

Understanding  
**ISLAM &  
CHRISTIANITY**

JOSH MCDOWELL  
JIM WALKER



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## UNDERSTANDING ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

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*To my wife, God's greatest gift to me.  
Thank you for being who you are  
and loving me through all these years.*

*—Jim Walker*

I want to thank Scott, Haythem, and Diane, who helped make this book possible. I also want to thank Jonathan Kendall for his New Testament support and input.

—Jim Walker

# CONTENTS

Christianity and Islam .....	9
1 Who Is Jesus? Similarities Between the Quran and the Bible.....	15
2 The Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God .....	35
3 The Father, His Son, and Their Relationship .....	57
4 The Trinity: Development of the Doctrine .....	77
5 The Trinity: Foundation from the Bible.....	91
6 The Gospel and the Atonement.....	109
7 Jesus' Crucifixion .....	125
8 Muhammad and the Bible: Is He the "Counselor" Foretold by Jesus? .....	147
9 Muhammad and the Bible: Is He the "Prophet" Foretold by Moses? .....	163
10 The Reliability of the New Testament (Part 1).....	183
11 The Reliability of the New Testament (Part 2) .....	207
12 An Evaluation of the Quran .....	231
13 The Quran Confirms the Christian Scriptures .....	255
14 A Christian Evaluation of Muhammad .....	269
A Prayer for Salvation .....	281
Glossary .....	283
Notes .....	285
Bibliography .....	295



# Christianity and Islam

Islam and Christianity interact considerably today. Millions of Muslims have immigrated to the West in search of a better life and many evangelize for Islam. They have found converts, built mosques, and established communities. Many have become good citizens, performed beneficial duties, and served well in the armed forces. Likewise Christianity's efforts in the Islamic world have borne fruit, and meetings of Muslims and Muslim converts to Christianity occur in every Muslim country.

Usually their interactions are pleasant and enjoyable but at times they can be confrontational as one challenges the other's faith. Many Christians know their faith but know little about Islam. On the other hand, Muslims have many misconceptions about Christianity. The aims of this book are to provide answers for the body of Christ in their interactions with their Muslim friends and provide thought-provoking material for interested Muslims as they examine and evaluate the Christian faith.

## **A Crucial Question: Who Is Jesus?**

Muslim and Christian dialogue often delves into Jesus' identity. Was He just a great prophet? Was He the Messiah, the Son of God? Certainly He was a great man, but He claimed to be more. During His life on earth others realized that indeed He was more.

"Who is Jesus?" This same question was asked during Jesus' life.

[Jesus] asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you, who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven...

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life (Matthew 16:13-21).

“Who is Jesus?”

Later in Jesus’ life a similar but more intense question-and-answer exchange occurred. Jesus was on trial before the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin. Jesus was being examined and His life was in the balance. Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, led the interrogation and those that sat in judgment were predisposed to put Jesus to death. They were striving to find some excuse, some justification, to pronounce a death sentence upon Him. They hated Him. Why did they hate Him?

The interrogation wore on but it was not going well for Caiaphas. Trite accusations yielded paltry results. Caiaphas became frustrated and his anger grew. Jesus was outwitting them at their game and Caiaphas’s fury rose. Finally, when he could contain himself no longer his heart cried out and his voice exclaimed the point that enraged him most: “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!”

Again the question is asked: Who is Jesus? Was He the Son of God?

With that question, Caiaphas challenged Jesus to reveal His true identity. “Who are You, Jesus? Do You claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God?” That is why they hated Him. Jesus’ answer was the most

crucial answer of that day. Pain, suffering, and death awaited one answer. Behind this farce of a trial the fundamental question, “Who is Jesus?” was thrown down as a gauntlet and Jesus was challenged to answer.

And answer He did!

“I am,” said Jesus. “You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

The Sanhedrin reacted violently! “The high priest tore his clothes. ‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked. ‘You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’ They all condemned him as worthy of death. Some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophecy!’”

Jesus had answered them boldly and truthfully! He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Jews howled in anger. But Jesus went further! He told them that He was the one foretold by the prophet Daniel: “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Jesus told them that it was He who would fulfill that messianic prophecy!

Jesus proclaimed that He was more than a prophet. He proclaimed Himself as the Messiah, the Son of God, as foretold by the prophets.

## Answering the Question

This question, “Who is Jesus?” has been asked throughout history and is still asked today. It is one of the most important questions of all time. Billions of people have asked and answered it and their answer affected their lives, their cultures, and their history.

The subject of Jesus’ identity is a challenging one. According to Jesus it is also a spiritual one. Jesus told Peter that His true identity was revealed to him by God. This was not a lucky guess, this was not deductive reasoning, this was not the teaching of men, but rather Jesus’ true identity was revealed to Peter by God:

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”

“Who is Jesus?”

Islam answers exactly like many of the Jews of Jesus' time, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." While Islam answers that Jesus was a mighty prophet, Christianity answers that He was far more.

We will examine Jesus' identity and determine an answer by focusing on Jesus' core-nature, illustrated and demonstrated by His deeds, teachings, and self-description. There is a rich depth in the New Testament, and close examination yields facts about Jesus' identity that are often missed in a casual reading.

Further, we will investigate many of the topics that Christians and Muslims discuss. Many Christians will be surprised to learn that there is substantial agreement between Islam and Christianity about Jesus. His name is mentioned over 20 times in the Quran and there are more than 90 Quranic verses that refer to Him either directly or indirectly and many of these verses agree with the Bible's statements.

## **Toward a Clear Understanding**

When I (Jim Walker) began my study of Islam, years before the advent of the Internet, there were few books available in English. I began with books written by Christians and atheists and fortunately their scholarship was excellent. Over time I found books written by Muslims which gave me deeper insight into Islam. Now I have a substantial collection of Islamic literature written by dedicated Muslims.

However during the last few years we've seen books written by Christians, atheists, or members of other faiths who either consciously or unintentionally distort the true teachings of Islam. Their audience may not know much about Islam so they may believe whatever people publish.

Unfortunately, the same things happen in the Islamic world. Various Muslim writers have intentionally or unintentionally distorted the true teachings of Christianity, and many Muslims, who trust their religious leaders, have accepted those distortions and falsehoods. As an unfortunate result many Muslims have not learned Christianity from Christian sources but rather from Muslim teachers who propagate error.

So I'm asking the reader to bear this in mind because we will expose misconceptions that have been promoted in both the Christian and Islamic world. Let the Quran and the Bible speak for themselves and try your best to understand their meaning. Make an effort to evaluate honestly what the Scriptures say about Jesus and what He says about Himself.

Christian and Muslim dialogues and debates most frequently focus on several primary topics:

- Jesus' identity, was He the divine Son of God?
- Was Jesus crucified?
- Is the New Testament reliable as the Word of God?
- Is Muhammad's prophethood predicted by the Bible?
- Was Muhammad a real prophet of God?
- Is today's Quran the literal and reliable Word of God?

We wish to address these topics and more in the hope of opening the eyes, minds, and hearts of both Christians and Muslims to the teachings found in the Bible and the Quran. We will show evidence that Jesus claimed to be more than a prophet. We will address misconceptions about Jesus and the New Testament. We will also show that the Quran and the Bible agree about many things theological. It is not always an "either-or" proposition. Of course their theologies disagree about prominent points as well and some of those will also be discussed.

We pray that God will use this book to reveal to its readers what God revealed to Peter: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

### **A Note About Quotations from the Quran in This Book**

All quotations from the Quran in this book are from Muhammad Pickthall's translation, unless otherwise noted.\* Pickthall's translation is accurate and widely accepted by Muslims. N.J. Dawood's translation of the Quran is also used in some places, as it is the easiest to read.†

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\* Muhammad M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: Mentor, 1953).

† N.J. Dawood, *The Koran* (London: Penguin, 1995).

In some cases we will reference a passage but only quote a key portion of it. We encourage you to use a Bible and Quran and to read and evaluate all of the referenced passages in full. Don't rush through the read. Taking the time to examine the referenced passages completely will enable you to understand the details fully. At times we will bold or underline key phrases for emphasis.

# Who Is Jesus? Similarities Between the Quran and the Bible

It might be considered odd to start an apologetic book by presenting similarities between the Bible and Quran on what is taught about Jesus. This is being done to show that although there is substantial disagreement between the two faiths there is also substantial agreement. Before we delve into the differences, we want to present areas of theological agreement between Christianity and Islam. Knowing and understanding the areas of agreement will aid the dialogue between Christian and Muslim. It is not necessary to approach the other with a preconceived, “180 degree out” attitude. When Christians understand that Muslims have similar theological beliefs then the approach can be more gracious for we share similar beliefs.

## Jesus' Birth

There are various aspects of the birth of Christ on which both Muslims and Christians agree. His birth is an excellent starting point because Christians and Muslims believe that Jesus' birth was a miracle. The Gospel of Matthew's account is found at Matthew 1:18-25. The Quran's account is found at 3:45-47. If you read and compare the two you'll see many similarities.

Both faiths agree that Jesus' birth was a miracle! Both agree that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus. Both agree that an angel provided His name (the name Jesus is the transliterated Hebrew name “Yeshua” and means “the Lord saves” or “God is our salvation”). We have a common starting ground: God was involved with Jesus'

miraculous birth. Nobody else was born this way. Adam was created by God from the dust of earth because there were no parents to give him birth, but no one, no person or prophet, was ever born in the miraculous way Jesus was.

*(Note: The Muslim/Arabic name for Jesus is “Isa” but the angel would have given Him an actual Hebrew name. Yeshua is a historical Hebrew name. Some Muslim writers claim that Isa = Esau but it is unlikely that the angel would have named Jesus after a person who was considered to be profane in Jewish history. The name “Esau” means “hairy.”)*

### **Jesus Was Sinless**

Both Islam and Christianity agree that Jesus was sinless. Both agree that Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience to God. Jesus stated in John 8:45-47 that He was sinless, while the Quran describes Jesus as being sinless and perfect (faultless) in 19:17-22.

Some Muslims believe that all of the prophets were sinless. Others believe that some of the prophets did sin. However, there are verses in the Quran in which various prophets ask for forgiveness or are told by God to pray for forgiveness for their own sins, such as sura 11:47, 21:87, and 28:16. Consequently, when both texts are examined Jesus is the only one presented in Scripture as without sin.

Jesus’ sinless life shows us His character. As a man He was subjected to many temptations, but He chose to walk in faith and in obedience to God. He was disciplined and self-controlled. He resisted the temptations and overcame sin. He did that His entire life. Think about that for a minute. All of us know how often we sin and know that it is difficult to even go an entire day without some evil emotion of hatred, jealousy, lust, or envy springing up out of our heart. We know how hard it is to refrain from saying the wrong thing. Jesus faced the same challenges we face and some of them were far more stressful than any of us will face. Yet each time He chose to follow and obey God. He lived a sinless life and we should strive to live a sinless life as well. Whether or not we believe He was the only sinless man, or one of a few sinless men, we can all agree that in this He was exceptional.

## Jesus Was a Prophet

Both Muslims and Christians agree that Jesus was a prophet. He had a unique and divine calling and ministry. He brought God's message to the people. In various places through the New Testament (for example, Matthew 13:53-57), Jesus describes Himself as a prophet. Likewise in the Quran (19:30) Jesus describes Himself as a prophet.

This is an important area of agreement between Muslims and Christians because this brings Jesus' ministry into our view: He had a special prophetic ministry given to Him. This ministry was important because it would bring God's word of love and truth to the people. Jesus' ministry is lightly mentioned in the Quran but it is the focus of the Gospels and described completely in the New Testament. When you read all four Gospels, you can sum up the primary message as:

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:16-18).

Yes, this is an often quoted verse. But there is a reason for that: It is the heart of Jesus' message. We know that Muslims do not believe that God has a Son, but here it must be said that, whether you agree with it or disagree with it, this is what the Bible teaches. We'll discuss this more in a later chapter.

Both faiths agree that Jesus was a prophet and He brought God's message. But let's define the ministry of "prophet" and the type of message a prophet is to bring. What exactly are prophets supposed to do and say?

Both the Bible and the Quran teach that a prophet's mission was both grave and powerful. Prophets were authoritative, speaking God's word to the people. Prophets were given demanding tasks that they were to fulfill in service to God and in ministry to the people. The

overall aim of the prophet's ministry was to cause the people to repent, heed God's word, and live in faith and obedience. This often brought the prophets into conflict with people who rejected God's message.

Prophets' lives were not easy. They suffered at the hands of sinful men. Both the Quran and the Bible say that prophets were often killed by the people to whom they ministered (Luke 11:47 and sura 2:91). On the other hand, a prophet would face severe consequences if he himself went astray. Even a proven prophet, one who had worked miracles, could sin and attempt to mislead the people. That prophet who was once true had become false and must be punished. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 mandates that the prophet be put to death!

Like a prophet Jesus came with a message given to Him by God and He proclaimed it to the people of Israel. Many of the Jews believed in Him but many rejected Him. Jesus was faithful to God and proclaimed the message in the face of much hostility.

There are a number of functions and characteristics of a prophet. You can find these actions being performed by many of the biblical Old Testament prophets.

1. Proclaim God's words, be they commands, laws, or special messages.
2. Encourage those who serve God.
3. Warn those who are in sin.
4. Rebuke men, groups, tribes, or races of people.
5. Foretell what is to happen in the future.
6. Most importantly, teach the people about God's nature, that is, His character and attributes.

How did Jesus' words compare to the above list of functions and characteristics of a prophet?

- Jesus proclaimed God's words in Luke 4:16-19.
- He encouraged those who serve God in John 16:33.
- He warned those in sin in Luke 13:1-5.
- He rebuked people in Matthew 23:33-35.

- He foretold what would happen in the future in Matthew 24.
- Jesus taught the people about God's nature in John 4:24 and Luke 11:11-13.

Jesus fulfilled the office of prophet completely. He took His mission seriously, faced strong opposition, but persisted and preached God's word in various ways and ministered to the people.

### Jesus Performed Miracles

Not all prophets were known to have performed miracles but both faiths agree that Jesus performed many miracles! His miracles were performed in the eyes of His followers and in the eyes of people who refused to believe in Him because their hearts were hard. Many Jews saw that God was with Jesus because He was able to perform miracles that had never been performed in Israel's history. Here are several of His miracles found in the Bible:

- healed a blind man in Mark 10:46-52
- fed 5000 people in Matthew 14:13-21
- resurrected a synagogue ruler's daughter in Mark 5:21-43

Of course there are many more of Jesus' miracles described in the Bible. The Quran also says that Jesus performed miracles:

And will make him a messenger unto the children of Israel, (saying): Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah's leave. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah's leave. And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. Lo! herein verily is a portent for you, if ye are believers (3:49).\*

This is another strong agreement between Islam and Christianity:

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\* Quranic references refer to *sura* (similar to a chapter) and verse. Thus "3:49" designates sura 3, verse 49.

Jesus indeed performed many unparalleled miracles in the eyes of the people. These miracles were a proof to them that God's power was with Jesus. It was also a sign to them that God had not forgotten them but that He was still anointing people to speak to them.

In summary then both the Quran and Bible agree that these miracles were proof, or a sign, that Jesus and His teachings were from God. None of the prophets before Him ever performed such great miracles! More importantly they demonstrated God's love and outreach for His people.

### **Jesus Ministered the Gospel**

This is another point of agreement between Islam and Christianity. Both faiths agree that Jesus was given the message of the Gospel. "Gospel" comes from the Greek word "euangelion" and means "good news." "Gospel" in Arabic is "Injil." The word "Injil" is used 12 times in the Quran.

Here is a verse from the Quran:

And We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, confirming that which was (revealed) before him, and We bestowed on him the Gospel [Injil] wherein is guidance and a light, confirming that which was (revealed) before it in the Torah a guidance and an admonition unto those who ward off (evil) (5:46).

And here is a verse from the Bible:

One day as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him (Luke 20:1).

Note that both texts say that Jesus ministered the Gospel (or good news). In fact the Quran says that Jesus was given the Gospel directly from God without the use of an intermediary angel!

Although the importance of the Gospel is stressed throughout the

Quran, it does not identify what exactly constitutes the Gospel. But it does identify the Gospel as a message that could be accessed and that must be followed by the Christians in Muhammad's day. The Quran specifically says:

Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allah hath revealed therein. Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed: such are evil-livers (5:47).

Clearly, the Quran is telling Christians at that time to judge by what God revealed in the Gospel. They could only do that if it was given to them in some kind of written and codified form. In fact, the Quran actually states that the Gospel was available to those in Muhammad's time. In the very next verse, The Quran says:

And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it (5:48; see also 3:3).

It is therefore obvious that in the light of the Quran and Bible the Gospel's message then is very important. So what exactly is the Gospel message? The Quran states that there is "guidance and light" in the Gospel Scripture but it does not define the Gospel. The Bible goes into more detail. The first verse in Mark's gospel in the New Testament tells us that the Gospel is about Jesus:

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Messiah, the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

There is more to the message than a call to believe in God. There is a requirement that the people of God are to believe in Jesus also, that the good news is about Jesus! But what specifically is this good news about Jesus? What's "good news" about Him? We will go into more detail in a later chapter. The point here is to show that both Islam and Christianity agree that Jesus was given a unique and special message, the gospel, to proclaim to the people. Jesus did proclaim the Gospel and instructed His followers to continue to do so.

## Jesus Was the Messiah

Both faiths agree that Jesus was the Messiah. The word “Messiah” is a Hebrew word and means “anointed one.” It is “Christos” in Greek, “Christ” in English, and the Quran uses “al-Masih” (most Anointed) in Arabic. In fact that title is used for Jesus 11 times in the Quran! Nobody else in the Quran is called “al-Masih.” As we noted before, the Quran states the angels gave Jesus the special title, “al-Masih”:

(And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah) (3:45).

Further, this title, “al-Masih” that the Quran gives Jesus, identifies something special about Him. Grammatically, the definite article “al” gives the title “Masih” a unique meaning. It sets Jesus apart from other messengers and prophets and characterizes this anointing as unique and unmatched.

Also, supporting the idea that being called “al-Masih” is a distinguished title, the *Encyclopedia of the Qur’an* states:

...it should be noted that those which seem to indicate qualities that Jesus shared with other prophets do not do justice to the fact that he alone is called al-Masih in the Qur’an. It seems likely that the first hearers of the revelations would have been aware that al-Masih was a dignified title which the Christians held was uniquely applicable to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise the Jews understood that there were many “anointed” people in the Old Testament but that there would be a special and unique “Anointed One.” This is shown in the conversations Jesus had with various people. They asked Jesus if He was the Messiah, the special one they were waiting for. In fact, Jesus told them that He was the Messiah but they rejected Him (John 10:22-28).

Both Islam and Christianity agree that Jesus is the Messiah but the Quran does not identify what is special about Jesus as the Messiah. It does not explain what that title means.

The Bible does tell us what is special about the Messiah. One of the most informative Scriptures is found in the book of Matthew 2:1-6:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

The Magi were devout men who were watching for the birth of the Messiah and when a sign was given to them they proceeded to search it out. They were men of faith and obedience and were determined to stay true to what God had shown them. They identified the Messiah as “the king of the Jews.” Likewise the chief priests, on their understanding of the Torah, also identified the Messiah as a ruler. They knew that the Messiah was predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures to be born in Bethlehem. Jesus fulfilled that prophecy when He was born in Bethlehem. He was the Messiah and was to rule and shepherd God’s people.

We’ll more fully review “the Messiah” in a later chapter.

## **Jesus Received Worship**

Now we will take a step back and take a closer look at the Magi who sought Jesus out in Matthew chapter 2.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born (Matthew 2:1-4).

What did the Magi wish to do? What was their purpose? They knew that the one prophesied as the "king of the Jews" had been born. The Magi wanted to worship Jesus! Isn't that a questionable choice for men who were devoted to God? Wouldn't that be idolatry? Yes, unless they understood that the Messiah was to be worshipped as God. This is exactly what they did:

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11).

These wise men were not the only ones who worshipped Jesus. When Jesus performed the miracle of walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33) His disciples realized who He was.

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for calling Him the Son of God or for worshipping Him!

After Jesus performed the miracle of healing a man who had been born blind, Jesus again was worshipped. Jesus spoke with the man after the Jewish clergy interrogated him:

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him (John 9:35-38).

F.F. Bruce, in his commentary on John writes:

Naturally, the man does not know who the Son of man is, but he is very willing to learn, so he asks. Jesus replies in terms similar to those which he used when the Samaritan woman spoke of the coming Messiah: "It is I, the person talking to you" (John 4:26). The man has no further hesitation. On whom would he more readily believe than on the man who had restored his sight? He had already called him a prophet; now he confesses him as more than a prophet. If the vocative *kyrie* in verse 36 has the courtesy sense of "sir," in verse 38 it is more than a courtesy title; it implies that Jesus is a fit person to receive worship: "Lord, I believe," he said, and bowed low in reverence before him. So quickly has an honest and good heart progressed from recognizing the benefactor as "the man called Jesus" (verse 11) to confessing him as Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus asked the man to believe in "the Son of Man." The man knew that Jesus was from God, but he didn't know who the Son of Man was. But he had faith in and love for Jesus and was willing to obey Him. Jesus told him that He was the Son of Man. The man said, "Lord, I believe." Then he worshipped Him.

This is the key... Jesus does not say to him, "Worship only God." Instead Jesus receives his worship. But Jesus was not ignorant of the Law of God! When Jesus was challenged by Satan, Jesus rebuked him for asking for worship...

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matthew 4:8-10).

Glenn Miller sums up the perspective on worshipping other than God:

...this point ALONE would eliminate all “Jesus is—in His nature—an angel.” The worship of angels is forbidden by the above scriptural teachings, and explicitly in Col 2.18, and is contrasted with Jesus in Hebrews 1.2. This means—since worship is encouraged/afforded to Jesus in the NT—that Jesus CANNOT be an angel in nature, but only in function (as a prophet was also a “messenger”), and only then occasionally (in some cases, e.g., As messenger of the Covenant [Malachi] and Head of the Army in the OT/Tanaach). This is a strong argument against the belief of some groups that Jesus was an angel, or an archangel. His rebuke of the Angel of Light with “only God shall ye worship” is proof positive of this fact.

SUMMARY: The data in the NT is surprisingly uniform—“worship” is for GOD ALONE! \*

Jesus was sinless, and He would not allow or receive the sin of idolatry or the worship of the wrong person! He knew the Law, He knew the punishment for worship of other than God. Yet He allowed others to call Him the Lord and the Son of God and He received their worship. No holy, devout man would allow this, no prophet of God would tolerate this, no great teacher would sanction this, unless it was acceptable and proper to do.

## Jesus Was a Great Teacher

So far we’ve examined several areas of agreement and common ground between Islam and Christianity. In this section we have another area of agreement: Jesus was a wise and gifted teacher. The Quran, in 5:110 notes how Jesus was gifted to minister to the people and John 3:2 shows how people acknowledged Jesus as a teacher from God. However here we want to delve into the substance of what He taught. Jesus, the gifted teacher, taught truths about Himself that had never been claimed by other prophets. Jesus understood the significance of His teachings and comprehended the ramifications of what He taught.

Although both Muslims and Christians agree that Jesus was a wise and gifted teacher, the Quran says very little about what exactly Jesus

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\* <http://www.christian-thinktank.com/trin03g.html>

taught. Commenting on the lack of material about Jesus in the Quran, the Muslim writer Neal Robinson wrote:

Little is said about Jesus' teaching although at the annunciation Mary was told that he was destined to speak to mankind in the cradle and also when of mature age (3:46). To perform his task he was strengthened by the Holy Spirit and given signs (5:110, 2:87) and God taught him the Scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel (3:48, 5:110). Jesus attested the truth of what was in the Torah (3:50, 5:46, 61:6). He made lawful some of the things that were forbidden to the Children of Israel in his day (3:50 cf. 3:93). He came to them with wisdom and made plain to them some of the things about which they were in disagreement (43:63).<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, as the Quran instructed Muhammad and his followers, we can find out more about what Jesus taught from the book of the "People of the Book" (that is, the Bible).

And if thou (Muhammad) art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before thee. Verily the Truth from thy Lord hath come unto thee. So be not thou of the waverers (10:94).

When you begin to read the New Testament you learn very quickly that Jesus frequently taught by using parables. This was a very effective teaching technique because parables, when used correctly, cause the hearers to listen, evaluate, and continue to ponder their meaning.

Parables convey aspects of a story with which the hearers are familiar. Farmers understand when you talk about tilling the ground or growing crops, fishermen understand about using nets and catching fish. But then the parable is meant to convey a much deeper moral lesson or spiritual truth. The parable is meant to have a profound dimension or meaning. Many physical aspects of the parable have counterparts in the moral lesson of the story. We are going to examine some of Jesus' teachings and focus on key points that are often overlooked.

### ***Jesus, Lord of the World: The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares***

Jesus taught the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30. Thereafter He explained its meaning in verses 36-43. Take a couple minutes and read those passages.

Not only was Jesus teaching people about the last judgment, He was making strong claims about Himself and His rulership. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* highlights this:

The identification of the actors is over, and the description of the action begins. As the weeds are “pulled up” (verse 40; same verb as “collect” in verse 30b) and burned, so it is at the end. The kingdom we have known as the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God is also seen as the kingdom of the Son of Man, Jesus’ kingdom (cf. 20:21; 25:31; cf. Dan 2:35; Rev 11:15).<sup>4</sup>

There are many things that can be highlighted, but here are the key points:

1. Jesus identified Himself as the sower: “The Son of Man.” Jesus used this term most often to describe Himself.
2. Both the good seed and the bad seed are allowed to grow side by side until the time of judgment.
3. The harvesters are the angels who cast evil people into hell.
4. Who owns the field? The sower owns the field. It is his field—it is Jesus’ world. Jesus is claiming ownership. Note Jesus says, “The Son of Man will send out ‘his angels.’” Angels are meant to obey God; Jesus is saying that His angels are obeying Him and doing His bidding.

### ***Jesus, the Son of God: The Parable of the Wicked Tenants***

This parable is found in Matthew 21:33-45. Take a couple minutes and read it. Note how this parable corresponds with both the Bible’s and Quran’s statements that the messengers that God sent were killed by the unbelievers. They fit together.

Are you able to correlate the parable's physical points with its spiritual truths? Who does the landowner represent? Who do the farmers represent? Who do the servants represent? (Hint: Cross-reference sura 2:91.) Who does the son represent?

Albert Barnes notes the Gospel message here:

This beautifully and most tenderly exhibits the love of God, in sending his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die for men. Long had he sent the prophets, and they had been persecuted and slain. There was no use in sending any more prophets to the people. They had done all they could do. God had one only-begotten and well-beloved Son, whom he might send into the world, and whom the world ought to reverence, even as they should the Father. . . Matthew 21:37.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Jesus, Judge of the World: The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats***

The parable of the sheep and the goats is found in Matthew 25:31-46. Take a few minutes and read the parable. The primary lesson of the parable is that “followers of Jesus” are required to meet the needs of all fellow “followers of Jesus,” and not just special or favorite ones. When a follower of Jesus helps a fellow follower, even one who is poor and of no account, he is doing that deed unto Jesus.

But note who is doing the judging. Jesus! He is claiming for Himself the right to judge the world. And where is Jesus going to sit? Take a look at the first two sentences and read them again.

The introductory comment to this passage in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (NICNT) ties this passage to Daniel's vision:

Since 24:36 the theme of being ready to face the Son of Man at his parousia has dominated the latter part of the discourse. Now that theme comes to its majestic climax in a vision of the judgment that will then take place, when in fulfillment of the vision of Dan 7:13-14 the Son of Man is enthroned as judge over all the nations, and the great division will take place between those who are ready and those who are not

ready. In the preceding parables, we have seen indication of what “readiness” may be understood to mean, in terms of the lifestyle which the master will commend at his coming. Now we find a more explicit statement of the criterion of judgment, in the way people have treated “one of these my smallest brothers and sisters.”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus would later tell the chief priests that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that He would “come with the clouds” as prophetically foretold by Daniel. This parable, the “sheep and the goats,” presents a broader description of that event.

### ***Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath***

Now, Jesus did more than teach in parables. Sometimes He was very straightforward. At other times He spoke in metaphors. We’re going to take a look at one of His most bold statements about Himself.

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

Jesus answered them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” Then Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Luke 6:1-5).

Here the Pharisees accused Jesus’ disciples of breaking the Law. Jesus answered them “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Jesus was claiming to be Lord over the special day set aside to be lived in faith and obedience to God! The *NICNT* explains,

Thus, he concludes by implication, the disciples have not violated the Sabbath, as they have been accused; rather, the Son of Man, who has authority over the Sabbath, has permitted them to pluck and eat on the Sabbath. This is not a rejection

of the Sabbath or of Sabbath observance in general, but it does undercut the utility of Sabbath observance as a boundary-keeping mechanism (that is, as a sign of faithfulness to God), and it designates Jesus as God's authorized agent to determine what was appropriate on the Sabbath.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus had the boldness, had the audacity, to declare Himself "Lord of the Sabbath"! Who did Jesus think He was!? *Jesus, the great teacher, not only identifies Himself as the Son of Man, but also as the Lord.* No prophet ever claimed that for Himself. Either Jesus was truly the Lord, or He was a false prophet who deserved punishment for breaking God's Law and blasphemy.

### Jesus Spoke in His Own Name

Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner understands exactly what Jesus was doing. He understood the deeper meaning and implication of Jesus' ministry. After a detailed explanation, Neusner presents a hypothetical question he would challenge Jesus with:

I am troubled not so much by the message, though I might take exception to this or that, as I am by the messenger. The reason is that, in form these statements are jarring. Standing on the mountain, Jesus' use of language, "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you..." contrasts strikingly with Moses' language at Mount Sinai. Sages, we saw, say things in their own names, but without claiming to improve upon the Torah. The prophet, Moses, speaks not in his own name but in God's name, saying what God has told him to say. Jesus speaks not as a sage nor as a prophet...

...At many points in this protracted account of Jesus' specific teachings, we now recognize that at issue is the figure of Jesus, not the teachings at all.

...But what troubles me is simple, and if I could have walked up the mountain and addressed the master and disciples that day, I would have said: "Sir, how come you speak on your own say-so, and not out of the teachings of the Torah given

by God to Moses at Sinai? It looks as though you see yourself as Moses, or as more than Moses...”<sup>8</sup>

Neusner’s challenge is on target. He recognized that Jesus was claiming to be more than a prophet. Neusner is saying, “Who the heck are you, Jesus, to speak and command in your name! Who do you think you are to supersede Moses! Do you think you’re greater than Moses?”

But then Neusner goes on to make a stunning error! He writes:

But the Torah of Moses does not tell me that God is going to give instruction—*torah*—through someone besides Moses or the other prophets; or that there is going to be another Torah.<sup>9</sup>

How could Neusner have missed God’s prediction in Deuteronomy 18:15-19?

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. This is what you requested from the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not continue to hear the voice of the LORD our God or see this great fire any longer, so that we will not die!” Then the LORD said to me, “They have spoken well. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put My words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to My words that he speaks in My name” (HCSB).

Moses did foretell that another prophet like him would be raised up by God. The prophets did foretell that a new covenant would be established (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Perhaps Neusner’s difficulty in taking into account these Scriptures is similar to the difficulty that many Jews had with Jesus: Jesus was bringing change, change to the old, established ways, change that cut across the grain of what the Jewish teachers taught, change that threatened their status. He repeatedly made audacious, unheard-of claims about Himself! This upset the Jews of Jesus’

time just as it troubles Neusner. Jesus, the great teacher, made many uncomfortable and angry with both His words and His actions. There was a choice to make: Accept Jesus as He said He was, or reject Him as a liar, false prophet, or demon-possessed madman. The Jews of Jesus' time made a choice, either for or against.

### **Jesus, the Unique Prophet**

Christian scholar Dr. Raymond Brown emphasizes the uniqueness of Jesus compared to *all* other prophets:

But no prophet broke with the hallowed past in so radical a way and with so much assurance as did Jesus. Moreover, the certainty with which Jesus spoke and acted implies a consciousness of a unique relationship to God. The Gospel traditions agree in depicting him as a man who thinks he can act and speak for God. The superior authority and power manifested by Jesus and acknowledged by many who encountered him supposed more than that he was the final prophet of the last times through whom God's salvation breaks through. His implied relationship to God was more than that of an agent; God was acting not only through him, but in him.<sup>10</sup>

Over and over, the statements made about Jesus before He was born, the depth of His parables, and His straightforward statements and actions demonstrate that He was more than another prophet. He was the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God.

Both Islam and Christianity agree on much concerning Jesus. He was born of a virgin, He performed great miracles, He was a prophet, the Messiah, and a great teacher. But when we look deeper into His teachings we find that Jesus said things that went beyond the claims of a prophet. He said He was the Son of Man, the Son of God. He said that He was Lord of the Sabbath. He said that He would judge the world, that He would give His followers eternal life. He received the worship of men. In short, Jesus made statements and performed actions that no prophet would dare to claim or attempt. Jesus went way

beyond all other prophets. Jesus knew where He had come from; He knew who He truly was. And that is why He was able to make those statements and perform those actions with powerful confidence.