
Crucifixion or stoning of Prophet Jesus (A.S): a historical analysis in the context of Judaism and Islam

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Abstract

There are various conflicts in Talmudic and gospels traditions about Prophet Jesus' (A.S)' death. According to Talmudic tradition, he was stoned to death while gospels narrate that he had been crucified. Despite the availability of narrations, this incident is as unauthentic and doubtful as it was two thousand years ago. It is out of the question to clarify these traditions because unreliability has already been established due to fictitious pieces of evidence. In its historical sense, there are a number of unsubstantial sayings in the incident of the crucifixion and these lacunae prevent relying on the authenticity of this event. After six hundred years passed, Quran was revealed with truth & reality about the allegedly event of the crucifixion. According to Quran Prophet Jesus (A.S) neither was crucified nor stoned to death but Allah had taken him up towards Him. Because of restoring the status and dignity of a glorious and majestic prophet, this divine revelation was revealed so that all the aspersions about Prophet Jesus (A.S) may be removed from his personality. In this article, Quranic statements have been analyzed while inspecting the Jewish and Christian traditions regarding this event.

Key Words: Crucifixion, Prophet Jesus' (A.S) death, Stoning

The topic of the alleged death of Prophet Jesus Christ (A.S) has uncountable conflicted problems within itself and these difficulties have not been solved for two thousand years. In every era, numerous cults and people had different thoughts and beliefs about this issue. After the assumed event of crucifixion, Jews proclaimed that they killed Prophet Jesus Christ (A.S). This claim was present in such a vigorous manner that a great number of Christians had believed it. Despite spreading this false news, there were many people who disbelieved it as they knew well about the reality of this incident and they took it as nothing more than a rumor.¹

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The Jews had been the audience of Prophet Jesus, where his teachings were accepted by many instinctively while some denied it plainly and turned into his enemy. Afterwards, these people claimed for the alleged crucified death of Prophet Jesus (A.S). Crucifixion's event totally belongs to the Jewish culture because it came about in the Jewish nation therefore, to begin with, it had been narrated by the Jews alone. Under the Paulian thoughts, four canonical gospels were written a long while after this incident, so this event has not been accurately mentioned in those Gospels. One of the major reasons for this is that Gospel's authors were non-Jewish and didn't know very well about Jewish Law and its problems so they made numerous mistakes. Taking very serious note of these errors, many scholars have challenged the chronology of the Gospels. In² this situation, only Jewish traditions are left to provide some information to the readers about Prophet Jesus (A.S) who was also from a Jewish clan.

After having been occupied by the Roman troops in 6th decade of 1 century B.C, many revolutionary movements had commenced in entire Palestine. They had only one purpose: to reestablish the great kingdom of Israel which had been in the era of Prophet Solomon (A.S) and Prophet David (A.S). These movements reached their peak as Prophet Jesus (A.S) was born. According to the Gospel of Luke, Prophet Jesus' (A.S) birth was in the age of *Caesar Augustus* which was 7 C.A. It was the same time when the claimer of being the messiah of Israel, *Judas Galilee's* revolutionary movement was at its climax and a great numbers of Jewish militants were engaged in the war with Romans.³ Utilizing their whole force, the Romans crushed them and thousands of Jews had been crucified under the penalty of helping the rebels or being a warrior against the Romans which also announced to be a clear warning for the rest of the Jewish nation.⁴ In spite of these oppressions, many claimers of Messiah had been raising and continued to be persecuted by Romans.

Prophet Jesus (A.S) was among one of these Messiahs whose trail had been presented before the court of a Roman governor saying that he had declared himself the king of Jewish.⁵ According to Torah, the claim to be a messiah was a proclamation of the king because in the Jewish perception about messiah, the promised Messiah must have been a warrior king. During the appearance before the Roman court, Prophet Jesus (A.S) was charged for the crimes of blasphemy and claiming to be a king. If Prophet Jesus (A.S) perpetrate blasphemy so he was lawbreaker in the sight of Jewish Shariah, but if he claimed to be a messiah then such a claim was considered by Romans as a political crime.⁶

If Prophet Jesus' (A.S) claim was really a blasphemy or Prophet Jesus (A.S) taught about trinity, incarnation, and his divinity (in accord with Jewish theology, these teachings were really a blasphemy as Jews were unaware of such teachings) so Prophet Jesus (A.S) was true in their assertions. Because of alleged blasphemy, if he ever committed it, Prophet Jesus (A.S) deserved the same punishment which was sentenced by the Jewish court to *Stephen*⁷ and *Paul* in the book

of Acts. This was capital punishment, stoning to death, and for implementation of this punishment, Jews were as free as they were in the cases of *Stephen* and *Paul*.

This matter belonged to the Jewish Law and the Romans had granted a few powers to Jewish courts to resolve and implement the punishment in such cases by themselves. Romans were pagans and heathens so they had no interest in the blasphemy cases because it was not considered a crime in their law. They were worshipers of various deities so this case entirely fell under the jurisdiction of the Jewish Law and it should have been resolved in the light of the same.

According to the Torah, blasphemy of God was treated as the capital punishment and after having been killed, the accused was hung on the tree.⁸ The way of killing was to stoning to death and Jews had followed this way in the case of *Stephen*⁹ and *Paul*.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that Prophet Jesus (A.S), *Stephen* and *Paul*, all had been accused of the same charge but *Stephen* and *Paul* had faced stoning while in the case of Prophet Jesus (A.S), as narrated by Gospels, this scenario got changed from stoning to crucifixion. Contrary to Gospels' accounts, as we glance at Jewish traditions about Prophet Jesus' (A.S) death, according to Talmud, Prophet Jesus (A.S) was allegedly stoned to death. Talmud narrates:

*"On the eve of the Passover, Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before Passover, the execution took place. A herald went forth and cried. He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy."*¹¹

In the Jewish narrations, the cause of Prophet Jesus' (A.S) alleged death was to bewitch and deceive Israelites according to the Jews scholar's declaration about Prophet Jesus (A.S) at that time. A famous Jewish Scholar and authority on Jewish studies, 'Peter Schafer', attributed the above-mentioned narration to Prophet Jesus (A.S).¹² Moreover, the same statement has been recorded by an ancient Jewish book '*Toledot Yeshu*' that after killing Prophet Jesus (A.S), his body was hung on a tree and after a while he was put off and buried in the drain from a garden.¹³ Hanging corpse on the tree has been attested by Greek manuscripts of New Testament as well where a tree is mentioned on which Prophet Jesus (A.S) corpse had been hung. In Urdu translations of New Testament, the word 'tree' has been changed into a cross but the tree is still mentioned in the New International Version of the Bible. There are a few versions in which the word 'tree' is printed.

*"The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree."*¹⁴

*"They killed him by hanging him on a tree."*¹⁵

*"They took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb."*¹⁶

Except for the book of Acts, it has been narrated in the apostolic letter of Saint Peter that Prophet Jesus (A.S) was hung on a tree instead of being crucified.

*"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree."*¹⁷

However, Saint Paul seems unaware of the hanging of Prophet Jesus (A.S) on the cross as he wrote in his apostolic writing about tree. He writes:

“Christ redeemed us from curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written: Cursed is everyone who is hung in tree.”¹⁸

It is obvious that just hanging on a tree cannot because of someone’s death so, in the accomplishment of the Torah’s command, the victim was hung on a tree after stoning. As narrated by above-mentioned traditions, the *Talmud* and *Toledot Yeshu* undergird this element of the Torah. We find various examples in the Torah in which a stoned person was hung on a tree after being dead. For instance, in the book of Joshua, the king of Ai was killed by Israelites and was hung on a tree.¹⁹ On another occasion, Prophet *Joshua* (A.S) arrested the five kings of the Amorites and after killing them, he ordered them to hang them on the trees so they were hung on the five trees till the sunset.²⁰

On the other hand, if it’s imagined that Prophet Jesus (A.S) died on a cross so this matter gets more complicated and raises various questions. Presuming that Prophet Jesus (A.S) was killed by Jews on account of blasphemy so they had the authority to stone him easily but it didn’t occur. Instead of killing, Jews took Prophet Jesus (A.S) away towards *Pilate*, the Roman governor, and charged him that he was declaring himself as the king of Jews.²¹ Certainly, being a messiah means Jewish king so Prophet Jesus (A.S) was sentenced to be crucified without delay by *Pilate* because rebels of the Roman Empire were treated in this way.²²

It is remarkable that in the political circumstances of the first century, the term ‘bandit’ has been used for rebels of the Roman Empire in the ancient writings and it may be seen in the Gospels that accompanied by two rebels, Prophet Jesus (A.S) was crucified.²³ Therefore, this context depicts such a scenario that Prophet Jesus’ (A.S) case was not taken as a religious issue but Jews and *Pilate* rather considered it a political one. The reason for the alleged death of Prophet Jesus (A.S) was also political instead of religious so no creed of redemption can be related to it.

Christians present a quotation from Prophet Jesus’ (A.S) sayings that *“my kingdom is not of this world.”*²⁴ In any case, Prophet Jesus’ (A.S) kingdom does not belong to this world so how can we rely on his claim of *Messianicship* because it has obviously been predicted in sacred scriptures that promised messiah would establish the kingdom of Israel (same words had been stated by the angel who came to Mary at the occasion of announcement of Prophet Jesus (A.S)’ birth that this lad would restore the throne of his father Prophet *David* A.S).²⁵ In this situation, to refuse the kingdom from himself may be caused to make Jews angry as Jews had no interest in such a messiah who said his kingdom doesn’t belong to this world.²⁶

In the political cases of the Roman Empire, Torah was not taken as law and Prophet Jesus’ (A.S) matter was a purely political matter. Having killed the Jewish rebels, Romans were used to leaving their corpses on the cross and birds and beasts fed on them. *Martin Hengel* writes about it:

“Crucifixion was aggravated further by the fact that quite often its victims were never buried. It was a stereotyped picture that the crucified victim served as food

for wild beasts and birds of prey. In this way his humiliation was made complete. What it meant for a man in antiquity to be refused burial, and the dishonor which went with it, can hardly be appreciated by modern man.”²⁷

To protect from sacrilege, Gospels writers state that Prophet Jesus’ (A.S) body was taken by a dramatic and mysterious character, *Joseph of Arimathea*, a member of the Jewish court ‘Sanhedrin’, who got special permission to receive the dead body of Prophet Jesus (A.S) from Roman administration. This stranger is invented by Gospel writers because other sources have no clue about this person. Gospel writers made him enter silently into the crucifixion’s myth and after playing his role, he totally disappeared from the story leaving no marks on the pages of history. A question takes place here instead of being honorable member of the Jewish court how did Romans hand over the corpse of an alleged rebel to him? The Roman never gave their enemies’ bodies to their relatives. If Joseph had gotten the corpse using his political influence so it was not an admirable deed in Jewish perception. Therefore, they demanded *Pilate* to post guards at the alleged tomb of Prophet Jesus (A.S), lest his body should not be hidden and his disciples claimed that he had risen. In their view, if it happened, so it would prove more dangerous than previous events.²⁸ On the desire of Jews, security guards were posted at the tomb but influential Jews did not question *Joseph* why did he get the corpse of a rebel in such a way?

After having analyzed these inextricable issues, it may be concluded that this narration of the Jews regarding the demise of the Prophet Jesus (A.S) have been doubtful and diffident since its inception. In such a condition, to get the facts straight, we must turn towards divine testimony leaving the historical pieces of evidences to find out that whether Prophet Jesus (A.S) was crucified as narrated by Christian traditions or stoned according to Jewish traditions.

Holy Quran explicitly states in a decisive way that this affair is doubtful for Jews from the very first day and the reality is that Prophet Jesus (A.S) was neither crucified nor executed but he was lifted up towards Allah S.W.T., as stated explicitly in the Holy Quran,

“And [for] their saying, “Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Prophet Jesus (A.S), the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.” And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain. Rather, Allah raised him to Himself. And ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise.”²⁹

There is an inglorious hint similar to Holy Quran that has been found in the Gospels that while Prophet Jesus (A.S) was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, an angel was making him strong.³⁰ Strengthening by the angel was according to prophecies of the book of Psalms because it is written in sacred scripture that God answers his servant in distress and sends help to him from the sanctuary and supports him from Zion. Additionally, Lord saves his anointed and answers him from his holy heaven with the saving power of his right hand.³¹

Although it, the real founder of Christianity, Saint Paul reveals this secret in his letter to Hebrew. He writes:

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.”³²

In this paragraph, Saint Paul clearly admits that in the garden of Gethsemane, Prophet Jesus’ (A.S) prayer was heard by God and an angel immediately got there to rescue Prophet Jesus (A.S) from his enemies as Luke narrates.

After the divine testimony of the Holy Quran and Psalms, the conjectural and hypothetical statement of the Gospels has got no value

In the first century, uncountable rumors and legends about Prophet Jesus (A.S) were circulating in society. A lot of them got lost over time while some of them are still preserved in a few ancient documents. Gospels and Talmud are few of those scattered legendary remaining and these do not belong to Prophet Jesus (A.S). Taking everything into consideration, it may be said that the event of Prophet Jesus’ (A.S) crucifixion is a collection of baseless stories. These accounts have been doubtful because of numerous contradictions in their statements. The only truth is, that which is witnessed by the heavens and this testimony is from Holy Quran which is pure and doubtless.

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