

Jesus in Islam

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A Christian Perspective of Islamic Thought

Of all the **major** religions in the world, Islam is the only non-Christian faith that recognises Jesus. Within the pages of the Qur'an is a distinctly Islamic portrayal of Jesus. Three of its Surahs (chapters), Aale-Imran, Al-Maida and Mariam are so named because of their references to Jesus and his work. There are about ninety verses spread across fifteen Surahs of the Qur'an that refer to Jesus. A second source for the Islamic understanding of Jesus are the numerous Ahadith (traditions) which portray his teaching and the ultimate purpose of his first and second coming. There are also many references to Jesus in other Islamic literature.

His Name and Its Significance

Christians believe that "Jesus" is the Greek form of Joshua, which means 'the Lord saves' and occurs in the Christian scriptures around 1200. However, in Islam, Jesus is known as *Isa*. In the Qur'an the name *Isa* often occurs with the addition "son of Mary". Of the 25 places in the Qur'an where *Isa* is used, in sixteen of them he is called *Ibn Mariam* (the son of Mary), and in five passages his name is coupled with that of *Musa* (Moses).

The Qur'an does not mention who chose the name and why he was named *Isa*. Christian Scriptures, however, relate that the name Jesus was chosen by God himself. It is stated that the angel of God came and said to Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus" (Luke 1:30-31). He was to be called Jesus, "because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Since Arabic is quite similar to Hebrew, some question why the Qur'an used the word *Isa* instead of *Yesu'a*. Some have suggested that Muhammad used it to make a rhyming couplet with the name of *Musa* (Moses), in the same way as he called Goliath *Jalut* (Loewenthal, Isidor, *The Name Isa: An Investigation*, p.5-6, Calcutta: 1861). Other similar examples are *Haruth* and *Maruth* (Surah 2:102, 249-251). Examples from traditions are Abel and Cain being called

Habil and *Qabil* (The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol. IV, p.82).

Qazi Nasiruddin Abusaeed Abdullah bin Umar al-Baidhawi (d. 1300 CE) who wrote a well-known commentary on the Qur'an, originally called "Anwar al-Taunzil", says that *Isa* is Arabized from *Ishu*, he probably meant the Syriac *Yeshu* (vol. I. 96). Most English translations of the Qur'an translate *Isa* as Jesus.

There is no hint in the Qur'an as to why the appellation *Ibn Mariam* (Son of Mary) is added to his name. Some believe that because he had no father, he was named so after his mother. However, we see that though it is normal in the Semitic world for a man to be called after his father, yet there are instances of men being called after their mothers in spite of having known fathers. The poets *Ibn Aish* and *Ibn Mayyada* are examples (Watt, Muhammad at Madina, 1956, p. 374). Only in one place in the Christian scriptures is Jesus referred to as the 'son of Mary' (Mark 6:3).

As with other prophets of God, Muslims add to his name, *aleihe salam* (peace be upon him). Some wonder why Christians do not use his name with honorific terms. However, according to the Christian scriptures Jesus himself is the fountain of peace and thus it is them who need his peace (John 14:27).

His Miraculous Birth

The Qur'an acknowledges that Jesus was born without a father. Mary, his mother was chosen by God for this purpose. The Qur'an highly reveres her. Surah 19 of the Qur'an is given her name. She is the only woman who is specifically called by name in the Qur'an (Surah 3:42; cf. 21:91; 66:12; 23:50). In line with other Qur'anic references the designation "son of Mary" serves to remind readers that Jesus was born of the virgin

Mary. She conceived Jesus through God's creative word. (Surah 3:47).

According to a tradition, Muhammad said, "When any human being is born, Satan touches him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except Jesus, the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch but failed, for he touched the placenta-cover instead" (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4, Hadith 506).

Jesus as the Messiah

Jesus is called by his proper name along with the title *Al-Masih* (the Messiah). This title is sometimes accompanied by the name Jesus and sometimes used by itself and occurs in the Qur'an some eleven times. This title is used in a personal way, as in Surah 5:76/72: 'The Messiah said, "O children of Israel, serve God".'

There is no etymological explanation of the word *Masih* in the Qur'an. However, Muslim commentators and lexicographers give various explanations. The popular one is that it is a Hebrew word, *mashiah*, which was used of kings, patriarchs, and deliverers (Ahmad Deedat, *Christ in Islam*, p.13). However, it means 'anointed' and it was in this sense that Jesus was called the Messiah, the one anointed for specific purpose, the last prophet of Israel.

The Qur'an says that Jesus was blessed by God (Surah 19:32/31) and so anointed with honour. He had been protected from Satan from birth (Surah 3:36; The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol. IV, p.82). Some attach this special anointing to his birth. Yet others say that Jesus was the Messiah because he anointed the eyes of the blind to cure them (Surah 3:43; Mark 6:13; James 5:14), or because he used to rub sick people with his hands. Some Muslims from Sufi circles think that Jesus was called the

Messiah because he travelled far and wide and never settled. They connect *Masih* with the word *Sah*, to wander, to survey, to go on pilgrimage. Thus they believe that Jesus is the leader of *Imam al sa'yihin* (peripatetic ministers) (The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol. IV, p.82). The Ahmadiyya movement in Islam has adopted this idea of the wandering Jesus into their belief that Jesus travelled eastward as far as Kashmir (Ghulam Ahmad, *Jesus in India*, p.53).

The title Messiah is very important to Christians. In Hebrew the word Messiah means "the Anointed One". It can in a lesser form, refer to any priest or anointed leader and occasionally the expression is used in this context in the Old Testament. However, later it became a title for the Promised One from God - the Redeemer (Daniel 9:25).

When Jesus came he claimed to be that expected Messiah (John 4:25-26). The Jews of his day did not understand that he was the Messiah because they had expected a military leader, while Jesus claimed to be the Messiah who came "not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a *fidya* (ransom) for many" (Matthew 20:28).

In the Scriptures we find that the title Messiah is synonymous with the title Son of God. (Matthew 16:16; 26:63; Mark 1:1; Luke 4:41; John 11:27; 20:31).

Other Descriptions of Jesus in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, Jesus has been given a number of honourable titles. Apart from being known as the son of Mary and the Messiah, he is the *aya* (sign). The sign not only to the Israelites but to the world (Surah 19:21; 21:91; 23:50-52; 3:44-50). Jesus is also mentioned as a *mathal* (example or likeness) in the Qur'an. He is an example for the people (Surah 43:57, 59). In another place he is likened to Adam (Surah 3:52-59).

The Qur'an depicts Jesus also as *rahma* (mercy) from God for all people (Surah 19:21). However, for Muslims it is the Qur'an that is the expression of the *rahma* of God (Abdoldjavad Falaturi, Muslim thoughts for Teachers and textbooks authors, p.18. Croydon: Islamic Scientific Academy, 1990). Since God is eternal, the Qur'an as his *rahma* and word is eternal and uncreated. This interpretation is similar to the Christian doctrine of the pre-existence of Jesus as the Word (Greek: *logos*), presented in John 1:1.

Jesus is described as one who is *min al-muqarrabin* (among the nearest to God) and as *min al-salihin* (of the upright) and as *wajih* (eminent) [Surah 3:40-46]. Baidhawi amplifies this, saying that Jesus is illustrious in this world as a Prophet and in

the next as an intercessor (Hughes, Dictionary of Islam, p.229.) Following the Qur'anic presentation of Jesus, he is known among Muslims as *Kalimatullah* (the word of God), and *Ruh Allah* (the spirit of God) [Surah 3:45; Surah 4:171]. No other prophets have been described in such terms. Neither Muhammad nor any other prophet has ever been called the spirit of God.

Islamic belief is incomplete without a belief in Jesus. In some traditions the belief that Jesus is the word and spirit of God, is considered as an essential item of faith along with the belief in the Muslim *Shahadah* (Creed): Narrated Ubada: The Prophet said, 'If anyone testifies that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah alone who has no partners, and that Muhammad is His Slave and His Apostle, and that Jesus is Allah's Slave and His Apostle and His Word which He bestowed on Mary and a Soul from Him, and that Paradise is true, and Hell is true, Allah will admit him into Paradise with the deeds which he has done even if those deeds were few' (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4, Hadith 644). In other words, belief in Jesus can earn a soul the paradise of God. Yet Muhammad in other traditions is quoted as saying that he could not give that assurance himself.

Jesus as the Prophet and Messenger

Jesus is known by the common titles of *nabi* (prophet) and *rasul* (messenger or apostle) and he was the recipient of the Injil (the gospel) to give to people (Surah 19:31; 4:169; 3:48; 4:46). As in the Qur'an, we find in the Christian scriptures that Jesus was 'sent' by God who had 'given him the Gospel' (Luke 10:21; 4:18). In Hebrews 3:1 Jesus is called *rasul* (apostle).

In John's narrative Jesus is spoken of as the prophet that was to come in the

world and as the Messiah, the Son of God (John 6:14; 11:27). We also find that he was called a prophet by those who first heard his teaching (Mark 6:15; 8:28) and although Jesus accepted this title (Mark 6:4; Luke 13:33), he did not think of himself as just a prophet. At times he claimed that he was greater than the Prophet Jonah, David, Solomon and even Abraham (Luke 11:31'32; Matthew 22:45; John 8:54-55).

The Purpose of His Coming

God taught Jesus the *Tawrat* (the books of Moses) and gave him the *Injil* (the Gospel) as a confirmation of the *Tawrat*. The *Injil* is regarded by the Qur'an as *Hikma* (wisdom) because it fills the hearts of those who follow it with meekness and pity (Surah 5:82). The Qur'an claims that Jesus' prophetic authority guaranteed the Gospel, the Torah and all other prophetic writings, all of them being taught by God to him (Surah 3:43; 5:110).

Although generally Muslims claim that the original *Injil* can no longer be found, yet remnants of the teaching of Jesus can be detected in sermons and parables ascribed to him in the current New Testament, this idea of corruption in the Christian scriptures goes against not only the documentary evidence but also the Qur'anic teaching which claims that none can alter God's words (Surah 6:34; 10:64).

According to the Qur'an, the ministry of Jesus commenced from the cradle (Surah 3:49). God sent many prophets and messengers to lead the people of Israel. At the end, God sent Jesus to revive their Islam (then called Judaism). He came to enhance the inner meaning and purity of the religion that had become heavily burdened by outer ritual, dietary laws and abuse of power by rabbinical figures (Surah 3:43-40) the Qur'an mentions how Jesus preached and taught. He called the children of Israel to the worship of one God. He tried to bring unity among them and legalised things previously forbidden to them (Surah 3:50). Perhaps the Qur'an is portraying what we read in Matthew chapters 4 to 6. Let us not forget that the Qur'an is not trying to tell the main reason why Jesus came and what he was referring to: "The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45).

The Qur'an, however, generally portrays most of the children of Israel as

recalcitrant people from whom God protected Jesus. In the face of such recalcitrance, *Al-hawariyun* (the disciples) stepped forward to accept the call of Jesus to be his helpers in serving God (Surah 3:52-54; 5:111-113; 57:27; 61:14). Some of the things Jesus is alleged to have said reflect the message that Jesus sent to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:5) and resemble several new Testament sayings of Jesus about eating, fasting and worship (Matthew 6:16-26). The attitude of Jesus to the Law, and relaxation of its rigidity is found in his sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:17). Little importance is given in the Qur'an to the moral teaching of Jesus and there is only one reference to his parables which we find in abundance in the four narratives of the Gospel in the New Testament (Surah 48:29 compare with, for instance, Mark 4:27-28).

Sufi traditions depict Jesus in his teaching and practice as an ascetic. One of the most famous Sufis in the Umayyad period was Hasan al-Basri (d. 728). He was renowned for his scholarship as well as his piety. A letter that he wrote to the caliph to plead with him to follow the teaching of the prophets, depicts the prophets as ascetics. He portrays Jesus as saying:

"My daily bread is hunger, my badge is fear, my raiment is wool, my mount is my foot, my lantern at night is the moon, my fire by day is the sun, and my fruit and fragrant herbs are such things as the earth brings forth for the wild beasts and cattle. All the night I have nothing, yet there is none richer than I!" (A.J.Arberry, *Sufism, An account of the Mystic of Islam*, pp. 34-35)

Here too we see that the whole picture of Christ is not available. Yes Jesus, in a way, has given us an example of not loving the world but that is because our abode is not this world but the coming world, where we will be in fellowship with God. That is our goal, which can be achieved through Jesus.

The Divine Status

The Qur'an denies that God begets or takes to himself offspring (Surah 112). In other places it asks, "How can Allah have a son, when he hath no consort?" (Surah 6:101). Allah "has taken neither a wife nor a son." (Surah 72:3). Such denunciation was directed primarily against the polytheism of the Makkans. However, Muslims use these passages along with passages which deal specifically with heretical trinitarian ideas to condemn the doctrine of the Sonship of Christ as they believe it is taught in Christianity (Surah 19:88-93).

Every messenger of God is a *shahid* (witness) to the true faith before his people. Jesus' mission as a witness is highlighted in the discourse between him and Almighty God that will take place on the day of judgement but is already written down in the Qur'an, that God will ask him whether he taught people to worship him and his mother beside God. Jesus will certainly deny this and will affirm that he had said, "Worship God, my Lord and your Lord". (Surah 5:116 - 117).

It is thought that the Qur'an also denies the doctrine of the Trinity (Surah 4:171; 5:73,116). However, what it denies is the Trinity that consists of Father, Mother and Son. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that type of trinity or that God is one of three or the third of three. Christians certainly agree that there is no god, but one God. The notion of three gods is as offensive to Christians as to Muslims.

There is nothing in the Bible which could suggest that Jesus ever spoke of Mary being taken as a god beside God. What the Qur'an re-edits is some of the

heretical doctrines that were around in those days in Arabia and its neighbouring areas.

It is important to appreciate that Jesus, alone among the founders of the great religions of the world, spoke with authority. Others have claimed to speak the words they have received from God, for example, Moses begins all his teachings with the phrase, "Thus says the LORD". However, Jesus says, "But I say to you...". The people who heard him "were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority" (Luke 4:32). No other prophet spoke with such authority. Prophets claimed to have a deeper insight into the Truth, however Jesus went further by claiming to be the Truth, the source of all Truth. In the light of his claims and deeds the Bible portrays him as the "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) and as the living Word of God through whom He has spoken in a way He never did before (Hebrew 1:1-3). Jesus certainly did not go around saying, "I am God". Indeed, he joyfully acknowledged his dependence upon God. However, the things he said and did convinced his contemporaries that he was stepping into the space reserved for God, acting and speaking for him in a way never seen or heard before.

Christians respond that they do not raise a mere human being to the status of being equal with God but that this Jesus before coming into this world existed with God as his Word. As God is, his Word is. It is due to the glory that Jesus had with God before becoming the Son of Mary that Christians believe in him as coexistent and coequal with God. Jesus as the Son of Mary or as *Ibn Adam* (the Son of Man) is God *az-zahir* (revealed).

His Miracles

The Qur'an reports that Jesus performed a series of miracles, such as giving life to birds made of clay by breathing into them; feeding people from meagre supplies,

healing the blind and the lepers; and giving life to the dead, all by the permission of God. All these extraordinary performances, including the miraculous birth of Jesus,

were meant to show the materialist Jews, who erroneously used to associate every incident with its immediate causes, that God can perform anything without being subject to normal causes.

Surah 5 is named after Jesus' miracle of providing "a table laden with food" (Surah 5:112-114). From the Qur'anic narrative it is not clear whether it is the story of the last supper or the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:34 ff; 14:12ff). Some Muslims relate it to the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, "Give us this day our daily bread." (Matthew 6:11). However the Qur'anic reference says that this occasion was "to be to us a festival". The word *Eid* is used, which is applied also to Islamic festivals, and so this would be appropriate for the Lord's supper, which many Christians celebrate every first day of the week also known as the Communion.

Some Muslims think that a real table came from heaven and it stayed with Jesus and his disciples for three days and then was taken into heaven. Another version says that there was no table from heaven. It was Jesus who multiplied the bread. They refer to the feeding of the five thousand (Tabari commentary on 5:112-114). Some Sufi mystics believe that the table symbolised the truths of mystical knowledge, the nourishment of the spirit.

Although the Qur'an mentions Jesus as giving life, no details are given. In the New Testament there are three cases mentioned; the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son at Nain and Lazarus (Mark 5;

Luke 7; John 11).

In Islam, it is the traditions that provide details for these and other works of Jesus, the abundant detail of which is obviously found in the New Testament. As Muslim writers came into close contact with Christians, they assimilated stories from the Bible and from legend. So there are accounts in their writings about Jesus healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water, making loaves, and making birds out of clay.

For example, "The commentators *a/-Jalalan* say that Jesus made for his disciples a bat, for it is the perfect bird in make, (sic) and it flew while they looked at it; but when it had gone out of their sight, it fell down dead. That he cured in one day fifty thousand persons, and that he raised Lazarus from the dead; also Shem, the son of Noah, who had been dead 4,000 years, but he died immediately; also the son of an old woman, and the daughter of a tax collector." (Hughes, Dictionary of Islam, p.231)

These stories have spurious elements in them. The miracles that are recorded in the Gospels have greater authority in preservation. In these scriptures we learn the reasons why certain miracles were performed. For example, from the raising of Lazarus Jesus demonstrated that he had the authority to raise the dead and that he was the one sent by God to be followed (John 11:25-27; 12:10-11). Jesus' final sign was to raise from the dead himself.

Jesus and the Coming of Muhammad

Muslims believe that one of the most important features of Jesus' mission was to give the glad tidings of the coming of Prophet Muhammad. During his short missionary career that lasted not more than three years and which was overshadowed by the hostile attitude of his own people, Jesus gave them the good news of Ahmad, the last messenger of God, who would

perfect the divine teaching both in theory and in practice. According to the Qur'an, Jesus said, "O Children of Israel! I am the apostle of God (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of an apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad." (Surah 61:6).

It is interesting to know that although the Qur'an gives the name as Ahmad but there

was a variant reading in the *mashaf* (copy of the Qur'an) of Ubayy b. Ka'b, who was also one of Muhammad's secretaries appointed to write the Qur'an. This rendering referred to a prophet after Jesus but did not speak of Ahmad (A. Jeffrey, Materials for the history of the text of the Qur'an, p.170). Furthermore we do not find any mention of a name Ahmad in Ibn Ishaq or Ibn Hisham's Sirah Rasul, in their argument, dealing with the prophecy of the coming of a prophet after Jesus. (Alfred Guillaume, The Life of Muhammad, pp. 103-104). W. M. Watt says that 'Muslim children were practically never called Ahmad before the year 125 A.H.' (As quoted by G. Parrinder, Jesus in the Qur'an, p.99).

Abdullah Yusaf Ali in his notes on the verse states:

"Ahmad or Muhammad, the Praised One is almost a translation of the Greek word Pericytos. In the present gospel of John 14:16, 15:26 and 16:7, the word comforter in the English version is for the Greek word Paracletos, which means Advocate, one called to the help of another, a kind friend, rather than Comforter. Our doctors contend that Paracletos is a corrupt reading for Pericytos, and that in their original saying of Jesus there was a prophecy of our Holy Prophet Ahmad by name. Even if we

read Paraclete, it would apply to the Holy Prophet, who is a Mercy for all creatures (21:107) and most kind and merciful to the Believers (9:128)."

However, none of the manuscripts available to us have a variant reading of the word Paracletos. Neither is there any evidence to suggest that there ever was a variant reading. In the Gospel according to John, Jesus promised the Paraclete four times (John 14:16-17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15). Christians believe that the promise is about the Holy Spirit, to descend upon the disciples, on the Day of the Pentecost, to witness of Christ and lead them into truth and to be with the believers forever. The promise clearly was to have its fulfilment with the first disciples, therefore the idea of its fulfilment 600 years later in Muhammad would be too late for them. Secondly, this Paraclete, comforter, or the Spirit of truth, was going to live for ever while the Prophet of Islam lived on this earth only for about 63 years. Thirdly, the message the Paraclete was to give was from Jesus; "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." (John 16:14). Therefore, if we agree with the claim that, 'Muhammad is the Paraclete', then we would have to conclude that the Qur'an came from Jesus.

Hearing this argument, Muslim friends state that the Bible is corrupt and this passage has been changed. However, see our discussion topic for the discussion on the Integrity of the Bible.

The Last Days of Jesus

The mission of Jesus, according to Islam, is in two phases. The first was as a prophet to Israel, the second will be at his second coming when he, as a follower of Muhammad, will fight *Dajjal* (the anti Christ), and help Muslims to change the world into an Islamic abode. In his first phase, during the third year of his mission, Jesus was strongly opposed and harassed by the Jews. Though they had been long awaiting a Messiah to relieve them of their miseries, they did not believe Jesus to be

the true Messiah. Out of their disappointment, hatred and enmity towards Jesus, they finally accused him of rebellion against the emperor, whose officers gave orders for his arrest and eventual crucifixion. Muslim commentators believe that the Jews failed in their treacherous plot, that the Roman soldiers arrested a person who had a striking resemblance to Jesus, while Jesus himself was lifted alive to Heaven.

The Qur'an points out that the Jews claimed, "We killed Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, the apostle of God; but they killed him

not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubt, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not" (Surah 4:157). It further adds, "Nay, God raised him up unto himself, and God is exalted in Power, wise" (Surah 4:158). The same issue is dealt with in other places of the Qur'an (Surah 3:54-55).

Commentators, such as Baidhawi, Tabari, Razi and Zamakhshari express similar opinions that God raised Jesus into heaven, a substitute being killed whom God had made to look like Jesus. Despite some differences, all these commentators agree that Jesus was not killed by crucifixion (Tabari, Jam al-Bayan, part 6, p.9, line 35 to p. 13, line 6; Zamakhshari, al-Kashshaf, vol. 1, p. 432, lines 23ff; Razi, al-Tafsir al-Kabir, vol. 2, p. 454, line 27 to p. 455, line 2. Baidhawi, Anwar al-Tanzil, p.75, lines 8ff).

Some Muslims do not believe in the substitution theory. In his book, 'City of Wrong', Qaryah Zalimah, Dr. Kamil Hussain says, "the idea of a substitute for Christ is a very crude way of explaining the Qur'anic text. ... No cultured Muslim believes in this nowadays. The text is taken to mean that the Jews thought they killed Christ but God raised him unto him in a way we can leave unexplained among the several mysteries which we have taken for granted on faith alone" (City of Wrong, p.231).

Like Dr. Hussain, some Muslims disagree with the substitution theory but they insist on a swoon theory. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan of Aligarh, India (1817-1898), in the nineteenth century believed that Jesus was crucified but did not die. This theory, that the soldiers thought he was dead, yet he was just unconscious, was later adopted and enlarged by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908), the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement. He asserted that Jesus was taken away by friends, his

wounds treated and later, he travelled to India where he died at the age of 120.

The majority opinion is that Jesus was taken up bodily into heaven. However, adherents of the Ahmadiyya Movement, and some orthodox Muslims, do not believe in the bodily ascension of Jesus. Dr. Mahmud Shaltut, late Rector of Al-Azhar university did not believe in the bodily ascension of Jesus, his being alive in heaven and his descent therefrom in the latter days (Ali Akbar, Israel and the prophecies of the Holy Qur'an, page 127). Similar opinions have been presented by others like Muhammad Asad and Muhammad Abduh (ibid., pp. 124-127). Such interpretations have led some to wonder whether it is essential to have a clear belief about what happened to Jesus.

In spite of such ideas, Christians uphold the belief that Jesus was crucified, as prophesied by him and by other prophets before him, that he also died and rose from the dead. Although it is suggested that his death on the cross is a defeat, the whole story is that he gave his life, died and rose victoriously. Jesus himself spoke about this event stating, "I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." (Revelation 1:18). The Qur'an has just one verse which may be ambiguously quoted to deny the crucifixion, but about one third of the Christian Gospels refer to this event.

Christians are often asked: 'Why did Jesus go through all this?' Jesus was sent by God to be the way to eternal life to all who believes in him (John 3:16 and John 14:6). By his death on the cross he became the *fidya* (ransom) for all who believe in him, including those who went before. Jesus said, "Before Abraham was born, I am!", and that "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56-57). God had announced the Gospel of Christ in advance to Abraham that all nations were to be blessed through Jesus (Gal 3:8-9).

The Second Coming

There are two verses in the Qur'an that Muslims believe indicate the second coming of Jesus: "And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before is death; and on the Day of Judgement he will be a witness against them" (Surah 4:159). "And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgement): Therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow ye Me: This is a Straight Way" (Surah 43:61).

According to the first verse, all the *Ahl-e-Kitab* (Jews and Christians), will believe in Jesus before his death. Muslim commentators state that the Arabic *leuaminanna* (must believe) refers to an event in the future. This they believe could only be possible should Jesus come again and live in this world till he dies. The second verse shows that Jesus is the sign of the Last Hour. So it is argued, 'How can he be a sign for Doomsday if he doesn't appear sometimes before it?'

Those who do believe Jesus will come again, see him in a subordinate role to that of the Prophet of Islam. Jesus will be under a Muslim Amir, leader, showing his complete adherence to Islam. Some Ahadith indicate that on his arrival Jesus will kill an impostor Messiah (i.e. the antichrist). He will live for forty years during which he will marry, have children, and perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage). After his death, he will be buried beside the grave of the Prophet Muhammad (Wali ad-Din, *Miskat Al-Masabih*, (tr. James Robson), Vol.II, p.1159; *Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.92).

Most Muslims believe that Jesus descent from heaven will be accomplished by resting his hands on the wings of two angels. He will descend onto the white minaret, situated in the eastern part of Damascus. He will invite the whole world to be Muslim including Christians and Jews. The one eyed antichrist, accompanied by seventy thousand Jews, will be killed by Jesus, at the place called Lod. The Jews will

be badly defeated. Jesus will break the cross, annihilate swine and will end all wars and *jizya* (poll tax). His position will be like that of a judge. During this period there will be an abundance of all sorts of goods. Muslims will dominate the world and there will be an end of all religions except Islam (Mawdudi, A.A, *Finality of Prophethood*, pp. 58-61).

Some groups like the Ahmadiyya and the Bahai believe that their founders were the second coming of Christ. Other groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus came back at the turn of this century and took the elect with him. However, the Bible reveals that his second coming will not be in secret. When the apostles saw Jesus ascending into heaven, the angels told them: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Muslim friends have various ideas about the physical descent of Jesus. Some say he will land on the Ka'ba, others claim he will land on the minaret of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, yet others think he will descend in Jerusalem. Whether coming to Jerusalem, Damascus or Mecca, one has to think carefully where he is coming from. If he is coming from heaven, then this coming will not be an ordinary one, with an ordinary body like ours. The Bible declares that he is coming in heavenly splendour. He will come in all his glory and power (2 Thessalonians 1:7). Jesus said: "as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west", so will be his coming (Matthew 24:27). In simple words, his coming will be visible to everyone. His first coming took place in obscurity, but his second coming will be universally visible. His coming will be so dramatic, no-one will fail to recognise him. (Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:9,11).

Christians are fortunate to find a major part of the New Testament directly concerned with Christ's second coming. Jesus and his return as Judge is one of the major themes. Nevertheless, there is no mention of him coming as an ordinary being, nor is there the

least suggestion that he will marry, die, and be buried. The Scriptures indicate that when he comes, his people both living and the dead will be raised or changed and meet him in the air and the earth will be destroyed (1 Thessalonians 4 :15 - 17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 2 Peter 3:10).

On many occasions Jesus said that he came down from heaven and that he would come again (John 3:13; 8:23; 14:2-3,18-19; 16:28; Matthew 25:31-32; 26:64). This second coming is to be different from the first , his coming will be as the Mighty Judge and conquering King (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). The reassuring news and the final reminder is found in the last chapter of Revelation, the last book of the Bible: "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Revelation 22:12).

At his first coming Jesus became like us in every respect, to deliver us from the power of Satan (John 1:18; Hebrews 2:14-17). He came to conquer sin and rise from the dead to gain victory and triumph. At his second coming, we are going to see him as he really is (1John 3:2).

The mission that Jesus had left to his Church to perform and proclaim his Gospel

to the world will terminate at his second coming. He will uproot evil and enthrone righteousness for ever. He will establish eternal peace. Although it is right to campaign for social justice and peace to improve society, the Bible makes it clear that we will never be able to perfect it. Only Christ at his second coming will fulfil it.

The Bible speaks clearly about the unexpectedness of his return. About the day of his return, Jesus advised us all not to speculate because no one knows the date but God (Mark 13:32). All that we have to do is to be ready and prepared for his return - at any time. Jesus said that he would come when people did not expect him. Critics consider the idea of Jesus' second coming as naive: "Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4).

Jesus has already answered such ridicule. He said his coming would be as unexpected as the flood in the time of Noah (Matthew 24:37-41). People were told about it but they did not believe it. Then it arrived and it was too late. Today everyone has the opportunity to believe in Christ now and act as he has commanded (2 Peter 3:9; Acts 2:37-38). At his arrival this chance will have been withdrawn; it will be too late.

The Whole Story

The Qur'an and the Bible agree that Jesus was special. He is recognised as one 'par excellence' but to understand the whole purpose of his coming one has to study and see him in the light of the Torah, the psalms and the books of the prophets, which Jesus himself referred to. It is through these scriptures that one can see the full picture of Jesus and how his

companions and disciples understood him (2 Peter 1:16-17; 1 John 1:1-4). The Qur'an says that Jesus was sent in order to 'make him a Sign unto men' (Surah 19:21). However, the whole story can only be found in the scriptures of those, known to Muslims as *ahl al-kitab* (the people of the Book) or in today's language, the people of the Bible.

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