

The Concept of Miracles in Islam: A Case for the Resurrection of Jesus

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KEY WORDS

| Miracles | Islam | Mohammad's Miracles |
| Minimal Fact Theory | Resurrection |

ABSTRACT

The concept of miracles in Islam is not being given much attention in Western scholarship. While much literature has been written in the Arabic world about Mohammad's miracles in the Qur'an, not many are known in the Western world. Therefore, this paper shall use the analytical method to examine the definition and the purpose of miracles in Islam, and critically compare the miracles performed by Jesus and Mohammad in the Qur'an. Moreover, the resurrection miracle is not a foreign concept in Islamic belief (Surah 2:73). The Qur'an itself attests to Jesus miraculously restoring dead people to life, which aligns with the New Testament account. Therefore, following the exegesis of the early Islamic/Sunni scholars of Surah 3:55, this paper will show that the resurrection of Jesus is plausible within the Muslim worldview. .

INTRODUCTION

Theistic religions, especially Islam and Christianity, accept the concept of miracles. They believe that miracles are possible because of the supernatural power of God. They also believe that miracles are historical events and not mythical stories repeated over passing generations. Despite this apparent similarity, closer inspection reveals the existence of deep differences between the Christian and the Islamic views regarding the definition and the purpose of miracles. One of the key differences occurs over the resurrection of Jesus. Muslims deny the crucifixion, the killing, and the death of Jesus—entailing the denial of his resurrection (Surah 4:157).¹ They believe that Jesus ascended to heaven without experiencing

death, whereas Christians believe that Jesus was crucified, died, buried then was resurrected from the dead, and that this miracle is the most important event in history (1 Cor 15 ESV).

This paper first discusses the definition and purposes of miracles between Islam and Christianity, second compares the miracles of Jesus and Mohammad in the Qur'an to examine if they are consistent with the Islamic criteria of miracles, and lastly makes a case for the resurrection of Jesus from Islamic literature.

THE CONCEPT OF MIRACLES: CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC VIEWS COMPARED

A Christian Definition of Miracles

In the Christian view, a miracle is a supernatural

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Qur'anic passages referenced are in *Translation of the Meaning of the Noble Qur'an in English Language* (Madinah, KSA: King Fahed Complex, 1984).

event that refers to or is caused by a supernatural power. As Richard Purtill states, a miracle is “an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting.”² This definition implies several facts: first, miracles are real historical stories. They happened to real people in particular locations and at a particular time. Second, a miracle is not an event that happens against the order of nature but “an exception to the laws of nature, [that] can be permitted only by the creator of nature, just as an exception to a legal ordinance can be permitted only by the authority that passed the law (or some higher authority).”³ In other words, these events do not contradict or violate natural laws, but they go beyond them or supersede them.⁴ Thirdly, miracles are rare. These events do not happen on a daily basis because they are not the norm. However, most Christians believe that they are still happening today because the living God is actively interacting with his creation (Acts 17:27; Rom 8:26). In other words, God performs miracles not only through his prophets and disciples of the past but also directly in the lives of regular people today.

An Islamic Definition of Miracles

The Islamic understanding differs from the Christian view in that a miracle is an event that violates natural law, and such a violation can only be performed by Allah through his prophets.⁵ The Arabic word for a miracle in the

Qur’an is *aya* which also means sign, wonder, and marvel. Muslims believe that Qur’anic verses are expressive of inexhaustible truth. They signify meaning layered within meaning, light upon light, truth upon truth. As Sayed Mubarak explains in his book, *Mu’jizat Al-Anbiya’ wa Al-Mursalin*,

The miracles that Allah—Glory be to his name—did on the hands of his prophets and messengers are facts without any doubt... Allah supported his prophets and messengers with miracles to prove to the people the honesty of their message... and miracles are acts that human beings cannot do, they are supernatural acts, which do not submit to ontological nor natural laws, and Allah—Glory be to his name—prevents the prophet who did the miracle from taking any credit for it. In this way the miracle would be attributed to Allah—Glory be to his name—only.⁶

Several points should be made regarding the Islamic definition of miracles: first, like the Christian view, Muslims believe that miracles are real historical events, not fictional or merely mythical stories. Second, unlike the Christian view, miracles are events that violate or contradict the natural laws of Allah. When Allah performs a miracle, he chooses to contradict and violate certain natural laws that he himself had applied in creation. This view is compatible with the view of the ultimate will of Allah. Muslims believe that Allah is a universal possibilist because he can do anything he wants (Surah 2:20; 2:259; 3:189; 5:17; 16:77; 22:6 ...

2 Richard L. Purtill, “Defining Miracles,” in *Defense of Miracles*, Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 62-63.

3 Ibid., 68.

4 Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 6.

5 There is a misconception that the word Allah in Arabic is used to refer to the name of the Islamic God. This is not true for Allah means God in Arabic language. Arab Christians use the word Allah to refer to the Christian God in their Arabic Bible and literature. In this study, however,

I will be referring to Allah as the god of Islam and God (with a big G) as the God of Christianity.

6 Sayed Mubarak, *Mu’jizat Al-Anbiya’ wa Al-Mursalin* (Cairo, Egypt: Al-Maktaba Al-Mahmoudiyah, 2004), 5. The original Arabic translation renders this way: المعجزات التي اجراها الله تعالى على يد انبيائه ورسله حقائق لا شك فيها... لقد ايد الله انبيائه ورسله بالمعجزات ليثبتوا للناس صدقهم فيما يدعون اليه... والمعجزات افعال يعجز البشر عن الاتيان بمتلها، فهي امور خارقة للعادة، لا تخضع لقوانين الوجود، ولا لقوانين العلوم، وينزع الله تعالى من النبي الذي اجرى على يده المعجزة أي سبب من شأنه ان يحدث المعجزة، وبذلك تخلص المعجزة لله تعالى وحده.

etc.).⁷ Since he has dominion and power over his creation, he can choose to create, order, and define everything according to his own approval.⁸ Third, miracles are performed only by Allah himself through the prophets. No other person can perform miracles. Mohammad Al-Sha'rawi agrees with Mubarak on the idea that only prophets perform miracles. He explains,

A miracle is a violation of human laws, and no one can do it except for Allah who created these laws ... the miracle, the miracle of every prophet, should be related to what his people are proficient in, so the challenge can be great and strong and pointing to the ability of Allah—glory be to his name. For instance, he will not send a miracle of eloquence to people who are great in medicine.⁹

Allah used his prophets to perform different miracles among different people based on their skills in order to show them that no matter how good they are, he is able to exceed their expectations. However, if Mubarak and Al-Sha'rawi's definition of a miracle is true (i.e. only prophets can perform miracles), then miracles no longer occur because the prophecy era has ended with Mohammad as the last prophet.

7 The mainstream of Sunni traditionalists believe that Allah can do anything logically and illogically impossible if he wants. See Sherene N. Khouri, "What Does the Euthyphro Dilemma Reveal about the Nature of Allah?" *Eleutheria*, vol.6, no. 1, (2022):83.

8 Alvin Plantinga, *Does God have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 90.

9 Mohammad Al-Sha'rawi, *Al-Qur'an Mu'jiza*, vol. 1 (Dar Akhbar Al-Yom, 1981), 7. The Arabic translation renders this way: أن المعجزة يجب ان تكون خرقاً لقوانين البشر ولا يقدر عليه إلا الله سبحانه وتعالى الذي وضع هذه القوانين ... وأن المعجزة معجزة كل نبي يجب ان تكون مما نبع فيه قومه حتى يكون التحدي نابغاً وقوياً .. وإثباتاً على قدرة الله سبحانه وتعالى .. فلا أتى بقوم نبغوا في الطب مثلاً .. وأرسل لهم معجزة في البلاغة.

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES: A CHRISTIAN VIEW VS. AN ISLAMIC VIEW

Miracles are affirmed in the Christian and Islamic theology. They have functional similarities for both views believe that miracles, when they occur, confirm the message of the prophet, and point to the divine. However, the purpose of miracles in the Christian view is different from the Islamic view because of its relation to the intention of God.

In the Christian belief, the purpose of miracles is to show that God has acted in history and that he is still active with his own creation today. Miracles, by nature, point beyond themselves because of the awe that they produce. However, God in the New Testament performs miracles for several reasons, but first and foremost because he cares about the people. In the Christian context, God loved the world (John 3:16)¹⁰ and wanted all people to be saved (1Tim 2:4); therefore, performing miracles is not just to challenge them but to lead them to repentance.¹¹ As the apostle Paul explains, "Faith comes from hearing the message" and the message which "is heard through the word about Christ" is confirmed through miracles (Rom 10:17). Also, Jesus asks the Jews to not believe in him if he is not doing "the works of the Father" (meaning miracles), but he invites them to believe in him because he performed several miracles among them, so they are without an excuse (John 10:37-38).

In contrast, Allah in the Islamic view performed miracles in the past to challenge people to believe in him. In other words, his main purpose of performing miracles is to impress

10 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

11 Purtil, "Defining Miracles," 64.

people with his power. To explain this concept, Al-Sha'rawi gives the example of Jesus and his miracles in the Qur'an. In his view, Allah sent Jesus to people who were very knowledgeable and proficient in medicine. He allowed him to heal their blind and lepers and even raise their dead in order to prove his ultimate power.¹² Isra Yazicioglu echoes this idea explaining that "The Qur'an is very clear that such miracles do not signify that the prophets are endowed with any superhuman qualities. Rather, it is God who enables the prophets to perform the miracles at specific times during their mission and, at times, to their own surprise (e.g., Q. 19:8, 27:10)."¹³ This is to say that miracles point beyond the prophet to surprise people about the power of God. Rebecca Williams quotes one of the most important commentators on the Qur'an stating, "For al-Tabari, the role of God is revealed in relation to a request by the unbelievers for a sign like those performed by Moses or Jesus, and his emphasis is on the power of God to choose His prophet as opposed to the power of man to question that choice."¹⁴ The prominent goal of many of the earlier reported miracles is to show the power of Allah and the humanity of Mohammad. People of Arabia had different backgrounds (Jews, Christians, and Pagans) and they are used in their scriptures to see signs and miracles as part of the evidence of prophethood. However, in the Qur'anic reports of miracles the priority was given to stress the power of Allah and his ability to do all that he wants to

12 Al-Sha'rawi, *Al-Qur'an Mu'jiza*, 10. The Arabic translation renders as: "وعيسى جاء الى قومه وقد نبغوا في الطب: فأبرأ الأكمه والأبرص .. وزاد على ذلك بأنه أحيا الموتى بإذن الله .. إذن عيسى تحدى قومه في شيء يبغوا فيه .. فجاء لهم بما تجاوز علمهم .. وزاد عليه بإحياء الموتى بإذن الله .. فكان التحدي من جنس ما نبغ فيه قومه".

13 Isra Yazicioglu, *Understanding the Qur'anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015), 4.

14 Rebecca Williams, *Muhammad and the Supernatural: Medieval Arab Views* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 34.

do, not what people asked for. The later reports of miracles in Hadith and Sira books, however, took a different route.¹⁵ As William explains,

In these reports, rocks, trees, Christian monks, Jewish soothsayers, pagan idols, and angels all reveal Muhammad's future importance. And yet, Muhammad himself is unaware of most of these events. He rarely speaks – his only dialogue coming from reports of later events in which he tells someone about his early life. Instead, he is portrayed simply as a passive receptor of God's signs – things to him or for him rather than because of his actions.

As if these accounts were created later to answer certain objections that were not raised during the life of Mohammad. As stated earlier, the paper will focus on the Qur'anic miracles of Jesus and Mohammad and not the later reports of signs and miracles. None of the previous explanations show Allah's careness for his people, but the emphasis is always on his power so that people may believe in him. This contrast shows that the purpose of miracles in both religions is different because the divine's ultimate priority in Islam is Allah's power.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS VS. THE MIRACLES OF MOHAMMAD IN THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an mentions several miracles performed by Jesus and only three miracles performed by Mohammad. By focusing on the miracles that are mentioned in the Qur'an only, the following section shall list the miracles of Jesus and Mohammad, and applies the criteria of the Islamic miracles to both (Jesus and Mohammad's miracles) to evaluate the consistency of their purpose within the Islamic

15 Hadith means the accumulated commands and sayings of prophet Mohammad.

standards. The conclusion will show that while Mohammad's miracles are inconsistent with the Islamic criteria of accepting a miracle, Jesus miracles are consistent. Mohammad's miracles are ahistorical, lack eyewitnesses, and do not serve Allah's purpose; however, Jesus's miracles are consistent with the Islamic criteria of accepting a miracle. This conclusion entails the idea that the invention of the later miracles of Mohammad in the books of Hadiths and Sira was a necessity to fill in the gap in the literature and to fulfill the demands of prophethood's signs.

Jesus's Miracles in the Qur'an

The Qur'an mentions several miracles that were done by Jesus. For instance, Jesus was born of a virgin (Surah 19:16-21), speaking in the manger (Surah 19:27-33), predicting his death and his ascension to heaven while a child in the manger (Surah 19:33), creating a living bird from clay, healing blind people and lepers, raising the dead (Surah 5:110), and creating a huge feast for his disciples to believe in him (Surah 5:112-115). It is worth noting that all these miracles are unique to Jesus, Mohammad did not do any of them.

Mohammad's Miracles in the Qur'an

The major and most important miracle that Mohammad did—which most Muslims agree upon—is the Qur'an itself.¹⁶ The writer of the Qur'an repeatedly challenges its people to produce a similar discourse on their own: "If you are in doubts concerning that We have sent down to Our slave, then produce a surah of the like thereof and call your witnesses besides Allah, if you are truthful" (Surah 2:23). Also, provocatively, Mohammad reframes the challenge, stating, "If the mankind and

the jinn were together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they helped one another" (Surah 17:88, see also 10:38, 11:13, 52:33-34). The Qur'an was considered a sufficient sign in itself and presented as a challenge to people who disbelieved in Mohammad.¹⁷ There is no specific verse that mentions or calls the Qur'an a miracle. However, most Muslims agree that the Qur'an is the strongest miracle that was given to humankind about the truthfulness of the message of Allah. Many verses mention that the Qur'an is a dictation from Allah that was given to Mohammad through *Jibril* (angel Gabriel) in a plain eloquent Arabic language (Surah 6:19; 26:192-193; 41:1-3). The miraculous element is that no one was able or will be able to create a book like the Qur'an. This logic might sound circular, especially to Westerners; however, most Muslim scholars agree with it because it is mentioned in the Qur'an (Surah 17:88).

Mohammed's second Qur'anic miracle is the trip that he took from Makkah to Jerusalem. It is mentioned in a concise way in the Qur'an, but in more detail in the Hadith:¹⁸

Gloried (and Exalted) be He (Allah) [Above all that (evil) they associate with Him] who took His slave (Muhammad (ﷺ))¹⁹ for a journey by night from *Al-Masjid-Al-Haram* (at Makkah) to *Al-Masjid-al-Aqsa* (in Jerusalem), the neighborhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him (Muhammad) of Our Ayat (proofs, evidences, lessons, signs, etc.). Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer.²⁰

17 Yazicioglu, *Understanding the Qur'anic Miracle*, 5.

18 This miracle is repeated in Sahih Bukhari

19 "Sala Allah Aleih wa salam عليه وسلم" (for artistic purposes, it occurs sometimes in this way []). The literal translation is: Allah prayed over Mohammad and greeted him. However, Muslims do not translate this statement to English in a literal way; they simply interpret it as "Peace be upon him."

20 No emphasis was added to this citation. The extra information between two parentheses are provided by the

16 Mubarak, *Mu'jazat Al-Anbiya' wa Al-Mursalin*, 102.

On this overnight trip, Mohammad traveled to Jerusalem on Buraq (a metaphysical winged animal that is between a mule and a donkey). According to Hadith, he bargained with Allah and reduced the number of daily prayers from fifty to five.²¹

The third miracle of Mohammad was the splitting of the moon. At the introduction of Surah Al-Qamar (the moon), Mohammad writes, “The Hour has drawn near, and the moon has been cleft asunder. If they see a sign, they turn away and say: ‘This is continuous magic’” (Surah 54:1-2). When the people of Makkah asked Mohammad to perform a miracle in front of them, he cleaved the moon. Despite this miracle, they did not believe, and they attributed what they saw to magic.²²

MOHAMMAD VS. JESUS’S MIRACLES IN THE QUR’AN: AN EVALUATION

Mohammad’s Miracles: An Evaluation

An examination that arrays evidence to establish the authenticity of an event is a very essential act of historiography. Historians use several criteria to authenticate the event under study, such as the number of eyewitnesses, artifacts, scientific laws, and written documents that describe the event.²³ According to the Islamic view, miracles are historical events

translators.

21 Muhammad Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, Hadith no. 3207, accessed February 2, 2019, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/59/18>

22 Islamic scholars disagree whether this miracle should be interpreted literally or figuratively. See Hussein Abdulsater, “Full Texts, Split Moons, Eclipsed Narratives: The Literary History of a Cosmological Miracle,” *Narrative Culture*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 162-166.

23 Philip P. Wiener, “On Methodology in the Philosophy of History,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 38, no. 12 (1941): 309-24.

that happened in real-time and in geographical places. However, none of Mohammad’s miracles share the aforementioned criteria, either because the Qur’an mentions none (no eyewitnesses, no external or unbiased written documents, etc...) or because of the nature of the miracles. As for the eyewitness account, no one saw the Qur’an descending on Mohammad because it was a direct communication between him and angel Jibril. Those who did not believe in Jibril’s revelation were accused of being the prophet’s enemies (Surah 2:97), without the ability to provide any evidence to Jibril’s communication. Moreover, there is no extra-Islamic account affirming that Jibril gave the Qur’an to Mohammad and there is no verse in the Qur’an testifying that people saw Jibril revealing the Qur’an to Mohammad. On the contrary, there is contraposition information to eyewitnesses. The Qur’an mentions several times that when Mohammad recited the verses of the Qur’an in front of other people, they said that it was the legends of their ancestors (Surah 16:24; 23:83-89; 83:13; 25:5; 26:68; 46:17; 68:15). They were able to recognize the stories, but they attributed them to tribal legends. Jibril’s revelation would be a stronger argument if an enemy eyewitness account was available. However, many of Mohammad’s listeners gave opposing testimony to how Mohammad got the Qur’an.

In a similar fashion, there are no eyewitnesses to Mohammad’s trip to Jerusalem. This trip took the form of a vision that no one but Mohammad saw.²⁴ The only miracle that involved eyewitnesses is the splitting of the moon. Nevertheless, the eyewitnesses accused Mohammad of being a magician by attributing

24 This story is called Al-Isra’ wa Al-Mi’raj. Its genre is similar to a myth. It also could be copied from the Ethiopic legends, such as the apocryphal book “The book of Enoch.”

it to sorcery (Surah 54:1-2). In fact, if the moon did really split that night, then there should have been some recordings of astronomical observations that attest to this event in different countries. However, no known historians have recorded such an event that we know of today. In short, no historical criterion applies to any miracle that Mohammad performed because they lack viable eyewitnesses.

The second criterion for accepting miracles in the Islamic belief is that they are supposed to be performed by prophets. Mohammad's miracles fit this criterion, but they bear a weakness. Mohammad's miracles are self-attestation to his prophecy and using the Qur'an (that says Mohammad is a prophet) as a testimony to the truth of his prophecy is circular reasoning. The same weakness applies to his vision or trip to Jerusalem because there is no way to authenticate it. Mohammad thinks that he is a prophet because he believes that he has seen a supernatural vision in his dreams that no one can confirm.²⁵

The last criterion is that miracles should challenge people to show the power of Allah and lead them to believe in him. However, this criterion is dysfunctional because miracles in the Islamic view have ceased. By Mohammad being the last prophet, no miracle can be performed today and no attestation to the divinity of Allah is accomplished except through da'wa (preaching). Challenging people today to believe in Allah is an inapplicable measure for contemporary evaluation.

In conclusion, Mohammad's miracles that were mentioned in the Qur'an cannot serve the purpose of miracles in the Islamic view and point to the divinity and the existence of Allah because of the absence of historic testimonies,

25 Muslim Ibn Al-Hajjaj Al-Naysaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith no. 127, accessed February 23, 2019, <https://www.sunnah.com/muslim/1/337>.

the lack of eyewitnesses, and the cessation of miracles. This weakness perhaps explains why additional miracle accounts (such as the ones mentioned in the Hadith and Sirah) were needed to authenticate the prophethood of Mohammad.

Jesus's Miracles in the Qur'an: An Evaluation

Despite the fact that Jesus's miracles are numerous in comparison to Mohammad's (especially the ones that are mentioned in the Qur'an), they fit into the Islamic criteria of miracles better than Mohammad's. For instance, all of Jesus's miracles enjoyed strong testimonies from eyewitnesses. Unlike Mohammad's miracles, they were performed in front of people who approved and testified their authenticity in addition to people who were his enemies (Surah 5:110; 3:49). For example, miracles such as Jesus speaking in the manger or creating a bird were performed in front of people who witnessed their accounts and were not private to the person who claimed to have done them. Moreover, people who were in contact with Jesus approved of his message because all of his miracles were done to benefit them. For instance, Jesus's disciples believed in him after he had fed them and testified to his identity as a prophet (Surah 5:112-115), whereas the people around Mohammad accused him of borrowing their earlier legends to compose the Qur'an (Surah 6:25). Jesus raising people from the dead is a very strong account to his prophethood because it would be very easy to oppose if the miracle did not happen.

THE RESURRECTION: THE ISLAMIC VIEW VS. THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

While the Christian view of the resurrection of Jesus is unique to the Christian faith, it fits

the Islamic miracle criteria better than all of Mohammad's miracles. The resurrection is considered a historical fact performed via a messenger of God to help people believe in him and gain eternal life. Nevertheless, Muslims do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus because of the Qur'an's *a priori* rejection of Christ's death. The Qur'an clearly states that Jesus was never killed nor crucified: "but the resemblance of Isa (Jesus) was put over another man (and they killed that man), and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely; they killed him not. But Allah raised him [Isa (Jesus)] up (with his body and soul) unto Himself. And Allah is Ever All-Powerful, All-Wise" (Surah 4:157).²⁶ It is beyond the scope of this paper to show the historical evidence for the crucifixion of Jesus. But since the resurrection from the dead is not a foreign idea in Islamic belief, the rest of this paper focuses on the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus and shows several problems related to the claim that Jesus was never raised from the dead. The following sections make a case for the resurrection of Jesus from the Islamic criteria of miracles by defining the minimal facts about the concept of the resurrection that all Muslims agree upon, and by discussing the dispute among Islamic scholars of whether Jesus died before his ascension.

A Case for the Resurrection: A Minimal Facts Approach

Christian scholar, Gary Habermas, created the minimal facts theory by finding at least twelve facts that most critics accept in their scholarly works about the resurrection.²⁷ Following his steps, this section lists several facts about the

26 All the information between parentheses and square brackets that are added by Al-Hilali and Khan.

27 Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, 9-10

miracles of Jesus that Christians and Muslims accept. Believing in these facts and ignoring the resurrection of Jesus shows inconsistency in the Islamic belief, and therefore, makes a case for the resurrection of Jesus.

Muslims and Christians agree on several facts related to the personhood and the miracles of Jesus. Both affirm that Jesus was a prophet/messenger sent by God, although Christians believe he was more than a prophet (John 1:1). They agree that he performed several miracles including raising a person from the dead (John 11:42-43; Surah 5:110). They also agree that he was ascended to heaven and will be back in the future to judge the world (John 5:22).²⁸ Furthermore, Christians and Muslims believe that miracles are historical facts, done by prophets for the purpose of affirming their message and pointing to God. Jesus's resurrection affirmed his message as a prophet (the Islamic account) and the Son of God (the Christian account) because many can claim they will be raised from the dead; however, just one person was able to fulfill it, Jesus Christ. There is collaborative evidence from biblical and non-biblical resources which support the historical status of the resurrection of Jesus. The strongest early biblical source is the first epistle to the Corinthians, which includes an early (mid-30s AD) creedal confession that "provides some crucially important information, like the report of Jesus's appearance to several groups, including to five hundred persons as one time," says Habermas (1 Cor 15:6).²⁹ The non-biblical sources that testify to Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection are many, including prominent

28 Abi Abdullah Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadith no. 3448, (Damascus, Syria: Dar Iben Kathir, 2002), 854. Abi Al-Hussain Muslim Al-Nissabouri, *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith no. 242, (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Dar Tiba, 2006), 80.

29 Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope*, 19.

historical figures like Josephus (AD 37),³⁰ Tacitus (AD 56-120),³¹ and Thallus (AD 55).³² Although Muslims believe in Jesus's ascension, their literature does not include any eyewitness account of this event.

The resurrection of Jesus fits the rest of the criteria of the Islamic miracles because it challenged the Jews, proved Jesus's prophecy, and pointed to God. Jesus challenged the Jews several times by performing several miracles. However, prophesying his resurrection and raising himself from the dead on the third day is the ultimate challenge because no man was ever able to fulfill it before Jesus (Luke 24:46; Mark 10:34; Matt 20:19). Moreover, the resurrection of Jesus pointed to God because Christianity started spreading all over the world after that event, which means people started believing in God after this event in a widespread way. Even those who were skeptical about Jesus during his life changed their perspective and became willing to die after they saw the resurrected Jesus. In a nutshell, the resurrection of Jesus fits the Islamic criteria for miracles more than Mohammad's own miracles. Therefore, disbelieving in the resurrection of Jesus is considered *a priori* rejection and it is inconsistent with the Islamic belief in miracles.

A Case for the Resurrection: Ascension vs. Resurrection

The claim that Jesus was never raised from the dead is inconsistent and incoherent with the Islamic view because of a particular verse that says Allah has ended the life of Jesus. If Jesus died, then his ascension to heaven should be regarded first as a resurrection from the dead

and later a bodily ascension. There is a missing link, an intermediate stage between the death and the bodily ascension of Jesus, which the resurrection event covers. Muslims, however, believe that Allah saved Jesus from the crucifixion without mentioning what happened to him or to the other person who was crucified in his place (Surah 4:157; 3:55).

A close examination of Surah 3:55, however, proves that Jesus died before his ascension. In this verse, Allah speaks to Jesus saying, "I will take you [Jesus] and raise you to Myself." It does not say how or when Allah took Jesus to himself. It is also noteworthy that the English translation of this verse substitutes the word *mutawafika* (ending your life) with the verb "will take you," and this translation does not capture the meaning because the root verb of *mutawafika* is *tawafa*, which means "قبض روحه" took his soul"³³ not "will take you."

The word *tawafa* and its different forms are mentioned several times in the Qur'an under the meaning of ending someone's life. In Surah 39:42, Mohammad explains how Allah's sovereignty controls the death and the life of people. He states, "It is Allah who takes away [*yatawafa*] the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep." Mohammad distinguishes between those who Allah *yatawafa* and those who sleep. In other words, those who sleeps will wake up again, therefore, Allah did not take their soul—Allah did not *yatawafa* these people. The same meaning is translated for the word *yatawafa* and its form in several other places in the Qur'an to indicate death (Surah 8:50; 22:5; 40:67; 10:46; 13:40; 40:77). Finally, when Allah asks Jesus if he told the people to believe in him and his mother, Jesus answers using the past tense of the verb

30 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18,63.

31 Tacitus Ann. 15.44.

32 Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2010), 235-245.

33 *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit*, s.v. "توفى," 4th ed, (Cairo, Egypt: Al-Shuruq international, 2004). See also, *al-Muhit Qamus*, s.v. "توفى" 8th ed., (Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Risala, 2005)

yatawafy, which is *tawafa*, but the English translation insists on using “when you took me up” for the verb *توفيتني tawafaytani* (Surah 5:117). The word *tawafa/yatawafa/tawafaytani/mutawafika* all mean “ending someone’s life” in every place in the Qur’an and the dictionaries, yet they are translated as “took me/you up” in English when Jesus speaks. This rendering does not seem consistent or correct linguistically or Qur’anically. It may include a pre-supposed meaning that the translators of the Qur’an are trying to convey to non-Arabic speakers.

One of the proper ways to know the accurate meaning of *mutawafika* is to go to early Islamic commentaries, such as Al-Tabari and Al-Qurtubi, who most Sunni Muslims trust and follow. Surprisingly enough, these scholars do not fully agree on the meaning of this word. Al-Tabari and the Al-Qurtubi both mention three possible meanings: 1) Allah put Jesus under sleep and then he ascended him to heaven, 2) Allah terminated his life, or 3) Allah ended his life temporary for few hours, then raised him from the dead and ascendant him to heaven.³⁴ Al-Qurtubi adds a fourth meaning: Jesus asked his disciples, “who is ready to die with him?” when one of them volunteered, Jesus gave him his staff and garment and placed his likeness on him so that people would think that they are crucifying Jesus.³⁵ Then Al-Qurtubi continues, “As for the Messiah, Allah covered him with feather and light and cut his pleasure of eating and drinking, so he flew with the angels.”³⁶ Even this meaning does not say when or after how

34 Muhammad Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jame' Al-Bayan An Ta'weel Ay Quran*, Bashar Ma'roof & Issam Al-Herštani eds., vol. 2, (Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Risallah Publisher, 1994), 265-266. Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Asna fi Sahreh Asma' Allah Al-Husna*, accessed February 24, 2019, <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/qortobi/sura3-aya55.html#qortobi>

35 Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Asna fi Sahreh Asma' Allah Al-Husna*.

36 Ibid., The Arabic translation is: وأما المسيح فكساه الله الريش وألبسه النور وقطع عنه لذة المطعم والمشرب فطار مع الملائكة

long Jesus ascended to heaven. It seems that Muslim scholars are confused about this word and disagree about its exact meaning because they do not want to submit to its only and obvious meaning. They do not want to admit that Jesus died and that the word *mutawafika* (ending your life) is the Qur’anic proof. They know that if they approve this meaning, they will contradict the view that Jesus was never crucified (Surah 4:157), which implements death. This position, however, is inconsistent with the Islamic claim about the original Arabic of the Qur’an and its superiority to the English translation. Taking this notion into consideration with the concurrent meanings of Al-Qurtubi and Al-Tabari, the reader can conclude that this verse is a clear declaration that Jesus deceased first (even for a few hours as they claimed) before he was raised from the dead and then ascended to heaven. This notion is crucial because it supports the Christian claim that Jesus died and then was resurrected from the dead.

A Case for the Resurrection: The Status of Jesus & Allah’s Omnipotence

As stated earlier, miracles in the Islamic view are performed by prophets only. Several prophets performed different types of miracles. However, no prophet was able to raise people from the dead, except for Jesus. In the Qur’an, the miracle of raising people from the dead is dedicated only to Allah for he is introduced as the creator and the one who raises people from the dead (Surah 22:6; 30:50; 36:11; 41:39; 42:9). In Islamic history, no other man was able to do what Allah does—raising people from the dead—except for Jesus. To be consistent with Islamic belief, this miracle should elevate Jesus’s status from a prophet to a miracle worker, if not divine.

In a different story, Mohammad himself

took notice of the importance of the miracle of the resurrection. In a conversation between him and Allah, Allah says, "When you killed a man and fell into dispute among yourselves as to the crime. But Allah brought forth that which you were hiding. So we said: 'strike him (the dead man) with a piece of it (the cow). Thus Allah brings the dead to life and shows you His ayat (proofs, evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelation, etc.) so that you may understand" (Surah 2:72-73). The purpose of this miracle is to point to Allah by showing unbelievers the evidence of the resurrection. Denying that Jesus was raised from the dead, therefore, is denying the ability of Allah and rejecting his evidence. Resurrecting the person who was killed by mistake is one of the signs that Mohammad was ordered to perform, but never did. Yet, when Jesus performed it, Muslims undervalued it.

CONCLUSION

Miracles' criteria in the Islamic view are divided into four points. They are historical events that were performed by prophets to prove their message, challenge people, and point to the divine. Mohammad's miracles that are mentioned in the Qur'an fail to fulfill these criteria because of their nature. They are ahistorical events that lack eyewitnesses, and they do not prove Mohammad's message nor point to Allah because they are self-attested. In contrast, Jesus's miracles, including Jesus's resurrection from the dead, aptly fit the Islamic criteria. The miracle of Jesus's resurrection was a historical event that challenged people to believe in God. When Muslims insist that Jesus's resurrection was a mere ascension, they contradict the Qur'an and reverse the early belief of Muslim commentators who state that Jesus died before his ascension. When they deny the

resurrection, they cripple the ability of Allah to perform it and they disrupt its purpose, which is to point to Allah. In a nutshell, Muslims should consider the resurrection of Jesus because it fits the Islamic criteria of miracles, it does not contradict the Qur'an, and it proves the ability of Allah to raise people from the dead.

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