

Jesus in Islam

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Jesus of Nazareth, perhaps more than any other historical figure, has consistently remained a magnetic person for the past two millennia. Since the earliest inception of the Christian movement, Jesus has remained a source of spiritual, historical and philosophical inquiry, while at the same time, remaining a person of intense controversy. The question of the identity of Jesus is a question that will not go away, but continues to vex the modern person. Who really was Jesus of Nazareth? Was he a prophet? The Messiah? The Son of God? A charismatic Jewish rabbi? Or a zealot with a revolutionary vision to bring about the destruction of the Roman occupants and thereby usher in the kingdom of God? The other extreme side of the question asks whether Jesus even existed at all.¹ Perhaps he was a mythical figure invented by early Christians by copying from pagan sources? All of these questions have been raised, entertained, debated, and answered. The debate however is not over, as the question of Jesus' identity still persists.

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

In what appears to be an ironic twist, Jesus himself seemed to be cognizant of questions pertaining to his identity. In Matthew 16:13-17 we read,

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say

John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”
15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied,
“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him,
“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to
you, but my Father who is in heaven.”²

The query of the identity of Jesus is posed as two questions in the Matthean text.³ One is in the third person plural, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matt 16:13), and the second in the second person plural, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matt 16:15).

The answer that is given to the first question is quite enlightening. People assume that Jesus is merely a human prophet, that he was John the Baptist or Elijah, or Jeremiah or just “one of the prophets.” He was not necessarily different, or extraordinary, but just one among the prophets. On this point, the religion of Islam would be in full agreement. Muslims would agree with the popular consensus in the time of Jesus that he was only a prophet. The Qur’an⁴ claims that Muslims are to make no distinction among the prophets (Q 2:285).⁵ Muhammad, the prophet of Islam is also said to be one of the “messengers,” a title also used of the prophets in the Qur’an (Q 36:3). Other prophets like Elijah, Lot, and Jonah are also said to be “one” of the messengers / prophets (Q 37:123, 133, 139). The qualitative difference with Muhammad is that he is believed to be the “seal of the prophets,” the final prophet (Q 33:40). In Islam Jesus was only a prophet, a messenger sent by Allah.⁶ The Qur’an asserts,

O People of the Scripture [Jews and Christians]! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, *was only a messenger of Allah*, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not “Three”—Cease! (it is) better for you!—Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His Transcendent Majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender (Q 4:171; italics mine).

This passage from the Qur’an issues a warning and rebuke to the “People of the Scripture” or “People of the Book,” a title used throughout the Qur’an

for Jews and Christians. The warning is specific in this context to Christians. They are told not to “exaggerate” which involves the claim that Jesus is divine, that he is associated with the “Three” (*thalatha* in Arabic), a garbled reference to the Christian belief in the Trinity which we will address shortly. The Qur’an asserts here that Jesus “was only a messenger of Allah.” Thus, in Islam, Jesus is only a messenger, a prophet among other prophets. This is the same claim that many of Jesus’ contemporaries in the first century made of him as we saw in Matthew 16:14. Jesus as a messenger or prophet in Islam, cannot in any way, shape or form be associated with God. The Qur’an moreover asserts the oneness of Allah, “Allah is only One God.” Christians, however, like Jews, also believe in one God, and thus find it strange that the Qur’an calls this part of their faith into question.

SON OF GOD AND THE TRINITY

The reason for this is twofold. First, the idea of the Trinity is seen as a polytheistic distortion of the unity of God. Secondly, Jesus being the Son of God is taken in Islam to be blasphemous and so serious that it constitutes the sin of *shirk*, that is, associating partners with Allah. This is the unpardonable sin in Islam which bars one’s entrance into paradise as the following passages indicate: “Lo! Allah forgiveth not that a partner should be ascribed unto Him. He forgiveth (all) save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners to Allah, he hath indeed invented a tremendous sin” (Q4:48), and “Lo! Allah pardoneth not that partners should be ascribed unto Him. He pardoneth all save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah hath wandered far astray” (Q4:116).⁷ To the notion that Jesus is the Son of God, the Qur’an retorts as we saw above with the claim, “Far is it removed from His [Allah’s] Transcendent Majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender.”

The claim that Allah could have a son is denigrating, and tantamount to assaulting the very transcendence of God and makes God dependent on someone else as a partner or associate. Note again the remark, “His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender.” Allah is independent, he does not need anyone. This is reinforced in what is believed to be the most important chapter in the Qur’an, surah 112, composed of only 4 verses which states:

Say: He is Allah, the One!
Allah, the eternally Besought of all!
He begetteth not nor was begotten.
And there is none comparable unto Him.

Note the third verse which notes that Allah *lam yalid wa lam yūlad*, begets not, nor is he begotten, a clear critique of the Christian use of the term “begotten” in relation to Christ especially as set out in the Nicene Creed that the Son is “begotten, not made.” Thus, one of the main offensive strikes against Christianity is the idea that Jesus is the Son of God. The seriousness of attributing a son to God is so serious that the Qur’an makes several references to this Christian teaching described as “excess” and an “exaggeration,” and “those who go astray” (Q 1:7). To say that God has a son is paramount to seismic proportions, of causing the earth to split open, to set the mountains crumbling, and for the heavens to be rent asunder.

88 And they say: The Beneficent hath taken unto Himself a son. 89 Assuredly ye utter a disastrous thing 90 Whereby almost the heavens are torn, and the earth is split asunder and the mountains fall in ruins, 91 That ye ascribe unto the Beneficent a son, 92 When it is not meet for (the Majesty of) the Beneficent that He should choose a son. 93 There is none in the heavens and the earth but cometh unto the Beneficent as a slave (Q 19:88-93).

The Qur’an also states elsewhere, “And they say: Allah hath taken unto Himself a son. Be He glorified! Nay, but whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth is His. All are subservient unto Him” (Q2:116). The Qur’an is very clear that the appropriate relationship of God to any creature, and all creation for that matter (including Jesus), is that of a slave to his / her master. The basic Islamic paradigm in terms of relationship between the human and God is that of a slave-master relationship. All humans, and all of creation are slaves of God, which as we have seen, would also include Jesus. Thus the Qur’an asserts, that Jesus is merely a slave of Allah, like all other prophets, and certainly not the Son of God. The term “Muslim” itself is associated with the concept of “slave” as the word “Muslim” means “one who has submitted” or “surrendered” to Allah. This word is also associated with the word “Islam” which means “submission.” Jesus and all the prophets were Muslims, slaves of Allah.⁸

In the Qur'an, Jesus is proudly declared to be a slave of Allah, "The Messiah [Jesus] will never scorn to be a slave unto Allah, nor will the favored angels" (Q 4:172). Indeed, Jesus himself affirms in the Qur'an as an infant speaking from the cradle, "Lo! I am the slave of Allah. He hath given me the Scripture and hath appointed me a Prophet" (Q 19:30; cf. 5:110).⁹

One of the reasons the Qur'an mandates the violent subjugation of Jews and Christians (Q 9:29) is because of their claims that God has a son. The majority of references is certainly to Christians who profess Jesus as Son of God, but it also includes the Jews whom the Qur'an charges with claiming Ezra is the son of God,

And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah [Jesus] is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they! (Q 9:30).

This claim is indeed fantastic as there is no evidence in any extant Jewish texts of any such belief among the Jews regarding Ezra.¹⁰ While the Qur'an condemns the use of sonship language in regards to Jesus on the grounds that it attacks the unique sovereign majesty of Allah, there is another reason. The Qur'an seeks to expose what it perceives to be an egregious error on the part of Christians who claim God has a son by setting forth the following question: "To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: *How can He have a son when He hath no consort?* He created all things, and He hath full knowledge of all things" (Q 6:101; Yusuf Ali translation; italics mine). This idea is repeated again, "And Exalted is the Majesty of our Lord: *He has taken neither a wife nor a son*" (Q 72:3; Yusuf Ali translation; italics mine).

It should be noted in these two passages that the Qur'an provides its own understanding of what it means to say that God has a son. To say God has a son means that God has a wife or consort. In other words, the Qur'an takes the meaning of "son" in a very literal way and assumes that when Christians confess Jesus as Son of God, they are simultaneously asserting that God has a wife! For what purpose? To produce a son. This notion would involve sexual reproduction which would also at the same time, necessitate a physical body with sexual organs. This immediately poses a problem. Christians have never believed that God had a wife, or that he procreated Jesus through a wife.

This indicates that the author(s) of the Qur'an was / were grossly ignorant of Christian theology. This also leads to the Qur'anic misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Trinity. The Christian understanding of Jesus as Son of God is closely linked to the belief in the Trinity where the Son is the second person in the Godhead. The Qur'an also makes a connection in this area, but does so in a literal way. The literalistic belief in God having a wife and a son is so embedded in the Qur'an, that the Qur'an charges Christians with believing in three gods, namely, the father, the mother, and the son. Notice how the words "wife" and "son" are used in relation to Allah in Q 72:3 (cf. 6:101). Earlier we noted how the Qur'an warns Christians, "say not 'Three'—Cease! (it is) better for you!" (Q 4:171). What or who does the "Three" refer to? Some Qur'an translators have tried to add to this text to make it seem that what is under attack here is the doctrine of the Trinity. Yusuf Ali translated this part of Q 4:171 as follows: "Say not 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you."¹¹ The irony here is that the Qur'an says nothing about the Trinity nor does it use the word "Trinity" in Arabic, but rather the cardinal number "Three" (*thalatha* in Arabic). Why would Yusuf Ali introduce a word into the text of the Qur'an which is clearly not there? This would be at best, a corruption and misrepresentation of the text. Another pertinent text related to this idea of the "Three" is Q 5:73, "They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the *third of three*; when there is no God save the One God. If they desist not from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve [*italics mine*]." How is Allah a "third of three"? If Allah is the third of three, then who are the other two?¹² The answer to this question lies in Q 5:116,

And when Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: *Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah?* he saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right. If I used to say it, then Thou knewest it. Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Thy Mind. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Knower of Things Hidden [*italics mine*]:

The "Three" the Qur'an is referring to is Allah, Mary, and Jesus. In other words, Allah is the implied father, Mary the mother, and Jesus the son. Notice the plural "gods" where Jesus and his mother are joined together with Allah. When we bring all the passages together from the Qur'an, the

idea is that Christians believe that Allah had a wife or consort named Mary, and their offspring, their son, was Jesus. This conclusion raises a question: When did Christians or any Christian denomination in history ever make the claim that the Trinity constituted the belief in the Father, the Mother, and the Son as three gods? The answer is, of course, never. No Christian has ever held to such a belief. This idea in the Qur'an is not Trinitarian theology, but tritheism, the belief in three gods—something Christians have always repudiated. Thus, we see not only a gross misrepresentation of the sonship of Jesus, but also that of the Christian belief in the Trinity. Scholars have correctly noted that “[Muhammad] never understood the doctrine of the Trinity”¹³ and that “[There are] mistaken concepts of the Trinity in the Quran.”¹⁴ The *Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* summarizes this point quite well,

In some cases the “material” which forms the substance of Koranic narrative, details of the creeds of Christianity and Judaism for example, does not correspond to those religion’s own understanding of their beliefs ... This could be said, for example, of the notion of the Trinity found in the Quran ... The Trinity seen in the Koran is not the Trinity of the Apostles Creed, or of the Nicene Creed.¹⁵

This raises a legitimate question. If Allah inspired the Qur'an, how could he get these Christian doctrines so terribly wrong? Did he not know what Christians in the seventh century believed regarding Jesus and the Trinity? Or is it possible that the author(s) of the Qur'an did not know or just misunderstood what Christians believed altogether on these central doctrinal issues? Before taking leave of this passage, it is worth noting the words of Jesus which are given in response to Allah's queries in Q 5:116, “Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Thy Mind.” Here the direct emphasis on the humanity of Jesus and his utter ignorance of what is in Allah's mind cannot be denied. Compare this to what Jesus says in the New Testament, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Matt 11:27; cf. Luke 10:22). Notice that the Father and the Son have absolute and intimate knowledge of one another. In addition, only the Son possesses the sovereign right to reveal the Father to “anyone to whom” he chooses. If we recall the passage in Matthew 16:17 above, we will observe a striking

chord with Matthew 11:27. In Matthew 16:17 Jesus tells Peter that the Father revealed the identity of Jesus to him as Messiah and Son of the living God (Matt 16:16). In Matthew 11:27, Jesus states that he reveals the Father. Both the Father and the Son share the divine prerogative of revealing each other to their people. The dissimilarity between the Jesus of Islam and the Jesus of the Bible could not be so clear as it is in the consideration of these points.

As we have seen, the Qur'an vehemently denies that Jesus is the Son of God, or that he is associated with Allah in any way and that such an association results in tritheism. If Jesus was merely a mortal and he could not be the Son of God, then it also follows that believers in Jesus cannot be children of God as the Qur'an 5:18 states,

The Jews and Christians say: *We are sons of Allah and His loved ones.* Say: Why then doth He chastise you for your sins? *Nay, ye are but mortals of His creating.* He forgiveth whom He will, and chastiseth whom He will. Allah's is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and unto Him is the journeying [italics mine].

This text bears out that no believer Jew or Christian can call themselves sons of Allah, they are rather "mortals" and the slaves of Allah. The main problem as we have seen is that the language of sonship in regards to Jesus is taken literally/biologically in the Qur'an. However, Christians do not take such language literally, but analogically/figuratively and so there is no need to posit God needing a wife to have a son. Jesus is not the Son of God by physical generation akin to a father and a mother. Christian theology holds that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, there never was a time when he was not as he is the eternal one (cf. John 1:1-3; 8:58; 1 John 1:1-2). What is ironic is that while the Qur'an applies this literalistic use of sonship to Christians and condemns them for it, it nevertheless also recognizes that terms such as "son" can be used metaphorically or in a non-literal sense.

The Qur'an uses the language of "son" and even "mother" without implying that these terms are to be taken literally. The Qur'an for instance refers to a traveler as *wajibni alsabeeli*, literally, "a son of the road" (Q 4:36). I have not met one Muslim to date who believes that this passage actually means that the road fathers or begets sons and that a traveler is begotten by the road. This is clearly metaphorical language for someone who is travelling.

We can also consider Qur'an 13:39, "God doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is *the Mother of the Book* [*ommu al-kitabi*]" (Yusuf Ali translation; italics mine). The heavenly tablets which are believed to be the source of the Qur'an are called "mother." Does this mean that if the heavenly tablets are the mother, the written text of the Qur'an is the son? Would this make Allah the "father" of the Qur'an? In short, why is the Qur'an allowed to use metaphorical language like "son" and "mother" but the Bible is not? Why is there one rule for the Qur'an, and another rule for the Bible? This is clearly the epitome of inconsistency.

As we have seen, the Islamic view of Jesus reflects the same opinion that the general populace in the first century had of Jesus, that he was merely "one of the prophets" (Matt 16:14). It is instructive to note the response that was given to the direct question posed by Jesus to his disciples as to who they thought he was (Matt 16:15). Matthew 16:16-17 states, "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'" The confession of Peter involves two affirmations, that Jesus is the Christ / Messiah, and that he is the Son of the living God. This confession is virtually the same as that found in John 20:31, "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." This confession contradicts the Islamic portrayal of Jesus. It should also be noted that the confession of Peter was not derived from a human source, but rather as Jesus said it was from, "my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 16:17). The testimony of God the Father in the New Testament is to listen to, look to, and believe in his Son.¹⁶

THE VIRGIN BIRTH (CONCEPTION) OF CHRIST

While the Qur'an denies the divine sonship of Jesus, it nevertheless has some points of agreement with the Bible. The Qur'an unequivocally affirms the virgin birth of Jesus. Jesus is called "the son of Mary" in the Qur'an (cf. Mark 6:3). His mother Mary, is the only woman mentioned by the name in the Qur'an and one of the surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an, namely surah 19 is named after Mary (*sura Maryam*). The nativity account of Jesus' birth in the Qur'an is very different from that of Matthew and Luke, and it is related

in the Qur'an in surahs 3 and 19. The Qur'anic nativity appears to have been borrowed or influenced by an older apocryphal text known as the *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, chapter 20 which contains striking parallels. Joseph who plays a prominent role in the biblical nativity accounts is conspicuously absent in the Qur'an, no mention is made of him or his association with Mary. The other point of agreement is the belief that Jesus is the Messiah, a title which appears eleven times in the Qur'an.¹⁷ The Qur'an refers to Jesus as *Isa al-Masih* (Jesus the Messiah), but the Qur'an never defines or explains the meaning of *al-Masih*, the Messiah. While the Qur'an overtly emphasizes the humanness of Jesus, it nevertheless gives him titles that are unique to Jesus alone among all the prophets, such as "a word from him [Allah]" (Q 3:45) and "his [Allah's] word" (Q 4:171),¹⁸ terminology which some Christians feel resonate with John 1:1, but this should not be pushed too far as if the Qur'an justifies New Testament Christology.¹⁹ Jesus is also called "a spirit from him [Allah]" (Q 4:171).

THE SINLESSNESS AND MIRACLES OF JESUS

Another point of agreement is the sinlessness of Jesus. While the Qur'an affirms that Muhammad was a sinner and was ordered to confess his sins (Q 40:55; 47:19; 48:2),²⁰ Jesus is said to be the only prophet, the only human who did not sin as he was "faultless" (Q 19:19) and "blessed" (Q 19:31).²¹ Jesus is also a miracle worker in the Qur'an. He heals the blind, the lepers, and raises the dead. Jesus also breathes life into clay birds so that they are animated (Q 3:45-50; 5:110),²² he also asked Allah to lower a table spread with food for his disciples (5:112-115),²³ and he also had the ability to tell people what they had stored in their homes (Q 3:49). However, the qualifying clause in the Qur'an is that Jesus did these miracles by Allah's "permission" (Q 5:110) and "Allah's leave" (Q 3:49), and not by his own authority, thereby stripping Jesus of any divine status.

The Ministry of Jesus and His Prediction of the Coming of Muhammad

One of the unique features of Jesus in the Qur'an is that he is a prophet who actually predicts and points forward to the coming of Muhammad and mentions him by one of his names. The Qur'an 61:6 states, "And remember,

Jesus, the son of Mary, 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 Ahmad²⁴ (Yusuf Ali translation).” Thus Jesus is not presented as the final fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets as we see in the New Testament (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46), but rather as a herald, a forerunner who points forward to the advent of Muhammad. He is the Islamic version of John the Baptist who points forward to one greater than him. Over the course of history, based on this and another text of the Qur’an (Q 7:157), Muslims have scoured the New Testaments gospels to find anything remotely connected to Jesus predicting Muhammad’s coming and many argued that the Paraclete passages in John 14-16 are actual references to Muhammad, and not to the Holy Spirit. Thus the Qur’an is not Christocentric, but centered and culminates with Muhammad. The centrality of Muhammad is also seen in the fact that Allah entered into a covenant with all the prophets in which they agreed to believe in and aid Muhammad (Q 3:81). Abraham also predicts the coming of Muhammad (Q 2:129), although not by name as Jesus does in Q 61:6.

The ministry of Jesus accordingly to Islam was a restricted one in that he was sent only to the children of Israel. The Qur’an does not fully support this claim but in Islamic apologetics this form of argumentation is employed to elevate and enhance Muhammad’s status as a universal prophet with a message for all people in general. While the former prophets were sent to their particular people, Muhammad is sent to all.

THE CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF JESUS

Another striking feature of Jesus in Islam is the direct denial of his crucifixion and death, and by extension his resurrection. Islam believes in the ascension of Jesus, but this event unlike the gospels / Acts does not follow Christ’s death and resurrection, but rather, precedes it as a means to rescue Jesus from the evil machinations of his enemies to have him killed. The classic text of the Qur’an on this subject is found in Q 4:157-158,

And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger—they slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no

knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain.
But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise.

The text of Q 4:157 made up of forty Arabic words has engendered much debate and controversy in Islam. Many Muslim commentators differ on whether Jesus died or not, whether someone was crucified in his place, sometimes known as the “substitution theory.” The Qur’an says that it so appeared to them, *shubbiha lahum*, that Jesus was crucified and died but it was in fact, an illusion. Islamic tradition says someone who looked like Jesus was crucified instead. Several candidates have been proffered such as Judas Iscariot, Simon of Cyrene, a Roman soldier, a Jewish rabbi.²⁵ Some have speculated the “swoon theory” that Jesus was in fact crucified, but did not die on the cross but rather was rendered unconscious and was later revived in the tomb. The various views and opinions on this subject among Muslim scholars is indicative of the fact that this passage (Q 4:157) is not clear but rather ambiguous. Other passages in the Qur’an do in fact speak about Jesus’ death (Q 2:87; 3:55; 19:33), and do not deny it as Q 4:157 does. The most reliable Hadith collections of *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* do not even address this passage but remain silent on it. If we take Q 4:157 at face value, the crucifixion of Jesus was a delusion foisted on the world by Allah himself because the earliest believers in Jesus did believe he did in fact die on the cross as do the vast majority of scholarship through the centuries. The classical Islamic rejection of the crucifixion and death of Jesus has baffled historians because the evidence in favor of it is so overwhelming. The death of Jesus by crucifixion is admittedly the most certain fact we can know about the historical Jesus.²⁶

If we return to the Matthean passage we notice that immediately after the identity of Jesus was revealed as the Christ and Son of God, Jesus proceeds to predict and discuss his impending passion, death, and resurrection (Matt 16:21). This reveals that the person (identity) of Christ is closely related to the work of Christ. After hearing this prediction Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him for making such a claim. It would be unthinkable that the Messiah, the anointed of God, and the Son of God should suffer such an ignominious death (Matt 16:22). This brought about a stinging sharp rebuke from Jesus against Peter identifying the source of Peter’s critique with Satan himself (Matt 16:23). Peter’s refusal to accept the death of Jesus in Jerusalem

is not so different from the Islamic justification for the rejection of Jesus' death by crucifixion as set out in the Qur'an 4:157-158. If Jesus, the prophet of Allah was allowed to be tortured and die a cruel shameful death such as crucifixion, the Allah must have failed to save Jesus' honor.²⁷ Here we come to the heart of the matter insofar as Christianity is concerned. A denial of the death of Jesus logically leads to the denial of the resurrection of Jesus. There can be no resurrection without death. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is the very center, the foundation of the Gospel. To deny the death and resurrection of Christ, is to deny the Gospel itself. One of the earliest Christian creeds is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4,

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you- unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

The creedal material found in verses 3-4 which mention Jesus' death, burial and resurrection is extremely early. James Dunn argues that it originated within *months* after the death of Jesus²⁸ and Gerd Lüdemann argues that the creed was created in the first two years after Jesus' death and can be no later than three years.²⁹ Paul also goes on to note that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then the Christian faith is vain and futile (1 Cor 15:12-19). In denying the crucifixion and death of Jesus, Islam as a result denies the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To deny this Gospel and to bring another one in its place is to incur the anathema of God himself (Gal 1:6-9). It is this Gospel, of Christ crucified, dead, and risen that is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). In Matthew 16:13-21 we saw how the identity of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God is intricately tied to his death and resurrection. It is clear from what we have examined in this article that the Jesus of Islam is not the Jesus of the Bible. Muslims and Christians can use the same terminology such as "God" and "Jesus" but the meanings of these words vary considerably. To assume they mean the same thing is nothing short of equivocation. The Jesus of Islam is a Muslim prophet who although he is the Messiah (which remains ambiguous by way of definition in the Qur'an) is nonetheless a mere human. The Jesus of the

Bible is the Messiah, the Incarnate Son of God and Savior of sinners. The apostle Paul warned of those who would use Christian terminology in an equivocating manner, even introducing “another Jesus.”

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough (2 Cor 11:3-4).³⁰

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

Muslims will often share that they also believe in the second coming of Jesus, just as Christians do. While this may be a point of similarity, the details of the second coming of Jesus are vastly different from that of the Bible. Since Jesus did not die on the cross but was rescued by Allah and taken up into heaven, the death of Jesus has not yet occurred. He has yet to die. The Qur’an does not say anything about the second coming of Jesus but contains some vague references to Jesus being a witness against the People of the Book on the Day of Resurrection which is a term for the last day or day of judgement (Q 4:159; 43:61). More explicit references to the second coming of Jesus is found in the Hadith collection. A number of things should be noted. Jesus returns as a jihadi, to fight on behalf of Islam. One of the first orders of business is that Jesus will destroy the cross (it should be recalled Jesus did not die on the cross; Q 4:157), the emblem of Christianity, thus destroying Christianity itself. He will see to it that Islam triumphs over all religions. He will kill the pigs and abolish the *jizya* (a special poll tax that subjugated Jews and Christians pay in an Islamic state; Q 9:29) because Islam will be the only religion on the earth. Jesus will also fight and kill the Antichrist. Other traditions say that Jesus will live for forty years, and then die, and be buried in the city of Medina beside the Islamic prophet Muhammad.³¹

The points above clearly show the significant disparity between the Jesus of Islam and the Jesus of the Bible. It should be noted that the speeches attributed to Jesus in the Qur’an have no relation to that of the canonical gospels, our most reliable sources for the historical Jesus. The figure of the

Qur'anic Jesus is also dissimilar to the biblical one. A number of Muslim scholars have noted this problem. Tarif Khalidi says the following about Jesus in the Qur'an,

The Qur'anic Jesus is in fact *an argument* addressed to his more wayward followers, intended to convince the sincere and frighten the unrepentant. As such, *he has little in common with the Jesus of the Gospels, canonical or apocryphal.*³²

Khalidi goes on to boldly state that the Islamic Jesus is “a Muslim creation ... an artificial creation” and that he “may be a fabrication ... [and] meta-historical.”³³ The Jesus of the Qur'an appears to be a justification for Islam and for the Islamic prophet Muhammad whose coming he predicts.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have sought to describe the Jesus of Islam. We have seen that there is a sharp difference between the Jesus of Islam and the Jesus of the Bible. The former is a Muslim prophet, who had a restricted ministry to the Jews, he predicted the coming of Muhammad, and according to classical Islam, he did not die on the cross and was thus was not resurrected. He will return as a jihadi to destroy Christianity, correct the People of the Book and judge them, and expand Islamic hegemony throughout the world. He would then die and be buried next to Muhammad. We also saw that the identity of the Jesus of Islam clashes with that of the biblical Jesus and especially in regards to his redemptive work in procuring the salvation of sinners. It is important that both Christians and Muslims continue to move forward in dialogue to understand each other. It is not constructive to ignore the differences that we have surveyed in this article and pretend they are not significant. The issues are profoundly important and weighty and must be addressed.

¹ See for example Robert M. Price, *Jesus is Dead* (Cranford: American Atheist Press, 2007). For a refutation of such Christ myth arguments and their advocates see Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012). See also my Review of Robert Price, *Jesus is Dead*. Online: <https://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=7049>.

² Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

³ This pericope in Matthew is known as the Petrine confession because of Peter's confession about Jesus'

identity. Parallels to this account are also found in Mark 8:27-29 and Luke 9:18-20. Scholars also believe the Fourth Gospel contains a parallel in John 6:67-69.

- 4 All references and citations of the Qur'an will be designated with the abbreviation Q and unless otherwise stated, the English translation of the Qur'an used in this article will be that of Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Delhi: Millat Book Center, 1930). While the English in Pickthall's translation appears archaic and appears to resemble King James "English" I consider Pickthall's translation to be the most faithful and accurate to the original Arabic text of the Qur'an.
- 5 For more on this topic, see my blog post, Tony Costa "To Distinguish or Not to Distinguish? That is the Question: A Problem With the Distinction of the Prophets in the Qur'an and Jesus". Online: <http://www.answermuslims.com/2016/01/to-distinguish-or-not-to-distinguish.html>.
- 6 This is the Arabic word used for the deity in the Qur'an and in Islam in general. The word Allah comes from the Arabic *al-illah* which means "the god." On Allah and its meaning see Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 13-31.
- 7 While the Qur'an states in these passages that Allah does not forgive those who commit *shirk*, there are other passages in the Qur'an which show that Allah does forgive those who commit *shirk*, presenting an obvious tension (Q 2:51-52; 4:153; 6:76-78).
- 8 Not only was Jesus a Muslim, but his disciples were also Muslim according to the Qur'an, "And when I inspired the disciples [of Jesus], (saying): Believe in Me and in My messenger [Jesus], they said: We believe. Bear witness that we have surrendered (unto Thee) 'we are muslims'" (Q 5:111; italics mine; cf. Q 3:52; 5:112; 61:14).
- 9 The idea of Jesus speaking from the cradle was a well-known legend attested in the apocryphal *Arabic Gospel of the Savior's Infancy*, chapter 1. In that text, Jesus says, "I am Jesus, the Son of God" (!)
- 10 On the charge of the Jews calling Ezra the son of God from an Islamic perspective see Mahmoud Ayoub, "Uzayr in the Qur'an and Muslim Tradition," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions* (eds. W. M. Brenner and S. D. Ricks; Denver: The University of Denver, 1986), 3-18. Ayoub notes that the charge against the Jews calling Ezra the son of God "cannot be historically substantiated" (5).
- 11 Other English translations try to include the word "trinity" in Q 4:171 such as those of Hilali-Khan, Khalifa, and Rodwell even though the original Arabic of the Qur'an does not have "trinity" but the Arabic word *thalatha* for the cardinal number "three." Muslims usually accuse Jews and Christians of corrupting their Scriptures. Do we have a case here where these Muslim translators are corrupting the text of the Qur'an by including a word that is absent in the original Arabic of the Qur'an?
- 12 Notice again how Yusuf Ali mistranslates this verse (Q 5:73) to make it look like it is referring to the Trinity by inserting the word "Trinity" into the text, "They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three *in a Trinity*: for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them [italics mine]." There is no warrant for this. The word "Trinity" does not appear at all in the Qur'an. Hilali-Khan and Khalifa do the same in their English translations.
- 13 Richard Bell, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953), 141.
- 14 *Encyclopedia Britannica* (London: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1957), 12:708.
- 15 Cyril Glasse, ed., *The Concise Dictionary of Islam* (London: Stacey International, 1989), 229-30.
- 16 Matt 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35; John 6:40; 1 John 5:9.
- 17 Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 61.
- 18 While Jesus is called a "word from [Allah]," Q 3:39 which recounts the birth of John the Baptist, it is said that John would come "to confirm a word from Allah" (italics mine). The contrast is important. Jesus is a word from Allah, while John is not the word, but comes to confirm it.
- 19 See comments in Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 61.
- 20 In the Hadith collection (recorded sayings and deeds of Muhammad) it states: "I heard Allah's Apostle [Muhammad] saying, 'By Allah! I ask for forgiveness from Allah and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day.'" *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Volume 8, Book 75, Number 319.
- 21 In the Hadith collection, both Jesus and Mary appear to have been sinless, an apparent precursor to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary which was declared dogma in December 8, 1854. We find the following Hadith statements [bold letters mine]:

"Abu Huraira said, 'I heard Allah's Apostle saying, 'There is none born among the off-spring of Adam, but Satan touches it. A child therefore, cries loudly at the time of birth because of the touch of Satan, EXCEPT MARY AND HER CHILD.'" (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Volume 4, Book 55, Number 641; see also

Volume 4, Book 54, Number 506).

“Abu Huraira reported Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: No child is born but he is pricked by the satan and he begins to weep because of the pricking of the satan EXCEPT THE SON OF MARY AND HIS MOTHER ... The newborn child is touched by the satan (when he comes in the world) and he starts crying because of the touch of satan.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Book 030, Number 5837).

Abu Huraira reported Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: The satan touches every son of Adam on the day when his mother gives birth to him WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MARY AND HER SON. (*Sahih Muslim*, Book 030, Number 5838; see also Book 033, Number 6429). If Jesus was not touched by Satan when he was born, and he was blessed and sinless, and Mary was not touched by Satan when she was born, this would seem to imply that Mary was also blessed and sinless.

²² This story comes from the pre-Islamic text of *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* 2:1-3.

²³ Some scholars believe this to be an adaptation of the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper narrative in the gospels.

²⁴ This is an alternate name for Muhammad.

²⁵ Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 65.

²⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 125; John Meier, “The Circle of the Twelve: Did It Exist during Jesus’ Public Ministry?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116.4 (1997): 664-65; Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 229.

²⁷ Norman Anderson, *Islam in the Modern World* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 219.

²⁸ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Vol.1; Christianity in the Making; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 825.

²⁹ Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 38.

³⁰ It is interesting to note that in 2 Cor 11:13 Paul goes on to identify those who preach “another Jesus” as those who are “false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” In other words, Paul warns that those preaching “another Jesus” would make claims to being “apostles”. It should be noted that Muhammad made such a claim and is spoken of in the Qur’an as the *rasul*, an Arabic word meaning “apostle” and “messenger”. The Greek word *apostolos* used in the New Testament refers to one who is sent and communicates the idea of an emissary or messenger. Thus, some English translations of the Qur’an will translate the Arabic word *rasul* as “apostle.” For example in Q 48:29, Pickthall translates the opening line as “Muhammad is the messenger of Allah” and Yusuf Ali has “Muhammad is the apostle of God.”

³¹ See Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 65-66.

³² Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001), 16 (italics mine).

³³ *Ibid.*, 44-45 (italics mine).