

Truth For Muslims

Truth Messenger

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Jesus in the Quran

The content of this article is based on the training seminar called Jesus in the Quran developed by John Marion. This educational seminar is one of several taught by different teachers for Truth For Muslims.

There are four important names used for Jesus in the Quran. Understanding the context of how these names are used in the Quran provides insight into Muslim beliefs about Jesus. Each name can be compared to what the Bible says about Jesus, which is an important evaluation for Christians to make in order to understand the stark differences between the two views of Jesus. These names or titles are Isa, Messiah, Word of God, and Spirit from God.

Isa

The word *Isa* (عيسى) for Jesus is a unique word, a purely Quranic name which never occurs in the Bible.¹ Scholars are not in agreement about how this name came to be used by Mohammed and it seems the name itself has no meaning. The Arabic name for Jesus, used in the Arabic Christian Bible, is “Yeshua,” which means “the Lord saves.” The name Yeshua corresponds to the Hebrew name, Joshua, and the Greek form of the name, Jesus.

The name *Isa*, while the most common name for Jesus, is used in only twenty-five verses of the Quran.² Among these references, *Isa* occurs sixteen times with the phrase “son of Mary” and five times with the name *Musa* (the Quranic name for Moses).

One of the verses from the Quran which uses the

words *Isa* with *Musa* and other biblical figures is Surah 2:136:

Say ye: We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to Allah (in Islam).³

This passage from the Quran supports the Islamic belief, established by Muslim scholars, that Allah has sent between 100,000 and 240,000 prophets, culminating in Mohammed the greatest and last. Islamic doctrine teaches that all prophets were Muslims. So although the Quran considers Jesus to be an important prophet, it makes him only one among many—and even more importantly, it denies him the divinity so clearly expressed in Scripture.

Another verse in the Quran, Surah 4:157, calls Jesus the son of Mary:

And behold! Allah will say: “O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?”

Although the story of the birth of Jesus described in the Quran is different than the biblical account, such as having him born under a palm tree instead of in the stable, Islamic theology teaches that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary.

However, the Quran confuses the place of Mary in Christian theology by placing her in the Trinity! The

¹ Some scholars believe biblical names were changed in the Quran in order to sound more poetic together in the Arabic language: Musa – Isa (Moses and Jesus) rhyme, as do Habil – Kabil (Cain and Abel) and Talut – Jilut (Saul and Goliath).

² These verses are: 2:87, 136, 253; 3:45, 52, 55, 59, 84; 4:157, 163, 171; 5:46, 78, 110, 112, 114 116; 6:86; 19:34; 33:17; 42:13; 43:63; 57:27; 61:6, 14.

³ All Quran references are from the translation by Yusef Ali, distributed in the United States by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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Quran indicates that the Christian Trinity is God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son and it is this Trinity which is rejected by the Quran.⁴

Messiah

The title *Messiah* (masi, المسيح) is used eight times in the Quran.⁵ The Arabic word *masi* is similar to the Hebrew word translated “Messiah” in the Old Testament scriptures. The Greek word for Messiah which is used in the New Testament (*Christos*, Χριστός) is translated into English as “Christ.”

The biblical meaning for the titles Messiah and Christ is “anointed one,” and the word has a rich and deep history in the Bible. In the Old Testament the Messiah who was to come is the Son of David. The Messiah would be anointed as King. Psalm 2 is an important prophetic passage about the Messiah.

In the New Testament we learn that the promised Messiah has arrived in the person of Jesus. It is Jesus who meets the requirements to be the Messiah and he fulfills all the Old Testament Messianic prophecies.

In the Quran, however, there is no context or content attached to the term “Messiah.” So although the Quran uses the word, it is void of the rich biblical meaning of the person and work of the promised Messiah. “Messiah” in the Quran becomes a meaningless title. When Muslims say they believe Jesus is Messiah, they are simply repeating a word which has been stripped of any associations with fulfillment of covenant promise or with kingship.

In reality, although the Quran uses the word Messiah, the Quran rejects the role and purpose of the Messiah. Surah 4:156 makes this plain:

That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ⁶ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah";—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 doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not.

Islamic theology teaches from this Quranic passage that Jesus Christ was neither crucified, nor died, nor was buried, nor rose again. The moving passages of Isaiah about the Messiah as the “suffering servant” have no meaning whatsoever. The

⁴ It should be noted that Islamic scholars also reject the biblical trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

⁵ The 8 verses in the Quran that use the title Messiah are: 3:45; 4:156, 169, 170; 5:17, 76, 79; 9:30

⁶ The English edition of the Quran here translates the Arabic word masi (المسيح) as Christ.

crucifixion was literally an apparition: “so it was made to *appear* to them.” Muslim theologians interpret this verse to mean that Allah changed the appearance of Jesus so that the person who was arrested and nailed to the cross was someone else. Some theologians say that the person who was made to look like Jesus was actually Judas, the disciple who betrayed Christ Jesus!

It is clear from the Quran that the Jesus of the Quran is not the Jesus of the New Testament who was crucified, shedding his blood for the forgiveness of sins, and rising again to conquer sin and death. Islam denies these truths.

Word of God

The title *Word of God* (kalimat Allah, كلمة الله) is used twice in the Quran (3:45; 4:171). Both verses that call Jesus the Word of God also use the words *Isa* and *Messiah*.

Surah 3:45 states:

Behold! the angels said: "O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah."

The Quran does honor Jesus—but only as a prophet. Surah 4:171 continues this theme:

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers. Say not "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.

It is clear from this passage, because of the denial of Jesus as the Son of God and the denial of the triune nature of God, that calling Jesus the Word of God has little significance in the Quran.

When the New Testament calls Jesus the Word of God, it is unambiguous and forceful. The opening of the Gospel according to John is a key passage:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and

apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:1-5

Another New Testament verse, also from the Apostle John, is a vision of Messiah coming in glory:

He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God.

Revelation 19:12b-13

The biblical use of the title Word of God for Jesus is clear. He is the Son of God who shed his blood on the cross, rose from the dead and is coming again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The Quran may call Jesus uniquely the Word of God, but the meaning of the passages where the title occurs is used to diminish his true character and nature and deny his supremacy.

Spirit from God

The phrase *spirit from God* (ruh allah, روح الله) is used once in the Quran, in Surah 4:171, quoted in full above. The phrase is also unique for Jesus in the Quran, no other prophets are called a spirit from God.

The phrase occurs in the context of a Quranic rebuke against Christians, who are called “people of the book.” It flatly contradicts the biblical teaching of Jesus as the Son of God.

Discovering the Truth

While it is clear that the person and work of Jesus Christ is diminished, he is unique among all the other prophets in the Quran. However, since the emphasis is on reciting the ancient Arabic text over and above reading it to understand the meaning, most Muslims miss the uniqueness of Jesus in the Quran. Those who do notice his uniqueness begin to realize that he is more than a mere prophet.

Over a hundred years ago Haji Sultan Mohammed, Khan of Afghanistan, began to realize that Jesus is unique. Haji was an Islamic scholar who extensively studied the Quran and traditions of Mohammed. One day Haji read the words of Jesus from the Gospel according to the Apostle Matthew which says, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” Haji began reading the New Testament more and he clearly saw that the biblical Jesus is different than the prophet of Islam.

In his written testimony, Haji said this,

The Messiah claims: “I will give you rest.” He shows how salvation depends on him. He does not merely point to a path which is above or beyond him. But he says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me.”⁷

Haji discovered the truth! He soon dropped his allegiance to Islamic ideology, putting his own life at risk in the process, and became a passionate follower of Jesus the Messiah.

Haji’s testimony is proof that Muslims who decide to seriously consider the uniqueness of Jesus can make their greatest discovery: that Jesus himself is the Truth.

⁷ Available online: <http://www.the-good-way.com/eng/article/a18.htm>