

Stories to use at Easter to respond to a common question

Here are some stories (and helpful explanations) to use when our friends ask this question about Easter:

"Why did Jesus have to die on a cross?"

(They mean: God would never allow such a good prophet to be killed in such a humiliating way. Another man, probably Judas, was put in his place)

Story A - Did you hear about the traffic accident in my neighbourhood a month ago? Three guys were chatting and listening to music in their Fiesta parked on the edge of the road when a brand-new Range Rover came roaring down the street. There were four different people who were eyewitnesses of the accident, and all of them recorded their statements as to what happened. One of them saw the driver roaring down the road talking on his mobile phone. One of them was standing next to the Fiesta talking with the guys when the Range Rover smashed into them etc etc. All four of them agreed that the Range Rover had smashed into the parked Fiesta. So the Range Rover driver had to pay up on his insurance for the car repairs and the injuries of the three men.

But a few days ago a rich man said that the Fiesta had been going backwards really fast and smashed into the front of the Range Rover. Now we don't know whether to believe the rich guy or the original account of the accident. What does he know? Was he there? Did he see it? Why does he think he can come later and tell people what happened when he wasn't even there?

Didn't you say that there were four eye-witnesses to the accident? Yes, the police station has their written statements of what they saw.

Then there's no question! They were there, they saw it happen, they wrote it down, and there were four of them. Who does that rich man think he is? The truth is clear - you should believe the eyewitness and the written accounts instead of someone who wasn't even there) hmmlong silence to let them digest the story and their reaction to it.

The eyewitnesses with Jesus saw him arrested and watched him be whipped and then crucified on a cross. They wrote down how he asked God to forgive those who were driving the nails through his hands and feet. They heard him say "It is Finished" and watched him die and the sun go dark and the earth shake. A spear was thrust into his side to make sure he was dead, and blood gushed out. Three days later they saw him rise from the dead and eat with them and teach them and show them the scars in his hands and feet. After 40 days they watched him ascend to Heaven. The witnesses told others and some wrote down a detailed eyewitness account of his death and resurrection, and we have their written statements in the Injeel. Then 600 years later, a man in Arabia claimed that the Messiah was not killed by the Jews. This is true, He was killed by the Romans. Maybe you misunderstood. Who should I believe - the eyewitness who wrote down their account of Jesus' death or modern misunderstandings?

Story B Two men had a strong enemy. He wanted to capture them and put them into his prison from which no-one had ever escaped. Both men had said that they would be able to escape if imprisoned. But when the enemy came to capture them, the first man deceived him and ran away. The second man, however, allowed himself to be captured. He was placed in the deepest dungeon of the strongest part of the prison. But three days later, he broke out of the prison. Which man showed his power more: the one who ran away, or the one who broke out of the prison? (Muslims think that Jesus ran away when Satan tried to destroy him. But we know that he allowed himself to be captured so he could be killed and show his power over sin, death and the devil.)

Story C A murderer is in court and the sentence is passed for execution. He requests to go outside and he comes back with a sheep and asks the judge to accept the sheep in his place. Will the judge accept? Then before he goes to the executioner he requests to go and smoke a cigarette in private. He goes into a room and his identical twin brother knocks him unconscious and puts on the jail clothes. The brother goes out to face the executioner. Will he be accepted? After the brother has been executed, will the murderer go free? Yes—no one will be looking for him. Now the murderer looks in his pocket and finds his brother's ID card. What is his new identity? That is what Jesus has done for us and now we have his identity!

1) A verse appears to deny that Jesus died on the cross. Quran 4:157 asserts that the Jews "*killed him not nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them*". Some have responded that indeed the Jews did not kill the Messiah – the Romans did. The Jews had no authority to execute a criminal, so they had to go to the Romans (John 19:6-10), who carried out this task for them. The normal Jewish method of execution was stoning – crucifixion was a Roman punishment. Despite the human involvement and responsibility for the death of Jesus, it is still presented as part of the divine plan (John 19:11). This was God working out His purposes through a human agency. In a similar way, the Muslim victory at Badr is strikingly presented as the direct physical action of God (Q 8:17).

2) If 130 verses clearly say something, and one verse seems to say something different but is not clear, what should we do? Should we assume that our interpretation of the one is wrong, or that our interpretation of the 130 is wrong? (130 verses in the Bible and Quran clearly say that Jesus Christ died, while one verse in the Quran seems to say that he did not. Which are we probably wrong about – the 130 clear verses, or the one ambiguous verse?)

3) A common Muslim belief is that when the Jews wished to kill Jesus, God changed his features into those of Judas, and those of Judas into the features of Jesus. So the Jews took Judas and crucified him by mistake, while God took Jesus up into heaven. For many reasons this view is not credible:

a) It contradicts the witness of all the disciples. They knew Jesus, and so did his mother who was standing there.

- b) Jesus Himself had frequently predicted that He would be killed (Matt 16:21; 20:18; Mark 10:45; John 10:17-18).
- c) After His resurrection Jesus appeared before His disciples, showing them the wounds in His hands and side so that they would know He was the one crucified (John 20:26-27).
- d) Had it been Judas on the cross, he would certainly have died shouting out his innocence and cursing his enemies for killing him. Jesus on the cross prayed for their forgiveness (Luke 23:34).
- e) Jesus said that the purpose of His death was to atone for the sins of mankind. He told His disciples, *"This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matt 26:28). Without His death this purpose could not have been realized. Christ's death was the culmination of His ministry. He came *"to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45).
- f) In response to the story of Judas taking Jesus' place on the cross: What would display God's power more, replacing Jesus or actually watching him die and then raising him from the grave in three days? What benefit for the kingdom would there be in having a criminal die? Would followers of Jesus have stopped the sacrificial system if a criminal had died in their place?
- g) This is seen by Muslim commentators as an act of God to save Jesus from an ignominious death, even though God had allowed other prophets to be violently killed. This raises some important issues, such as how God might be involved in such a deception to make it appear that Jesus had died. This is not in His nature, He is not a deceiver. God could have simply raised Jesus to heaven in public view, thus vindicating him before all.

4) Why does Jesus say in the Quran: *"And peace be upon me the day that I was born, the day that I die and the day I am raised alive."* (Q 19:33), if he did not die. (Muslims may respond that he will die when he returns – the hadith claim that he will live on the earth 40 years, get married, have children and die). Response: So why do you change the order of the Quran where it says: birth – death – resurrection?