

WEEK 4 OF 6

The Cross and Salvation

Two Irreconcilable Gospels

Christianity & Islam • October 4, 2026

Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church • Tampa, Florida

Review and Introduction

Week 1

Foundations

Muhammad, the Qur'an, how Islam began. The Qur'an is not narrative but proclamation, organized by length, understood through hadith and tafsir.

Week 2

Tawhid vs. Trinity

Islamic strict monotheism vs. the triune God. The Qur'an attacks a straw-man Trinity (Allah, Mary, Jesus). The actual doctrine—one Being, three Persons—is never engaged.

Week 3

Jesus in Two Books

Isa in the Qur'an: prophet, Messiah, born of a virgin—yet not divine, not crucified. The Qur'an gives Jesus titles (Word, Spirit, Messiah) it denies Muhammad.

Today: From the Person of Christ to the Work of Christ — the cross and what it accomplishes

Surah 4:157 — The 40-Word Denial

Qur'an — Surah 4:157 (An-Nisa')

"They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but it was made to appear so to them. And 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."

Only 40 Arabic Words

The entire denial of the crucifixion rests on a single brief passage — roughly 40 words in Arabic. No elaboration, no theological explanation, no mechanism given.

No Hadith Expansion

Unlike many Qur'anic statements expanded by the hadith tradition, Surah 4:157 receives minimal hadith clarification on the mechanics of what actually happened to Jesus.

Three Interpretations

Classical tafsir offers: (1) Substitution — someone else (often Judas) was crucified in Jesus's place. (2) Swoon theory — Jesus didn't actually die on the cross. (3) Docetic reading — the physical appearance was an illusion.

Historical Evidence for the Crucifixion

Tacitus — Annals 15.44 (~116 AD)

"Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate."

Roman historian, hostile to Christianity. No motive to affirm Christian claims.

Josephus — Antiquities 18.3.3 (~93 AD)

"Pilate had condemned him to be crucified." (Even the minimally interpolated Testimonium affirms the execution.)

Jewish historian writing for a Roman audience. No Christian agenda.

Babylonian Talmud — Sanhedrin 43a

"On the eve of the Passover, Yeshu was hanged." (Hanging on a tree = Roman crucifixion in Jewish idiom.)

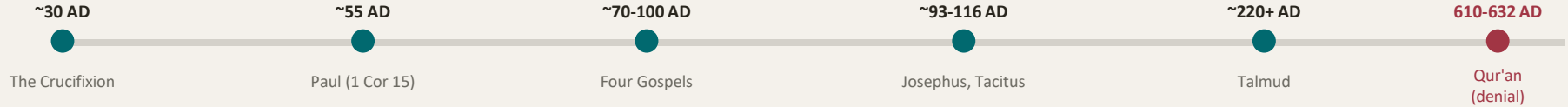
Rabbinic source, written by those with every reason to deny Jesus's influence — affirms his execution.

Paul — 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (~55 AD)

"That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day." Within 25 years of the event; cites pre-Pauline creed (possibly within 3-5 years).

Criterion of embarrassment: no 1st-century Jewish movement invents a crucified Messiah.

White's Argument: 7th-Century Qur'an vs. Ancient Sources



Not a Religious Dispute — An Historical One

Non-Christian historians (Tacitus, Josephus, Talmud) attest to the crucifixion. This is not a question of Christian faith versus Muslim faith — it is a question of historical evidence versus a 7th-century claim.

No Independent Corroboration

The Qur'an's denial of the crucifixion has no ancient corroboration. No 1st-3rd century Jewish, Roman, or even Gnostic source says Jesus was not crucified. Even those who denied His resurrection affirmed His death.

The Silence Problem

The Qur'an offers no alternative account: Who was crucified instead? How was the switch made? Where did Jesus go? The silence is loud. A 40-word denial without historical argument cannot overturn 600 years of uncontested attestation.

Two Views of Salvation

The scales of Islam and the cross of Christ

The Qur'an's Scales: Salvation by Deeds

The Mizan — Scales of Judgment

Surah 23:102-103

"Those whose scales are heavy [with good deeds] — it is they who will be the successful. But those whose scales are light — those are the ones who have lost their souls, [being] in Hell, abiding eternally."

Surah 7:8-9

"The weighing [of deeds] that Day will be the truth. So those whose scales are heavy — it is they who will be the successful. And those whose scales are light — they are the ones who will lose themselves."

Surah 101:6-9

"As for one whose scales are heavy [with good deeds], he will be in a pleasant life. But as for one whose scales are light, his refuge will be an abyss." (Al-Qari'ah)

No Assurance — Even for Muhammad

Sahih Bukhari 5:266 — Muhammad said: "By Allah, though I am the Apostle of Allah, yet I do not know what Allah will do to me." Allah's mercy remains a sovereign, arbitrary act — not a covenant promise. No believer can be certain of paradise.

Predestination in Islam: Maktub

Surah 57:22 — Al-Hadid

"No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being — indeed that, for Allah, is easy."

Islamic Predestination (Qadar)

- Everything is written in the Preserved Tablet (Al-Lawh al-Mahfuz) before creation.
- Maktub: "It is written." Acceptance of divine decree (tawakkul).
- Can feel fatalistic: what will be, will be. Personal agency unclear.
- Allah's will is sovereign but often inscrutable — no revealed covenant purpose behind election.
- No assurance of salvation even for those "selected" — mercy remains discretionary.

Reformed Predestination (Election)

- God elects in love, in Christ, before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4-5).
- Election is covenantal and relational — rooted in God's love, not arbitrary will.
- WCF Ch. 3: God's decree is His eternal purpose by which, for His own glory, He ordains whatever comes to pass.
- Election guarantees assurance: those God has chosen, He calls, justifies, and glorifies (Rom 8:30).
- Human agency is real and meaningful — not fatalism but providence.

The Biblical Gospel: Grace, Atonement, Assurance

Isaiah 53:5-6

"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray... and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Written ~700 BC — the suffering servant. Penal substitution in the Old Testament.

Romans 3:21-26

"God put forward [Christ] as a propitiation by his blood... It was to show his righteousness... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Propitiation (hilasterion): the wrath of God against sin is satisfied — justice AND mercy meet.

2 Corinthians 5:21 + Ephesians 2:8-9

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." — "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works."

Double imputation: our sin credited to Christ; His righteousness credited to us.

The Great Contrast: Islam and Christianity

Islam

The Cross

Did not happen — made to appear so (4:157)

Mediator

No mediator — each person stands alone before Allah

Atonement

No atonement — no sin-bearing sacrifice for sin

Salvation Basis

Deeds weighed on scales; Allah's arbitrary mercy

Assurance

None — even Muhammad lacked certainty

Divine Mercy

Sovereign assertion — not grounded in justice satisfied

Christianity

Central historical fact; God's planned act of redemption

Christ the one mediator (1 Tim 2:5); represents us before the Father

Penal substitution — Christ bears sin's penalty (Isa 53, Rom 3)

Grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Eph 2:8-9)

"That you may know you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13)

Mercy and justice meet at the cross (Rom 3:26)

Discussion Questions

Take 10-15 minutes in groups of 3-4, then share with the class.

- 1** Why is the Qur'an's denial of the crucifixion historically problematic — not just theologically?

Think about the criterion of embarrassment, non-Christian ancient sources (Tacitus, Josephus, Talmud), and the timeline.

- 2** How would you explain "assurance of salvation" to a Muslim friend whose entire theological framework has no concept of it?

What does the cross make possible that the scales system cannot? What objective grounds does the Christian point to?

- 3** How does penal substitutionary atonement (PSA) differ from the Islamic view of divine mercy — and why does that difference matter?

Consider: is God just if He forgives without grounds? What does the cross say about God's character?

- 4** What does it mean that God's justice AND mercy fully meet at the cross? Why can't they fully meet anywhere else? Does Islam provide any answer to this issue?

Romans 3:26 — "just and the justifier." How is this unique to the Christian gospel?

Next Week: Scripture Wars

Bible Corruption and Muhammad in the Bible

Topics We'll Cover

- The Islamic charge of tahrif — Bible corruption
- The Qur'an's own affirmation of prior scriptures
- Manuscript evidence: Dead Sea Scrolls, 5,800+ Greek NT manuscripts
- Is Muhammad predicted in Deuteronomy 18, Song of Solomon, or John 14-16?

Reading Assignment

- James R. White — What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an, Chapters 8-9
- Optional: Nabeel Qureshi, No God but One, ch. 9
- Key question to bring: If the Qur'an commands Jews and Christians to judge by their own books, how can Muslims claim those books are corrupted?