would not open his mouth in his defence at his trial but would be led to the cross "as a sheep before its shearers is dumb". It is quite clear from the prophecy that this did not mean that Jesus would say nothing at all once he was arrested but rather that he would not venture to defend himself before his accusers. Deedat's whole argument depends on certain statements made by Jesus, which he attempts to draw out as defences made against his accusers.

He attempts to ridicule Jesus by asking whether he spoke "with his mouth closed" when he told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), when he called on one of the officers of the High Priest to testify of anything he had said wrongly (John 18:23), and when he prayed to God that, if possible, the cup of suffering he faced might be taken away from him (Matthew 26:39).

It needs to be pointed out that none of these statements was made by Jesus during his public trials before the Sanhedrin in the house of Caiaphas the high priest, or before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. The first statement was made to Pilate during private conversation in the praetorium; the second was made during Jesus' appearance before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, which was not during his trial before the Sanhedrin as Deedat wrongly suggests (p.28) - the trial only took place after this event in the house of Caiaphas as the Gospels clearly show (John 18:24; Matthew 26:57); and the third was made in the Garden of Gethsemane before Jesus was even arrested. The evidence brought forth by Deedat is therefore totally irrelevant to the point and he proves nothing at all. What does concern us is whether Jesus defended himself either before the Sanhedrin in Caiaphas' house or during his public trial before Pilate. It does not surprise us to find that Deedat overlooks what the Gospels plainly have to say about two official trials. After hearing the evidence against Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas put Jesus on terms to answer his accusers and what transpired is of great importance:

And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus was silent. Matthew 26:63

Instead of defending himself he promptly testified, in answer to the next question, that he was indeed the Son of God - a testimony that prompted the Sanhedrin to sentence him to death. The important point is that, in answer to his accusers, we read plainly that *Jesus was silent*. Likewise we read that when Pilate put much the same question to him the same thing transpired. He did not open his mouth to say anything in his own defence.

But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But he gave no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor wondered greatly. Matthew 27:12-14

Deedat subtly conceals these incidents that tell us plainly that Jesus was *silent* before the Sanhedrin when accused by the false witnesses that had been put forward, and that he *made no answer* - not even to a single charge, - when accused before Pilate. In his traditional fashion Deedat suppresses the evidences that relate directly to the subject at hand and instead tries to draw arguments from other occasions not relevant to the issues.

It is also interesting to find that exactly the same thing happened when Jesus appeared before Herod, the Jewish king, before being sent back to Pilate.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Luke 23:8-10)

Once again, when Jesus was accused, he made no answer. On every occasion when he was actually on trial before the Sanhedrin, Herod or Pilate, he said absolutely nothing in his own defence and so fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that he would not defend himself at his trial by opening his mouth to speak on his own behalf. None of the statements quoted by Deedat was made while Jesus was actually on trial and so yet another of his arguments falls entirely to the ground.

4. The Theory that Jesus Survived the Cross

We have never ceased to wonder why Ahmed Deedat continues to promote the theory that Jesus was indeed crucified but came down from the cross alive. Our amazement arises from two considerations. On the one hand, this idea is supported only by the heretical Ahmadiyya sect in Islam and is denounced by all true Christians and Muslims. On the other hand, this theory has been refuted time and again and, whereas Deedat continues to promote it, he can offer no reply to the arguments produced against it.

For example, on page 36 of his new booklet, he claims that when the centurion watching over Jesus on the cross "saw that he was dead already" (John 19:33), this means purely that he "surmised" that Jesus had died and that there was nothing to verify his death. In a reply to his earlier booklet *Was Christ Crucified?* I showed quite plainly that the centurion's observation was the best possible evidence that Jesus was already dead. The centurion had to confirm before the Roman governor that the crucified man was already dead and, if he was wrong, his own life was likely to be forfeited. We read:

And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Mark 15:44-45

The Roman governor Pilate knew that if the centurion confirmed his death, then it was sure, for in those days any soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape would lose his own life in consequence.

When the Apostle Peter escaped from prison some time later in the city, the sentries appointed to guard him were summarily executed (Acts 12:19). Again, when another jailer supposed that Paul and Silas had escaped from prison as well, "he drew his sword and was about to kill himself" (Acts 16:27), until he discovered they had not. He preferred to die by suicide than by execution. Death was the penalty for allowing prisoners to escape - what then could the centurion expect if a man condemned to death had escaped because he had made some careless and negligent observations? No one but the centurion could have been such a reliable witness to the death of Jesus on the cross!

Although an emphatic refutation of Deedat's assumption that the soldiers only "surmised" that Jesus was dead has thus been given, Deedat continues to promote the same old argument. He casually overlooks the conclusive evidence against his theory and just simply reproduces it. It is a poor advocate who can only repeat his original arguments once these have been thoroughly disproved by his opponent.

Not only did the centurion observe very conclusively that Jesus was dead but one of the soldiers thrust a spear into his side - an act calculated to ensure his death. One of the common Roman methods of killing people was to "put them to the sword", that is, to thrust them through. This is precisely what the soldier did to Jesus and, even if he had been in perfect health, he could never have survived such a blow. Yet Deedat ridiculously suggests that this death-dealing blow "came to the rescue" of Jesus and helped to revive him by stirring up his blood so that "the circulation could regain its rhythm" (p.39). Surely not even the most gullible of his readers will believe such absolute nonsense - that a death-blow, a spear-thrust through his body, could help to revive him! When one has to resort to such absurdities, it is clear that there is no merit in the argument.

A similar absurdity is set before the reader a few pages on in Deedat's booklet where he discusses the occasion when Mary Magdalene came to anoint the body of Jesus shortly after his crucifixion:

In three days time, the body would be fermenting from within - the body cells would be breaking up and decomposing. If anybody rubs such a decaying body, it will fall to pieces. (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* p.44)

This, too, is sheer scientific nonsense. Jesus had died late on the Friday afternoon and it was only a day and two nights later, as Deedat admits on the same page, that Mary Magdalene came to anoint his body. No body will "fall to pieces" within such a short period. In bold letters Deedat adds that Mary came alone to the tomb to supposedly help Jesus recover, yet in Matthew 28:1 and Luke 24:10 we discover that she was accompanied by at least two other women, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, and that only to bring spices which they had prepared according to the *burial* custom of the Jews. There is just no substance in Deedat's arguments. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are facts of history - the only fiction is his theory that Jesus supposedly survived the cross and recovered.

We do not propose to go into the moving of the stone, whether Jesus tried to show his disciples that he was not yet dead, or the subject of the sign of Jonah. Although all these subjects are treated in Deedat's booklet, we have given a thorough answer to them in the second booklet in this series entitled *What Indeed was the Sign of Jonah?* which readers may obtain from our Fellowship free of charge.

Another argument repeated by Deedat, which has often been refuted, is his suggestion that Jesus was reluctant to die. In refutations of his previous booklet on the subject of the crucifixion I have shown clearly that Jesus was only reluctant to be forsaken by his Father and be abandoned to the realm of sin and the wickedness of sinful men. This fear reached its pitch in the Garden the night before Jesus was crucified when the hour had come for him to be handed over to sinful men (Matthew 26:45). Had he been reluctant to die, this fear would only have reached its climax as he faced the cross the next day but, after he had been strengthened the night before by an angel who ministered to him (Luke 22:43), he faced death with remarkable fortitude. He calmly walked forward, knowing all that was to befall him, as we have seen. He walked right into a course that he knew must lead to his crucifixion and death.

He calmly took all the injuries heaped on him the following day and without any sign of fear or protest gave himself over to be crucified. As he was taken out of Jerusalem he showed more concern for the women of the city and their children than for himself (Luke 23:28) and on the cross cared only for those around him and not for himself (John 19:26-27). Indeed, instead of finding that he was reluctant to die, we discover in the Gospel narratives that he set his face towards the cross and, although he had many opportunities to avoid it, he did not seize them but went on, determined to redeem men from their sins.

Yet another of Deedat's arguments thus comes to nothing. We find him in considerable confusion in another place when he says:

For God Almighty will never allow His truly "anointed one" (Christ) to be killed - (Deuteronomy 18:20). (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* p.15)

There is no substance in the suggestion that God would not allow his anointed one to be killed for there was a specific prediction in the prophecy of the great prophet Daniel that the "anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing" (Daniel 9:26). It is in fact from the very use of the word *mashiah* in this text that the Jews came to call the awaited Saviour of the world the "Messiah", and yet it is right in this text that we read that this very Messiah would be cut off - a clear prediction of the crucifixion and death of Jesus.

We are particularly intrigued to find that Deedat quotes Deuteronomy 18:20 as a reference to the coming "anointed one", the "Christ", the Messiah, namely Jesus. In his booklet *What the Bible Says About Muhammad* he labours to prove that the prophecy of a coming prophet in Deuteronomy 18 is a reference to Muhammad, even though we have proved again and again that it was an anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, namely Jesus. (The Qur'an confirms that the only Messiah, the only "anointed one", *al-Masih*, was Jesus - Sura Al Imran 3:45). It is therefore most significant to find Deedat making one of his occasional slips and conceding in the above quote from his booklet that the prophecy relates to Jesus, the Messiah, and not to Muhammad.

Perhaps the most absurd argument in the whole of Deedat's booklet is his suggestion that God, in hearing Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, sent his angel to strengthen him "in the hope that God will save him" (p.35). He goes on to argue that God especially put it into the minds of the soldiers that Jesus was already dead on the cross and says this was "another step in God's plan of rescue" (p. 36). The argument, thus, is that after hours of scourging, beating, having thorns pressed into his head, being forced to carry his cross, being crucified, succumbing into unconsciousness in exhaustion at the point of death after hours of indescribable agony, and enduring an awful sword-thrust, God wonderfully stepped in to "save" him by fooling everybody into thinking that Jesus was already dead when he was really only at the point of death.

One struggles to find any logic in this line of reasoning. If it was God's intention to "save" Jesus, surely he would have taken him away immediately, as the overwhelming majority of Muslims believe. What sort of "comfort" or "strengthening" could the angel have given if God's hand was only to be revealed after hours of indescribable agony and torture to the point of death on the cross?

Firstly, such pain and suffering would have been unnecessary and God's deliverance brought about only after a tragic delay. Secondly, it could have been no comfort to Jesus to know that he faced the horrors of crucifixion only to be delivered at the point of death. Furthermore, if Jesus was taken down alive from the cross purely because he was so close to death that all thought he was already dead, we cannot see how God "saved" him or even where he intervened. This would have been nothing more than an accident caused by an illusion.

The whole argument is obviously strained against the logical progression of the events in the Gospels. The truth of the whole matter is that Jesus was physically at the breaking point in contemplating suffering for sin. He has just told his disciples that he was "exceedingly sorrowful - even unto death" (Mark 14:34). God heard the prayer of Jesus and the angel gave him strength to proceed and

endure the cross and death and so fulfil his mission to redeem sinners from sin, death and hell.

To save Jesus from dying when at the point of death after hours of agony on the cross would have been an untimely and senselessly delayed deliverance accompanied by a lengthy period of painful recovery from the horrific ordeal. To save him from death by raising him in glory and perfect health is sensible, logical, and is in fact the genuine Biblical account of the crucifixion.

We press on to Deedat's argument that Jesus disguised himself after surviving the cross so that no one would recognise him, calling this "a perfect masquerade!" (p.49). He suggests that when Jesus met two disciples on the road to Emmaus the day he walked out of the tomb alive (Luke 24:15), he concealed his identity until he revealed it in breaking bread before them, and then went away. This is nothing but an attempt to water down the incident in the Bible, which has a far more dramatic element. It will be useful to quote exactly what happened:

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" Luke 24:30-32

The drama here unfolds rapidly. Suddenly their eyes are opened and he vanishes out of their sight! If we look carefully at this passage we can see what really happened when they recognised Jesus.

The Bible states that after his resurrection his body bore the nature that all the righteous will bear in heaven. He was able to transcend all earthly limitations and could appear or vanish at will. He could suddenly appear in a locked room (John 20:19) and could conceal or reveal himself at will.

So here, it was not Jesus who removed a "disguise". The text plainly says "*their* eyes were opened." Suddenly *they* were able to perceive who he was. So likewise we read that the risen Jesus, in his eternal body, was not only able to open men's eyes to perceive his true identity but could even open their minds to perceive the meaning of God's revealed Word (Luke 24:45).

Just as he suddenly appeared in the room (Luke 24:36), so he equally suddenly vanished out of their sight. The dramatic character of the narratives in Luke 24 cannot be explained away in rationalistic terms. The thrust of this whole chapter is the *resurrection of Jesus from the dead* (cf. 24:46) and it was this remarkable event that led to such dramatic incidents.

The whole theme of the narratives in the Gospel is the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus. It requires a good deal of word-twisting to argue otherwise. An example is Deedat's suggestion that Jesus was laid in a "big, roomy chamber" (p.79). All the Gospels teach plainly that this was nothing but a *tomb* which had been especially hewn out of a rock by Joseph of Arimathea as his own *burial-place*. In Matthew 27:60 we read that Joseph took Jesus' body and "laid it in his own new *tomb*" (so also Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53). In John 19:41-42 it is twice

said Jesus was laid in a *tomb* and bound according to the *burial-customs* of the Jews. Deedat's attempts to torture these accounts of a funeral into his own speculation that Jesus was placed in a "big roomy chamber" so that he might "recover" are a self-evident proof that there is no substance in his argument at all.

Lastly we shall consider his four statements on page 50 of his booklet, where he points out that many people testified on the day of resurrection that he was alive. The word is placed in capital letters, is underlined, and is accompanied by an exclamation mark in each case. This purports to be an argument favouring his theory that Jesus had not died on the cross but was still alive. We marvel at such reasoning, for the whole point of the *resurrection from the dead*, as set out in the Gospels, is this very fact - that Jesus was raised alive from the dead. What, then, is Deedat trying to prove? The testimonies that Jesus was alive are central to the whole Christian belief that Jesus had risen from the dead after being killed on the cross.

In his quote from Luke 24:4-5, Deedat only quotes the words of the angels to Mary and the other women, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" He significantly omits these words which follow:

"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise." Luke 24:6-7

In these words we clearly find the angels speaking of Jesus being *crucified* and *rising on the third day*. Clearly they proclaimed that he was alive because he had duly risen from the dead. Much the same was said by the brethren at Jerusalem to the disciples from Emmaus:

"The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon." Luke 24:34

The united testimony of all was that Jesus was alive because he was *risen indeed*. "He has risen" (Mark 16:16) was the universal testimony that day. He had come alive from the dead and had conquered all the power of death. He had made it possible for men to be raised with him to newness of life (Romans 6:4) and to rise with him to eternal life in victory over death and sin (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). He had fulfilled his own declaration:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." John 11:25

Deedat's whole argument is a pitiful caricature of the glorious event described in the Gospels. Our brief treatment of his argument that Jesus came down alive from the cross and somehow recovered proves conclusively that there is nothing at all in what he says. The misleading arguments he presents lead us to conclude that he fails to prove his cruci-"fiction" theory because he comes from an "improper"-gation Centre!

5. Wild Statements in Deedat's Booklet

One of the things that struck me again and again as I read through Deedat's booklets was his unrestrained tendency to make wild statements devoid of good sense and authority. It seems he trades on Muslim ignorance of the Bible and simply hopes his readers will accept whatever he says without question. He surely cannot be endeavouring to convince Christian readers who know their Bible well and who can only marvel at his presumptuousness. To begin with he says in his booklet:

From the "call to arms" in the upper-room, and the masterful deployment of forces at Gethsemane and the blood-sweating prayer to the God of Mercy for help, it appears that Jesus knew nothing about the contract for his crucifixion. (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* p.16)

The last statement, to the effect that *Jesus knew nothing about his crucifixion* is a fallacy set forth in bare defiance of overwhelming facts to the contrary. Time and again Jesus told his disciples that he would be crucified, killed and rise again on the third day in statements like these:

"The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Luke 9:22

"Behold we are going to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day." Matthew 20:18-19

When he was duly raised from the dead he rebuked his disciples for not believing all that he had told them as well as the prophecies of the former prophets that he would be killed and rise on the third day (Luke 24:25-26,46). On numerous other occasions he made it plain that this was the whole purpose of his coming to earth. He told them he had come to lay down his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28), that his body would be broken and his blood shed for the forgiveness of their sins (Matthew 26:26-28), that he would give up his life that the world might live (John 6:51), and that he had power to lay down his life and power to take it again (John 10:18). It is surely absurd to suggest that Jesus knew nothing about his pending crucifixion. On the contrary, as he faced this climactic moment in his life when, as the Saviour of the world, he would redeem mankind and pave the way for many to enter eternal life, he proclaimed "I have come for this hour" (John 12:27). So aware was he of the fateful climax that awaited him that he constantly referred to it as "my hour" (John 2:4) and "my time" (John 7:6). Of no other man was it more truly said, "cometh the hour, cometh the man." The hour for the salvation of the world had come and God had sent the only man who could achieve it, Jesus Christ.

Deedat makes a similar loose statement when he says that the title "Son of God" in the Bible "is also another harmless expression in Jewish theology" (p.25). On the contrary, just as Muslims hold to an austere unitarianism which does not allow that it is possible for God to have a Son, so the Jews of that time and to this day reject the concept completely. When the high priest asked Jesus if he was

the Son of God, as he had been reported as making such a claim, Jesus answered, "I am" (Mark 14:62). If this was a "harmless expression" as Deedat claims, the high priest would hardly have taken exception to it, but he immediately cried out "he has uttered blasphemy" (Matthew 26:65). When Jesus appeared before Pilate, the Jews cried out:

"We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God." John 19:17

Muslims to this day attempt to avoid this issue and allege that Christians have turned the prophet Jesus into the Son of God. But the Jews could hardly foist this claim on his followers when Jesus himself made this very confession before them. "He has made himself the Son of God," they cried, and this was why they condemned Jesus for blasphemy. Through his resurrection, however, God gave assurance to all men that Jesus was indeed his own beloved Son just as he had claimed (Romans 1:4).

Deedat makes a similar outlandish claim when he says that "any Christian scholar will confirm" that the Gospels were only written up to a number of centuries after the time of Jesus. It has been generally accepted among all good Biblical scholars that the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) were all written about 55-60 AD (less than thirty years after Jesus' resurrection) and the Gospel of John up to 70 AD. Only the most prejudiced "scholars" could suggest otherwise, and even hostile critics have accepted these dates. How could the Gospels have been written centuries later when manuscript fragments dating as early as 120 AD still exist and quotes from the Gospels are found in the writings of the early Christians in the generation immediately succeeding the apostolic age?

Deedat makes a most unfortunate statement when he says in another place, "Salvation is cheap in Christianity" (p.61). We doubt whether Muslims will consider Abraham's willingness to offer his son to God a "cheap" sacrifice. Surely, then, there can be nothing cheap in the willingness of God to give his own Son as a sacrifice for our sins. The Bible tells Christians plainly, "you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20) - what a price! - and the apostle can only speak in consequence of God's "inexpressible gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15). There is no way to possibly evaluate the price that was paid to save men from sin, death and hell. Salvation in Christianity is the most expensive thing this world has ever seen - the life of the only Son of the eternal God. In the same way no man can obtain this salvation unless he commits his whole life to God through faith in his Son, and surrenders his whole personality and character to his will.

Lastly, in one of his typically inaccurate charges, Deedat claims that the story of the appearance of Jesus to his doubting disciple Thomas, as recorded in John 20:24-29, is a "flagrant 'gospel fabrication'" (p.31), and has the temerity to claim further:

Biblical scholars are coming to be conclusion that the "doubting Thomas" episode is of the same variety as that of the woman "caught in the act" - (John 8:1-11), i.e. it is a fabrication! (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* p.76)

Most significantly Deedat does not tell us who these so-called "Biblical scholars" are. There is not a shred of evidence anywhere to back up the claim that the story of Thomas' unwillingness to believe in the risen Christ until he had seen him, and his declaration on duly seeing him that he was his Lord and his God, is a "fabrication". The story is found extant in all the earliest manuscripts available to us without any variance in reading, and the evidences therefore are unanimously in favour of its authenticity. There is no support whatsoever for the speculation that this story may have been invented.

Deedat seems to base his claim on the assumption that Jesus was not nailed to the cross but only tied with ropes. He makes another really wild statement when he says "contrary to common belief, Jesus was not nailed to the cross" (p.31). Archaeological discoveries in the land of Palestine have confirmed that Romans crucified victims by nailing them to their crosses (a skeleton was found with a nail through both feet in recent years). Furthermore it is the universal testimony of the prophecies and historical records of Jesus' crucifixion that he was nailed to his cross (Psalm 22:16; John 20:25; Colossians 2:14). Deedat's argument is not only "contrary to common belief" as he admits, but, like as many of his points, is also contrary to the Scriptures, contrary to reliable historical records, contrary to archaeological discoveries, contrary to the evidences, and, as all too often, contrary to good sense. He cannot produce even an iota or a shred of evidence to support his claim that Jesus was fastened to the cross with ropes and, instead, has to resort to an unwarranted and thoroughly presumptuous attack on the sound historical record that Jesus was nailed to the cross, once again without any evidence whatsoever that this record is a "fabrication".

If there had been any merit at all in Deedat's attack on the Biblical record of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he would hardly have had to resort to such ridiculous claims as those we have considered. They indicate a fair measure of desperation in the critic as he battles against the odds to prove an untenable thesis.

6. Gospel Truth Deliberately Suppressed by Deedat

After all that has gone before it will not surprise our readers to find Deedat deliberately expunging words from the Bible that do not suit his purpose. On the day after Jesus' crucifixion the chief priests came to Pilate and in Matthew 27:62-64 we find a request made by them the tomb should be sealed. It appears in Deedat's booklet as follows:

"Sir, we remember that that deceiver said ... Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made secure until the third day, lest ... the LAST error shall be worse than the FIRST (error)." (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* p.42)

Twice in the quotation one finds three innocuous-looking dots as though something has been omitted because it is unimportant or irrelevant to the issues. Deedat's argument is that the Jews had suddenly realised that Jesus might still

be alive and that they might have been "cheated" (p.42). They supposedly went to Pilate to get him to seal the sepulchre so that he could not escape and recover. Nevertheless, says Deedat, they were a day too late and their "last" error was to allow some of Jesus' disciples an opportunity "to render help to the wounded man" (p.43).

All that has happened here is that Deedat has had to forcibly expunge two clauses in the quotation referred to, not because they are considered unimportant, but because *they refute his arguments completely* and oblige the reader to discover a totally different picture of what was really transpiring. We shall record the whole quotation as it appears in a modern translation and shall place in italics the words wrenched out by Deedat and replaces with dots. The passage reads:

"Sir, we remember how that impostor said, *while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.'* Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day, lest *his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead.'* and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Matthew 27:62-64

We see immediately that the Jews did not for one minute believe that Jesus had come down alive from the cross. They went to Pilate, speaking of something Jesus had said *while he was still alive*. These words can only be interpreted to mean that in their view Jesus *was no longer alive*. And they asked Pilate to seal the tomb, not because they feared a wounded man might recover, but because they feared his disciples would steal his body and proclaim that he had *risen from the dead*. This is the obvious and plain meaning of the passage.

It is quite clear why Deedat omitted the clauses in italics. They disprove his theory completely. In fact we have found him regularly using this devious tactic in his booklets against Christianity. He distorts the Scriptures by wrenching some texts out of context which he feels can be tortured and perverted into serving his ends, and then casually ignores others completely, which thoroughly discount his theories. Only in this case he has done this with just one passage, twisting some of its words to try to prove that the Jews thought Jesus was still alive, and expunging others which immediately show that this was not what was in their minds at all.

Surely any sincere Muslim can see that the whole theme of his booklet on the crucifixion is a distortion of the truth and that he has constantly warped the clear statements in the Gospels which testify unambiguously to the fact of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We might add that this is not the first time that we have come across publications published by Deedat's Centre, where quotations from other writings are so mistreated. We would advise all readers to treat such quotations, where words are deleted and are simply replaced by three dots, with extreme caution. Invariably what is left has been twisted into yielding an interpretation that the whole quotation could not possibly yield.

The Jews had remembered Jesus' oft-repeated prophecy that he would rise from the dead after three days and they wanted to prevent any possible fulfilment of this prophecy - whether actual, through his resurrection, or contrived through the actions of his disciples. There is no warrant for Deedat's claim that the "Jews doubted his death" and that they "suspected that he had escaped death on the cross" (p.79). The words omitted by him in the quotation on page 42 of his booklet show quite plainly that they were satisfied that he was indeed dead, but that they did not want his disciples to claim that he had been raised to life again.

Christians do not object to sincere critical analyses of their scriptures and convictions. In fact we welcome them in a way because they challenge us to be sure of what we believe and no true Christian would want to believe things that could not withstand critical analysis. We do sincerely take offence, however, at publications like Deedat's *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* which do nothing but pervert and distort the evidence for our faith and which are calculated to injure our feelings. We are persuaded that most Muslims would feel the same way about any Christian publication that distorted Islam the way Deedat does Christianity.

We are comforted to find that there are many Muslims in South Africa who have expressed their keen disapproval of such publications. A local Muslim magazine recently had this to say of Deedat's methods:

It is a well-known fact throughout South Africa, even among Christian evangelical circles, that in so far as Mr. Ahmed Deedat in particular is concerned, the Muslim community of South Africa as a whole is not in total agreement with his method of propagating Islam. The Muslim Digest itself provides ample testimony for having been reluctantly compelled over the years to condemn in no uncertain terms the method of Mr. Deedat's propagation of Islam, especially amongst Christians. No less has Mr. Deedat been condemned by responsible Muslim religious bodies and individual for the manner in which he propagates Islam that results in ill-will being generated against Muslims. (*The Muslim Digest*, Jul/Aug/Sept., 1984)

We shall close with a brief consideration of Deedat's argument that, if it can be proved that Jesus did not die on the cross, this proves he was not crucified at all! We have, in earlier publications, shown that such an abstruse argument arises from a predicament Deedat inflicts on himself with his theory that Jesus survived the cross. For the Qur'an plainly states that Jesus was "neither crucified nor killed" (Sura al-Nisa' 4:157) and the overwhelming majority of Muslims throughout the world take this (obviously, in our view) to mean that Jesus was never put on the cross at all. I held a symposium with Deedat in Benoni on the subject *Was Christ Crucified?* in 1975 and the local newspaper thereafter summed up his argument perfectly by saying, "He was crucified, but did not die, he argued." As there are a number of discerning Muslims who have seen that his whole theory debases not only what the Bible says but also what the Qur'an says about the crucifixion, he is now trying to extricate himself from this predicament in which he has placed himself.

He therefore argues that "to crucify" means to "kill on a cross" and says that if a man survived the cross, this means he was never crucified. He shows that in

English "to electrocute" means to kill by an electric bolt and that "to hang" means to kill by hanging. Therefore he says that in English "to crucify" must also mean to "kill on a cross" and claims that he cannot be held responsible for a deficiency in the English language, which does not have alternative words for an attempted crucifixion, electrocution or hanging.

In saying this he misses the point completely. The narratives of the crucifixion in the Bible were originally written in Greek and more than a thousand years were to pass before they would ever be translated into English. The important point is not what "to crucify" might mean in Deedat's understanding of English but what it meant in Greek when the Gospels were first written. One quotation will suffice to show that "to crucify" in Biblical times meant simply "to impale on a cross". The Apostle Peter once declared to a Jewish multitude:

"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Acts 2:23

The verse clearly reads you *crucified and killed*, meaning obviously, "you nailed him on a cross and you killed him there." Therefore it is absurd to suggest that if a man not actually killed on a cross, this means he was never crucified. If "to crucify" only meant to *kill* on a cross, Peter would just have said "you crucified him," but by adding "and killed," he shows plainly that "to crucify" meant simply to *impale* on a cross. Deedat remains in the predicament of advocating that Jesus was indeed crucified but did not die - a theory repugnant to true Christians and Muslims alike.

One struggles to follow the reasoning behind Deedat's line of approach. He seems to think that if he can prove that Jesus did not die on the cross, this proves that the Qur'an is true when it says he was not killed by the Jews. But how can the point possibly stand when the whole argument of necessity concedes the other thing the Qur'an denies - the actual crucifixion of Jesus? There just does not seem to be any logic in his argument at all.

Quiz

The Crucifixion of Christ

If you have read this booklet carefully, you will be able to answer the following questions, which are a part of our Bible Correspondence School:

1. Write three examples from the life of Christ, proving that he was not involved in politics.
2. Jesus said to his disciples, "It is enough" when they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords" (Luke 22:38). What did Jesus mean?

3. Why did Jesus choose to ride a donkey at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem?
4. The Old Testament prophet Zechariah prophesied that the Lord will remove the guilt of the land in a single day (Zechariah 3:9). How was this prophecy fulfilled?
5. Describe three facts Jesus knew the evening of his crucifixion, before they happened: (a) with Judas the traitor, (b) with Peter, (c) with all the disciples.
6. Read Matthew 17:22,23. What did Jesus foretell in these two verses about what will come upon him?
7. How did Pilate know that Jesus had indeed died?
8. How was Daniel's prophecy fulfilled, as he said, "The anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing" (Daniel 9:26).
9. How do the four Gospels describe the place of Jesus' burial?
10. Read Luke 24:4-7. What fact did the angel proclaim about Jesus in these verses?
11. What is the cost of salvation in Christianity?
12. Read Matthew 27:62-64. What did the Jews know about Jesus as mentioned in these verses?

Write the answer to these questions on a separate sheet, without any other remarks. If you have answered two thirds of the questions correctly, we will send you another one of our publications, so that you may strengthen yourself in faith, hope and love.

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