

**MUHAMMAD SPEAKING OF THE MESSIAH:  
JESUS IN THE HADĪTH TRADITION**

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## ABSTRACT

Much has been written about Qur'ānic references to Jesus (‘Īsā in Arabic), yet no work has been done on the structure or formal analysis of the numerous references to ‘Īsā in the Hadīth, that is, the collection of writings that report the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. In effect, non-Muslims and Muslim scholars neglect the full range of Prophet Muhammad’s statements about Jesus that are in the Hadīth. The dissertation’s main thesis is that an examination of the Hadīths’ reports of Muhammad’s words about and attitudes toward ‘Īsā will lead to fuller understandings about Jesus-‘Īsā among Muslims and propose to non-Muslims new insights into Christian tradition about Jesus. In the latter process, non-Muslims will be encouraged to re-examine past hostile views concerning Muhammad and his words about Jesus. A minor thesis is that Western readers in particular, whether or not they are Christians, will be aided to understand Islamic beliefs about ‘Īsā, prophethood, and eschatology more fully. In the course of the dissertation, Hadīth studies will be enhanced by a full presentation of Muhammad’s words about and attitudes toward Jesus-‘Īsā. While several non-eschatological references to Jesus appear the Hadīth and will be referenced, the dissertation focuses especially on Prophet Muhammad’s statements concerning ‘Īsā’s *parousia* (return to earth) and his messianic roles toward the End Times. It is anticipated that the work will contribute to further studies about correlations of ‘Īsā and Muhammad in Islamic and Christian theology, as well as to interreligious examinations of the Hadīth traditions.

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## INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about Qur'ānic references to Jesus (‘Īsā in Arabic), yet no work has been done on the structure or formal analysis of the numerous references to ‘Īsā in the Hadīth, that is, the collection of writings that report the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. In effect, non-Muslims and Muslim scholars neglect the full range of Prophet Muhammad's statements about Jesus that are in the Hadīth. The dissertation's main thesis is that an examination of the Hadīths' reports of Muhammad's words about and attitudes toward ‘Īsā will lead to fuller understandings about Jesus-‘Īsā among Muslims and propose to non-Muslims new insights into Christian tradition about Jesus. In the latter process, non-Muslims will be encouraged to re-examine past hostile views concerning Muhammad and his words about Jesus. A minor thesis is that Western readers in particular, whether or not they are Christians, will be aided to understand Islamic beliefs about ‘Īsā, prophethood, and eschatology more fully. In the course of the dissertation, Hadīth studies will be enhanced by a full presentation of Muhammad's words about and attitudes toward Jesus-‘Īsā. While several non-eschatological references to Jesus appear the Hadīth and will be referenced, the dissertation focuses especially on Prophet Muhammad's statements concerning ‘Īsā's *parousia* (return to earth) and his messianic roles toward the End Times. It is anticipated that the work will contribute to further studies about correlations of ‘Īsā and Muhammad in Islamic and Christian theology, as well as to interreligious examinations of the Hadīth traditions.

As referred to in Qur'ān 5:19, according to the usual exegesis, no prophet-messenger appeared between the time of Jesus-‘Īsā and Muhammad. Further, Jesus is

considered one of the four most important messengers sent to proclaim the message of the One God. As had Moses-Musa, Jesus had a divine book (Injīl-Gospel) to give guidance to the People of Israel. Muhammad, believed by Muslims to be the ultimate and final prophet-messenger also had a divine book (Qur'ān) and was sent to the people of Arabia and to all humanity. While other prophets and messengers have been the subjects of some study and discussion, Muhammad and Jesus have garnered the most attention and even controversy. Debates and disputes surrounding the return of Jesus have been especially persistent and frequent. In the area of theology, some Muslim and non-Muslim scholars argue that “the central Christian concept of redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus is absent from the Islamic understanding of Jesus, so therefore a genuine and total reconciliation between Christianity and Islam is at best problematic”<sup>1</sup>.

Western and Muslim scholars take different perspectives in their presentations about Muslim views of Jesus. The former almost always concentrate on merely discussing Qur'ānic passages about Jesus or making a comparison between the Qur'ān and the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Muslim scholars, on the other hand, tend to focus on only his *nuzūl* (descent) even though there are many more Hadīth reports about Jesus earthly life than those on his second coming.<sup>3</sup> The dissertation will not be about the sayings and stories attributed to Jesus that are found in works of ethics, works of *adab* (belles-lettres), works

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<sup>1</sup> Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān*. (London: Sheldon Press, 1965 and 1967) and Fred Maina Macharia, *Tracing Jesus in the Bible and the Qur'ān*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis /Dissertation Concordia Theological Seminary of Lutheran Evangelical Protestant, 2004

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Zeki Sarıtoprak, *İslâm İnancı Açısından Nüzûl-i İsa Meselesi*, (Izmir, Turkey: Çağlayan yay., 1997).

of Sufism, wisdom literature, and histories of saints, as Tarif Khalidi did in his book *The Muslim Jesus*.<sup>4</sup> Instead, addressing both specialist and nonspecialist readers, my dissertation will be about *what Muhammad said about Jesus*. The dissertation will focus on popular Sunnī books of Hadīth and some other sources in particular. No other sources, such as Shi‘a books of Hadīth, history and tradition will be a source of this dissertation.

According to the Qur’ān and the Hadīth, Jesus has not died yet. He is the Prophet Muhammad’s immediate predecessor-messenger. On Muhammad’s Night Journey and Ascent into Heaven (Isrā’ and Mi’rāj), Jesus recognized Muhammad as a fellow messenger, and Muhammad later referred to Jesus-‘Īsā as his brother in Hadīth reports. If we ask about the significance of the Hadīth tradition for the contemporary and continuing dialogue between Christians and Muslims, “we might point to its relevance to historical and theological reconciliation”<sup>5</sup>. In fact, “quite apart from what it may reveal of contacts between Christianity and Islam on the plane of history, it may well have something to teach us today about how religious cultures in general interact, enrich themselves,” and learn to live together with mutual respect.<sup>6</sup>

After searching the literature in English, French, German, Turkish and Arabic, I ascertained that there are no other studies that attempted the same range as and reached similar conclusions to this dissertation.

The initial step of my research was to scan all hadīth reports and find the ahadīth (sing. hadīth) that mention the name of Jesus. To do so, I have utilized several digital

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<sup>4</sup> Khalidi, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Khalidi, p. 5 and 45.

<sup>6</sup> Khalidi, p. 5 and 45.

libraries, such as “*Mawsū‘at al-Hadīth al-Sharīf* v.2.0”, “*al-Maktabahh al-Shāmilah* v.2.11”, and “*al-Jāmi‘ al-Kabīr* v.3.0”. Therefore, after a thorough search, I was able to gain all the hadīth reports on Jesus. I began studying the early period hadīth books, such as *al-Jāmi‘* of Ma‘mar b. Rāshid (d.154/770), Tayālisī (d.204/819), al-Humaydī (d.219/834), *al-Musannaf* of Abd al-Razzāq (d.211/826), *Musannaf* of Ibn Abū Shaybah (d.235/849), and *Sunan* of Said b. Mansūr (d.227/841). Afterwards, considering that most ahadīth are reiterated in different collections, I limited my study to the nine primary classical Hadīth sources, also known as *al-Kutub al-Tis‘ah* (the Nine Books of Hadīth), namely *Sahih of al-Bukhārī*, *Sahih of Muslim*, *Sunan of Abū Dāwūd*, *Sunan of Ibn Mājah*, *Sunan of al-Tirmidhī*, *Sunan of al-Nasā‘ī*, *Muwatta’ of Imam Malik*, *Musnad of Ibn Hanbal*, and *Sunan of al-Darimī*. - These are not mentioned in a chronological order. - Furthermore, I used the commentaries (*sharh*) written on these primary sources.

The Hadīth literature shows the Prophet “Muhammad speaking substantively and figuratively” about the creation, the End Times, the eschatological role of Jesus Christ towards the end of the world, and the eschatological descriptions of the Day of Judgment, paradise, and hell.<sup>7</sup> For eschatology, the Hadīth, therefore, has always been significant for Muslims generally.

The term “hadīth” literally means speech, narration, report, and account. When applied to the Prophet of Islam, it refers to his deeds, sayings, and approvals. These sayings and their meanings are his alone, for they were NOT included in the Qur’ān, whose meaning and wording belong to Allah exclusively. A hadīth has a particular

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Wagner, *Beginnings and End Times: Fethullah Gülen’s Vision for Today’s World*, (New Jersey: Blue Dome, 2013), 19-20.

pattern that cites the chain of narrators traced back to those who were with the Prophet when he said or did what is reported and confirm the authenticity of the statement or action. Following the Prophet Muhammad's demise and the spread of the religion of Islam various narrations and statements were attributed to him, some obviously false, others doubtful and some considered authentic. The six hadīth collections, known as *al-Kutub al-Sittah* (the Six Books of Hadīth) gained wide acceptance among Sunnī Muslims. The six collections are by Muhammad al-Bukhārī, Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, Ibn Mājah al-Qazwīnī, Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, and Abū Abd al-Rahman al-Nasā'ī. In fact, the Six Books did not gain acceptance as a group until later. The first five probably gained this acceptance gradually during the tenth century, not at the beginning of it. Actually, Ibn Mandah (d. 1004-1005) first described a list that included al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Nasā'ī only, as did Ibn al-Sakan (d. 964), suggesting a date of about 950 for agreement on these four. Al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066) added to the four al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Khuzaymah. Ibn Mājah was not added until perhaps around 1200, although Muhammad ibn Tāhir al-Maqdisī (d. 1113) includes him. In the west, Mālikīs continued to substitute *al-Muwatta'* of Mālik for Ibn Mājah for centuries, and even today, some Salafīs do so.<sup>8</sup> According to Jonathan Brown, the real canonicity of even the two *sahīhs*, *al-Bukhārī* and *Muslim* did not crystallize until the eleventh century.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Jonathan Brown, *Hadīth: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publishing, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Hadīth Canon*. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007).

The references to Jesus in the Hadīth can mainly be divided into five groups: birth and infancy stories; miracles and piety; dialogue between God and Jesus or between Jesus and his community; divine pronouncement on his humanity and prophethood; and Messianic role.

Through studying the Qur’ān, we see numerous names and titles attributed to Jesus, such as *the Son of Mary*, *al-Masīh* (the Messiah), *‘Īsā*, *Abdullah* (the Servant of God), *the Messenger of God*, *Kalimatullah* (the Word from God), and *Ruhullah* (the Spirit from God). Apart from these names, he is the *ayah* (sign or pointer) and an example for the people (Qur’ān 43:57, 59). In another place he is likened to Adam (Qur’ān 3:52-59). The Qur’ān depicts Jesus also as *rahmah* (mercy) from God (Qur’ān 19:21). Jesus is described as one who is *min al-muqarrabīn* (among the nearest to God) and as *min al-salihīn* (of the upright) and as *wajīh* (eminent) (Qur’ān 3:40-46). The Hadīth tradition further supports and clarifies this description of Jesus and that is why the Hadīth is needed to understand Jesus more fully.

A brief summary of Jesus’ roles include his being born of a virgin (Mary), being a *rasul* (messenger), being called the Messiah, being presently in one of the seven heavenly worlds, descent at the right time in God’s plan to destroy the *Dajjāl* (the Antichrist), and being present during a period of prosperity and peace, known as the Messianic age, before dying prior to the *qiyāmah* (the end of the world). According to the Qur’ān and the Hadīth, Jesus has not died *yet*. He, like Adam, is fully human but does not have a human father. God simply said “*Kun*” (Be) and the virgin named Maryam (Mary) conceived and bore him. As a newborn baby, he spoke clearly about his message. His prophethood

included healings, raising persons from the dead, caring for his mother, being clairvoyant and testifying for the One-Only God. His *hawāriyyūn*-disciples (sing. *hawārī*) proclaimed proudly that they were Muslims (those submitted to God). Opposed by Jews, Jesus only seemed to have been crucified. His opponents' claim that they killed him was based on an error either through someone else being executed or God's veiling the people's perceptions as to what actually occurred. In any event, according to Islam, Jesus was taken up by God and is in a heavenly place or dimension.

The image of Jesus in the Hadīth tradition will definitely interest those who seek to understand how Jesus is perceived by Islamic tradition which greatly reveres him and at the same time rejects his divinity. Therefore, the Jesus portrayed here is in some ways similar to the Jesus in the canonical Gospels and perhaps the Revelation to John and especially several Apocryphal Gospels. He has faithful disciples who believe in him. He is humble and pious toward his mother. "The legacy of Jesus is gentleness, compassion, humility."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there are things about Jesus which make his Islamic image so completely different from the Jesus of the Gospels. For instance, it is "the Ascension rather than the Crucifixion [or Resurrection] which marks the high point of his life" in the Hadīth and in the Muslim tradition as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the canonical Gospels, the Qur'ān and the Hadīth "tilt backward to his miraculous birth rather than forward to his Passion." There are no Sermon on the Mount, no parables, and no teaching on the Judaic

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<sup>10</sup> Khalidi, p. 12-16

<sup>11</sup> Khalidi, Ibid.

law. Like his birth, Jesus “death” is miraculous. He is lifted up to God, where he remains alive and waiting to fulfill his appointed role at the end of time.<sup>12</sup>

Both traditional Christianity and Islam look forward to Jesus-‘Īsā’s return and participation in the End Times. Although the two religions differ in their estimate of how Jesus will appear and what he is due to accomplish when he returns, they both teach that “he will return from the heavenly places *heralding the climax of human history*.”<sup>13</sup> How seriously present-day Christians retain eschatological expectations is debatable. Muslims have been perhaps more consistent in keeping belief in the Resurrection, Day of Judgment and life in the Hereafter as essential teachings.

End Time savior-rescuer figures are necessary in both Islamic and Christian traditions. Although Christians and Muslims consider Jesus-‘Īsā to be the Messiah-Christ, they have obviously similar and different functions and expectations for him. Nevertheless, both religions believe that Jesus-‘Īsā will be involved in evil’s defeat and the establishment of realms of justice, prosperity, and peace. Islam and Christianity have also traditions about false or counter-messiahs or antichrists. Islam has the *al-Masīh al-Dajjāl*, the false or imposter messiah, often translated as the Antichrist.

Another figure relevant to our study is the Mahdī. The term means both the Guide and the Guided One. The basic belief is that a man from the Prophet Muhammad’s family who will bear his name (Ahmad or Muhammad) will be raised up by God in a time of

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<sup>12</sup> Khalidi, Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> John Gilchrist, “Nuzul-i Isa: The Second Coming of Jesus Christ,” *Christianity and Islam Series* in Answering Islam. [http://www.answering-islam.org/Gilchrist/2nd\\_coming.html](http://www.answering-islam.org/Gilchrist/2nd_coming.html). Updated in 2013. Accessed on February 02, 2013.

great turbulence (*fitnah*). He will destroy evil or join with Jesus-‘Īsā in defeating evil. Then, a prosperous age will open. Even though I will discuss the Mahdī, as a figure in the End Times, I will not deal with the Shi‘a’s views of the imamate, as that would be beyond the scope of my current research.

Muslim thinkers who hold to traditional understandings of the Qur’ān’s inspiration and authority plus the authority of the sahih/authentic Hadīth reports accept the End Time and Hereafter positions revealed in the Qur’ān and expressed in the Hadīth, while not neglecting allegorical or spiritual interpretations along with the literal texts.<sup>14</sup> Some Muslim scholars believe the coming of Jesus as a person would be contrary to the divine wisdom of God. They rather consider that it will take place only as an arrival of a *shakhs ma‘nawī* (collective spiritual personality), that is, a concept of an individual person who represents in himself a community of individuals. I will consider that position in the course of the dissertation.

The study is in six sections: an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion.

*The Introduction* presents the subject’s significance, the major and minor theses, and a description of the sources and methodology employed. Matters such as terminology and transliterations are addressed briefly.

*Chapter One* centers on Sunnī Muslim understandings of the authority, authenticity, functions, roles and compilation of Hadīth collections.

*Chapter Two* introduces Jesus-‘Īsā according to general Islamic understandings with relevant references to the Qur’ān as well as in the pertinent Hadīth statements. The

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<sup>14</sup> Wagner, *Beginnings and Ends*, p. 20-30

areas mentioned are his names, titles, birth, family, physical appearance, and the environment in which he lived.

*Chapter Three* provides a more detailed presentation of Jesus, highlighting the major similarities and distinctions between Christian and Muslim beliefs about him. The distinctions concern issues such as Jesus' prophethood, his humanity/divinity, and the nature of his death/departure. In the course of the chapter, Jesus' miracles, virtues, and piety are discussed.

*Chapter Four* centers on the return of Jesus. He is an essential figure in the broadly accepted Islamic scenario relating to the end of the world. That scenario is framed by Qur'ānic revelations, but its events and descriptions are largely drawn from the Hadīth. Prophet Muhammad speaks about and testifies to Jesus' roles in the prelude to the Day of Judgment-Resurrection. Following a description of the scenario, the dissertation considers positively the reliability and authenticity of the hadīth statements as sayings from Muhammad. Even though the wording in these Hadīths seems to express a physical return and a set of actions Jesus will perform, they could possibly be symbolic expressions which make implications about some future events and relationships for the present.

The dissertation concludes with a general summary that leads to suggestions for inter-religious discussions and actions as well as for future research.

Some final introductory notes may be helpful. I use the academic designations BCE (Before the Common Era) in place of BC (Before Christ) and CE (Common Era) instead of AD (Anno Domini, Year of the Lord). Using a lunar calendar of 354 days,

Muslims calculate their era as beginning with the year of Prophet Muhammad's emigration from Makkah to Madinah (622 CE). That movement is termed the Hijrah (also spelled Hegirah). The Muslim abbreviation AH stands for Anno Hijrah, that is After the Hijrah. Generally, I use the solar calendar. Where necessary, I give the combined dates as AH/CE.

The Arabic word *Allah* is the regular word used for the One-Only God, the Creator of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In a more developed sense, “*Allah*” is the fullest expression of the totality of what humans may express as God's essence and identity known through many Names and Attributes as well as Divine actions – all without compromising the absolute One-Only Godness of God. In that sense, “*Allah*” is God's personal Name.<sup>15</sup> While some may argue to the contrary, I assume that Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Throughout the dissertation I use both *Allah* and God for the Supreme Deity. The initial letters of pronouns and other terms referring to God are in upper case for the sake of clarity. Some translations of Hadith materials render *rasul* as “apostle.” I have altered those quotations by replacing “apostle” with the less Christian-charged term “messenger.”

English quotations of the Qur'ān are from Ali Ünal's “The Qur'ān with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English.” Note that Ünal supplied words in parentheses in the Qur'ānic quotations for the purpose of clarifying and sometimes extending the sense of the Arabic. Muslims traditionally honor prophets and messengers when mentioning their names by adding *'alayhi al-salam* (peace be upon him) abbreviated PBUH. When

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<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Fethullah Gülen, *Questions and Answers About Islam*, 2 volumes, (Clifton, NJ: Tughra Books, 2008 and 2009), vol. 1, page 23.

speaking of God, they follow with the Arabic “Subhanahu Wa Ta’ala” for “Glory be to Him, the Exalted,” abbreviated as SWT. I acknowledge those uses here and ask readers assume their presence throughout the dissertation.

Traditions about the Prophet Muhammad have been gathered in several collections. When referring to these collections as a whole or one in particular I use the word Hadīth. When referring to a narration or statement within a Hadīth corpus, I use the singular hadīth. In the entire dissertation, I use both the original Arabic sources and translation of the Hadīth corpuses. I follow preferred Muslim transliterations: Muslim (not Moslem), Muhammad (not Mohammad), Qur’ān (not Koran), and Makkah (not Mecca).

It is customary for a Muslim to begin any worthwhile effort with the *Basmalah*, the phrase which regularly appears at the beginning of every Qur’ānic *surah* (chapter) and in which God’s attributes are recorded as the All-Merciful and the All-Compassionate.

Now, we begin:

*Bismillāhirrahmānirrahīm,*

In the Name of God, the All-Merciful and the All-Compassionate

(O Muslims! You) declare: “We have believed in God (without associating any partners with Him), and that which has been sent down to us, and that which was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Prophets who were raised in the tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and that which was given to all other Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them (in believing), and we are Muslims (submitted to Him wholly and exclusively).” (*al-Baqara* 2:136)

# CHAPTER 1

## THE HADĪTH TRADITION

“The sunnah and ahadīth are not to be taken as the wise sayings of sages and philosophers or the verdicts of rulers and leaders. One should believe with full conviction that the words and actions of the Prophet represent the will of Allah, and thus one has to follow and obey them in each and every circumstance of life.”<sup>16</sup>

Hadīth and Sunnah are essential factors understandings of Islam. They are also the key sources for their descriptions of ‘Īsā and his return. The chapter is structured in four major parts. It opens with a definition of the terms “Sunnah” and “Hadīth,” citing the similarities and differences between them. The second portion explains the factors behind the continual significance of the Hadīth for Muslims. The first two portions set the groundwork for the third area: the way in which the Hadīth became a tradition, and offers details about the major Hadīth compilations. The closing section describes the development of what Muslims term *‘Ilm al-Hadīth* (the Science of Hadīth).

### SUNNAH AND HADĪTH

For Muslims, the Qur’ān is the very word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by God through the archangel Gabriel over the course of twenty-three years. It is most authoritative and first legislative source for understanding Islam. Muslim scholars hold that the Qur’ān is its best interpreter, so that some obscure (*mutashābih*) passages often can be understood through clearer verses. The next best interpreter is the Prophet Muhammad himself. His sayings, actions and style of life provide a living,

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<sup>16</sup> Mazhar U. Kazi, *A Treasury of Ahadīth*, (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: Abūl-Qasim Publishing House, 1992), p. 2.

human interpretation of the principles proclaimed in the Qur'ān. The general term is *Hadīth* and/or *Sunnah*, that is, the custom, tradition, and usage of the Prophet. Without Muhammad, the Messenger of Islam it is merely impossible for anyone to understand the Qur'ān; its explanations and meanings, and it is also impossible to learn the detailed rulings of each and every obligation in Islam. The Qur'ān holds up Muhammad as the ideal human and model for all humanity, “Assuredly you have in God’s Messenger an excellent example to follow, for whoever looks forward to God and the Last Day, and remembers and mentions God much.” (Surah 33:21, Al-Azhab).<sup>17</sup> For Muslims, Islam is a universal religion which encompasses human life in its totality, and the Prophet set a perfect example to follow in all aspects of life. He set this example as a perfect spiritual guide, a model of morality, an educator, a president, a commander, a diplomat, and a husband, father, friend, neighbor, and as a God-inspired human being.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, his words and deeds are valued as valid interpretations of the Qur'ān and he is the living exemplar of what a Muslim is to be and do.

What is the Sunnah? As stated in the following hadīth, *Sunnah* literally means “a conduct and a good or evil path to be followed or an established practice or course of conduct.”

Those who establish a good path in Islam receive the reward of those who follow it, without any decrease in their reward. Those who establish an evil path in Islam are burdened with the sins of those who follow it, without any decrease in their burden.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cyril Glassé, *The New Concise Encyclopedia Of Islam*. Revised Edition, (New York: Altamira Press, 2001), p. 301.

<sup>18</sup> Ali Ünal (trans), *The Qur'ān with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, (New Jersey: The Light, 2006), p. 865.

<sup>19</sup> Muslim, “*Zakat*,” no 69; Ibn Mājah, “*Muqaddimah*,” no 203.

Fethullah Gulen writes that the term Sunnah has several terminological connotations according to *muhaddithūn* (traditionists, scholars of Hadīth), *usūliyyūn* (methodologists), and *fuqahā* (jurists). First, *muhaddithūn* view it as including everything connected to the religious commandments reported from the Prophet and categorized, according to the Hanafi law school (madhhab), as obligations, necessities, practices particular to or encouraged by the Prophet as recommended and desirable. Second, methodologists consider it to be every word, deed, and approval of the Prophet as related by his companions. Third, since *fiqh*/Islamic Jurisprudence does not concern itself with the Prophet's personal affairs, Muslim jurists approach Sunnah as the opposite of bid'ah, innovation of new religious thought and consider it a synonym for hadīth. They use it for the Prophet's words, deeds, and approvals, all of which provide a basis for legislation and categorizing people's actions. In other words, for Hadīth scholars, Sunnah is all that is narrated from the Prophet, his acts, his sayings and whatever he has tacitly approved, plus all the reports which describe his physical attributes and character.<sup>20</sup>

How about the Hadīth? The term *hadīth* (pl. *ahadīth*) derives from the Arabic root *h-d-th* (ح-د-ث) meaning to inform, to report, or to speak of. It means news or tradition regarded as narrative and record. When applied to the Prophet Muhammad, it refers to his deeds and sayings.<sup>21</sup> It is the record of the traditions or sayings of the Prophet,

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<sup>20</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad* (New Jersey: The Light, 2006), p. 315.

<sup>21</sup> There are two major types of hadīth sayings. Some are sayings in which the Prophet quoted God as speaking through the angel Gabriel. These are termed "Hadīth Qudsī," that is Holy Hadīth. In this variety of Hadīth, the Prophet narrates a concept directly from God. Hadīth Qudsī differs from the other varieties of Hadīth in form only. The Prophet himself has not distinguished Hadīth Qudsī from other ahadīth: it was in fact introduced as a separate category by the ulamā of Hadīth at around the fifth century

revered and received as a major source of Islamic law and moral guidance.<sup>22</sup> Although the Hadīth literature means the literature which consists of the narrations of the life of the Prophet and the things approved by him, the term was used sometimes in much broader sense to cover the narrations about *ashāb* (the companions of the Prophet and *tabiūn* ( the successors to the companions) as well.<sup>23</sup> Gulen states that another literal meaning of *h-d-th* is something that takes place within time. That is why Muslim scholars point out that *Hadīth* is that which is not divine, eternal, or without beginning in time. “This fine line separates Hadīth from the Qur’ān, as the latter is divine, and eternal, and without beginning in time”.<sup>24</sup> The Prophet himself distinguished his words from the Qur’ān: “It is two things only, nothing else: the Word and guidance. The best word is the Word of God, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad.”<sup>25</sup>

In M. M. Azami’s *Studies in Hadīth Methodology and Literature*, the following precise definition of a hadīth is given,

According to Muhaddithiin [scholars of hadīth] it stands for ‘what was transmitted on the authority of the Prophet, his deeds, sayings, tacit approval, or description of his sifaat (features) meaning his physical appearance. However, physical appearance of the Prophet is not included in the definition used by the jurists.’

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hijrah. Hadīth in all of its varieties consists of divine inspiration – *not wahy*- which is communicated in the words of the Prophet. No Hadīth may be ranked on equal footing with the Qur’ān. See Sahbanul Hind and Ahmad Said, *Hadis Qudsī (Commands Of Allah)*, translated by Mohammad Salman, (New Delhi: Arshad Said, Dini Book Depot, 1988), pages iii-iv. The other types are Muhammad’s sayings and actions. See also Muhammad Hashim Kamalī, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, (Islamic Text Society, 2005), p 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Hadīth” accessed November 02, 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/251132/Hadith>

<sup>23</sup> M. M. Azami, *Studies in Hadīth Methodology and Literature*, (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1992), p. 5-13.

<sup>24</sup> Gulen, p. 316.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Mājah, “Muqaddimah,” no 7.

Thus hadīth literature means the literature which consists of the narrations of the life of the Prophet and the things approved by him. However, the term was used sometimes in much broader sense to cover the narrations about the [c]ompanions [of the Prophet] and [s]uccessors [to the companions] as well.<sup>26</sup>

Even though the Sunnah and Hadīth are similar, they are not exactly the same. Muslim scholars (*ulamā*) have used Sunnah and Hadīth almost interchangeably. Hadīth is a narration about the life of the Prophet or what he approved as opposed to his life itself, which is Sunnah. Hadīth is a narration of the conduct of the Prophet whereas Sunnah is the example or the law that is deduced from it. While Hadīth is the biographical ground of Islamic law, Sunnah is the system of obligation derived from it. Hadīth in this sense is the vehicle or the carrier of Sunnah.<sup>27</sup>

Hadīth is generally used to refer to the entire body of Prophetic tradition. Referring to a single piece of tradition, a hadīth has a particular pattern that cites the chain of narrators traced back to those who were with the Prophet when he said or did what is reported and confirm the authenticity of the statement or action.<sup>28</sup> Each hadīth consists of two parts: the tradition itself, or *matn* (text) and the *isnad* (chain of transmitters). The *isnad*, also known as *sanad*, indicates the human transmitters through whom the tradition was relayed.<sup>29</sup> For example,

Yahya related to me from Malik from Nafi from Abdullah ibn Umar that the Messenger of Allah said; [isnad]

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<sup>26</sup> Azami, p.11

<sup>27</sup> Suhaib Hasan, *An Introduction to the Sunnah: Understanding Islam Series no.5*, (al-Qur’ān Society, 1990), p. 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> In our study, “Hadīth” will be used for the entire body of Muslim tradition and “hadīth” will be used for a single report or statement.

<sup>29</sup> G.H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith*, Boston: Brill, 2007), p. xvii- xxviii

I dreamt at night that I was at the Kaba, and I saw a dark man like the most handsome of dark men you have ever seen. He had hair reaching to between his ears and his shoulders like the most excellent of such hair that you have seen. He had combed his hair, and water was dripping from it. He was leaning on two men or on the shoulders of two men doing tawaf around Kaba. I asked, ‘Who is this?’ It was said, ‘al-Masih ibn Maryam.’[matn]<sup>30</sup>

Another hadīth reads:

It is narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet Muhammad said: “When any human being is born. Satan touches him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except Jesus, the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch but failed, for he touched the placenta-cover instead.”<sup>31</sup>

A *matn* may seem to be logical and reasonable but it needs an authentic isnad with reliable narrators to be acceptable; Abdullah Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 789) says, “The isnad is part of the religion: had it not been for the isnad, whoever wished to would have said whatever he liked.”<sup>32</sup> Imam Malik says, “The first one to use the isnad was Ibn Shihab al-Zuhrī (d. 742).”<sup>33</sup>

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HADĪTH TRADITION

The importance of the Hadīth tradition is increased for Muslims by the fact that the Prophet Muhammad not only taught, but took the opportunity of putting his teachings and ideas into practice in all essential features of life. In the words of Muhammad Hamidullah, “[h]e founded a state, which he administered as the supreme head,

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<sup>30</sup> See *Muwatta’*, Book 49, Section: Description of the Prophet, Number 49.2.2

<sup>31</sup> See Muslim, Book I, Chapter 13, item 55, page 27.

<sup>32</sup> Related by Imam Muslim in the introduction to his *Sahih*. See *Sahih Muslim*, M.F. Abd Al-Baqī (tahqīq), (Cairo: 1955), vol. 1, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn Abū Hatim al-Razī, *Al-Jarh wa al-Ta’dīl*, (Hyderabad: 1373), vol. 1, p. 20.

maintaining internal peace and order, heading armies for external defense, judging and deciding the litigations of his subjects, and legislating in all walks of life. He married and left a model of family life. His practice was not mere private conduct, but a detailed interpretation and application of his teachings”<sup>34</sup>.

Gülen says that the Qur’ān commands absolute obedience to the Prophet, for he has been sent to guide people to truth in every aspect of his life. Muslims’ loyalty is, of course, to God, Who has sent His chosen messenger and told us to obey him, and not to the messenger personally: “We have not sent a Messenger save to be obeyed by God’s leave” (Surah 4:64), and: “O you who believe! Obey God and His Messenger, and do not turn away from him” (Surah 8:20). Gulen also underlines that obedience to God means unconditional obedience to what has been revealed and declared in the Qur’ān. Obedience to the Prophet means following his way of life by obeying what is commanded and prohibited in the Qur’ān and by the Prophet.<sup>35</sup>

As stated in Surah 8:20, Muslims should not turn away from the Messenger in any way. Therefore, “disobeying, belittling, or criticizing the Prophetic tradition are considered heresy or even apostasy.” Many other verses emphasize the necessity of following the Sunnah, such as, “O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority from among you” (Surah 4:59). This passage stresses obedience to God and His Prophet. According to Gülen, the repetition of the word *obey* (*amr*) in the

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<sup>34</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah, *Introduction to Islam*, (Paris: Centre Culturel Islamique, 1969), p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> Gülen, p. 318.

imperative mood indicates that the Messenger is authorized to command or forbid, and that Muslims have to do what he says.<sup>36</sup>

The Sunnah clarifies the ambiguities (*mughlaq*) in the Qur'ān, fills in the details about those subjects that the Qur'ān mentions only briefly, specifies what is unconditional (*mutlaq*), enables generalizations from what is specifically stated (*khāss*), and particularizations from what is generally stated (*'āmm*). For example, how to perform the *salat* prayer, fast, give alms, and make pilgrimage was established and expounded in the Hadīth tradition. “So were such principles or legislation that no one can inherit from the Prophet, killers cannot inherit from their victims, the meat of domestic donkeys and wild animals cannot be eaten, and men cannot marry a wife’s female cousins if she is still living”<sup>37</sup>. In regard with our study, as we will see in the following chapters, the Qur'ān mentions the Messiah, yet it does not speak of his functions. The Hadīth tradition tells us where and when the Messiah will first appear and what he will perform. Indeed, the Prophetic Sunnah is relevant to all aspects of Islam, and Muslims must design their lives according to it. For this reason, it has been studied and transmitted to each new generation with almost the same care as the Qur'ān.

Gülen states that the Prophet ordered his companions to show absolute obedience to his Sunnah. He spoke distinctly, so they could understand and memorize his words, and encouraged them to convey his sayings to future generations. Sometimes he even

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<sup>36</sup> Gülen, p. 318

<sup>37</sup> Gülen, p. 314.

urged them to write his words down, for “Whatever I say is true”<sup>38</sup>. As Gulen puts it, his companions were fully attentive to what his words and deeds and they considered his every word and deed as a valuable trust to which they must adhere and follow as closely as possible.<sup>39</sup>

Many non-Muslims, including those who study the religion of Islam and many Muslims do not fully understand the fundamental importance of the hadīth as a basis for the religion. According to Muslims, the Hadīth is *almost* equal in importance to the Qur’ān. Dr. Mazhar U. Kazi, in the introduction to his *A Treasury of Ahadīth* states that “all the sayings, sermons, and utterances of the Prophet were divinely inspired. In Arabic these are known as ahadīth (singular: hadīth)”<sup>40</sup>. Dr. Kazi goes on to say that “all of the actions and deeds of the Prophet were also divinely inspired”<sup>41</sup>. Dr. Kazi summarizes his view on the Hadīth tradition with clarity:

The sunnah and ahadīth are not to be taken as the wise sayings of sages and philosophers or the verdicts of rulers and leaders. One should believe with full conviction that the words and actions of the Prophet represent the will of Allah, and thus one has to follow and obey them in each and every circumstance of life.<sup>42</sup>

John L. Esposito, in his work, *Islam - The Straight Path* states that,

Qur’ānic principles and values were concretized and interpreted by the second and complementary source of law, the Sunna[h] of the Prophet, the normative model behavior of Muhammad. The importance of the Sunna[h]

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<sup>38</sup> Muslim, “Prophets,” no 54.

<sup>39</sup> Gulen, p. 314.

<sup>40</sup> Kazi, *A Treasury of Ahadīth*, p. 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> Kazi, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Kazi, p. 2.

is rooted in such Qur'ānic injunctions as “obey God and obey the Messenger... If you should quarrel over anything refer it to God and the Messenger” (4:59) and “In Gods messenger you have a fine model for anyone whose hope is in God and the Last Day” (33:21). Belief that Muhammad was inspired by God to act wisely, in accordance with God’s will, led to the acceptance of his example, or Sunna[h], as supplement to the Quran, and thus, a material or textual source of the law.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, there are some complications involved in the use of the Hadīth as an authoritative source. Difficulties seem to arise when the transmission and preservation of the Hadīth are considered. As John L. Esposito states, “by the ninth century, the number of traditions had mushroomed into the hundreds of thousands. They included pious fabrications by those who believed that their practices were in conformity with Islam and forgeries by factions involved in political and theological disputes”<sup>44</sup>. However, according to Dr. Kazi, Islamic scholars have answered these problems as,

Each hadīth was scrutinized and tested for its authenticity and recorded only if it proved to be reliable... These scholars [Ibn Jurayj, Imam Malik, Sufyan al-Thawrī, Hammad bin Salamah, ‘Abdullah bin Mubarak, Imam al-Awza’i] made significant contributions to ‘Ilm al-[H]adith and laid down solid foundations for the evaluation of ahadīth. Consequently, a lot of inauthentic ahadīth that had crept into the masses were discarded, and at the same time, reliable ahadīth were widely disseminated.<sup>45</sup>

According to Dr. Kazi, especially the works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim are considered to be reliable and are termed correct.<sup>46</sup> Dr. Kazi states that “all that was humanly possible for ensuring the authenticity of the ahadīth was completed by the third century Hijrah... no other religion, nation, party or even small group of people can

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<sup>43</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islam - The Straight Path* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 80.

<sup>44</sup> Esposito, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> Kazi, p. 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> Kazi, p. 11.

parallel what the early Muslims did to ensure the authenticity of ahadīth and the sunna[h]”<sup>47</sup>. The concern of Dr. Kazi to ensure that Muslims believe the hadīth are authentic as the divinely inspired words and actions of Muhammad, is very clear.

Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), one of the International Muslim scholars who have paid attention to reform the Islamic thought in the Muslim world, had specially concerned on the methodology of Islamic thought reform. In his book *Islamic Methodology in History*, Rahman’s attempts are confined to “a true understanding of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, in other words, a “recourse to the Qur’ān and the Sunnah in order to get from there an understanding of and a guidance for solving our new problems”<sup>48</sup>. This point should not be ignored by contemporary Muslims trying to overcome their social, political, legal, and moral problems. Rahman goes on to point out that these problems “must be answered from the depths of the Islamic conscience, not from mimicry of the past. If the right and successful answer emerges now from the Islamic conscience, therein shall live the Sunnah of the Prophet”<sup>49</sup>.

## HADĪTH COMPILATION

During the life of the Prophet Muhammad there was no regular compilation of the Hadīth tradition, for they were not *generally* recorded in writing. They were transmitted orally. It is narrated in *Sahih* of Imam Muslim that the Prophet Muhammad said: “Do not write on my authority and whoever wrote anything from me other than the Qur’ān must

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<sup>47</sup> Kazi, 12-14. The author gives the criteria used in evaluation of authenticity of hadīth.

<sup>48</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*, (Karachi: Central Institute of Islamic Research, 1965), p. 143.

<sup>49</sup> Rahman, p. 190.

erase it”<sup>50</sup> He did not want his companions to confuse the Qur’ānic verses with his own words. Gulen points out that the Qur’ān was still being revealed and recorded on fragments of leather or wood; it would assume its final book form at a later date. This was a reasonable precaution, to Gulen, for the Prophet wanted to be sure that later generations would not mistake his words for those of God.<sup>51</sup>

Another reason for this prohibition could be that the Prophet also had to address, on various occasions, people with different levels of understanding. For instances, Gulen says, when a new Muslim asked what the best deed was, he answered that it was belief and performing the salat prayer. However, during a time when jihad had priority, he said it was jihad. Further, since Islam is for all time and all people, he frequently resorted to allegories, parables, metaphors, or other figurative speeches which had great significance, as we will come across in the hadīths regarding the second coming of Jesus.<sup>52</sup>

Use of the Hadīth tradition as a source for the life of the Prophet has been widely criticized in Western scholarship. Ignaz Goldziher is among the more famous Western scholars who doubted the historicity of Hadīth and most of his views were supported by almost all other Orientalists, such as Juynboll, Schacht, and Gibb. Goldziher’s thesis is that “the majority of hadīths does not date from the time of the Prophet but rather were falsely ascribed to him to propagate rival ideologies over the course of the first two centuries of the hijrah”<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> Muslim, “*Zuhd*,” no 72; Darimī, “*Muqaddima*,” no 42.

<sup>51</sup> Gulen, *the Messenger of God*, p. 361-2.

<sup>52</sup> Gulen, *Ibid*.

Kamali, on the other hand, asserts that, regardless of seemingly conflicting evidence, the recording of the Prophet's sayings began in his own lifetime. To prove this, he quotes the various instances of the *sahifah* genre of literature that appears to have existed during the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the following companion period. Thus, quoting Subhi al-Salih<sup>54</sup>, Kamali affirms that the written recording of Hadīth began at a very early stage, not at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> / 8<sup>th</sup> century as many Western scholars have claimed.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, all Muslim authorities agree that a large number of fabricated, inauthentic traditions were circulated as hadīths for various ideological purposes. Kamali tends towards the idea that hadith forgery existed for two main reasons: “the influx of foreigners into the nascent Islamic state and the development of political and theological divisions”<sup>56</sup>. Thus, Kamali suggests that the Hadīth forgery began in the year 40/660, presumably with the death of the fourth caliph Ali and the consequent tribulations (*fitnah*) that followed.

Although the Hadīth were not usually written during the Prophet's lifetime, some were. Some companions had prepared written collections of traditions for their own personal use. These were also dictated to their pupils. For instance, Abdullah b. 'Amr b. al-'Ās (d. 684) used to write down all the sayings that he heard from the Prophet. This

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<sup>53</sup> Ignaz Goldziher. *Muslim Studies*. Edited by S. M. Stern. Translated by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern. Vol. II, (New York: State University of New York Press, Aldine Publishing Co., 1973), p. 5-20.

<sup>54</sup> Subhi al-Salih, *'Ulum Al-Hadīth Wa-Mustalahuhu* (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li'l-Malayin, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *A Textbook of Hadīth Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Hadīth*, (Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 2005), p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> Kamali, chapter 7.

compilation of Abdullah was called *al-Sahifah al-Sādiqah* and later incorporated into the larger collection of *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, those companions who had executive offices arranged for written copies of narrations, so that they might carry out their duties in the straight path of Islam. For example, while appointing ‘Amr b. Hazm as the governor of Yemen, the Prophet Muhammad himself gave him a letter containing the times of prayer, methods of prayer, details of *wudu*’ (ablution), zakat (almsgiving) and so on.<sup>58</sup>

After the Prophet Muhammad, interest in Hadīth tradition increased significantly on two reasons. “Firstly, the companions who knew the hadīths at first hand were gradually passing away. Their number continued to [reduce] day by day. Secondly, the number of [new Muslims] was growing and they showed great eagerness to learn as much about the traditions as possible”<sup>59</sup>.

The Hadīth compilation largely took place during the age of Tabiūn, the follower of the companions of the Prophet. ‘Umar b. Abd al-Aziz, the Umayyad caliph who reigned during the years 717-720, initiated and partially carried out the task of compilation. Being worried about the loss of hadith narrations, the caliph took steps towards their collection. Ibn Shihab Zuhri and Abū Bakr Ibn Hazm were asked by ‘Umar b. Abd al-Aziz to prepare a collection of all available traditions. ‘Umar b. Abd al-Aziz wrote to Abū Bakr Ibn Hazm: “Whatever sayings of the Prophet can be found, write them

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<sup>57</sup> Gulen, *Ibid*, p. 314. See, also, CPS: International Center for Peace and Spirituality. <http://www.cpsglobal.org/content/how-were-hadith-compiled>. Accessed January 10, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*.

down, for I fear the loss of knowledge and disappearance of learned men, and do not accept anything but the Hadīth of the Prophet, and people should make knowledge public”<sup>60</sup>. ‘Umar b. Abd al-Aziz even asked the traditionists, the scholars of Hadīth living in the various parts of the Umayyad caliphate to collect in the form of books as many ahadīth as were available. As Imam Bukhārī and Abū Nuaym Al-‘Isbahānī narrate it in their works, this command from ‘Umar b. Abd al-Aziz is the first official order to collect the Hadīth.<sup>61</sup>

After Ibn Shihab Al-Zuhrī, it seems that scholars adopted an organizational pattern that collected the sayings and reports according to subjects in a single corpus. While it is usually felt that Imam Malik began that practice, but it is most likely that a number of scholars in different locations during the same time period used the same practice.

This is the era in which *the Kutub Sittah*, six authentic collections of traditions were compiled. The authors’ names and book titles are as follows:

1. Bukhārī: The most revered of all hadīth compilers was Muhammad b. Ismail al-Bukhārī (810-870), whose *al-Jāmi’ al-Sahih* has a unique place in the respect and esteem of Muslims as a work of great historical and deep piety.<sup>62</sup> Born in Bukhara, Al-Bukhārī visited many centers of knowledge, where he collected hadīths of the Prophet, until he had compiled more than 600,000 narrations. From this huge number of hadīths he

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<sup>60</sup> Gulen, *Ibid*, p. 396.

<sup>61</sup> Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance, and Authorship of Early Hadīth*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 23-66.

<sup>62</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Hadīth” accessed November 02, 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/251132/Hadith>

compiled his book *al-Sahih*. Although it does not contain all the *sahih*/authentic hadīths, Imam Bukhārī followed a specific method in his research as to their authenticity and in distinguishing the *sahih* from the weak, and in finding out about the narrators, until he recorded in his book the most *sahih* reports.<sup>63</sup>

His collection of hadīth is considered second to none. He winnowed the 600,000 hadīths down to 2,762 (7,397 with repetition), arranging the whole into 97 books and 3,450 *bābs* or chapters, repeating the traditions that bore on several themes.<sup>64</sup>

2. Muslim: Muslim b. al-Hajjāj b. Muslim (817-875) was born in Nīsābūr (or Nishapur), Iran. Having finished his studies, Imam Muslim settled down at Nīsābūr where he came into contact with Imam Bukhārī. He was so much impressed by Bukhārī's vast knowledge of Hadīth and his deep insight into it that he kept himself attached to him up to the end of his life and thus became a true pupil of Imam Bukhārī.<sup>65</sup>

Imam Muslim wrote many books and treatises on Hadīth, but the most important of his works is the collection *al-Jāmi' al-Sahih*. Imam Muslim took great efforts in collecting 300,000 narrations, and then after a thorough examination of them retained only 4000, the genuineness of which is fully established. Here we need to underline that *matn* (text) is not the basis on which is calculated the number of hadīths. Hadīth is

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<sup>63</sup> Mustafa Al-Sibā'ee. *The Sunnah and Its Role in Islamic Legislation*. Tr. by Faisal ibn Muhammad Shafeeq. (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House (IIPH), 2008), p.543-45. Also, Sheikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, *Hadīth Compilation*, excerpted, with some modifications, from: <http://islamqa.com/en/>. Accessed on February 16, 2013

<sup>64</sup> See Alfred Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam: An Introduction to the Study of the Hadīth Literature*, (Oxford: Clerandon Press, 1924), p. 9-37. See, also Syed Bashir Ali, *Scholars of Hadīth*, (Skolde, IL: IQRA International Educational Foundation), p. 86-96. Also, Sheikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, *Hadīth Compilation*.

<sup>65</sup> Al--Sibā'ee, p.547-51. Also, Sheikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, *Hadīth Compilation*.

counted on the chain of transmission. Thus when we say that Imam Muslim collected 300,000 ahadīth and included only 4,000 in his compilation, it does not imply that he regarded the rest of the whole lot of the Prophet's sayings as unreliable. What this means is that the words and deeds of the Prophet were transmitted to Imam Muslim through so many chains of transmission out of which he selected 4,000 chains as most sahih.<sup>66</sup>

Muslim also wrote as an introduction to his work the very first treatise on the methodology of hadīth study, a crucially important point. This introduction illustrates also that Muslim's work was not at the beginning of hadīth study, as it is quite sophisticated, even if short.

3. Abū Dāwūd: Even though Abū Dāwūd (817-888) was born in Sijistān, he spent the greater part of his life at Basra and heard hadīth from 300 persons who were his teachers.<sup>67</sup> His most famous of all his works is *Sunan*. It contains 4800 traditions which were taken out from a collection of 500,000 hadīth. He completed this compilation at Baghdad. He presented this compilation to his teacher Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal. *Sunan of Abū Dāwūd* is an important collection of hadīth. Most of the scholars have assigned it to third position among the six authentic books of hadīth.<sup>68</sup>

4. Nasaī: Abū Abd al-Rahman Ahmad bin Shuayb ibn al-Nasaī, (829-915) came from the city of Nasa in Khorasan.<sup>69</sup> He is well known for *Sunan of al-Nasaī*, also known

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<sup>66</sup> Imam Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, trans. by Abdul Hamid Siddiqui, (Los Angeles: Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement, USC). Archived from the original on 4 January 2010. Retrieved 31 March 2012

<sup>67</sup> Al-Sibā'ee, p. 553-4. See, also, Sheikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, *Hadīth Compilation*, excerpted, with some modifications, from: <http://islamqa.com/en/>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

as *Sunan al-Sughrā* (the small Sunan) which is a collection of around 5700 sound hadīths.<sup>70</sup> In the collection, Imam Nasaī mentions one hadīth under different chapter as Imam Bukhārī does. Like Imam Muslim, he writes different chains of a tradition and points out the differences in the wordings. He discusses the weak points of reports and their reasons.<sup>71</sup>

5. Tirmidhī: Having grown up in an environment of learning, Imam Abū ‘Īsā Muhammad b. ‘Īsā Tirmidī (824–892) was driven to dedicate his life totally towards the field of Hadīth. He studied Hadīth under great personalities such as Imam Bukhārī, Imam Muslim and Imam Abū Dāwūd.<sup>72</sup>

Abū Dāwūd and Ahmed b. Hanbal had compiled books consisting of both sound and weak hadīth. Later Imam Bukhārī compiled his Sahih and mostly omitted all weak narrations from it. His main objective was to derive masāil/laws from the relevant hadīth. Later Imam Muslim compiled his book with a primary focus on the different chains of narrators of the same hadīth. Imam Nasaī’s purpose was to mention the discrepancies of the hadīth while Abū Dāwūd prepared a book which became the basis for the jurists. Imam Tirmidhī, on the other hand, had combined the styles of Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and Nasaī by mentioning the discrepancies regarding the narrators and also

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<sup>69</sup> Bashir Ali, p. 142-153.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Sibā’ee, p. 551-2. See, also Sheikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, *Hadīth Compilation*

<sup>71</sup> Sheikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, *Hadīth Compilation*.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Sibā’ee, p. 555-6. See, also, Sheikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, *Hadīth Compilation*,

making his compilation a basis for the jurists.<sup>73</sup> Most importantly, al-Tirmidhī was the first to offer an actual grading of each hadīth.

6- ) Ibn Mājah: Muhammad Bin Yazid al-Rabi‘ al-Qazwinī’s (824-887) *Sunan* began to be included in the *Kutub Sittah* by the end of the fifth century of the hijrah. With respect to soundness and strength, Sunans of al-Darimī and al-Dāraqutnī and other books of Sunan might be superior Ibn Mājah’s Sunan but they did not gain popularity as much as Sunan of Ibn Mājah.<sup>74</sup>

His *Sunan* contains over 4,000 hadīths in 32 books (*kutub*) divided into 1,500 (*bāb*) chapters. Ibn Mājah’s purpose in the work is to record hadīths that are often cited as evidence for various Islamic teachings and legal rulings, and he gives the full chains of transmission that he has for those hadīths.<sup>75</sup>

## THE CLASSIFICATION OF HADĪTH

Later, more narrators and people were involved in each *sanad*, and so the situation demanded strict discipline in the acceptance of hadīth reports; the rules regulating this discipline are known as *Mustalah al-Hadīth* (the Classification of Hadīth).

One of the earliest works to attempt to cover this classification systematically was the work by al-Ramahurmuzī (d. 971). The next major contribution was *Marifah ‘Ulum al-Hadīth* by al-Hakim Naysabūrī (d. 1012), which covered fifty different classifications of Hadīth, but still left some points untouched. Some of the missing parts were completed

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<sup>73</sup> Bashir Ali, p. 118-23.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Sibā‘ee, p. 557. See, also, Sheikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, *Hadīth Compilation*,

<sup>75</sup> Bashir Ali, p.153-8. See, also, Sheikh Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, *Hadīth Compilation*.

by Abū Nuaym al-‘Isbahanī (d. 1038). After that came *Al-Kifayah fi Ilm al-Riwāyah* of al-Khātib al-Baghdadī (d. 1071) and another work on the manner of teaching and studying Hadīth tradition; later scholars were considered to be greatly indebted to al-Baghdadī’s this work. These books speak of a number of classes of hadīth in accordance with their status. Here I give this broad classification presented by Suhaib Hasan without further explanation due to the limited space in this study:<sup>76</sup>

According to the reference to a particular authority, e.g. the Prophet, a *sahabi*-companion, or a *tabii*-successor; such hadīths are called *marfu’* (elevated), *mawqūf* (stopped) and *maqtu’* (severed) respectively.

According to the links in the isnad, i.e. whether the chain of transmitters is interrupted or uninterrupted, e.g. *musnad* (supported), *muttasil* (continuous), *munqati’* (broken), *muallaq* (hanging), *mu’dal* (perplexing) and *mursal* (hurried).

According to the number of transmitters involved in each stage of the isnad, e.g. *mutawatir* (consecutive) and *ahad* (isolated), the latter being divided into *gharib* (scarce, strange), *aziz* (rare, strong), and *mashhur* (famous).

According to the manner in which the hadīth has been reported, such as using the words *an* (on the authority of), *haddathanā* (he narrated to us), *akhbaranā* (he informed us) or *sami’tu* (I heard). In this category falls the discussion about *mudallas* (concealed) and *musalsal* (uniformly-linked) hadīths.

According to the nature of the matn and isnad, e.g. a text containing a vulgar expression, unreasonable remark or obviously-erroneous statement is rejected by the traditionists outright without consideration of the isnad: such a hadīth is known as *munkar* (denounced). If an expression or statement is proved to be an addition by a narrator to the text, it is declared as *mudraj* (interpolated).

According to the reliability and memory of the reporters; the final judgment on a hadīth depends crucially on this factor: verdicts such as *sahih* (sound), *hasan* (good), *da’if* (weak) and *mawdu’* (fabricated, forged) rest mainly upon the nature of the reporters in the isnad.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, the classification of Hadīth is strongly associated with the study of the reporters of hadīth known as *Rijāl al-Hadīth*. It was not enough to simply hear that

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<sup>76</sup> Further information, see Jonathan Brown, *Hadīth: Muhammad’s legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publishing, 2009) and Suhaib Hasan, *An Introduction to the Sunnah: Understanding Islam Series no.5*, (al-Qur’ān Society, 1990).

<sup>77</sup> Hasan, *An Introduction to the Sunnah: Understanding Islam Series*.

the Prophet Muhammad said or did something for the hadīth scholars to include the hadīth in their collection. In *Rijāl al-Hadīth* are some very restricting conditions for a narration to be accepted as authentic, which include;

First, there must be continuity within the chain of narration between the transmitters. This relates to whether each transmitter did indeed meet the person who is the source the transmitter met. To confirm this we find the scholars of hadīth examining factors such as the exact dates of birth and death of each person in the chain.<sup>78</sup>

Second, whether everyone in the chain of transmission is an upright person with sound intellect and strong memory (*adl and zabt*). In analyzing the narrators of a hadīth, authenticating or disapproving remarks are made by renowned experts from amongst the Tabiūn -Successors and those after them. Examples of such remarks, in descending order of authentication, are:

- “Imam (leader), Hafiz (preserver).”
- “Reliable, trustworthy.”
- “Makes mistakes.”
- “Weak.”
- “Abandoned (by the traditionists).”
- “Liar, used to fabricate ahadīth.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Hasan, *An Introduction to the Sunnah: Understanding Islam Series*. Also, Mohammed Ghilan, *The Hadīth: Collection and Importance*. <http://mohamedghilan.com/2012/02/19/the-hadith-collection-and-importance/>. Updated on [February 19, 2012](#). Accessed on January 29, 2013. The scholars of Hadīth wrote multi-volume books about narrators in which they detailed these people’s biographies. The first book of this genre was ‘Ali ibn al-Madinī’s *Kitab al-Ma’rifat al-Sahaba* (The Book of Knowledge about the Companions). Among the most significant are the following: Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s *Al-Isti’ab fī Ma’rifat al-Ashab* (The Comprehensive Book of Knowledge about the Companions), Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalanī’s *Al-‘Isaba fī Tamyīz al-Sahaba* (Finding the Truth in Judging the Companions), Ibn al-Athīr’s *Usd al-Ghābah* (The Lions of the Forest), Ibn Sa’d’s *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra’* (a most comprehensive biographical dictionary of the leading Companions and of the Tabi‘un scholars), and *Tarikh Ibn ‘Asakīr* (History by Ibn ‘Asakir), *Tarikh al-Bukhārī* (History by Bukhārī) and Yahya ibn Ma‘in’s *Al-Tarikh al-Kabīr* (The Great History).

<sup>79</sup> Hasan, *An Introduction to the Sunnah: Understanding Islam Series*. Comments like these are seen as exceptions from the basic Islamic prohibition of backbiting (ghiybah) another believer, even if the

Suhaib Hasan states that reporters who have been unanimously described by statements such as the first two may contribute to a *sahih* (sound) isnad. An isnad containing a reporter who is described by the last two statements is likely to be *da'if jiddan* (very weak) or *mawdu'* (fabricated). Reporters who are the subject of statements such as the middle two above will cause the isnad to be *da'if* (weak), although several of them relating the same hadīth independently will often increase the rank of the hadīth to the level of *hasan* (good).<sup>80</sup>

In conclusion, there are two important areas in the Hadīth tradition that is related to our study: the origins and forgery of Hadīth. Regardless of the debates unfolding over more than a century, the question of origins of Hadīth tradition has yet to be answered unanimously. I think this is not because we do not have enough studies about Hadīth, but perhaps because the question of the origins of a literary corpus as a whole is itself unanswerable. Instead, it would be much better for the scholars to focus on critically researching the origins of particular hadīth reports.

Some Orientalists, in agreement with Muslim scholars, adopted a critical approach to individual hadīths, but on the whole saw Hadīth tradition as originating from the time of the Prophet Muhammad. By contrast, others saw Hadīth as originating in later centuries. As Motzki demonstrates, it is almost impossible to find two Orientalists dealing with this question who agree in their opinions.<sup>81</sup>

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statement is true. Such exceptions are permitted where the general benefit to the Muslim community is at stake, like knowing which hadīths are authentic. See *Riyadh al-Salihīn of Imam al-Nawawī*, chapter on backbiting.

<sup>80</sup> Hasan, *An Introduction to the Sunnah: Understanding Islam Series*.

According to Fazlur Rahman, political and social factors in early Islamic history could not be easily isolated from the outproduct, that is to say the Hadīth tradition. The Hadīth collection partially may be viewed as an interpretation of the early practice of the early Muslim community and a reaction to the theological and political conflicts between various Muslim groups at the time, such as Shi'a, Mu'tazilah, and Khawārij. The Hadīth tradition, in a way, portrays religious, political and social tensions in the second and the third century of the Hijrah in the centers of Muslim learning such as the Baghdad, Hijaz, and Syria.<sup>82</sup>

In addition, as we will see in the following chapters, it is very clear that both the Qur'ānic commentaries and Hadīth tradition could not escaped forgeries especially in regard to the the Jewish narratives, known as *Isrā'iliyyāt*. The prior to Islam when the Bedouin and uneducated class of the Arabian people wanted to learn more about certain subjects, such as the creation, turmoil and *fitnah*, the Messiah, the end of the world, afterlife and so forth, they asked the Jews and Christians who has known of such topics from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. Later when these people embraced Islam they transferred the knowledge they had into their commentaries on the Qur'ānic passages and Hadīth reports.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Harald Motzki (ed.), *Hadīth: Origins and Developments*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p.34-40.

<sup>82</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*, p. 143.

<sup>83</sup> Kamali, Chapter 7, hadith forgery

## CHAPTER 2

# GENERAL MUSLIM VIEW ON JESUS CHRIST FROM HIS BIRTH TO HIS PROPHETHOOD

Chapter Two introduces Jesus (‘Īsā) according to the general Islamic understandings in the Qur’ān and relevant Hadīth statements. The considerations open with his names and titles as well as references to his family and mother (Maryam). The study continues with issues such as his birth and childhood, the question of his siblings, and his physical appearance. The latter subject includes Hadīth traditions about other persons said to resemble Jesus.

Studying the Qur’ān and the Hadīth tradition, we would find that there are many names and titles attributed to Jesus, such as *the Son of Mary*, *al-Masīh (the Messiah)*, *‘Īsā*, *Abdullah (the Servant of God)*, *Rasulullah (the Messenger of God)*, *Kalimatullah (the Word from God)*, and *Ruhullah (the Spirit from God)*. While ‘Īsā, al-Masīh, and the Son of Mary are considered as the names of Jesus, the others are regarded as his attributes. In the Qur’ān, Jesus is given the highest titles; nevertheless, Islam insists that he was simply a man whom God had chosen as a prophet, even if he was a very favored prophet.<sup>84</sup> Even though Christians and Muslims can agree on most names and qualities of Jesus, some terms have historically and theologically divided the two religious traditions and need special attention. I believe that through a closer examination of these debatable terms that many misunderstandings can be removed and, often, bridges of dialogue and respect can be built. The differences between the two religions will remain, such as the

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<sup>84</sup> Several Christian scholars, especially, in the past have sought to use the Qur’ānic passages to prove Jesus’ superiority and discredit the Prophet Muhammad. See E. M. Wherry, “Christ Superior to Mohammed: Fourteen Reasons from the Koran,” in *the Moslem World*, Vol. 8, 1918. In response, Bevan Jones wrote: “How not to use the Koran,” in the *The Moslem World*, Vol. 30, July 1940.

Christian position that Jesus is a direct manifestation of God, yet those differences will be understood at deeper levels by Muslims and Christians as a result of dialogue.

## **JESUS' NAMES**

### **1-) 'Īsā**

“‘Īsā” is the proper name for Jesus in Islam. The Qur’ān, considered by Muslims to be God’s final and authoritative revelation to mankind, mentions the name ‘Īsā twenty-five times.<sup>85</sup> In the Qur’ān, the name ‘Īsā often occurs with the addition “son of Mary.” Of the 25 places in the Qur’ān where ‘Īsā is used, in sixteen of them he is called Ibn Maryam (the Son of Mary), and in five passages his name is coupled with that of Musa (Moses). As with other prophets of God, Muslims use the name ‘Īsā with an honorific term, *alayhi al-salam* (peace be upon him).

Considering that Arabic-speaking Christians refer to Jesus as Yasu‘ (يسوع), some scholars acknowledge that the name ‘Īsā came from other languages. Jesus’ mother tongue was Aramaic, an ancient Semitic language from which Hebrew and Arabic scripts were derived. In his own lifetime he was called *Yeshua-(Joshua)* in Aramaic and *Jesus* in Greek, which means the one who saves and occurs in the Bible around 1200 times. In the Hebrew Bible, Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land. One of the closing sections of the book of Joshua has a covenant making scene in which Joshua tells the Israelites to out away from their midst their gods and worship the Lord God and the only the Lord. The New Testament relates that the name Jesus was chosen by God himself. It

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<sup>85</sup> Al-Baqara, 2; 87, 136, 253; Âl-i Īmran, 3; 45, 52, 55, 59, 84; al- Nisā, 4; 157, 163, 171; al-Maedah, 5; 46, 78, 110, 112, 114, 116; al-An’ām, 6; 85; al- Maryam, 19; 34; al-Ahzāb, 33; 7; al-Shūrā, 42; 13; al- Zukhrūf, 43;63; al-Hadīd, 57; 27; al-Saf, 61; 6, 14.

is stated that the angel of God came and said to Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus” (Luke 1:30-31). He was to be called Jesus, “because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21, 23; ‘Isaiah 7:14).<sup>86</sup>

One opinion proposes that ‘Īsā was a name imposed upon the Prophet Muhammad by the Jews, which he adapted in good faith. The Jews referred to Jesus as “Esau,” [the brother of Jacob] out of hatred, implying that the soul of Esau had been transferred to Jesus. Others believed the name to have come naturally from the phonetic change of Yeshu in Syriac, combined with an imitation of Musa (Moses).<sup>87</sup>

There are Muslim scholars, on the other hand, who assert that the name ‘Īsā is a genuine Arabic word. When considered to be derived from the root “ع ي س = a-y-s”, ‘Īsā would mean *yellowy or slightly yellow*, and when considered to be stemmed from the root “ع و س = a-v-s”, it would mean *governor or ruler*. The name ‘Īsā is a common name among Muslims. A hadīth report tells us how the *khalifah* (caliph) Umar objected to a man being called Abū ‘Īsā (the father of Jesus), as such a name called to mind Jesus who had no father, and therefore seemed unfitting.<sup>88</sup> It is surprising, however, as we have seen, that *Tirmidhī*, who compiled one of the six most important collections of the hadīth tradition, was called Abū ‘Īsā.

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<sup>86</sup> Mark Durie, “‘Isa, the Muslim Jesus,” in *Answering Islam*. Presenting numerous critical comments on Jesus in Islam, the author argues that ‘Īsā is not an historical figure, Jesus’ name was never ‘Īsā, and as prophetic history, the Qur’ān contains many errors and anachronisms.

<sup>87</sup> H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, eds. *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 173.

<sup>88</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Adab*, 64.

## 2- ) Ibn Maryam (Son of Mary)

The Qur'ān emphasizes that “no mortal has ever touched Mary” and states that Jesus had no natural father but was conceived by Mary through a miraculous event which occurred by the decree of God. In other words, the birth of Jesus, which is called the Virgin Birth, was accomplished by God's miraculous intervention, not by human intimacy (Al-i Imran 3:47; Maryam 19:20; Anbiyā 21:91; Tahrim 66:12).<sup>89</sup> For Muslims the virgin birth is both a biological and a theological statement. Since Jesus had no a father, he was named after his mother and the appellation *Ibn Maryam* (Son of Mary) is added to his name. In hadīths, this mother-son relation is expressed with various phrases; the Son of Mary<sup>90</sup>, Mary and her son<sup>91</sup>, 'Īsā son of Mary<sup>92</sup>, Masīh son of Mary<sup>93</sup>, and Masīh-'Īsā son of Mary<sup>94</sup>. Surprisingly, only in one place in the New Testament is Jesus referred to as the “Son of Mary” (Mark 6:3).

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<sup>89</sup> Clare Julian and Meryem Tuz, “Mary: Her Conception and he Birth of the Messiah,” in *Fountain*. May - June 2011, Issue 81, p.14-20

<sup>90</sup> Bukhārī, “*buyū*” no 102, “*mazālim*” no 31, “*anbiyā*” no 48, 49, “*tafsir-u surah*” no 5, “*ta'bīr*” no 33, “*fitan*” no 26; Muslim, “*imān*” no 242-245, 277, “*hajj*” no 216, “*fadāil*” no 143, 146; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no 54, 62; Abū Dāwūd, “*sunnah*” no 13; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 24, II, 122, 144, 233, 240, 272, 493, 538, 540, 541, III, 420, IV, 226, 390.

<sup>91</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 44, “*tafsir-u surah*” no 2; Muslim, “*fadāil*” no 147, “*qadar*” no 25; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 274, 288, 292, 319, 368.

<sup>92</sup> Bukhārī, “*bad' al-khalq*” no 11, “*anbiyā*” no 48, “*hudūd*” no 31; Muslim, “*imān*” no 247, 259, 263, 267, 271, 275, 278, “*fadāil*” no 145, 149, “*birr*” no 8, “*fitan*” no 34, 39-41, 110, 116; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no 21, 59, “*tafsir-u surah*” no 6, 22, “*manāqib*” no 1, 12, 35; Abū Dāwūd, “*janāiz*” no 56, 58, “*malāhim*” no 12, 14, 17, “*sunnah*” no 8; Nasāī, “*jihād*” no 41, “*ādāb al-qudāt*” no 12, 37; Ibn Mājah, “*kaffârât*” no 4, “*ashribah*” no 25, “*fitan*” no 20, 24, 28, 33; Darimī, “*riqaq*” no 68, “*farâiz*” no 47; Muwatta', “*sifat al-Nabi*” no 27, “*kalâm*” no 4, 8; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 4, 23, 24, 55, 202, 245, 259, 296, 309, 317, 318, 391, 461, II, 22, 39, 83, 154, 166, 290, 292, 298, 299, 307, 308, 314, 319, 336, 406, 411, 437, 463, 482, 513, 523, 528, III, 334, 345, 367, 368, 384, IV, 6, 7, 181, 216-217, 429, V, 13, 143, 278, 291, VI, 10, 75.

<sup>93</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 48, “*libās*” no 68, “*ta'bīr*” no 11; Muslim, “*imān*” no 273-275, “*fitan*” no 110; Muwatta', “*sifat al-Nabi*” no 2; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 22, 39, 83, 126, 154, IV, 181.

As the details of her life are laid out below, the Qur'ān presents Mary as one of the two exemplary women who lived before the Prophet Muhammad (Surah 66: 12). The Prophet Muhammad mentions her as one of the greatest women in the world. Mary was perfectly chaste, devout, and righteous. Her mother dedicated her to the service of the Temple. She spent all her time in that service and in the worship of God. God chose her as the virgin mother of Jesus, who was distinguished among the prophets with his superior spirituality.<sup>95</sup>

### 3- ) Al-Masīh (The Messiah)

The word *al-Masīh* is mentioned 11 times in 10 different Qur'ānic verses alone<sup>96</sup> and along with the name *'Īsā*<sup>97</sup> when referring to Jesus. It usually comes as a surprise for Jews and Christians to find that the Qur'ān openly admits that Jesus was the Messiah.<sup>98</sup> He is often called in the Qur'ān *al-Masīh 'Īsā* – “Jesus the Christ” (Surah 4:157, 171). The title *al-Masīh* (the Messiah) sometimes appears by itself (Surah 4.172) and on other occasions he is called *al-Masīh Ibn-u Maryam* (the Messiah, son of Mary - Surah 9:31), but on each of the eleven occasions where it appears the title *al-Masīh* - the Messiah - is applied specifically to Jesus alone. The Qur'ān even goes so far as to say that right in the

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<sup>94</sup> See Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 394.

<sup>95</sup> Also, see surah 3: 35–37, 42–48.

<sup>96</sup> Al-Nisā, 4; 172; al-Maeedah, 5; 72; al-Tawbah, 9; 30.

<sup>97</sup> Āl-i Īmran, 3; 45; al-Nisā, 4; 157, 171; al-Maeedah, 5; 17 (twice), 72, 75; al-Tawbah, 9; 31.

<sup>98</sup> The Hebrew word “messiah,” translated as the Greek “christos” means someone who is anointed. It is a royal title. We see that the author quotes the Lord calling the Persian king Cyrus His anointed in Isaiah 45:1-19. Both “Messiah” and “Christ” are used of Jesus in the New Testament and later Christianity. This indicates that Muslims, Jews and Christians will use the same terms and titles with different meanings.

beginning, when the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary he deliberately stated that the name of her son was to be *al-Masīh 'Īsā* (Surah 3:45).

In some hadīth narrations, we come across that the same title *al-Masīh* has also been used for the Dajjāl.<sup>99</sup> The name “Dajjāl” is not mentioned by name or referred to in the Qur’ān. When the term *al-Masīh* is used for the Dajjāl, we would realize that there are some other titles attributed to *the Dajjāl* as a distinguisher, for instance *al-Masīh al-Dajjāl (Messiah the Deceiver)*<sup>100</sup>, *al-Dajjāl mamsuh al-ayn (Dajjāl the wiped eye)*<sup>101</sup>, *Masīh al-dhalālah (Messiah the Heretic)*<sup>102</sup>, and *al-Masīh al-kazzāb (Messiah the Liar)*. Muslim scholars point out that the reason why the Dajjāl is called *masīh* is because one of his eyes is *mamsuh* (lit. “wiped”; smooth or abraded, i.e., he will be blind or defective in one eye). He is also to appear pretending to be *al-Masīh* at a time in the future, before the Judgment Day. The detailed discussion on the Messiah and Dajjāl will be in Chapter 4.

## JESUS’ TITLES

### 1- ) Abdullah and Rasulallah

The Qur’ān repeatedly underlines that Jesus is neither God nor the Son of God; he is a mere Abdullah (the Servant of God) and Rasulallah (the Messenger of God)

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<sup>99</sup> The Dajjāl is an evil figure in Islamic eschatology, directly comparable to the figure of the Antichrist in Christian eschatology. Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 48, “*libas*” no 68, “*ta’būr*” no 11; Muslim, “*imān*” no 273, 274; Muwatta’, “*sifat al-Nabī*” no 2; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 126, V, 13.

<sup>100</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 48, “*libas*” no 68, “*ta’būr*” no 11; Muslim, “*imān*” no 273, 274, 275, “*fitan*” no 119; Abū Dāwūd, “*jihad*” no 4, “*malāhim*” no 14; Muwatta’, “*sifat al-Nabī*” no 2; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 22, 39, 83, 126, 154, 406, 437, III, 420, IV, 437.

<sup>101</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 104, 105; Ahmad b. Hanbal, III, 201, 211, 349, V, 16, 386, 404, 434, VI, 456.

<sup>102</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 437; Al-Tayālīsī, *al-Musnad*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, no date), p.335; Ibn Abū Shaybah, *al-Musannaf*, VII, 499.

whose mission was to confirm the Torah revealed before him and call to monotheism. “Surely he (Jesus) was not other than a servant (worshipping God), whom We favored (with messengership), and We made him a miraculous example for the Children of Israel (to follow and mend their ways)” (Surah 43:59). In various passages, Jesus himself proclaims that he is a Messenger of God (Surah 3: 49, Surah 4: 157, 171, Surah 5: 75, Surah 6: 85, Surah 43: 63-64, and Surah 57: 27).

There are many hadīths referring to Jesus as Abdullah and/or Rasulallah. One hadīth emphasizes that people must believe in that none has the right to be worshipped but God Alone who has no partners, and that that Jesus is God’s Servant and His Messenger.<sup>103</sup> In a lengthy hadīth with different variants, also known as the *hadīth of shafaat (intercession)*, the believers on the Day of Judgment wander among prophets and they say, “Let us ask someone to intercede for us with our Lord that He may relieve us from this place of ours.” After asking several prophets, they go to Moses who will reply, “I am not fit for this undertaking,” and mention to them the mistakes he made, and add, “You had better go to Jesus, God’s Servant and His Messenger and His Word and a soul created by Him.” They will go to Jesus who will say, “I am not fit for this undertaking, but you had better go to Muhammad.”<sup>104</sup>

In the Makkan period, all Muslims faced atrocious persecutions and tortures. Some were stretched on burning sands and some are killed. The Prophet Muhammad

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<sup>103</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 47; Muslim, “*imān*” no 46; Ahmad b. Hanbal, V, 314. See also, al-Nasaī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, VI, 277-278; al-Bazzār, *al-Musnad*, VII, 125-126, 130, 142; Ibn Hibbān, *al-Ihsān fī Taqrīb-i Sahīh Ibn Hibbān*, I, 437.

<sup>104</sup> In some variants of the same hadīth, the phrase “God’s Servant and His Messenger” is attributed to the people who wander among prophets, not Moses. See Bukhārī, “*tafsīr-u surah*” 1, (17) 5; “*tawhid*” no 19, 24, 36; Muslim, “*imān*” no 322, 326, 327, 329; Tirmidhī, “*qiyāmat*” no 10; Ibn Mājah, “*zuhd*” no 37; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 281, 295, 461, II, 435, III, 116, 244, 247.

advised his companions to leave for Abyssinia, the former name of Ethiopia. He told them that the Ethiopian king is a Christian and just ruler in whose realm nobody is oppressed and he would protect them. When they got to the king's court, he asked them a question among many about the belief that they hold about Jesus. *Jafar b. Abū Tālib* stands up and answers without any hesitation: "Jesus was a Servant of God and His Messenger. He was a Spirit and a Word from God which had been sent to Virgin Mary." Then the Christian king picked up a straw from the ground and said, "By God, Jesus was no different (even as much this straw) than what you have said about him."<sup>105</sup>

## 2- ) **Kalimatullah**

Following the Qur'ānic presentation of Jesus, he is also known among Muslims as *Kalimatullah* (Word from God), and *Ruhullah* (Spirit from God) (Surah 3:45; Surah 4:171). In Islam, neither any other prophet nor any messenger, including Muhammad, has been called the Spirit from God. The Quran mentions in Surah 4:171 "O People of the Book! Do not go beyond the bounds in your religion, and do not say anything of God but the truth. *The Messiah*, Jesus son of Mary, was but a Messenger of God, and *Kalimatuhu* (a Word of His (Power)) which He conveyed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God (as the One, Unique God), and His Messengers (including Jesus, as Messenger)..." The fascinating feature of this verse is its attribution of three titles to Jesus, each one of which strongly implies that he was special; the Messiah, *Kalimatullah* (Word from God), and Spirit from God. The title *Kalimatuhu* (His Word) appears in two other places in the Qur'ān in much the same context. In Surah 3:39 an angel announces to

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<sup>105</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 202, 461, V, 290-291; Tayalisī, *Musnad* s.46; Ibn Abū Shaybah, *Musannaf* VII, 350; Said b. Mansūr, *Al-Sunan*, (Riyad: Dār al-Asīmī, 1414/1993), IV, 1428.

Zachariah that his son John the Baptist (Yahya) will witness to a “*kalimatin min Allah*” - a Word from God, - and in Surah 3:45 the angels, in announcing the conception of Jesus to Mary, speak of him as a “*kalimatin min Hu*”-a Word from Him-.

In fact, *Kalimatullah* literally means the Word of God, however for Muslims the Qur’ān, the Holy Book of Islam is very Word of God, therefore the term *Kalimatuhu* (*His Word*) in Surah 4:171 is translated with various phrases by different commentators; His Word, which He bestowed on Mary (*Yusuf Ali*), His word which He conveyed unto Mary (*Pickthall*), His Word which He communicated to Mary (*Shakir*), His Word which He conveyed into Mary (*JM Rodwell*), His Word, which He cast into Mary (*E. H. Palmer*), His Word, which He bestowed on Mary (*Muhammad Asad*). Yusuf Ali, commenting on Surah 3:39, says: “Notice: “a Word from God,” not “the Word of God,” the epithet that mystical Christianity uses for Jesus. Jesus was created by a miracle, by God’s word “Be,” and he was.”<sup>106</sup>

Many Muslim writers and scholars argue that Jesus is called a Word from God solely because he was created by the Word of God, *kun* – “be”, just as Adam was created (Surah 3:59). “Thus Imam Razī, followed by some modern writers, maintains that the term ‘Word of God’ means no more than that, ‘Jesus was created by the command or word of God’.”<sup>107</sup> Al-Baydawī says that the expression “Word from God” refers to Jesus Christ because he was conceived by the word of the command of God, without a

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<sup>106</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’ān*, (Istanbul, Turkey: Asir Media, 2002), p. 335.

<sup>107</sup> William Goldsack, *Christ in Islam*, (Christian Literature Society for India, 1913), p. 14.

father.<sup>108</sup> Kenneth Cragg points out that the title only relates to the creative word of God in bringing Jesus into being of a mother only and says that it celebrates “a unique status belonging to Jesus - albeit for the purposes of prophecy - which gives him a significance altogether his own as God’s Word.”<sup>109</sup>

Another argument is that the words of God were revealed to Jesus and that in this sense alone he can be called a Word from God. In other words, Jesus as the “word” means it is a form of “prophetic”, or he came “to bring and proclaim a word”. “A word” from God means a message of God. If a person is referred to as “a word” from God, it means that he is a *nabi* (prophet) or *rasul* (messenger) of Allah. The common argument, however, is the previous one, namely that Jesus was created in an unusual way simply by divine command just as Adam was created.

As stated above, commenting on Surah 4:171, Ali Ünal prefers to say “a Word of His (Power)” and continues;

God has two kinds of words, one issuing from His Attribute of Speech, the other from His Power. His words that issue from His Attribute of Speech are His Books and Scrolls that He sent to some of His Messengers. His words that issue from His Attribute of Power are all of His works – His creatures and all events in the universe. Why then does God mention Jesus especially as one of His Words (of His Power) is that God, due to His Grandeur and Honor, acts in this world from behind cause and effect. He does so because this world is the world of Wisdom, and some people, unable to discern the good behind every act of God, would otherwise ascribe to God the things displeasing to them, which could lead them to perish. God acts from behind the veil of cause and effect so that people can ascribe displeasing things, such as illnesses, death, and misfortunes, to their “natural” causes and not complain of God. But since the other world is the world of Power, God will act there without any

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<sup>108</sup> George Sale (trs.), *The Koran (al-Qur’ān)*, (New York: A. L. Burt Publisher, 1734), p. 48, n.4

<sup>109</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim; An Exploration*, (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 1999), p. 32.

veils; everything will happen there instantly. The creation of Jesus was different from that of other people, and God created him without a father. So in Jesus, His law of Power was manifested, rather than His law of Wisdom. The Prophet Adam was also created without parents, but God did not call him His Word. Adam was the first to be created as a human being; but Jesus' creation was completely unusual after so many centuries during which all people came to the world with a father and mother.<sup>110</sup>

In many hadīths on numerous matters, Jesus is seen to be called the Word from God. As mentioned above, sending people to Jesus on the Day of Judgment, Moses says “You had better go to Jesus, God’s Servant and His Messenger and His Word and a soul created by Him.” In another narration, the Prophet Muhammad encounters with his *ashab* (companions) speaking of the virtues of prophets and referring to Jesus as the Word from God, and the Prophet confirms their usage of this title.<sup>111</sup> Again, the Muslims who seek asylum in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) has notified the Christian authorities there that they believe Jesus is God’s Messenger, Spirit and Word from God, which is inserted into the Virgin Mary.

In addition, presenting Surah 4:171 as one of the *bab* titles in his collection, Imam Bukhārī mentions the comment made by Abū Ubayd (Qāsim ibn Sallam) (d.838) in the title that is *Kalimatuhu kun fakan* (*His Word* means that God said the word “Be” and Jesus came into existence).<sup>112</sup> In his marvelous hadīth commentary on the *Sahih* of Muslim, Imam Nawawī (d. 1278) states that the reason why Jesus is called a Word is that he was miraculously born without a father; he was born only by a word, “Be”.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ünal trans. *The Qur’ān with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, p. 228.

<sup>111</sup> Tirmidhī, “*manāqib*” no 1; Darimī, Abdullah b. Abdurahman; *al-Sunan* I-II, (Dār al-Kitab al-Arabī, Beirut, 1407/1987), “*muqaddimah*” 8.

<sup>112</sup> Bukhārī “*anbiyā*” no 47.

In brief, Muslims do not understand *Kalimatullah* (the Word of God) as Christians understand Logos in John 1:1-14. As explained, for Muslims, Jesus did not have an existence before his creation, like any other mortal, was brought into being by God. Logos in the Christian faith is certainly not the creation; in Christianity, the title *Word* implies that Jesus himself is the communication and revelation, in his own person, of God to human beings:

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 were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:1-2)

We see here that for Christians Jesus existed as *the Word of God* before creation and that he therefore enjoys the fullness of deity. It was this Word himself which took human form - the Word did not come to him as a man: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).<sup>114</sup>

Does the Islamic view of Jesus as the Word of God help the adherents of the two religious traditions bridge the gap which exists between the Muslim and Christian understanding of Jesus’ personality and his relation to God? Can Muslims help Christians better understand the Muslim understanding of Jesus through this designation? There is no doubt that Christians, in the past and present, have found this designation more helpful

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<sup>113</sup> Nawawī, *Sharh-u Muslim* I, 226. For similar understandings, see Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Barī* VI, 474; Aynī, *Umdah al-Qarī* XVI, 27, XVIII, 83.

<sup>114</sup> Ernest Hahn, *Jesus in Islam: A Christian View*, (Hyderabad, India: Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies, 1978), p. 36.

than some other exclusively Christian titles of Jesus (such as Son of God, Lamb of God, etc.) to introduce the New Testament picture of Jesus to the Muslim.<sup>115</sup>

It is true that what Christians and Muslims have in common is far greater than what divides and separates them. The Qur'ān calls to the People of the Book, Jews and Christians to come to a common word between them and Muslims:

Say (to them, O Messenger): “O People of the Book, come to a [*kalimah*] word common between us and you, that we worship none but God, and associate none as partner with Him, and that none of us take others for Lords, apart from God. (Surah 3:64)

The common *word* in this passage is indeed the belief in One God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Nevertheless, considering Jesus a Word from God, we could say that Jesus might be another common word between the adherents of Christianity and Islam. Christians and Muslims have much to share concerning the divine message for mankind found in the person and role of Jesus. He provides such helpful bridge between the two religions.

### **3- ) Ruhullah**

There are indeed different interpretations and understandings upon why Jesus has been called *Ruhullah* (Spirit from God). First of all, Jesus was created not from the sperm of a human being, but the breath of the Archangel Gabriel, however to say *minhu* (from God) is for honoring Jesus. Secondly, Jesus revived dead hearts with the light of faith and guidance. Thirdly, Jesus is a mercy sent by God in order to lead the people to goodness and bliss both in this world and the afterlife. Fourthly, here the *Spirit* has definitely come

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<sup>115</sup> Hahn, p. 36. Also, see a thorough discussion of commentary regarding the meaning of “Word” ascribed to Jesus in Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (London: Sheldon Press, 1965), pp. 45-48

from the breath of Gabriel, nevertheless blowing performed by the angel took place with the command and permission of God. Lastly, the word *Ruh* (Spirit) in Surah 4:171 does not have an article. In Arabic, not having an article for words occasionally indicates greatness and majesty; therefore here the meaning would be “one of majestic, esteemed, and exalted Spirits.”

According to Ünal, since Jesus was a Word of God’s Power, in the meaning of being created not based on cause and effect, as all other people are, but rather by being breathed into Virgin Mary by or through an angel who is purely a spiritual being, the spiritual dimension weighs more in his creation. Why this was so for Jesus is that he came to spiritually revive the Children of Israel who had been drowned in materialism according to the Qur’ān. So Jesus’ mission gave priority to the spiritual dimension of the divine message.<sup>116</sup>

Some prominent Muslim scholars, such as Ali al-Qārī (d.1605) and Mubarakfurī (d.1934) underline that the two titles *Kalimatullah* and *Ruhullah* have been used for Muslims for centuries to honor Jesus and express his great virtue. Imam Tabarī (d.922), the author of enormous compendiums of early Islamic history and Qur’ānic exegesis states that there has always been a considerable controversy about the meaning of the phrase “*Ruhun minhu* (Spirit from Him)” in Surah 4:171 among Muslim scholars and then numerates different interpretations: a breath from God, human being created by the command of God “Be,” Mercy from God, Spirit from the archangel Gabriel, and Gabriel himself.<sup>117</sup> Ibn Kathīr (d.1372), the Muslim theologian and historian who became one of

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<sup>116</sup> Ünal trans. *The Qur’ān with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, p. 228.

the leading intellectual figures of 14th-century Syria perceives the phrase “Spirit from Him” as Spirit from God’s creation or Spirit from God’s sight. Emphasizing that it cannot be understood as a part from God, as Christians do, Ibn Kathīr also gives different meanings to the phrase, such as Messenger from God and Grace from God. The common argument according to Ibn Kathīr, however, is the first one, namely that Jesus is a Spirit from God’s creation because Jesus is created from a Spirit that is also created by God.<sup>118</sup>

What is the Spirit then? Muslims scholars do not have a single view about what “spirit” in Surah 17: 85 means: *They ask you about the spirit. Say: “The spirit is of my Lord’s Command, and of knowledge, you have been granted only a little.”* According to Unal, some state that “it means divine revelation, while others assert that it is the essence of living existence or the source of life. Some claim that it is consciousness, feelings, and senses in living beings.” The spirit is the source of both physical and spiritual life. For this reason, it is used in the Qur’ān to describe both *wahy*-revelation and the angel of revelation, Gabriel.<sup>119</sup>

As quoted before, God has two laws, one issuing from His Attribute of Speech, and manifested as the divine message or religion. The other issues from His Attributes of Will and Power, and is manifested as what we call the laws of nature and life. The spirit is also a manifestation of God’s Attributes of Will and Power. It is a living law endowed with consciousness and a real, sensible existence.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Al-Tabarī, *Tafsir* VI, 35-36.

<sup>118</sup>Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fidā Ismail b. ‘Umar b. Kathir al-Dimashqī, *Tafsir al-Qur’ān al-Azīm*, I-IV, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1401/1980), I, 591.

<sup>119</sup>Unal, p. 1306

Nursi affirms that like the laws mentioned and many others, the spirit is a law issuing from the world of Divine Commands. Nevertheless, unlike the other laws, the human spirit is a living, conscious law. “If the spirit were to be stripped of life and consciousness, it would become a law; if, on the other hand, the laws were to be given life and consciousness, they would each become a spirit”<sup>121</sup>.

As we have seen in Islamic tradition, Jesus has been given a number of honorable titles. Apart from being known as the Son of Mary, the Messiah or Spirit from God, he is the *ayah* (sign or pointer). The sign is not only to the Israelites but to the world (Surah 19:21; 21:91; 23:50-52; 3:44-50). Jesus is also mentioned as a *mathal* (example or likeness) in the Qur’ān. He is an example for the people (Surah 43:57, 59). In another place he is likened to Adam (Surah 3:52-59).

The Qur’ān depicts Jesus also as *rahmah* (mercy) from God for people (Surah 19:21). Jesus is described as one who is *min al-muqarrabīn* (among the nearest to God) and as *min al-salihīn* (of the upright) and as *wajīh* (eminent) (Surah 3:40-46). Prominent *mufasssirs* amplify this, saying that Jesus is illustrious in this world as a prophet and in the next as an intercessor.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ünal trans. *The Qur’ān with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, p. 228.

<sup>121</sup> Said Nursi, *Risāla-i Nur Collection, The Letters*, (Somerset, New Jersey: The Light Publishing, 2007), 445-459.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Patrick Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2007), p.229

## MARYAM (MARY)

Christians might be surprised to learn that Mary is mentioned more often (34 times in 12 surahs) in the Qur’ān than in the New Testament (19 times).<sup>123</sup> She is the only woman specifically mentioned by name in the Qur’ān; one chapter in particular, Surah 19 (Maryam), is named after her; and Surah 3 (Al-i Imran) is named after her family. She enjoys a singularly distinguished and honored position among women in Islam. As her son, Mary is held up as a sign (*ayah*) of God’s power and mercy, a model (*mathal*) of faithfulness and trust, an upright (*siddiqa*) person and one of the devout (*qānitin*).

In the Qur’ān, Mary is declared [uniquely along with Jesus] to be a sign of God to humankind (Surah 23:50); as one who “guarded her chastity” (Surah 66:12); an obedient one (Surah 66:12); chosen of her mother and dedicated to God while still in the womb (Surah 3:36); uniquely [among women] accepted into service by God (Surah 3:37); cared for by Zachariah (Surah 3:37); that in her childhood she resided in the Temple and uniquely had access to Al-Mihrab<sup>124</sup> (might be understood to be the Holy of Holies), and was provided with heavenly ‘provisions’ by God (Surah 3:37).<sup>125</sup> She is also called a chosen one (Surah 3:42); a purified one (Surah 3:42); a truthful one (Surah 5:75); her child conceived through “a Word from God” (Surah 3:45); and “exalted above all women of the worlds [the material and heavenly worlds]” (Surah 3:42).

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<sup>123</sup> V. Antony John Alaharasan, *Home of the Assumption: Reconstructing Mary’s Life in Ephesus*, (Worcester, MA: Ambassador Books Inc., 2006), p. 66.

<sup>124</sup> In Islam, *mihrab* is semicircular prayer niche in the *qiblah* wall (the wall facing Makkah) of a mosque, reserved for imam, the prayer leader.

<sup>125</sup> Cyril Glassé, *New Concise Encyclopedia Of Islam*. revised edition, (New York: Altamira Press, 2001), p. 296

Mary holds a unique place of reverence in Islam. Mary is the personal and unique bearer of the Word of God in both Christianity and Islam.<sup>126</sup> For Muslims, she and her son are signs to humankind (Surah 23:50) that “personally and by their exceptional gifts and prerogatives, manifest Allah’s attributes of might and wisdom in an exceptional way”<sup>127</sup>. Mary in Islam received “a child from God’s spirit, a word from God ... whose name was the Christ Jesus son of Mary, chosen to be one of God’s righteous prophets”<sup>128</sup>.

Mary is exalted in Islamic faith because of the great things that God has done for her.<sup>129</sup> “These “great things” are linked to doctrines that Christians and Muslims have in common—namely, the virgin birth and her preservation from sin—but that are interpreted differently.” In the Muslim version of the account, the annunciation and following virgin birth constitute the great focus of the mission of Mary.”<sup>130</sup>

The New Testament does not give us any detail about the birth of Mary; however, the Qur’ān informs us that the wife of Imran<sup>131</sup> dedicated her unborn child to the service of God. Hannah as the mother of Mary and recognized as a highly spiritual woman was childless until her old age. According to tradition, she saw a bird feeding its chick while

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<sup>126</sup> Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’ān, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 76-77.

<sup>127</sup> Nilo Geagea, *Mary of the Koran: A Meeting Point between Christianity and Islam*, tr. Lawrence T. Fares (New York: Philosophical Library, 1984). p 45.

<sup>128</sup> Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’ān*, p. 67

<sup>129</sup> Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’ān*, pp. 71 and 78-80

<sup>130</sup> Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’ān*, pp. 71 and 78-80

<sup>131</sup> The wife of Imran in Islamic tradition is known as Hannah bintu Fāqūz. See Hākim, *al-Mustadrak* II, 648, 651; Tabarī, *Tafsīr* III, 235, 237, 241, 244, 294; al-Baydawī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, II, 29. Even though the Canonical Gospels do not mention her name, she is called Anna in *the Protevangelium of James* and *Gospel of Thomas*.

sitting in the shade of a tree, which made her want children of her own. She prayed for a child and eventually conceived.<sup>132</sup> Expecting the child to be male, Hannah vowed to dedicate him to isolation and the service in the Temple. However, Hannah bore a daughter instead.

Surah 66: 12 also refers to Mary as the daughter of Imran.<sup>133</sup> As stated in Surah 3:23 “God made pure Adam and Noah and the House of Abraham and the House of Imran, choosing them above all humankind,” therefore, Mary came from an honorable family, a father as noble as Imran and a mother so faithful and devout that her prayers were accepted by God. Mary was the fruit of a pious mother’s prayer and because of her oath she was entrusted to the Temple at a very young age. Hannah gave birth to a girl and again she turned to God in prayer and said:

My Lord, I have given birth to a female.”– God knew best of what she was delivered, (so she did not need to be sorry, because) the male child (she expected) could not be the same as (the) female child (whom We bestowed on her and would honor with a great favor). – I have named her Mary and commend her and her offspring to You for protection from Satan eternally rejected (from God’s Mercy). (Surah 3:36)

Hannah named her child Mary. Her name has been said to mean “the one who does not want, one who departs” or “the servant,” but the idea that the name Mary means

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<sup>132</sup> Tabarī, *Tafsir* III, 235; Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* I, 383; al-Baghawī, Abū Muhammad Muhy Al-Sunnah Husayn Ibn Mas’ud; *Maālim al-Tanzīl*, I-VIII, (Riyad: Dār-u Taybah, 1993), I, 295

<sup>133</sup> There are two *Imrans* in the history of prophets. The first is Imran b. Yashur, the father of Moses and Aaron, who came from the lineage of Abraham through Levi, the son of Jacob. The second is Imran b. Māsān, the father of Mary, who also came from the lineage of Abraham through, Yehuda, the son of Jacob. According to Muslim scholars, Imran, the father of Maryam, is referred to in this verse, not Imran, the father of Musa and Harun. There is a long period of time (approximately 1800 years) between Moses and Jesus.

“one who worships” in the language of Aramaic seems more appropriate.<sup>134</sup> This girl, Mary, was from the best of creation. The Prophet Muhammad mentions that whenever a child is born Satan pricks him or her and therefore the child cries loudly. This is a sign of the great enmity between mankind and Satan; however there were two exceptions to this rule. Satan pricked neither Mary nor her son Jesus, due to the supplication of Mary’s mother.<sup>135</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī says that Jesus and Mary were kept free from the Satan’s contamination because, as that passage declares, Mary’s mother appealed to God to protect Mary and her offspring from Satan. Imam Razī interprets the following verse (Surah 3:37) “*fa taqabbalahā rabbuhā bi qabūlin hasan* (her Lord accepted her with gracious favor)” as a response to her mother’s sincerity and purity of intention in dedicating the child and a sign of acceptance of her prayer.<sup>136</sup>

After the death of her father,<sup>137</sup> Mary was still only a young girl and many asked for the honorable duty of her guardianship, but this duty was bestowed upon the Prophet Zachariah (*Zakariyyah*). Zachariah made Mary a sanctuary in the Temple so she could be occupied with daily worship and prayer. During the period that Mary lived at the Temple under the guidance of Zachariah, she was exceptionally blessed with sustenance from God. As we will see, it is also known that after giving birth to Jesus, she was also

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<sup>134</sup> Zamakhsharī, I, 142; Baghawī I, 295; Baydawī, II, 31

<sup>135</sup> Bukhārī, “*bad’ al-khalq*” no 11, “*anbiyā*” no 44, “*tafsir-u surah (3)*” no 2; Muslim, “*fadāil*” no 146, 147, “*qadar*” no 25; Darimi “*farāiz*” no 47; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 233, 274, 288, 292, 319, 368, 523

<sup>136</sup> Razī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb* VIII, 25.

<sup>137</sup> Hakim, *al-Mustadrak* II, 646; Tabarī, III, 235; Zamakhsharī, I, 142.

miraculously provided with the blessing of fresh dates and water. The Qur'ān informs us that every time Zachariah went to see Mary, there were always be fruits in her room.<sup>138</sup>

Zachariah was surprised to find fresh out of season fruits in her room. When he inquired, Mary told him that the fruits were from God and that “truly God provides to whomever He wills without reckoning.”<sup>139</sup> Mary’s this statement opened Zachariah’s eyes. At this moment, he asked his Lord to bless him with a child in his old age. Zachariah’s plea for a son to succeed him was in regard with his mission among his people, not merely out of the desire for a child. Thus, Zachariah, who grew old and did not yet have any children, prayed God for a son, concerning that his nation might fail to follow and do not listen to the one who succeed him, and the unity of the People of Israel would be shattered.<sup>140</sup> After some time, the angels called to him: “God gives you the glad tidings of Yahya to confirm a Word from God, and as one lordly, perfectly chaste, a Prophet, among the righteous.”<sup>141</sup>

God removed Zachariah’s wife’s barrenness so that she might become mother. The Prophet Zachariah was given a son by the name of “Yahya” (John the Baptist), a name specially chosen for this child alone and not given to anyone before.<sup>142</sup> In accordance with Zachariah’s’ prayer, God made Yahya and Jesus, who according to

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<sup>138</sup> Surah 3:37

<sup>139</sup> Surah 3:37

<sup>140</sup> Gülen, *Reflections on the Qur'ān*, (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2012), p. 186-7.

<sup>141</sup> Surah 3: 39.

<sup>142</sup> Surah 19: 7-8

Qur'ānic commentaries was born six months later, renew the message of God.<sup>143</sup> Yahya was one of the prophets that the Prophet Muhammad met on the night of his Ascension through the Heavens. It is said that he met John and Jesus in the second heaven, where the Prophet greeted these two cousins before ascending with Gabriel to the third heaven and they returned his greeting saying, "Welcome, O pious brother and pious prophet."<sup>144</sup> Yahya's story was also told to the Negus, Abyssinian king during the Muslim refugees' migration to Abyssinia.<sup>145</sup> According to the Qur'ān, Yahya was one on whom God sent peace on the day that he was born and the day that he died.<sup>146</sup> Note that the Qur'ān uses the same sentence for Jesus a page later; therefore there is a spiritual cousinhood in their birth and career. Yahya is also important for paving the way for Jesus, who prophesied to Israel after him.

Along with the infancy narratives in the canonical Gospels of Matthew and Luke, *the Protoevangelium of James* exerted extensive influence on shaping perceptions of Mary's character within the Christian community. Cornelia Horn writes that recent research into the identity of Mary featured in the Qur'ān and Hadith tradition has demonstrated the great density of potential, possible, and probable parallels between representations of Mary, including Mary's mother's behavior, in the Qur'ān and in the

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<sup>143</sup> B. M. Wheeler, *The A to Z of Prophets in Islam and Judaism*, (New York: Scarecrow Press, 2010). p. 46.

<sup>144</sup> Bukhārī, "anbiyā" no 43, "manāqib al-ansār" no 42; Muslim, "imān" no 259; Nasaī, "salat" no 1; Ahmad b. Hanbal, III, 148, IV, 209-210.

<sup>145</sup> Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, (U.K: Allen & Unwin, 1983).

<sup>146</sup> Surah 19:13–15

*Protoevangelium of James*.<sup>147</sup> The books of the Apocrypha mention the blessing of sustenance bestowed upon Mary and give some information about the earlier period of Mary's life, including predictions as to where she was born and even estimations regarding the date of her birth.

A Coptic *Homily on the Nativity and the Virgin Mary*, which includes elements from the narrative of the *Protoevangelium of James*, features the three-year-old girl, Mary, functioning as a model of the holy life. Horn states that when her mother, Anna, brought her to the priests at the Temple, the girl has run on her own to the altar as the place of the sacrifice of the Lord. Once she had entered the Temple, she never turned back. In her daily progress, she far surpassed the behavior displayed by any of the other people in the Temple.<sup>148</sup>

While she increased her worship with every day that passed, the period that Mary was under the care of Zachariah continued with God's special protection and sustenance. This particular characteristic is mentioned in the Qur'ān: "And (in due time came the moment) when the angels said: "Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure, and exalted you above all the women in the world. "Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord, prostrate and bow (in the Prayer and devotion to Him) with those who bow!" (Surah 3:42–43)

God's purification of Mary have been interpreted in various ways as referring to spiritual, moral, or physical purification. Some said that this means "purification from

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<sup>147</sup>Cornelia B. Horn, "Mary between Bible and Qur'ān: Soundings into the Transmission and Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* on the Basis of Selected Literary Sources in Coptic and Copto-Arabic and of Art-Historical Evidence Pertaining to Egypt," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 509–538, October 2007

<sup>148</sup> Horn, *Ibid.*

disbelief and sin,” while others claim that it is “purification from menses following birth, all kinds of physical defect and contact with males.” Regarding the second part of the verse, most scholars say the words “chosen above women of all nations” refers to all the women of her era.<sup>149</sup> This verse in the Qur’ān about Mary being superior to all other women has been referred to in most commentaries as well as various hadīths. Among many virtues of Mary, the Prophet Muhammad said:

a. “The best of the women in the world is Mary [in her lifetime], and the best of the women in the world is Khadijah [in her lifetime].”<sup>150</sup>

b. “Many among men attained perfection, but among women none attained perfection except Mary the daughter of Imran, and Asya the wife of Pharaoh.”<sup>151</sup>

c. “Of all the women in the universe, four would suffice [as an example for others]: Mary, Asya, Khadijah, and Fatima.”<sup>152</sup>

d. “Fatima is the leader of the women of Paradise after Mary.”<sup>153</sup>

e. “There is no new-born except that [at the moment of birth] Satan disturbs him, so he begins to cry from Satan’s disturbance with the exception of the son of Mary and his mother.”<sup>154</sup>

f. “The best of the women of Paradise are Khadijah, Fatima, Asya and Mary.”<sup>155</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Tabarī, *Tafsir*, III, 262-264; Wahidī, I, 210. Some Muslim scholars like Qadī Iyadh (d.544/1149) and Qurtubī (d.671/1272) understood the meaning of these words (*khayru nisāihā*) as not only to all the women of her time, but “superior to all women in history.”

<sup>150</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 45, “*manāqib al-ansār*” no 20; Muslim, “*fadāil al-sahabah*” no 69; Tirmidhī, “*manāqib*” no 61; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 84, 116, 132, 143

<sup>151</sup> Bukhārī “*anbiyā*” no 32, 46, “*fadāil al-sahabah*” no 30, “*at’imah*” no 25; Muslim, “*fadāil al-sahabah*” no 70; Tirmidhī, “*at’imah*” no 31; Ibn Mājah, “*at’imah*” no 14; Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 394, 409.

<sup>152</sup> Tirmidhī, “*manāqib*” no 61; Ahmad b. Hanbal, III, 135.

<sup>153</sup> Tirmidhī, “*manāqib*” no 60, 63; Ahmad b. Hanbal, III, 64, 80

<sup>154</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 44, “*tafsir-u surah (3)*” no 2; Muslim, “*fadāil*” no 146; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 274.

The narrations stated above have led some scholars, such as Ibn Hazm to believe that there is a possibility of the existence of female prophets in Islam. Ibn Hazm simply was of the view that anyone, whether male or female who, received revelation from God was a prophet.<sup>156</sup> There have been various views supporting the idea that female prophets may have been sent and asking whether Mary was a prophet or not. The opinion of scholars, who believe Mary may have been a prophet is based on the fact that Mary's name is mentioned in the Qur'ān among the prophets: "...And (mention) that blessed woman who set the best example in guarding her chastity. We breathed into her out of Our Spirit, and We made her and her son a miraculous sign for all the worlds. So, this community of yours (which all the Messengers and their followers have formed) is one single community of the same faith, and I am your Lord, so worship Me alone...."(Mary 21: 91-2), and also on the angel bringing the revelation of tidings and the benevolence provided to Mary from the Creator, and the fact that she was a chosen person above all women purified through the grace of God as a "woman of perfection," and "leader in Paradise"<sup>157</sup> all led these scholars to believe that Mary could possibly be a messenger. However, the general opinion accepted by the majority of scholars is that women were not sent to the world as prophets.<sup>158</sup> Why the Qur'ān mentions Mary along with the

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<sup>155</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 293, 316, 322.

<sup>156</sup> Abu Muhammad Ali b. Ahmad Ibn Hazm al-Andalusī, *Al-Fisāl fi al-Milal wa-al-Ahwa' wa-al-Nihal*, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Hanji, Kahire, 1928), V: 17-19.

<sup>157</sup> Nawawī, XV, 198; Aynī, XV, 308.

<sup>158</sup> Nawawī, XV, 198; Baydawī, II, 38; Ibn Kathīr, II, 82; Aynī, XV, 308. Those who support this understanding usually refer to the following verse: "We did not send before you as Messengers any but

prophets, even though she was not a prophet, is because of Mary's exceptional greatness and honor, and for the purpose of introducing Jesus.

There is no account in the Qur'ān or Hadīth tradition of Mary's death and burial. In the New Testament, we see that Mary attends the miracle of Cana (John 2:11), she is at the crucifixion (John 19:25–27), and she is present with the community as they replace Judas in the Acts (1:14). Nevertheless, there is no mention of the remaining period of her life and death. It is estimated that Mary must have been around fifty years old at the time of Jesus' departure and there are varying reports regarding her own death; some say she was fifty-six, while there are other reports of her being seventy or even seventy-two.<sup>159</sup>

Although there is no information on Mary's place of burial in Christian sources, there are different views. Some say she was buried in Jerusalem, whereas others say it could have been in Ephesus or Antioch. Although there is no specific grave associated with Mary in Ephesus – not her house-, there are graves said to be that of Mary which are in churches, one in the Jehoshaphat valley between the Mount of Olives and Mount Temple and another in Gethsemane.<sup>160</sup> The questions of where and how she died and was buried have been topics of discussion and dispute for centuries,<sup>161</sup> but the fact that she

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men to whom We revealed, from amongst the people of the townships (where We raised them)" (Yusuf 12:109).

<sup>159</sup> Tabarī, *Tarikh*, I, 585; Hakim, *al-Mustadrak*, II, 651.

<sup>160</sup> Ibn Asakīr, *Tarikh al-Dimashq* II, 337, 411.

<sup>161</sup> For Catholics and Orthodox, there can be no grave: she was taken into heaven as she died. This is called the Bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – and for Catholics is a dogma that must be believed. There are traditions about the "Dormition of the BVM" – dormition is "falling asleep". The tradition is that the disciples gathered around her bed, Jesus came from heaven, and took her by the hand into a heavenly place, etc. Protestants do not accept the tradition. The tradition expands into making her "Queen of Heaven" and a mediator between humans and Jesus. The "veneration" of the BVM and prayers to her, etc. are part of Catholic and Orthodox piety – not Protestant.

carried on throughout her life in sincere devotion and worship of God is much more suitable for her general profile.

## **JESUS' BIRTH AND EARLY CHILDHOOD**

Christianity and Islam each teach that Mary was chosen to be the mother of Jesus Christ, and that her conception was accomplished by God's miraculous intervention, and not by human intimacy.<sup>162</sup> The account given in Surah 19 is nearly identical with that in the Gospel of Luke, and both of these (Luke 1:26-35 and Surah 19) begin with an account of the visitation of an angel upon Zachariah and good news of the birth of Yahya, followed by the account of the annunciation.<sup>163</sup> Islamic tradition, however, specifically record that *the Spirit (ruh)* appeared before Mary in the form of a perfect man announcing to her that she had found favor with God:

Thus, she kept herself in seclusion from people. Then We sent to her Our spirit, and it appeared before her in the form of a perfect man. She said: "I seek refuge in the All-Merciful from you, if you are a pious, God-revering one." He replied: "I am only a messenger of your Lord to be a means (for God's gift) to you of a pure son (Surah 19:17-19)

When Mary questioned the Spirit as to how this could be accomplished, since "no mortal has ever touched her" the Spirit once again responded:

He said (quoting God): "Just so. Your Lord says: 'It is easy for Me; and (you shall have a son) so that We make him for humankind a sign (of Our Power on account of his birth) and a mercy from Us (on account of his being a Messenger). It is a matter already decreed.'" (Surah 19:21)

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<sup>162</sup> Julian and Tuz, "Mary: Her Conception and the Birth of the Messiah," in *Fountain*.

<sup>163</sup> The Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke is close. But the birth story in Luke is far different.

Who or what was the Spirit appeared in front of Mary? Regarding the identity of this spirit appeared in the form of a perfect man, the majority of Muslim scholars maintain that he was the Archangel Gabriel. Among several arguments supporting this view are that the Qur'ān mentions Gabriel as the Holy Spirit (Surah 16:102) and the Trustworthy Spirit (Surah 26:193). Declared in the passage above, the spirit presents himself as a messenger or envoy of the Lord. The Qur'ān also mentions Gabriel as a noble messenger (Surah 69:40). Moreover, God sent Gabriel in the form of a human being that Mary might have confidence in him and be able to hear his words, for if he had come down in his angel form, she might have been terrified and have fled from him and not been able to hear the divine message. Some, on the other hand, hold the view that it may be another spiritual being mentioned in several places of the Qur'ān with the name of *the Spirit*, since the Qur'ān here uses the word "Spirit" without any specification. Other aspects of this annunciation story are stated in Surah 3:45–47. We need to emphasize that these passages say *angels*, rather than a single angel. This might mean that Gabriel came to Mary to be a means of God's conveying to Mary the gift of a son, while other angels gave her the glad tidings of that son.<sup>164</sup>

Christianity and Islam agree that Mary was alone when the angel appeared to her. Islam, in addition, holds that at the actual moment in which Mary gave birth to 'Īsā, she was again without human companionship. The Qur'ān records that Mary was alone in the desert and that during moments of great distress, just prior to 'Īsā's birth, God comforted

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<sup>164</sup> Ünal, *the Qur'an*, p. 629.

and reassured her. He provided nourishment to her from a nearby sacred date palm tree, as well as refreshment from a rivulet which miraculously appeared.<sup>165</sup>

It is also worth noting that accounts of Jesus' actual birth, expressed in both the writings of Mary of Agreda and Catherine Emmerich,<sup>166</sup> indicate that Mary was alone in the company of the divine presence during the moments in which she gave birth to Jesus.<sup>167</sup> In an account given by Catherine Emmerich about what happened just hours before the Nativity, the image of Mary being alone on the outskirts of the city and near a sacred tree bears a remarkable resemblance to the passage declared in the Qur'ān where Mary is alone in a remote area and near a sacred date palm tree.<sup>168</sup> Muslims believe that Mary gave birth to her child under this sacred tree:<sup>169</sup>

And the throes of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date-palm. She said: "Would that I had died before this, and had become a thing forgotten, completely forgotten!" (A voice) called out to her from beneath her: "Do not grieve! Your Lord has set a rivulet at your feet. And shake the trunk of the date-palm towards you: it will drop fresh, ripe dates upon you. So eat and drink, and be comforted. If you should see some person, say (through gesture): "I have vowed a fast of silence to the All-Merciful, so I cannot speak to any human being today.'"" (Surah 19:23-6)

Unal writes that while some *mufasssirs* claim that the voice who called out to Virgin Mary here belongs to the Spirit, the same Spirit who appeared before her, others argue that this person was the new-born child, Jesus and that the rivulet emerged

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<sup>165</sup> Julian and Tuz, "Mary: Her Conception and he Birth of the Messiah," in *Fountain*.

<sup>166</sup> Catholic nuns of the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries who received divine revelation of Mary's life.

<sup>167</sup> Catherine Emmerich, *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*; (Baronius Press, 2006), p. 197.

<sup>168</sup> Julian and Tuz, "Mary: Her Conception and he Birth of the Messiah," in *Fountain*.

<sup>169</sup> Julian and Tuz, "Mary: Her Conception and he Birth of the Messiah," in *Fountain*.

suddenly, and the date-palm, which had been dried up, grew green all at once and yielded fresh, ripe dates. In Islamic tradition, it is indeed most highly possible that such miracles could take place during the birth of a chosen prophet, as many miracles were reported to happen during the birth of the Prophet of Islam. Whether either of these opinions is accurate and this location suddenly became a restful place with a spring or not, we find in Surah 23:50 that the place to which Mary retreated was a lofty, quiet setting with a spring flowing in it.<sup>170</sup>

Here in these passages, we witness that for Mary, chastity was extremely significant that even though she was sinless, modest, and pure, her concerns about the possible reaction of the society to her giving birth without having a husband were so unbearable. Her chastity and purity would not have been able to tolerate any criticism; therefore, she wished to die and become totally forgotten. Additionally, the passages in Surah 21:91 and Surah 66: 12 specifically emphasize Mary's chastity and modesty.

As openly noted in the Qur'ān, but only slightly indicated in the New Testament (Mary does not speak at all in the Gospel of Matthew),<sup>171</sup> Mary is scorned by those who considered the birth of Jesus to be the result of an illicit relationship. This may account in part for the sorrow and distress she experienced stated in Surah 19 above when God comforted her moments before giving birth. Other passages in the Qur'ān make reference to a confrontation between Mary and her own people regarding Jesus' birth: "She came to her people, carrying him. They exclaimed: "O Mary! Assuredly you have done an

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<sup>170</sup> Ünal, *the Qur'an*, p. 629

<sup>171</sup> Her coming back into the community with a baby would have been taken as her having a lover elsewhere and that she had broken her vow of virginity-chastity. That would have branded her as a sexually loose woman. In the Gospel of Matthew that seems to have been an issue.

unexpected, strange thing! ‘O sister of Aaron, your father was never a wicked man, nor was your mother unchaste.’” (Surah 19:27-28). It was a custom among the People of Israel that they gave or linked their children to the names of renowned people, or people were linked with one of their renowned ancestors. Mary was of a priestly line that traced itself to Moses and Aaron; therefore people called her the sister of Aaron. A hadīth reported by *Mughira b. Shu’bah* states that when Mughira went to the Christians of Najran, they asked him: “You read ‘O sister of Aaron’ for Maryam in the Qur’ān, whereas Moses was born much before Jesus.” When Mughira came back to Madinah, he asked the Prophet about their question, whereupon he said: “The people of the time used to give names to their people after the names of prophets and pious persons who had gone before them.”<sup>172</sup>

After being reproached for immorality, Mary points to Jesus, and he answers for her, telling the people that God has made him a prophet and commanded him to observe the *salat* prayer and *zakat*-almsgiving and to show piety towards his mother. He finishes by saying, “So peace be upon me on the day I was born and the day of my death, and the day when I will be raised to life.”<sup>173</sup> These words are important, and the point of this remark will be seen later when we come to the crucifixion and the second coming of Jesus.

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<sup>172</sup> Muslim, “*ādāb*” no 9; Tirmidhī, “*tafsir-u surah (19)*” no 1; Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 252; Ibn Abū Shaybah, *Musannaf* VII, 427.

<sup>173</sup> Surah 19: 29-33.

There is no data available on Jesus' exact date of birth in Islamic sources. Nevertheless, a hadīth *mawqūf*<sup>174</sup> narrated by *Salman al-Farisī* states that the interval between Jesus and Muhammad was six hundred years.<sup>175</sup> What the secondary hadīth collections have to say are parallels with Salman's this statement. For instance, Ibn Abbas also says that the time period between Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad was 600 years. *Wahb b. Munabbih* narrates that Jesus was born six months after the birth of John the Baptist and 363 years after the birth of Alexander the Great.<sup>176</sup>

In a variant of the hadīth speaking of the Prophet's Night Journey in the *Sunan* of *Nasaī*, *Anas b. Malik* narrates that throughout the journey, Gabriel would sometimes tell the Prophet to dismount from his ride and perform the salat prayer and then the angel would indicate the location and city which they are in. When they come to the last station, Gabriel would say that this is Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus.<sup>177</sup>

Surahs 3:46, 5:110, and 19:29-30 clearly declare that Jesus spoke as an infant in the cradle: "He will speak to people in the cradle and in manhood, and he is of the righteous." Several hadīth books also refer to this event in Jesus' early childhood. There is a *daīf*-weak report stating that Jesus even began speaking in her mother's womb.<sup>178</sup> This narration must be referring to the time when Mary was alone under the date palm

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<sup>174</sup> Hadīth *mawqūf* is the own statement of a companion of the Prophet Muhammad who did not ascribe it to the Prophet.

<sup>175</sup> Bukhārī, "*manāqib al-ansār*" no 53.

<sup>176</sup> See Hākīm, *al-Mustadrak* II, 651-4.

<sup>177</sup> Nasaī, "*salat*" no 1.

<sup>178</sup> Ibn Abū Shaybah, *Musannaf* VI, 339, VII, 66; Abū Nuaym, Ahmad b. Abdullah al-Isbahanī, *Hilya al-awliyā wa tabaqāt al-asfiyā*, I-X, (Dār al-Kitab al-Arabī: Beirut, 1405/1985), III, 294.

tree. According to a hadīth narrated in Bukhārī, Muslim, and Musnad, Jesus is mentioned among the three persons who spoke in cradle:

The Prophet said, “None spoke in cradle but three: (The first was) Jesus, (the second was), there a man from Bani Israel [the People of Israel] called Juraij.....Juraij performed the ablution and offered prayer, and then came to the child and said, ‘O child! Who is your father?’ The child replied, ‘The shepherd.’ (The third was the hero of the following story) A lady from Bani Israel was nursing her child at her breast when a handsome rider passed by her. She said, ‘O Allah! Make my child like him.’ On that the child left her breast, and facing the rider said, ‘O Allah! Do not make me like him....’<sup>179</sup>

Again, there are no details in the Qur’ān and Hadīth tradition in regard with Jesus’ childhood and youth. In Qur’ānic commentaries, many stories are told of the early years of Jesus’ life. Al-Tabarī says that Mary took Jesus to Egypt and kept him there until he was twelve.<sup>180</sup> Al-Tha’labī tells of the coming of the three wise men with gold, frankincense and myrrh, and of their being warned not to return to the king.<sup>181</sup> These and many other stories of the early years of Jesus are of the type found in the Gospel of Luke and apocryphal infancy Gospels. The only Qur’ānic passage referring to Jesus’ early life would be the following passage:

We made the Son of Mary and his mother a miraculous sign (of Our Lordship and Power), and We provided for them refuge on a lofty ground of comfort and security, and with a (water) spring. (Surah 23:50)

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<sup>179</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” 48; Muslim, “*birr*” 8; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 309, II, 307-308. According to a hadīth *mawqūf* narrated by Ibn Abbas, there are four people who spoke in cradle; see Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 309.

<sup>180</sup> Tabarī, *Tafsir*, III, 37.

<sup>181</sup> Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Tha’labī, *Qisas al-Anbiyā*, (Dār Ihyā al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah: 1928), p. 241.

According to some including Abū Zayd, Egypt was the place which God spoke of in the passage. Abdullah bin Salam says that the place where Mary and Jesus took refuge was Damascus; Abū Hurayrah says it was Ramlah in Palestine; and Qatāda says it was Jerusalem; and Ka’ab b. Mālik says it was that part of the world which is nearest heaven.<sup>182</sup>

### **DID JESUS HAVE ANY SIBLINGS?<sup>183</sup>**

The birth of Jesus was the result of a miraculous pregnancy of Mary. The Qur’ān and the Hadīth tradition stress the fact that Mary protected her dignity and chastity and that she had never been in contact with any male. Her being astonished and amazed when she was given the glad tidings of a child is another clear evidence of her chastity. Surah 4:156 declares that whoever speaks against or slanders Mary would be subjected to grievous punishment and destruction. While the Roman Catholic and Orthodox perspective on Mary is akin to the Islamic view that Mary remained chaste and virgin *throughout her entire life*, some Christians believe that Mary was only a virgin until the birth of Jesus. The main reason for such an understanding is that the New Testament uses the phrases “brothers of Jesus” and “sister of Jesus,” sometimes even mentions the brothers by name, such as James (Mark 6:1-3). Later, in Acts, James becomes the head of the church in Jerusalem and nemesis of Paul in Galatians.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Abd Al-Razzāq, *Tafsir* III, 45-46; Ibn Abū Shaybah, *Musannaḥ* VI, 479; Tabarī, *Tafsir* XVI, 65; Qurtubī, *Tafsīr* XII, 126; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* III, 247; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Mathīr* V, 475.

<sup>183</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Ahmet Cetinkaya, “Did Jesus Have Brothers or Sisters,” in *Fountain*, September - October 2009. Issue : 71.

<sup>184</sup> Ahmet Cetinkaya, “Did Jesus Have Brothers or Sisters,” in *Fountain*.

Cetinkaya writes that according to some Christian tradition, one of the reasons for the view that Jesus had siblings is that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Explanations by those who argue for the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary include that they were Joseph's children by an earlier marriage and that he was a widower, or that they were children of one of Joseph's relatives that Mary and Joseph took into their own family. There is no mention in the Qur'ān or Hadīth tradition of Joseph, the person said to be betrothed to Mary in the New Testament. However, there are a few weak reports of some historical sources that say that there was a carpenter of the same name who was a member of Mary's family<sup>185</sup> and both of them were serving at the Temple during the same period.<sup>186</sup>

When Hannah, Imran's wife gave birth to Mary she prayed, "I commend her and her offspring to You for protection from Satan eternally rejected (from God's Mercy)" (Surah 3:36). According to Cetinkaya, there have been some scholars who claim that there is a possibility of Jesus having siblings because the word "offspring" (*dhurriyyah*) refers to a plurality, but the majority of *mufassirs* have understood that the words "her and her offspring" refer to only Mary and Jesus. According to the second group of scholars, when Hannah made the supplication to her Lord there was no indication of plurality or of the number of Mary's children, or for that matter if she was to have children at all, for it goes without saying that Mary herself was just a newborn baby at the time. The verse implies the possibility of her having children; so the use of the word

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<sup>185</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tarih*, II, 68; al-Alūsī, *Ruh al-Maānī*, XVI, 80.

<sup>186</sup> Tabarī, *Tarih* I, 350; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir*, III, 113.

“offspring” does not provide foundation for a possibility that Jesus may have had brothers or sisters. Those scholars also refer to the hadīth mentioned before in regard with the protection from Satan’s disturbance at birth, since the hadīth speaks of only Mary and Jesus, as Hannah’s offspring.<sup>187</sup>

The Hadīth tradition occasionally refers to Mary as *al-Batul* and *al-Azrā* both meaning virgin or untouched. The same narrations themselves give the interpretations of these terms saying, “She was untouched by man,” and “She bore no child other than Jesus.”<sup>188</sup> The term *al-Azrā* means a virgin woman, while *al-Batul* has a more extensive meaning—“the virgin, the woman who withdraws from worldly pleasures, one who devotes herself to worship.”<sup>189</sup>

In brief, both the Qur’ān and Hadīth literature shows that there is no evidence supporting the claim that Jesus had siblings, and *Ibn Hajar* specifically stresses that Mary only gave birth to Jesus and she had no other children.<sup>190</sup>

## JESUS’ APPEARANCE

Although the Qur’ān remains silent about Jesus’ outward features, there are several hadīth reports that give us an idea regarding the characteristics of Jesus’ body, hair, and skin color. It is also worth to note that there are, generally speaking, parallels between the features of the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus. First, there are many

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<sup>187</sup> Cetinkaya, “Did Jesus Have Brothers or Sisters,” in *Fountain*.

<sup>188</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 202, 461, V, 291;

<sup>189</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Gharīb al-Hadīth*, (Baghdad: Matbaat al-Ānī, 1397/1968), I, 446; Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-Arab* “ب ت ل”, XI, 43; Fīrūzâbâdī, *Qāmus* I, 1246.

<sup>190</sup> Ibn Hajar, *al-Fath al-Bārī*, VI, 470.

narrations on the Prophet Muhammad's Isrā (Night Journey) and Mi'raj (Ascension) <sup>191</sup>

where he met Jesus in the second heaven (the fourth heaven in another hadīth):

...I met Moses on the night of my Ascension to heaven. He was a tall person with lank hair as if he belonged to the people of the tribe of Shanu's... I met Jesus. He was one of moderate height and was red-faced as if he had just come out of a bathroom. <sup>192</sup>

Second, in his dream, the Prophet would see a man around the *Ka'bah*, ask the other people about his identity, and they would tell him that the man is Jesus:

While sleeping near the *Ka'bah* last night, I saw in my dream a man of brown color the best one can see amongst brown color and his hair was long that it fell between his shoulders. His hair was lank and water was dribbling from his head and he was placing his hands on the shoulders of two men while circumambulating the *Ka'bah*. I asked, 'Who is this?' They replied, This is Jesus, son of Mary. <sup>193</sup>

Third, speaking of the second coming of Jesus, the Prophet would say that "I am the nearest of all the people to the Son of Mary, and all the prophets are paternal brothers, and there has been no prophet between me and Jesus" and list his characteristics during Jesus' descent. <sup>194</sup> Many hadīths describe the appearance of Jesus so that people may

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<sup>191</sup> See Surah 17 (al-Isrā) which was revealed toward the end of the Makkan period; Isrā is Prophet's miraculous Night Journey from *Masjid al-Haram* (the Sacred Mosque) in Makkah to the *Masjid al-Aqṣā* in Quds (Jerusalem). The Prophet was taken from there through the heavenly dimensions of existence and observed the greatest signs of God; this journey is known as *al-Mi'rāj* (the Ascension). The preparation for the Ascension, how and when it took place, the means of transportation taken (i.e. *buraq*, *rafraf*...), what the Prophet witnessed in Heaven, and his descent are detailed in the hadīth corpus.

<sup>192</sup> Bukhārī, "*bad' al-khalq*" no 7, "*anbiyā*" no 24, 48; Muslim, "*imān*" no 266, 267, 271, 272, 278; Tirmidhī, "*tafsīr-u surah (17)*" no 1, "*manāqib*" no 12; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 240, 259, 296, 342, 374, II, 282, 528.

<sup>193</sup> Bukhārī, "*anbiyā*" no 48, "*ta'bīr*" no 33, "*fitan*" no 26; Muslim, "*imān*" no 275, 277; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 22, 39, 83, 122, 144, 154.

<sup>194</sup> Bukhārī, "*anbiyā*" no 48; Muslim, "*fadā'il*" no 143, 144, 145; Abū Dāwūd, "*malāhim*" no 14, "*sunnah*" no 13; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 319, 406, 437, 457, 463, 482, 541.

recognize him at his second coming. One such says that he will be of middle stature, reddish-white, and will be wearing two garments dyed red.<sup>195</sup>

### 1- ) Stature

Seeing the terms *rab 'ah*, *marbu'*, and *marbu' al-khalq* used in the hadīths, we are able to conclude that Jesus was one of moderate height.<sup>196</sup> The hadīths in Bukhārī and Musnad of Ibn Hanbal describe Jesus being of *arīz al-sadr* (a broad chest) and *ja'd* (strong shoulders and powerful body).<sup>197</sup> Another hadīth in Musnad uses the term *mubaddan al-khalq* meaning that he was neither overweight nor too slim.<sup>198</sup>

### 2- ) Hair<sup>199</sup>

According to the narrations, Jesus' hair is well groomed, slightly wavy (lank in some reports), hung down the earlobes, and falling between his shoulders. In Arabic, the hair hung down the earlobes, but not covering the shoulders is called *limmah*. If the hair covers the top of shoulders, it would be called *jummah*.<sup>200</sup> The Prophet says that Jesus

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<sup>195</sup> Bukhārī, “*bad' al-khalq*” no 7; Muslim, “*imān*” no 267; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 245, 259, 342; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 406, 437.

<sup>196</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Hadīth*, (Beirut: al-Maktabaht al-Ilmiyyahh, 1399/1979), II: 190; Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-Arab* “ع ر ب = r-b-a”; Nawawī, *Sharh-u Muslim* II: 224; Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī* VI, 486;

<sup>197</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 48; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 296. I, 275; Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-Arab* “ج ع د = j-a-d”

<sup>198</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 374.

<sup>199</sup> In Christian tradition, there is a description (apocryphal) about how Jesus looked. See *the Letter of Lentuleis*: Letter from First Consul Publius to Caesar Tiberius. The letter is partly an answer to a direct question from the Emperor. In the letter, Jesus comes out looking quite European! This description dominated Western art until the time of Rembrandt, Dutch painter and artist, and still is influential.

<sup>200</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Nihāyah* IV, 273; Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-Arab* “م ل م = l-m-m”

had the most beautiful *limmah* (hair hanging down to the earlobes) we might ever see.<sup>201</sup> His hair is also looking as if water drops were falling down from his head though it is not wet.<sup>202</sup> Some scholars take this literally and understand that Jesus used to wet his hair before using a comb. A hadīth talking about the end of the world and descent of the Messiah describes Jesus as when he would lower his head, there would fall beads of perspiration from his head, and when he would raise it up, beads like pearls would scatter from it.<sup>203</sup>

### 3- ) Face and Skin

On surveying the various references to Jesus' face and skin in the Hadīth tradition one is struck by the fact that Jesus has a penetrating look.<sup>204</sup> When it comes to his skin color, we see that various hadīths give us different colors. A weak hadīth in *Musnad* states that Jesus was white.<sup>205</sup> Indeed, this whiteness must be indicating a bright face and beauty. According to some narrations, he was red-faced as if he had just come out of a bath.<sup>206</sup> However, some hadīths describe Jesus as a tawny man, the most handsome of all brown men people might ever see.<sup>207</sup> Actually, people have only one

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<sup>201</sup> Bukhārī, “*libas*” no 68, “*ta’būr*” no 11; Muslim, “*imān*” no 273; Muwatta’, “*sifat al-Nabī*” no 2.

<sup>202</sup> Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 406, 437. According to a report in *Tabaranī*, his hair is looking as if oil was falling down from his head. *Tabaranī, Mu’jam al-Kabīr* XI, 73.

<sup>203</sup> Muslim, “*fītan*” no 110; Tirmidhī, “*fītan*” no 59; Ibn Mājah, “*fītan*” no 33.

<sup>204</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 374.

<sup>205</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 374.

<sup>206</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 24, 48; Muslim, “*imān*” no 272; Tirmidhī, “*tafsir-u surah (17)*” no 1; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 282.

<sup>207</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 48, “*libas*” no 68, “*ta’būr*” no 11; “*imān*” no 273, 274; Muwatta’, “*sifat al-Nabī*” no 2.

skin color and this color may change according to circumstances and surroundings. Since we find Jesus in the hadīths in three different times and places - the Prophet's Night Journey, his dream, and the End Time- it would be normal to see several descriptions of his face and skin color. Again, these various statements most probably depict Jesus' handsome appearance, rather than the darkness or lightness of his skin or what race he belongs to.

#### **4- ) Individuals Resembling Jesus**

##### ***a-) Salih:***

*Salih* is the prophet sent to the tribe of *Thamūd* who lived in *al-Hijr*, the north-west of Arabia. The people of *Thamūd* was an ancient Arab people and their main city, *Madā'in Salih*, was situated along the route of the famous Hijaz railway. The Prophet Salih came to them with God's divine message but they, like many other ancient nations, rejected him and his message and persisted in wrongdoing. Finally God destroyed them. Not in the *Kutub-u Tis'ah*, but in the *Mustadrak* of *al-Hākim*, due to his hair style and skin color, the Prophet Salih is likened to Jesus.<sup>208</sup>

##### ***b-) Urwah b. Mas'ud:***

In the *Truce of Hdaybiyah* in 628, as the Makkans refused to let the Muslims enter Makkah, the Prophet sent an envoy to announce that the Muslims had come for pilgrimage and thus were unarmed. The *Quraysh*, the ruling tribe of Makkah, in reply, sent Urwah b. Mas'ud Al-Thaqafī. A year later, this Urwah came to Madinah and embraced Islam. He was a loved and respected man among his people. He went out calling his tribe to Islam and hoping that they would not oppose him because of his high

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<sup>208</sup> Hākim, *al-Mastadrak* II, 616.

status among them. When he had invited them to Islam and shown his new religion to them, they shot arrows at him from all directions and killed him.<sup>209</sup> On his Ascension, the Prophet Muhammad would see Jesus son of Mary and say “I saw nearest in resemblance with him was Urwah b. Mas’ud.”<sup>210</sup> A hadīth on the description of the Messiah states that “one would suppose that his head was dripping with water, though there was no water on it. The man most like him among you is Urwah b. Mas’ud al-Thaqafī.”<sup>211</sup> Even though Urwah was believed to be famous for his good looking, the hadīth narrations do not mention any specific reason for this comparison between Jesus and Urwah.

**c-) Abū Dharr:**

As it will come in *Jesus’ Piety and Virtue*, the Prophet states that in terms of humbleness and piety Abū Dharr looked like Jesus.<sup>212</sup> The other version of the same hadīth says that Abū Dharr walked with Jesus’ piety on earth. A narration in *al-Musannaf of Ibn Shaybah* states that not only in morality and conduct, but also in physical appearance Abū Dharr had a resemblance with Jesus.

**d-) Muaz b. Jabal:**

Muaz b. Jabal was a companion of the Prophet known for his knowledge of law; he was among those who undertook the compilation of the Qur’ān and was appointed by the Prophet Muhammad as a judge in Yemen. In a hadīth *maqtu*<sup>213</sup> narrated by *Said b.*

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<sup>209</sup> Ibn Hisham, *al-Sīrah*, V, 222; Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqāt*, V, 510

<sup>210</sup> Muslim, “*imān*” no 271, 278; Tirmidhī, “*manāqib*” no 12; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 528, III, 334

<sup>211</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 116; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 166

<sup>212</sup> Tirmidhī, “*manāqib*” 35; Ibn Mājah “*muqaddima*” 11; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II: 163, 175, 223, V: 197, and VI: 442.

*Musayyab* in *al-Mustadrak*, Muaz b. Jabal is likened to Jesus in terms of the fact that as Jesus, Muaz was killed at the age of thirty three.<sup>214</sup>

Why is Jesus' appearance significant in our study? All Muslim theologians come to an agreement that prophets have no bodily or mental defects. As they were extraordinarily attractive in personality and behavior, they were also graceful and charming in outward appearance. As the following chapter explains, Jesus was a prophet-messenger; therefore he was both physically and mentally perfect. He was perfect in bodily structure, handsome, and well-built. Jesus must be free from all bodily defects, for his appearance should not repel others because believers are religiously obliged to love and respect him to the utmost degree, and follow his every command without feeling any dislike for his any aspect.

This chapter has showed that the Virgin Mary and Jesus have functioned as a bridge between Christianity and Islam. We cannot deny the reality of contacts, connections, and exchanges between early Eastern Christians and early Islamic communities, or even of their mutual influences upon one another. The Qur'ānic commentaries and the Hadīth tradition clearly point to oral contact between Christians and the Prophet Muhammad and his early followers. The given representation of Mary and Jesus in both traditions indicates possible influences of one tradition's heritage upon that of the other. Being a second-century Christian apocryphal work, the Protoevangelium of James, which tells of Mary's infancy and youth and ends shortly after the birth of Christ, offers remarkable parallels to presentations of Mary and Jesus in

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<sup>213</sup> Hadīth *maqtu'* is a report whose chain of narrators stop at the second generation, *the Tabīn*.

<sup>214</sup> Hākim, *al-Mustadrak* III, 302; Suyutī, *Tafsir* II, 226.

the Qur'ān and the Hadīth tradition. This clearly points out that as Christians are looking at other Christian traditions; the non-canonical Gospels and Nag Hammadi materials, they should expand their horizon and see the portrayal of Mary and Jesus in the Islamic tradition. Indeed, Muslims, too, need to study the Hadīth tradition about Jesus. More importantly, Christians need to study the Hadīth narratives on Jesus and have an understanding of what Muslims are seeing in these materials.

## CHAPTER 3 KEY CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM CONTRASTS

### INITIAL CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS<sup>215</sup>

People in Arabia, polytheists as well as monotheists in seventh century Arabia already had some knowledge about Jesus and had active relationships with Christians prior to the rise of Islam. Christians had settled in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries. Both Yemeni and Ethiopian Christians lived in the southern portion of the peninsula. Caravans traveling through the region stopped in Jerusalem and other towns in Byzantine Palestine and Syria where polytheistic merchants and drivers learned about Christianity, its Scriptures, other writings, controversies and oral traditions. Accounts about Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, the patriarchs and their families, Moses, Zachariah and his son, John the Baptist, as well as Mary and Jesus were well-known.<sup>216</sup>

Substantial numbers of Christians resided throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Contemporaries reported the existence of a Christian cemetery in Makkah, the birthplace of Muhammad, and Mesopotamian bishops apparently supervised Christian clergy and churches in portions of Arabia. The massacre of Christians at Mocha in southwestern Yemen in 523 C.E ordered by the Himyarite ruler, Joseph Dhu Nuwas, led directly to the reprisal invasion of southern Arabia by the Abyssinians and the establishment of a Christian enclave under Abrahah b. Sabāh. Having an army that included a number of war elephants, he attempted to subjugate the peninsula and attacked Makkah, vowing to

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<sup>215</sup> A modified version of this section was presented in the 11th Annual Graduate Research Symposium at the College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia on March 23-24, 2012.

<sup>216</sup> Walter H. Wagner, *Opening the Qur'ān: Introducing Islam's Holy Book*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), p. 98.

destroy the Ka'bah. The people of Makkah attributed Abrahah's humiliating retreat to droves of birds who pelted the invaders with fiery pebbles. The Qur'ān cites this event as an intervention by God (Surah 105, Al-Fīl, The Elephant). Muslim tradition dates the event to 570, the year of the Prophet Muhammad's birth.<sup>217</sup>

A number of Arab tribes were in close contact with Byzantine (Imperial) military outposts on the borderland with Syria. Doctrinal and ecclesiastical controversies among Christians in the Empire led to many Christians taking refuge in the Egyptian desert, Arabia and in the Persian Empire in order to be out of the reach of the Imperial government and church officials. It is likely that other Christians considered "Orthodox" by the official standards also resided in the Arabian Peninsula.

Among both the schismatic and the Orthodox Christians in Arabia were writings that had not been accepted into the canon used by Jews and by Christians. A number of these writings contained accounts that were part of popular Christian piety.

The essential Islamic factor underlying past and present Christian-Muslim relations is the Qur'ānic affirmation of the previous prophets and messengers. Islam incorporates and directly links the Qur'ān with the biblical and Christian traditions, albeit

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<sup>217</sup> According to Islamic tradition, the Makkans were not strong enough to defend Makkah and the Ka'bah against the army of Abrahah. They left Makkah for the surrounding mountains. Therefore, God defended His house. He sent down on the army flocks of birds. As can also be understood from the word *abābīl* translated in the Qur'ānic verse as birds, these were a species unknown in the region. According to reports, they were birds of different colors that carried pebbles of baked clay, one in their mouth and two in their claws. The pebbles penetrated deep into the bodies of Abrahah's soldiers, entering from the head and slicing through their organs. This incident became so famous in Arabian history that the year when it took place came to be known as the Year of the Elephant. See Elmalili Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili* (Istanbul: 1993) 9:167. Also, see the account of how Christianity came to Arabia and the defeat of Abrahah in Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, translated by A. Guillaume, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1955), pages 12-30.

within Islamic qualifications. The Qur'ān, revealed through Muhammad, gave particular emphasis to Abraham, Moses and Jesus as messengers of God.

Say: “We have believed in God, and that which has been sent down on us, and that which was sent down on Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Prophets who were raised in the tribes, and that which was given to Moses, Jesus, and all other Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them (in believing), and we are Muslims (submitted to Him exclusively).<sup>218</sup>

From the beginning, Islam has always been engaged in interreligious relations with Christians. Such relations are natural and required for Muslims. By giving particular emphasis to the revelations through Moses and Jesus, Muslims accept all prophets and scriptures sent to different peoples throughout history, and regard belief in them as an essential principle of being Muslim. The monotheistic faith revealed to humankind through Adam and other prophets, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad has always been the same. There are clear similarities with regard to prophets, scriptures, and practices. Therefore, when Muslims are asked “Do Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God?” they will answer the question clearly and unhesitatingly in the affirmative: Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same One Supreme Universal God, the Creator, and Sustainer and Cherisher of the Universe.

As referred to in Qur'ān 5:19, according to the usual exegesis, no prophet-messenger appeared between the time of Jesus and Muhammad. Further, Jesus is considered one of the four most important messengers sent to proclaim the message of the One God. As had Moses (Musa), Jesus had a divine book (Injīl) to give guidance to the Israelites. Even though Muslims believe that he does not have a divine origin, Jesus

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<sup>218</sup> Al-Baqara 2: 136 & Al-I Imran 3:84

has always been revered as a prophet in Islam, and occupies a distinctive place among other prophets.

Later Islamic traditions report that when the Prophet Muhammad realized his dream and returned to the city of Makkah in 630, he proceeded to cleanse the Ka'bah of idols. He ordered the removal and destruction of all the representations of the polytheistic deities and others venerated by the indigenous people. Representations of Jesus and Mary were among those in the Ka'bah. When he saw them, Muhammad covered these with his coat.<sup>219</sup> Whether or not this narrative is historically accurate, it demonstrates Muslim respect for Jesus and Mary.<sup>220</sup>

There are four important engagements between the Prophet Muhammad and Christians in Arabia:

First, clearly, Muhammad and his fellow Muslims knew and had commercial as well as social relationships with Christians. According to hadith traditions, the person who later became a prophet met with a Christian when he was a young boy traveling with his uncle's merchant caravan to Syria.<sup>221</sup> The Christian was a monk named Bahira<sup>222</sup> living in Bostra, a Roman city. According to Islamic history, when the monk realized that Muhammad had all the signs of the prophet that Bahira expected on the basis of

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<sup>219</sup> Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia Of Early Christianity*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997). See volume one, page 98 for a helpful survey.

<sup>220</sup> It has been said that those representations of Jesus and Mary are kept in a special/secret section (not the *Sacred Trusts*) in Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>221</sup> Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, (U.K: Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 29.

<sup>222</sup> Some Islamic sources call the monk "Sergius." See: Mustafa Fayda, "Bahira" TDV *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul 1991, IV: 486.

Deuteronomy 18:15-19, he told Muhammad's uncle to take him back to Makkah as soon as possible to protect him from potential enemies. Another personality with whom the Prophet came in contact in Makkah was Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a well-known and revered Christian scholar, who also happened to be one of Muhammad's closest in-laws. The tradition tells us that the Prophet's wife, Khadijah, took him to her cousin Waraqa and told him about the revelation that Muhammad began receiving. After listening to Muhammad, Waraqa said that it was Gabriel who had come to him, just he had come earlier to Moses.<sup>223</sup>

Second, following the beginning of the Revelation to Muhammad and the growth of the nascent Muslim community in Makkah, the Muslims faced atrocious persecutions and tortures by the polytheistic leaders of the city. Some believers were stretched on burning sands, some were cauterized with hot iron, and some were killed. The Prophet Muhammad advised his companions to leave for Abyssinia. He told them that the Ethiopian king was a Christian and just ruler in whose realm no one was oppressed and that the king would protect them. The king welcomed the Muslims and promised to protect them from their enemies. When hostile Makkan authorities arrived in Abyssinia to demand the extradition of the Muslims, the king asked the Muslims: "What do you say about Jesus?" The group leader replied, "we can only say what our Prophet has taught us: Jesus is the Servant and Messenger of God, the Spirit and Word from God, whom God entrusted to the Virgin Mary."<sup>224</sup> When the King heard this testimony, he picked up a

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<sup>223</sup> Bukhārī, *Volume 1, Book 1 (Revelation), Number 3*

<sup>224</sup> Ahmed b. Hanbal, I: 202, 461, and V: 290-291

twig from the ground and said, “I swear, the distinction between what we believe about Jesus and what you have said is not greater than the width of this twig.”<sup>225</sup> He then rejected the Makkan petition and continued to give the Muslims asylum in his realm.

Third, when the Prophet Muhammad migrated from Makkah to Madinah,<sup>226</sup> he originated and signed a contract called *Covenant of al-Madinah* with all communities in Madinah including Jews and Christians. This contract set out principles essential to a peaceful and pluralistic society. It gave equality to all residents and accepted the coexistence of different religious communities in Madinah living according to their own faith systems, performing their own rituals, and helping each other against any threat that might come from outside of Madinah. All religious and ethnic groups had equal rights, dignity, and protection. Madinah was declared a sanctuary for people of this document.<sup>227</sup>

Last, just as Muslims were shown mercy and respect as guests in Abyssinia, a Christian land, they are expected to do the same to Christians in their own society. Ten years after Muhammad and his followers had immigrated to Madinah, they hosted a group of well-educated Christians comprising a bishop, his scholars, and lay people from Najran<sup>228</sup> (southern Arabia). These men had come to Madinah to learn more about this new religion and have an investigatory dialogue with Muhammad over the divinity of

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<sup>225</sup> R. Marston Speight, *God Is One: The Way of Islam*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1989), p. 1-2.

<sup>226</sup> The Prophet Muhammad’s departure from Makkah to Madinah in 622 is called Hijrah.

<sup>227</sup> Muhammad ibn ‘Umar al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghāzi*, (Oxford: Matba’ Baptist Mishin, 1856), p.184. Also, see Hamidullah, *Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad*, (Kitab Bhavan, 2007), p.75.

<sup>228</sup> Name of a valley in North Yemen, where there was a Christian population inhabiting the highest range in the Arabian Peninsula at the time.

Jesus. The Prophet warmly welcomed the Najran delegation and provided them with a secure place close to his mosque. He even ordered Muslims to pitch tents for their guests as a sign of communal hospitality. The Prophet also invited the Christians to perform their prayers in his own mosque. An extended debate took place over several days; however, the Najran delegation and Prophet were not able to reach a conclusion on theological issues. At the end of the conference, the Prophet provided the Christians with written assurance that their lives, property, and religion would be protected in Muslim-governed areas.<sup>229</sup>

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, the Islamic territories expanded and within a short time covered the Middle East and North Africa. Within these territories were huge populations of Christians. For centuries there were large and even majority populations of Christians and other faiths living peacefully with Muslims. Because of the relationships between Christianity and Islam, Christians and Muslims have come together, not only in some areas about theology and culture, but also they have come together in terms of the history.

Christians and Muslims have been living together for over 1400 years and have always engaged actively with each other. It is equally true for Christians as for Muslims that the past of our relationship is still very much with us and contributes significantly to the present situation. Yet our historical memories contain more than negative episodes. The cited essential Islamic factor and the four precedents indicate that Christians and

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<sup>229</sup> Bukhārī Volume 5, Book 59 (*Al-Maghaazi*), Number 663 -664 and Muslim Book 31, Chapter 7 (*The Merits Of Abū 'Ubaida Bin Jarrah*), Number 5949. See also Abd al-Malik Ibn Hisham Ibn Ayyūb al-Himyarī, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyya*. I-VI, (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1411/1990), II:220

Muslims have historic foundational evidence that may be important to recover and build upon in the present for our futures.

## **WHERE CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS AGREE AND DIFFER ON JESUS**

In general, Islam agrees with Christianity on the following points:

1. Islam advocates the holiness of Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, it is an essential part of the Islamic teaching to respect and revere Jesus and to believe in his holiness, and that as a prophet, he lived in this world as a pure person free of any sin. (Qur'ān 3:45)

2. Islam declares the godliness of Mary, the mother of Jesus. No Muslim can doubt the decency, purity, and piety of Mary. She, according to the Qur'ān, had been the most noble among the women of the entire world. (Qur'ān 3:42-43)

3. Islam declares that Jesus was miraculously born from a virgin mother with no father. (Qur'ān 19:16-26)

4. The Qur'ān attributes to Jesus as a prophet many of the miracles which are mentioned in the Gospels. According to the Qur'ān, Jesus was empowered by God to revive the dead, and heal the leper and the blind. (Qur'ān 3:49)

In addition to this, the Qur'ān ascribes to Jesus a miracle that is not recorded in the canonical Gospels: Jesus spoke clearly while he was in the cradle (Qur'ān 19:27-33)

5. Furthermore, Islam joins Christianity in declaring Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah promised to the Jews through the prophets of old. (Qur'ān 3:45 & 4:172)

Six out of twenty Qur'ānic passages about Jesus were revealed in the Makkan period of the Prophet Muhammad's proclamation; the remainder belong to the Madinah

period, when the Prophet had more opportunity of coming in touch with different communities and societies than he had had in Makkah.<sup>230</sup> Compared to some of the Qur'an's other prophets-messengers, particularly Moses, accounts about Jesus are not detailed. While the Qur'an gives us little narrative about Jesus and almost nothing about his disciples and their identities, nevertheless Jesus is a bridge between Christians and Muslims, and between the earthly and spiritual worlds or dimensions. Beyond the few passages that deal with Jesus' sayings and miracles, the Qur'an addresses emphatically who Jesus is and is not. Plainly, Jesus is a *rasul*/messenger and his book is the Injil.<sup>231</sup>

### **1- ) Jesus the Messenger**

Wagner states that in Islam, the term "prophet" includes both prophets and messengers. A prophet (*nabi*) in the specific sense is a person "whose mission lies within the framework of an existing religion" and who seeks to call people to worship and obey the One-Only God through the language and culture of that current religion.<sup>232</sup> He may warn and admonish those people about their conduct as well as their religious commitments. The other type of prophet-in-general is the *rasul* or messenger. They bring new revelations that often break the patterns of the existing religions and social structures so that they actually introduce clearer and fuller insights and commands that lead to fulfillment in Islam.<sup>233</sup> In a more particular sense, a prophet is one who receives Divine Revelation, and follows the Book and the Law that the Messenger prior to him brought or

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<sup>230</sup> James Robson, "Muhammedan Teaching about Jews," in *The Moslem World*. (Hartford, Jan., 1939; Vol. XXIX, No. 1), p. 37.

<sup>231</sup> Walter, *Opening the Qur'an*, p. 335.

<sup>232</sup> Glassé, page 318

<sup>233</sup> Wagner, *Opening the Qur'an*, p. 40-60.

follows a contemporary messenger, without himself having received a separate Book, such as Lot in the time Abraham and Aaron in the time of Moses. Every Messenger is also a prophet, but not vice versa. On the whole, God may give a rasul a book such as the Tawrah for Moses and the Injil (Gospel) for Jesus. Revelation through the books has been progressive, that is, it fit the stage and state of the people to whom it was sent: “Most certainly, We sent Messengers before you, and (like every other man) appointed wives and children for them. It was not (the way) for a Messenger to work a miracle (as a sign of his being a Messenger) except by God’s leave. Every appointed term has its own Revelation and law.” (Surah 13:38).

God has sent innumerable numbers of prophets-messengers to all peoples in all times and places: “To every people (was sent) a messenger. When their messenger comes (before them) the matter will be judged between them with justice and they will not be wronged” (Surah 10: 48).<sup>234</sup> “Together and individually, messenger-prophets are the custodians of God’s truth, are endowed with different gifts by God, and will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment for carrying out their missions faithfully. Uniformly, they will be insulted, opposed, mocked, rejected, persecuted, and even killed, yet God will vindicate them, and woe to those who reject or harm these holy men.”<sup>235</sup>

The Qur’ān neither gives any account pertaining Jesus’ childhood --nor for that matter do the canonical Gospels, except for a single story in Luke-- nor explains where and when Jesus was given the prophethood-messengership. Since Jesus is a Prophet

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<sup>234</sup> See also Surah 14:4, 9-14

<sup>235</sup> See, for example, Surahs 33:7; 17:54; 6:10; and 2:87. Also, Wagner, *Opening the Qur’an*, p. 40-60.

(Qur'ān 19:30) while still in infancy, most Muslims believe he was a prophet from birth. As for the Bible, there are numerous references regarding his prophethood.<sup>236</sup> However, the distinction between the biblical and Qur'ānic accounts is Jesus' claim in the New Testament of being much *more* than a prophet. Arguably, everything he said and did was meant to authenticate his claim (John 20:31). Jesus viewed himself as the top or culmination of the line of prophets and claimed that Moses and all previous prophets spoke of him (Luke 24:25-27; Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; John 6:14). In the New Testament, Jesus performed miracles on his own authority — not by “God’s leave,” as the Qur'ān puts it. He even claimed to be able to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:9-11).

The fundamental characteristics of Jesus' prophethood in Islam, as Unal puts it, were the same as those of the other prophets and were as follows: a-) Humanity should believe, first of all, in the Existence and Oneness of God, and acknowledge His exclusive sovereignty, which demands absolute service and obedience to Him; b-) Humanity should obey the prophets since they have been designated by God to convey His religion; c-) God establishes the law which orders human life.<sup>237</sup>

In Islamic tradition, even before his virginal conception, Jesus was designated to be a special messenger who, like Moses, would be graced by God's signs as he testified to the One-Only God. The angels told Mary Jesus would be a messenger who would heal, animate clay birds and restore the dead to life (Qur'ān 3:45-51). As noted in discussing

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<sup>236</sup> See, for example, Matthew 13:57; Luke 1:76; 4:24; John 4:19. Nevertheless, there is not one single passage in which Jesus describes himself as prophet.

<sup>237</sup> Ünal, *the Qur'an*, p. 136

Mary and her return to her family with the baby she bore under the palm, the infant prefaced the statement that cleared her of any question about her morals with the first words he uttered. The Qur'ān reports that he continued to witness to the One-Only God throughout his time on earth. In addition, the Qur'ānic Jesus seems to showed far more respect and deference for his mother than did the Jesus of the canonical Gospels.<sup>238</sup>

(The infant) said: “Surely I am ‘abdullāh (a servant of God). He (has already decreed that He) will give me the Book (the Gospel) and make me a Prophet. He has made me blessed (and a means of His blessings for people) wherever I may be, and He has enjoined upon me the Prayer (the Ṣalat) and the Prescribed Purifying Alms (the Zakat – and to enjoin the same upon others) for as long as I live. And (He has made me) dutiful towards my mother, and He has not made me unruly, wicked. So peace be upon me on the day I was born and the day of my death, and the day when I will be raised to life. (Maryam 19:30-33)

This passage indicates that Jesus’ prophethood-messengership was to be characterized by several elements. First and foremost, he testified to the One-Only God from his infancy forward. Jesus will be especially instructed by the One-Only God about the previous revelations and scriptures revealed to and proclaimed by the prophets and messengers. As was Adam, Jesus received special guidance by God. Jesus stands in the line of prophets and messengers and was sent for the purpose of confirming the Tawrah (Torah) and to announce the coming of the greatest and final messenger Muhammad, as indicated in Surah 61:6:<sup>239</sup>

And Jesus son of Mary said: “O Children of Israel! Surely I am the Messenger of God sent to you, confirming (whatever of the truth is contained in) the Torah which was revealed before me, and bringing the glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad.”

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<sup>238</sup> Wagner, *Opening the Qur'an*, p. 330

<sup>239</sup> Wagner, *Opening the Qur'an*, p. 333.

Jesus canceled or altered some of the regulations that were imposed on the People of Israel through the Tawrah given through Moses such as some of the dietary regulations and probably ritual regulations. God, through Gabriel and Muhammad, recalls Jesus saying in Surah 3:50-51:<sup>240</sup>

And confirming (the truth contained in) the Torah that was revealed before me, and to make lawful for you certain things that had been forbidden to you. Be sure that I have come to you with a clear proof (demonstrating that I am a Messenger of God) from your Lord. So keep from disobedience to God in due reverence for Him and piety, and obey me.

Second, the Islamic understanding of God's revelations through prophets, messengers and scriptures before the Qur'an and Muhammad's prophethood includes the belief that the prophets and messengers constitute a brotherhood in which they may be regarded as one body.<sup>241</sup> Jesus has his place in the line of prophets and messengers that God has sent to reveal His will and ways to humanity. Jesus stands with Moses, Salih, Hud, Noah, Abraham and all the others. As were Moses and other biblical figures, Jesus was a prophet-messenger sent to the *Banu Isra'il* (the Children of Israel).<sup>242</sup>

Thus, Muslims hold all prophets of God in high esteem and place them on an equal footing. A Muslim believes in Jesus as he or she believes in the Prophet Muhammad. Even a mere attempt to impeach or accuse Jesus of committing a sin in Islamic theology is regarded as an act of disbelief because Muslims believe that all

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<sup>240</sup> Wagner, *Opening the Qur'an*, p. 123.

<sup>241</sup> See, for example, Surah 2:136, 285 also Surah 4:152. Also, Wagner, *Openin the Qur'an*, p. 300.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

prophets of God infallible and not liable to sin. Imam Bukhārī and Muslim state in their Sahihs that the Prophet said:

If anyone testifies that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah alone Who has no partners, and that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger, and that Jesus is Allah's servant and His messenger and His Word which He bestowed on Mary and a Spirit created by Him, and that Paradise is true, and Hell is true, Allah will admit him into Paradise with the deeds which he had done even if those deeds were few.”<sup>243</sup>

The Kutub-u Tis'ah with the exception of Abū Dāwūd and Imam Malik report that the Prophet Muhammad talked about three groups of people who receive a double reward and one of them is a group of people from *Ahl al-Kitab* (the People of the Book) who believe in their own prophets and then believe in the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'ān declares the same fact in Surah 28: 51-5;

Assuredly We have conveyed to them the Word so that they may reflect and be mindful. Those to whom We granted the Book before it do believe in it. When it is recited to them, they say: “We believe in it. Surely it is the truth from our Lord. Even before this, We were such as submitted (to the Divine Will).” These will be granted their reward twice over because they have remained steadfast; and they repel evil with good, and out of what We have provided for them they spend...

Certainly, this does not mean that all the People of the Book actually believed in the Qur'ān and the Prophet. This verse refers to some among the People of the Book who believed in it during the Makkan period of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad. According to *the Sirah* of Ibn Hisham, while the Prophet was in Makkah some twenty Christians from Abyssinia visited him when they heard news of Islam. When they had asked all the questions they wished, the Prophet invited them to believe in the One-Only God and read the Qur'ān to them. As referred to in Qur'ān 5:83, when they heard the

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<sup>243</sup> Bukhārī, *Volume 4, Book 55, Number 644.*

Qur'ān their eyes flowed with tears, and they accepted his call, believed in him, and declared him to be speaking the truth. They recognized in him the things which had been said of him in their scriptures. Afterwards, referring to these Christians, God revealed the passages (Surah 28:51-5) mentioned above.<sup>244</sup>

In addition, the Prophet had sent out some of his companions in different directions to the kings of the Arabs and the non-Arabs inviting them to Islam in the period between *the Truce of al-Hudaybiyah* and his death. He sent Dihyah al-Kalbī to Caesar who was Heraclius, Emperor of the Roman (Byzantine) Empire. The Prophet's letter with Dihyah came to him saying, "If you accept Islam you will be safe; if you accept Islam God will give you a double reward; if you turn back the sin of the husbandmen will be upon you."<sup>245</sup>

Jesus' prophetic mission involved warnings and promises about a person's destination in the Hereafter. If Moses' roles focused on establishing the community of the Children of Israel, Jesus pointed Jews toward their spiritual condition and destiny. His Injīl was a clear revelation of God's compassion and mercy (Surah 57:27), yet Jesus was a sign of the coming Judgment (Surah 43:61). He proclaimed the One-Onlyness of God and God added a dire warning to those who believed and taught otherwise: "But said Christ: 'O Children of Israel! Worship Allah my Lord and your Lord.' Whoever joins other gods with Allah, Allah will forbid him the Garden, and the fire will be his abode.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibn Hisham, *al-Sirah* II: 237;

<sup>245</sup> Bukhārī, "*bad' al-wahy*" 6, "*jihād*" 102, "*tafsir-u surah*" 4; Muslim, "*jihād*" 74; Ahmad b. Hanbel, I: 262.

There will for the wrongdoers be no one to help” (Surah 5:72). Nevertheless, rejected by many of his own people, Jesus turned to his disciples in Surah 61:14:

O you who believe! Be helpers of God (’s cause and Messenger), even as Jesus son of Mary said to his disciples: “Who will be my helpers (on this way) to God?” The disciples said: “We are the helpers (in the cause) of God.” And so it happened that some of the Children of Israel believed (in him and his Message) and others disbelieved (thus becoming two groups). So We strengthened those who believed against their enemies, and they became the uppermost.

When the People of Israel insisted on disbelief and arrogance, Jesus said, “Who will be my helpers (on this way) to God?” By *ansarī* (my helpers), Jesus meant the people who would help and support him to call people to the way of God. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad addressed the pilgrims before the Hijrah in the following manner: who will shelter me so that I can proclaim my Lord’s message, as the Arab pagans in Makkah prevented me from doing so. This was his custom until he immigrated to Madinah and *al-Ansar*<sup>246</sup> gave him shelter, defended him, consoled and protected him against anyone who was to do him harm. By the same token, Jesus chose a company of the People of the Israel who believed in his message, helped and defended him, as well as followed the light which was sent down to him.

Ibn Abbas states that this passage regarding Jesus’ disciples is a Qur’ānic reference to the nation of the Prophet Muhammad. It is confirmed in another hadīth reported in both *Sahihs* of Imam Bukhārī and Muslim that when the Prophet wanted to delegate a person in the Battle of al-Ahzāb (the Confederates or the Trench), he delegated al-Zubayr b. Awwam. Then he wanted to delegate a person and he again delegated al-

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<sup>246</sup> Supporters, Muslims in Madinah who supported the Prophet Muhammad’s cause and shared whatever they had with the Muslims who came from Makkah.

Zubayr. The Prophet then announced: “Every prophet had a disciple (*hawarī*), and al-Zubayr is my disciple.”<sup>247</sup>

When it comes to the divine scripture given to Jesus, the Qur’ān states in Surah 5:110, “When I taught you of the Book and wisdom, and the Torah and *Injīl* (the Gospel).” The passage mentions four factors: book, wisdom, Torah, and *Injīl*. Here the Qur’ān’s mentioning the Torah and the Gospel in addition to the Book, as in Surah 3: 48, has led some scholars to interpret the Book (*al-Kitāb*) as meaning “writing.” From this perspective, the verse would mean “When I taught you of writing...” However, when we consider another fact, namely that the Torah and the Gospel contain or even are embodiments of the wisdom as Divine Books, we can conclude that by the Book and the wisdom, the verse refers to the Divine Book and the wisdom generally, and particularizes or specifies them to be the Torah and the Gospel.<sup>248</sup>

In his book of history, Imam Tabarī mentions that the *Injīl* was sent down to Jesus while he was thirty, and that he lived among his people until he was raised to heaven at the age of thirty-three. Ali Ünal asserts in his translation that the *Injīl* signifies the inspired orations and utterances of Jesus, which he delivered during the last three years of his life in his capacity as a prophet-messenger. There are no certain means by which we can definitely establish whether or not his statements were recorded during his lifetime on earth. It is possible that some people took notes about them and that some followers committed them to memory. By the end of the first century, however, several treatises

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<sup>247</sup> Bukhārī, *jihad* 40, 41, 135; *fazâil al-sahaba* 13; *maghazi* 29; Muslim, *fazail al-sahaba*

<sup>248</sup> Ünal, *the Qur’an*, p. 264.

about Jesus were written. The authors of these treatises recorded those sayings of his which they had received from the previous generation of co-religionists.<sup>249</sup> By the mid-4th century, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, whose authors belonged to the second or third generation after Jesus were chosen from among other Gospels and accepted by the Church as the canonical. These are not identical with the Injīl. Rather, the Injīl consists of those statements by Jesus which form part of these Gospels. Muslims hold that there are no means of distinguishing the fragments of the original Injīl from the pieces written by the authors themselves. All we could say is that only those sections explicitly attributed to Jesus, for example statements such as: “And Jesus said” and “And Jesus taught,” *might* constitute the true Injīl.<sup>250</sup> It is the totality of such fragments which is designated as the Injīl by the Qur’ān, and it is the teachings contained in these fragments that the Qur’ān confirms. If these fragments are put together and compared with the teachings of the Qur’ān, one notices very few discrepancies between them.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Christian scholarship suggests that at least after 70 CE and perhaps earlier Christians began to write about Jesus, his mother, Mary, his followers, and the spread of the Christian message. Often the accounts about Jesus were called Gospels. By the early fourth century there was a plethora of Gospels, Acts of various figures, cosmologies, meditations and tracts. These featured various versions of Jesus’ teachings, actions, death and its aftermath. A number of Gospels described his mother, Mary, and the childhoods of Mary and Jesus. Some were widely popular and others were intended for sectarian Christian communities in the Roman Empire. All were written in Greek and made ample use of Greco-Roman rhetoric. The works were used for instruction, preaching, edification, countering the ideas of other Christians, attracting pagans to Christianity, and defending Christianity from its pagan and Jewish critics. (see Wagner, *Opening the Qur’ān*, p.25-40.)

<sup>250</sup> The biblical passages are indeed not uniformly the same and some are clearly not by Jesus but the later church (see use of the word “church” in Matthew).

<sup>251</sup> Mawdudī, Abū al-Alā, *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān*, 1:233-4. See, also Ünal, *the Qur’an*, p. 124.

## 2- ) Jesus' Miracles

Haylamaz states that in Islamic tradition, since the most prophets were sent to a certain people and their message was restricted to a certain time and nation, the miracles they worked pertained to the arts or crafts widespread in the time of each. Thus, the prophets established an important superiority over those whom they were addressing, and they were able to draw attention to themselves and to make their voices heard more easily. For example, since in the time of Moses, sorcery and magic enjoyed great prestige in Egypt, God favored Moses with a “staff” which would change into a snake which swallowed all the products of sorcerers.<sup>252</sup> Likewise, at the time of Jesus, the healing arts enjoyed great prestige and most of the miracles Jesus worked pertained to healing and reviving.<sup>253</sup>

Indeed, the first thing that strikes one is that most of Jesus' miracles in Islam, according to Haylamaz, were related to the field of medicine, such as healing and reviving. During his time there were important developments in the area of medicine and people were frequently confronted with these. For this reason, his miracles of healing, gained the attention of medical authorities, especially since he had not been educated in this field.<sup>254</sup>

In fact, unlike other prophets who performed miracles in Islamic tradition, Jesus himself and his entire life was considered a miracle from start to finish: his being born

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<sup>252</sup> See Surahs 7:117, 20:69, and 26:45

<sup>253</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, II: 164. See, also, Resit Haylamaz, “The Miracles of Jesus” in *Fountain*, Issue 44, October - December 2003.

<sup>254</sup> Haylamaz, “The Miracles of Jesus” in *Fountain*.

from Virgin Mother Mary, who had devoted herself to the Temple; coming into physical existence as a Spirit from God, he had no father though; speaking in the cradle; and his ascension to heaven. Furthermore, the good tidings that he will be a prophet were given before he was born, and his name was given by God before his birth. Among his major miracles are being strengthened by the Holy Spirit, breathing life into something in the shape of a bird that he fashioned out of clay, healing the blind from birth and the leper, reviving the dead, informing what people eat and what they store up in their houses, and providing a banquet that came from heaven for his disciples.

Another question to be answered is why the Qur'ān concentrates so exclusively on the miracles of Jesus rather than his moral message, which is hardly alluded to, while in the case of Islam's own Prophet Muhammad, it is the opposite: almost no mention of or emphasis on miracles, to the extent that modern Muslims commonly claim that the Prophet's only miracle is the Qur'ān itself (even though that position is contrary to the Hadīth, while great emphasis is placed on the moral teachings).

The Qur'ān's reference to Jesus miracles as an *ayat*/sign from Allah is understood by Muslims as being a sign or proof of the authenticity of Jesus' prophetic mission. The style is characteristic of the Qur'ān which tends to place emphasis on the lessons to be drawn from a story or miracle rather than the story itself. Like many other events and stories in the Qur'ān, Jesus miracles are recounted briefly, without any detail as to person, time or place. In addition, none of the nature miracles, such as walking on the water or changing water into wine are referred to.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Wagner, *Opening the Qur'an*, p. 290-7.

Interestingly, for some Christian scholars, there is recognition that some nature miracles attributed to Jesus actually are derived from the later Church's expansion of faith in Jesus. In his fascinating book *A Marginal Jew*, John P. Meier gives us an excellent detailed and balanced commentary on all the miracle stories in the Gospels. For Meier, the miracles of Jesus were not "individual acts of kindness"; they were demonstrations of the presence and certain coming of the kingdom of God.<sup>256</sup> In chapter 17, he constantly stresses that as a historian all he can affirm is that Jesus, during his historical career, performed actions which his contemporaries viewed as divine interventions taming evil spirits and curing destructive disease. The question of what actually occurred is for Meier a theological question, beyond the competence of a historian. That is why he raises much more modest questions: (1) Do the miracle stories derive from the early church, or do at least some of the miracle stories derive from the ministry of Jesus? (2) Do certain kinds of miracle stories appear to be typical of reports regarding Jesus? (3) Did Jesus in fact perform some startling deeds which his contemporaries regarded as miracles? (4) What did the miracles mean to Jesus and his contemporaries?

Meier's conclusion on Jesus' miracles is that it was Jesus' apparent exorcisms and healings which most clearly signaled the present rule of God in his ministry. Of seven exorcism stories, two or possibly three are historical in the sense that they go back to some event in the life of Jesus; of fourteen healing stories, eight are historical in this sense; except for the stories of the feeding the multitude, all seven of the "nature

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<sup>256</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume Two: Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, (New York: Doubleday, 1994), p. 453.

miracles” - which the Qur’ān does not mention at all - derive from church tradition rather than an incident in Jesus’ life.

A prominent element in the Qur’ānic accounts on Jesus’ miracles is the repeated mention of God’s permission:

Assuredly I have come to you with a clear proof from your Lord: I fashion for you out of clay something in the shape of a bird, then I breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by *God’s leave*. And I heal the blind from birth and the leper, and I revive the dead, by *God’s leave*. And I inform you of what things you eat, and what you store up in your houses. (Al-i Imran 3:49)

When God says: “O Jesus son of Mary! Remember My favor upon you and upon your mother, when I confirmed you with the Holy Spirit so that you talked to people in the cradle and in manhood; and when I taught you of the Book and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel; and when you fashioned out of clay something in the shape of a bird by *My leave*, then you breathed into it, and it became a bird by *My leave*, and you healed the blind from birth and the leper by *My leave*; and when you raised the dead by *My leave*. (Al-Maedah 5: 110)

Muslim commentators have often laid emphasis on this phrase in order to minimize the role of Jesus in initiating and carrying out the miracles. This contrasts with the Gospel accounts, which usually portray Jesus as acting on his own initiative and in his own authority. Jesus in the Gospels does not employ the use of a powerful angel or even in the name of God. The implicit claim is that he has a divine connection or dimension that empowers him to act. For Muslims, Jesus performed his miracles with the help of God rather than through any divine power of his own.<sup>257</sup>

After giving general information, we can now move on to the details of Jesus’ miracles. In regard with Jesus’ first miracle, his miraculous birth, the Qur’ān states in Surah 3:58-63;

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<sup>257</sup> David Thomas, “The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemic,” in *Journal of Semitic Studies* XXXIX/2 Autumn 1994, p. 233.

(The creation of) Jesus in reference to God resembles (the creation of) Adam. He created him from earth, then said He to him, “Be!” and he is.....so is this the truth from your Lord (in this matter); do not then be (and you are never expected to be) of those who doubt.... After the (true) knowledge has come to you, whoever still disputes with you about him (Jesus), say (in challenging them): “Come, then! Let us summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, ourselves and your selves, and then let us pray and invoke God’s curse upon those who lie.”

After these verses revealed, the Najran delegation, as previously mentioned, came to meet the Prophet. They were 60 people, with 14 of them in charge of all the rest, while the entire group had three chiefs, who were the noblest and the most highborn among them. They were al-Aqīb, al-Sayyīd, and Abū Harithah Ibn Alqamah. The three of them kept deliberating on Jesus. Therefore, God revealed this passage and explained how Jesus was created.<sup>258</sup>

Surahs 3:46, 5:110, and 19:29-30 clearly declare that one of Jesus’ miracles is his speaking as an infant in the cradle. Several hadīth books also refer to the same miracle. According to a hadīth narrated in Bukhārī, Muslim, and Musnad, Jesus is mentioned among the three persons who spoke in cradle.<sup>259</sup> This is found in Christianity only in a pseudepigraphon, the Arabic Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

While it does not specifically recount any healing or resuscitation miracles by Jesus, the Qur’ān seems to indicate that such actions took place. Most probably the Qur’ān knows that reader-listeners are aware of the basic events recounted in the canonical and non-canonical Gospels.<sup>260</sup> As the accompanying footnote relates, later

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<sup>258</sup> Ibn Hisham, *al-Sirah*, II: 220.

<sup>259</sup> Bukhārī, “anbiyā” 48; Muslim, “birr” 8; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 309, II, 307-308.

reports about healings and resurrections circulated in Muslim circles. According to these reports, Jesus was at the age of nine or ten while performing the resuscitation miracles and he was reviving the dead by saying *Ya Hayy Ya Qayyūm* (O! The All-Living, O! The Self-Subsisting).<sup>261</sup>

The sound hadīth reports, too, do not give us any detail about healing and resurrection miracles. Wandering among prophets on the Day of Judgment, the people say, “Let us ask someone to intercede for us with our Lord that He may relieve us from this place of ours.” After asking several prophets, they go to Moses who will reply, “I am not fit for this undertaking,” and mention to them the mistakes he made, and add, “You had better go to Jesus, God’s Servant and His Messenger and His Word and a soul created by Him.” In a variant of this hadīth in Musnad of Ahmad b. Hanbal, Moses says “You had better go to Jesus, who healed the blind from birth and the leper and revived the dead.”<sup>262</sup>

Ibn Kathīr mentions that the People of Israel criticized Jesus that he could revive only some people who died recently. They asked Jesus to bring back to life Sam, the son of Noah. He prayed to God, and He raised him up and then told them about the Ark of Noah. Then Jesus invoked God to cause him to die again, and it was done.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> There are 3 raisings of the dead in the canonical Gospels: The synoptics all have the raising of the little girl; Luke has the raising of a young man; and John has the raising of Lazarus.

<sup>261</sup> See Tarif Khalidi, pages 177-178 for the healing of a blind, leprous, crippled and paralyzed man, and page 211 for a comment by Jesus that he healed persons. Accounts about Jesus raising persons from the grave appear to have been common after the mid-8th century, see pages 85, 115, 154-157, 163, 188-189, 191, and 206-208. In the resurrection stories the person often was raised from a grave and then returned to the grave after testifying to the power of God.

<sup>262</sup> Ahmed b. Hanbal, I: 4.

<sup>263</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Islamic View of Jesus*, trans. Tamir Abū Muhammad, (Egypt: Dar al-Manarah, 2002), p. 90-2.

Some miracles recorded seem to have a strange nature. For example, Imam Tabarī narrates a story that Jesus and a companion being given a sheep to eat by a shepherd. Jesus tells the shepherd not to break the bones when he is preparing it. After the meal the bones are placed in the skin, Jesus prays, and the sheep is brought back to life. Stories are told of Jesus causing a skull to come to life.<sup>264</sup>

The animation of the clay figures into live birds is the only one of the Qur'ānic miracles – if we do not count Jesus' speaking in the cradle- which is not mentioned in the canonical Gospels. However, it does occur, with additional details and minor variations, in the apocryphal Gospels. One can therefore assume that some early Christians counted this among Jesus' miracles.<sup>265</sup> The Christian Greek *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* contains an account in which the five year old Jesus formed twelve sparrows on a Sabbath. When criticized for working of the Sabbath, he clapped his hands so that the birds came to life and flew away.<sup>266</sup> The Qur'ānic confirmation and correction of the Christian non-canonical story emphasizes that Jesus has been given power from God to breathe life into clay figures. This is not a manifestation of Jesus' being more than a human but of his being given such power by the God who can breathe life into clay to create Adam.

Moreover, God strengthened Jesus with the Holy Spirit, so that Jesus could withstand his opponents. Different views have been put forward about *Ruh al-Quds* (the

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<sup>264</sup> Al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, IV: 179. See, also, James Robson, "Muhammedan Teaching about Jews," in *The Moslem World*.

<sup>265</sup> Kate Zebiri, "Contemporary Muslim Understanding of the Miracles of Jesus," in *The Muslim World*, vol: 90, Spring 2000, p. 75.

<sup>266</sup> Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), p. 125.

Holy Spirit) with which Jesus was confirmed. The Holy Spirit, according to some, is a spirit from God, while some are of the opinion that it is one of the Beautiful Names of God, and still others maintain that it is the *Injil* (the Gospel). Others hold that it is the Archangel Gabriel whom the Qur'ān itself calls the Holy Spirit (Surah 16: 102) and One Trustworthy (Surah 81: 21).<sup>267</sup> According to Imam al-Ghazzalī, the Holy Spirit is an angel (or angel-like being) whom God employs in breathing each one's spirit into his/her body.<sup>268</sup>

Jesus' confirmation by the Holy Spirit indicates the existence of a particularity in his mission. That is, Jesus is confirmed with the Holy Spirit as his mission is distinguished by spirituality. The Holy Spirit is not a part of Jesus' personality as some Christians assert. The Holy Spirit was constantly with Jesus in different forms of manifestation or representation. He was with him from the moment the Virgin Mary conceived him until her delivery of the child. God embraced him with and brought him up in a pure spiritual or metaphysical atmosphere and confirmed him with pure spirituality which would dispel the materialism of people at the time. Yes, Jesus was sent to a community which was extremely materialistic. In order to reform them and balance their materialistic tendencies, Jesus emphasized spirituality.<sup>269</sup>

Jesus' disciples asked that he confirm their faith with a miracle that apparently the Gospel writers misinterpreted or perverted as the ritual where Jesus supposedly gave

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<sup>267</sup> Abdurrazzaq, *Tafsîr* I: 51; al-Tabarî, *Tafsîr* I: 403-405; al-Zamahsharî, *Kashshâf* I: 723; al-Baydawî, *Tafsîr* I: 357; al-Shawkanî, *Tafsîr* I: 110.

<sup>268</sup> Ünal, *the Qur'an*, p. 1242.

<sup>269</sup> Unal, *the Qur'an*, p. 367 and Gulen, *Reflections*, p. 58.

them wine and bread. The disciples are said to have asked whether God could send down a table from heaven. Jesus warned them against such a request, but when they persisted he prayed, asking that it might be a festival for the first of them and the last of them, to which God replied: “God said: “I send it down on you. Then if any of you should henceforth disbelieve, surely I inflict on him a punishment that I never inflict on anyone in the worlds” (Surah 5:112-115). The commentators are not quite sure what happened. Sometimes it is suggested that when God made this reply, the disciples declared that they had no further doubts and did not require to have the table sent down. Mujahid and Hasan al-Basrī are reported to have stated that it did not come down. Imam Tabarī and Ibn Kathīr, on the other hand, assert that it was sent down and details are given of the kinds of food which appeared on it.

Several Muslim interpreters of the Qur’ān state that it was reported that Jesus ordered the disciples to fast thirty days. Upon completing the fasting period, they requested him to ask his Lord to send down from heaven a table spread. According to one narration, the disciples asked for a table spread because of their poverty and dire need. Another narration reports that they asked for them to eat thereof and have energy and ability to continue their worship of God. Jesus feared for them not to be grateful enough for such bliss. However, they insisted that he should ask God for it saying. Jesus said: “O God, our Lord! Send down on us a table (of food) from heaven, that shall be an ever-recurring (religious) festival for us – for the first and the last of us – and a sign from You” (al-Mā’idah 5: 114) Imam Suddī affirms that it means that we will make that day a

feast to be glorified by us and those will succeed us. It may also mean, as some state, that the table will be enough for our first and our last.<sup>270</sup>

Ibn Kathīr writes that the table settled between Jesus' hands while covered with a napkin. Upon uncovering it, people found seven whales, and seven loaves of bread. It was said that there was also some vinegar, pomegranate, and other fruits. When the disciples said, "we will not eat until you eat first," Jesus ordered the poor, the needy, and the sick to eat, so they ate, and every one with illness, sickness, or a handicap was cured instantly.<sup>271</sup>

It was said that the table came down once a day, and people ate thereof, all amounting to about seven thousand people. Then it used to come very other day. Then Allah ordered Jesus to make it exclusively for the poor and the needy and not the rich. This was annoying to lots of people, and hypocrites began speaking about it, thus it was completely raised up.<sup>272</sup>

There is a point that, I believe, might have been overlooked by many scholars that when we look at the statement given by Jesus's disciples, we would see a rawness and crudeness in their nature. They said "Jesus son of Mary, is your Lord able to send down on us a table (of food) from heaven?" First, they say "is your Lord," not admitting that He is their Lord, too. Second, they want to know whether Jesus' Lord has power and ability to do such an act. Therefore, we assume that Jesus' disciples, whom the Qur'an highly praised in some other verses (i.e., Surah 3: 52; Surah 5: 111), may have made this

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<sup>270</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Islamic View of Jesus*, p. 79-83.

<sup>271</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Ibid*.

<sup>272</sup> Al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr* VII: 130-135; Al-Baghawī, *Maâlim al-Tanzīl* II: 78-79; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zâd al-Mathīr* II: 459; al-Qurtubī, *Tafsīr* VI: 369-370; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* II: 117-120.

demand in the early phase of their conversion, and before they had fully responded to Jesus' calling.

Jesus is also credited with being clairvoyant. He will know and be able to tell people what they have eaten and what their possessions at home are. The point of such knowledge may be that a person cannot dissemble before God or this messenger. A householder cannot claim not to have food to be shared with the hungry or wealth to relieve poverty. There are two views on the time of this particular miracle. Some say that Jesus was still a child while performing this miracle. Others assert that this miracle occurred pertaining to the table miracle explained above.<sup>273</sup>

### 3- ) Jesus' Piety, Virtue, and Asceticism

There are many hadīths regarding Jesus' *zuhd* (asceticism in the sense of renunciation) and *fazilah* (virtue) in the Hadīth tradition. Ibn Abū Shaybah lists 12 hadīths under a section titled "Hadīths on Jesus' *Fazilah*"<sup>274</sup> and 20 hadīths under the title "Hadīths on Jesus' *Zuhd*."<sup>275</sup> However, there are only 6 hadīths in regard with Jesus' *zuhd* in the Kutub-u Tis'a and here I am going to recount the substance of those hadīths.

Muslim scholars acknowledge five great or chosen prophets (*ulu al-azm*), namely Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon them all)

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<sup>273</sup> According to a report attributed to Imam Suddī, when Jesus informed his schoolmates what they have eaten and what their possessions at home, the parents got scared and did not allow their children to go to school or to see Jesus anymore. Being afraid of that Jews might do harm Jesus, Mary took her child and immigrated to Damascus. See al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr* III: 274-281; al-Râzī, *Mafâtiḥ* VI: 330-331; al-Baghawī, *Maâlim* I: 304; al-Qurtubī, *Tafsīr* IV: 95.

<sup>274</sup> Ibn Abū Shaybah, *Musannaf* VI, 339-340.

<sup>275</sup> Ibn Abū Shaybah, *Musannaf* VII, 65-67.

mentioned together in several Qur'ānic passages.<sup>276</sup> The rationale for selecting these five is that each had his own unique *shariah*, a system of religious laws and each had to face many hardships and enmity in proclaiming his message.

Surah 19:30-3 states that Jesus was *mubarak* (blessed); showed great respect and deference for his mother; was not rude, unruly, or wicked; and peace was/will be upon the day he was born, the day of his death/departure, and the day when he will be raised to life. The same surah also attributes some of these virtues to John the Baptist (Yahya).<sup>277</sup>

According to Surah 3:45-6, God gave Mary the glad tidings of Jesus, who is (*wajīhan*) highly honored in the world and the Hereafter, one of (*muqarrabīn*) those near-stationed to God, and of the (*salīh*) righteous. The Qur'ān uses the very same term *wajīhan* for Moses, indicating that he is, too, esteemed and respected.<sup>278</sup> Yet, for Jesus, we see the addition “in the world and Hereafter.”

In another variant of the hadīth of *shafaat* mentioned above in *Musnad* of Ahmad b. Hanbal, the prophets choose Jesus as representative and send him to the Prophet Muhammad to intercede for their nations with God.<sup>279</sup>

Not the *Kutub-u Tis 'a*, but other hadīth books report that Hasan and Husain, the sons of Ali b. Abū Talib, with the exception of Jesus and John the Baptist, will be the masters of the youth in Heaven.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> See al- Ahzāb 33: 7; al-Shurā 42:13; and al-Ahqāf 46: 35.

<sup>277</sup> See Al-Maryam 19:14-5

<sup>278</sup> See al-Ahzāb 33:69

<sup>279</sup> Ahmed b. Hanbal, III: 178

According to the reports in Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, and Ahmad b. Hanbal, Jesus was a pious and humble person. The Prophet Muhammad states that in terms of humility and piety Abū Dharr, one of the Prophet’s companions, looked like Jesus.<sup>281</sup> Another version of the same hadīth says that Abū Dharr walked with Jesus’ piety on earth. The hadīth speaking of the people of the Prophet Muhammad that is mentioned above also describes Jesus as a pious servant.<sup>282</sup>

According to a hadīth narrated by Abū Hurayrah in Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Mājah, Nasaī, and Ahmad b. Hanbal, once, when Jesus saw a man taking an article, Jesus asked the man, “Did you steal?” The man says, “No, by Allah, except Whom there is None who has the right to be worshipped” Jesus then says, “I believe in Allah and suspect my eyes.”<sup>283</sup> The point is that Jesus accepted the oath given in the name of God; such was his piety and awe of Allah. Commenting on this hadīth, Qadi Iyaz and al-Qurtubī assert that Jesus thought that the man was stealing. Possibly, it was the man’s own property, or he was taking it with the owner’s permission, or he was just checking out and later put it back. Ibn Hajar, on the other hand, says that the hadīth clearly indicates that the man was stealing. And Jesus was saying, in effect that on the Day of Judgment the man would bear responsibility both for the theft and the false oath.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Nasaī, *Sunan-u Kubrā* V: 50, 145, 148, 150; Tabaranī, *Mu’jam al-Kabīr* III: 36, 38; Ibn Hibbān, *Sahīh* XV: 411, 412; Hakim, *Mustadrak* III, 182.

<sup>281</sup> Tirmidhī, “*manāqib*” 35; Ibn Mājah “*muqaddima*” 11; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II: 163, 175, 223, V: 197, and VI: 442.

<sup>282</sup> Bukhārī, *Volume 6, Book 60, Number 149*

<sup>283</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” 48; Muslim, “*fadāil*” 149; Nasaī, “*ādāb al-quḍāt*” 37; Ibn Mājah, “*kaffārāt*” 4; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II: 314, 338.

<sup>284</sup> Nawawī, *Sharh -u Muslim* XV: 121; Aynī, *Umda* XVI: 37; and Ibn Hajar, *Fath* VI: 489

A *maqtu'* hadīth related by Yahya Ibn Said in *Muwatta'* of Imam Malik states that Jesus, the son of Mary encountered a pig on the road. He said to it, "Go in peace." Somebody asked, "Do you say this to a pig?" Jesus said, "I fear lest I accustom my tongue to evil speech."<sup>285</sup> According to Zurqanī, the phrase *unfudh bi salamin* (go in peace) is interpreted in two ways; first, there will be no harm from us and you can keep going and second, we will greet you with peace.<sup>286</sup>

A hadīth reported only in *Muwatta'* narrates that Jesus addressed his people saying, "Do not speak much without the mention of Allah for you will harden your hearts. A hard heart is far from Allah, but you do not know. Do not look at the wrong actions of people as if you were lords. Look at your wrong actions as if you were slaves. Some people are afflicted by wrong action and some people are protected from it. Be merciful to the people of affliction and praise Allah for His protection."<sup>287</sup>

Another hadīth again narrated only in *Muwatta'*<sup>288</sup> states that Jesus used to say, "O the People of Israel! You must drink pure water and the green things of the land and barley bread. Beware of wheat bread, for you will not be grateful enough for it."<sup>289</sup> One would not gather from the Qur'ān or sahih/sound hadīth literature that Jesus had been an ascetic, but this is the prevailing picture we get of him in later writings. This is most

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<sup>285</sup> *Muwatta'*, "*kalām*" 4. English trans.

<sup>286</sup> Al-Zurqānī, Muhammad b. Abd al-Baqī b. Yusuf. *Sharh al-Zurqānī (al-Muntaqā)*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1411/1990), IV: 515.

<sup>287</sup> *Muwatta'*, "*kalām*" 8. English trans. *Book 56, Number 56.3.8*:

<sup>288</sup> These last two hadīths in *Muwatta'* are narrated without any *sanad* (the chain of transmission). Imam Malik says "*balaghanī*" (it has reached me) and narrates the hadīth. Such hadīths are considered *weak* until it is proved otherwise.

<sup>289</sup> *Muwatta'*, "*sīfat al-Nabī*" 27 English trans. *Book 49, Number 49.10.27*

likely due to close contact with members of the Nestorian Church, which was noted for asceticism; but it should not be forgotten that the New Testament contains more of this element than one commonly imagines.<sup>290</sup>

In these later writings, Jesus is commonly represented as having been an ascetic. He had no house, he walked barefoot, he had no property, and no provision except the day's food. When someone suggested to him that he should get a house, he replied, "The rags of those who lived before us are sufficient for us." He is reputed to have said, "My seasoning is hunger, my under-garment is fear of God, my outer-garment is wool, my fire in winter is the rays of the sun, my lamp is the moon, my riding-beast is my feet, and my food and fruit are what the earth brings forth. At night I have nothing, and in the morning I have nothing, yet no one on earth is richer than I."<sup>291</sup> It is said that his only possessions were a comb and a jug; but one day he saw a man combing his hair with his fingers, so he threw away the comb. He saw another drinking from his hands, so he threw away the jug. In a hadīth narrated only in Ibn Mājah, the Prophet refers to Jesus throwing the jug and saying that "Oof! This is with the world."<sup>292</sup>

#### **4- ) Jesus the Servant**

Islam declares the holiness of Jesus and Mary. However, Jesus and his mother are not like the angels who conferred with Abraham. God states bluntly that any who claim that Jesus is divine or a form of the One-Only God is an idolater, that the concept of God being a Trinity is blasphemy. Jesus himself testifies to this fact in Surah 5:72-78;

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<sup>290</sup> James Robson, "Muhammedan Teaching about Jews," in *The Moslem World*

<sup>291</sup> J. Robson, *Christ in Islam*, p. 102.

<sup>292</sup> Ibn Mājah, "*ashribah*" 25.

...Assuredly they have disbelieved who say, "God is the Messiah, son of Mary," whereas the Messiah himself proclaimed: "O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord." Whoever associates partners with God, God has surely made Paradise forbidden to him, and his refuge is the Fire. And the wrongdoers will have no helpers...

From this point of view, the Muslim understanding of Jesus is far removed from what Christians consider creedal faith on the basis of the ecumenical councils: Nicea (325 CE), Constantinople (380-81CE), and Chalcedon (450 CE). When Christians begin to explore Islamic references to Jesus, they cannot help but be surprised, because Islam gives a different picture of Jesus. There is no incarnation and no room for dialogue concerning atonement through Jesus' passion or resurrection. The primary reason for this is that in Islam there is no theological concept that one person may die in order to gain forgiveness for another person. "In Islam, Jesus is placed within a theological framework that makes Christians wonder where the biblical narrative has gone."<sup>293</sup> Islam's theological framework insists that God would never be subject to an incarnation and would certainly never allow His chosen prophet to be crucified. The major difference between this framework and the Christian one is Christological and soteriological. "For Muslims, Christology is not included in theology, but for Christians it ultimately centers on the concept of sacrifice, taken from the Hebrew Bible."<sup>294</sup>

Say (to them, O Messenger): "O People of the Book, come to a word common between us and you, that we worship none but God, and associate none as partner with Him, and that none of us take others for

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<sup>293</sup> Samuel Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ: An Essay on the Life, Character, and Teachings of Jesus Christ According to the Koran and Orthodox Traditions*, (Edinburgh, Oliphant: Anderson & Ferrier, 1912), p. 7.

<sup>294</sup> J. Dudley Woodberry, "The Muslim Understanding of Jesus," in *Word and World*, vol. 16, No. 2, Spring, 1996.

Lords, apart from God.” If they (still) turn away, then say: “Bear witness that we are Muslims (submitted to Him exclusively).” (Surah 3:64)

There are three factors drawing our attention in this passage: worship only the God who reveals His ultimate divine message through His final messenger; do not place anyone or thing on par with this One-Only God; and do not make any human or divine being an intercessor between the believer and God. It also necessitates renunciations of the three doctrines in Christianity: the Trinity including the incarnation of God in Jesus, the meditorial-salvational role of Jesus, and veneration of saints as well as the authority of their clergy.

Both Scriptures, the Qur’ān and the Synoptic Gospels, agree most definitely that Jesus was a *human being*.<sup>295</sup> In the Qur’ān a main point of emphasis about Jesus is the humanity of Jesus. He was born, though not of a human father, of Mary. In Christianity, that lack of a human father makes him the Son of God, thus not only human but also divine. In Islamic tradition, Jesus was a servant of God who was born in a miraculous manner, and who called humankind to worship the One-True God. He is not different from other prophets in this respect. In the Surahs 5 and 9, we come across the denunciations of Christian doctrine. In Surah 9:30-32 Christians are denounced for calling Jesus Son of God.<sup>296</sup> In Surah 5:19 and 76 we read, “They have disbelieved who

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<sup>295</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel claims Jesus is a historical human being (see John 1:14)

<sup>296</sup> Actually, the term “son of God” is a flexible one in the Bible. Israel is the son of God, angels are the sons of God, etc. The same is true of servant. Jesus is presented in the New Testament as the servant of God. Israel is the servant, Job is the servant, etc. That is why the core narrative about Jesus in Christian tradition handled his relationship to God and humanity in diverse ways. Was he an exemplary human being who was inspired by God and raised to angelic status, or an angel-instructor who came to earth to teach humans the ways of God, or an emanation of the one God? Within the first century Christians could describe Jesus as the victor who defeated the devil through dying and rising from the dead and that he was

said, ‘Verily God is Christ, the son of Mary.’” “If God wished, He could destroy Jesus, his mother, and all who are on the earth” (Surah 5:19). Jesus did not teach that he was divine. Jesus was only a human. Both he and his mother Mary ate food (Surah 5:76-79), a fact which proves that they were human and not divine. Further on in the same Surah (116-18) God is represented as asking Jesus whether he had taught men to worship his mother and himself. Jesus denied this, saying that his message had been, “Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.”

Islam totally rejects the association of other personalities with the Godhead of the One and Only God, making the prophets or some godly persons into incarnations of God, and the personification of the attributes of God as separate from the Divine. The Qur’ān declares;

“Say: He – (He is) God, (Who is) *ahad*, the Unique One of Absolute Oneness. God – (God is He Who is) the Eternally- Besought-of-All. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And comparable to Him there is none.” (al-Ikhlās 1-4)

“O People of the Book! Do not go beyond the bounds in your religion, and do not say anything of God but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was but a Messenger of God, and a Word of His (Power) which He conveyed to Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His Messengers and do not say: (God is one of) a trinity. Give up (this assertion). God is but One God; All-Glorified is He in that He is absolutely above having a son.” (al-Nisā 4:171)

Unal writes that here the attribute *ahad* here negates all false notions and concepts about the Divine Being. It comes in the first passage in connection with the people, who have incorrect concepts of God, who deny Him, or who associate different partners with Him. Declaring that God begets not, and nor is He begotten is such an evident principle

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the human version of the lamb sacrificed in order to assuage the justifiable wrath of God for the sins of the community. Within two to four decades of his death and reputed resurrection, some were saying that he was the new Adam, Moses, and David. (See, Wagner, *Opening the Qur'an*, p. 37-49)

for the Divine Being that it is mentioned here to refute all creeds that attribute sons or daughters to God. It primarily and categorically refutes the pagans' attribution to Him of the angels as daughters and the Christians' seeing Him as the Father of Jesus, or their attributing Jesus to Him as a son.<sup>297</sup>

Islam states that it was not long after his departure from this world that some erroneously declared Jesus God Himself, while others claimed him the son of God, with his virtuous mother being *Theotokos*<sup>298</sup> (the mother of God). Making Jesus speak while he was a baby in the cradle, God made him proclaim first and foremost that he was a servant of God, and forewarned against possible deviations. As Muslims declare in the *shahadah* "I bear witness that there is no deity but God, and again I bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and Messenger," Jesus emphasized that he was, first of all, God's servant and, then, one of His messengers:

(The infant) said: "Surely I am abdullāh (a servant of God). He (has already decreed that He) will give me the Book (the Gospel) and make me a Prophet." (Maryam 19:30)

Gulen underlines that when inviting the Prophet to the heavens by the Mi'rāj/Ascension, God began His invitation with the complimentary phrase: *He transported [or carried] His servant by night* (al-Isrā 17:1), thereby referring to the matchless greatness of his servanthood. This is even more meaningful, as on this occasion when space and time were almost transcended, and God Almighty again

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<sup>297</sup> Ünal, *the Qur'an*, p. 1257.

<sup>298</sup> Literally meaning "God-Bearer," the term Theotokos in Eastern Orthodoxy is the designation of the Virgin Mary as mother of God. The term has had great historical importance because the Nestorians, who stressed the independence of the divine and human natures in Christ, opposed its use, on the ground that it compromised the human nature of Christ.

stressed his servanthood and declared: *He revealed to His servant what He revealed* (al-Najm 53:10).<sup>299</sup>

Interpreting the Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad, Sayyid Qutb asserts that al-Isrā 17:1 emphasizes the position of man as God's servant: "*He transported His servant by night...*" The emphasis here is needed in the context of the Prophet's Ascension to heaven where no human being had gone before. It is significant in this context that the status of man's servanthood to God should always be remembered. The Qur'ān emphasizes, according to Qutb, that there must be no confusion of status similar to that which happened in the case of Jesus on account of his birth, his being raised to heaven at the end of his life on this world, and the powers which were given to him during life. All these caused some people to confuse his status and to claim that he had a divine nature. In its simplicity and purity, Islam insists that no similarity could ever exist between God and any creature.<sup>300</sup>

From the Islamic perspective, Christians could not maintain the balance in their admiration, reverence, and love toward Jesus. As a result, they exaggerated his greatness and portray him someone who is totally different from a human being. They should have adhered only to the fact that Jesus is God's servant and messenger and the son of Mary who kept her chastity. Instead, they went far in glorifying Jesus and placing him in a rank more than that which God bestowed on him. We find in several hadīths that while the Prophet Muhammad reminds his companions of what Christians had done to Jesus, he warns them not to make the same mistake. Indeed, Muhammad was neither a god, nor an

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<sup>299</sup> Gulen, *Reflections*, p. 78.

<sup>300</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, I-VI, (Beirut: Dār al-Shuruq, 1986), IV:75-80

incarnation of a divinity, nor the son of God. He never claimed to be anything more than a man who had received revelations from God. He is not the founder of Islam; he simply received the message of Islam. As an ordinary human being, he lived, died, was buried, and will be resurrected with all other people in the Day of Judgment.

‘Umar narrates that he heard the Prophet saying, “Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a Servant. So, call me the Servant of Allah and His Messenger.”<sup>301</sup> Ibn Hajar states that one time Muaz b. Jabal wanted to prostrate to the Prophet, yet he never gave permission for such an act.<sup>302</sup>

In another hadīth indicating how cautious and careful the Prophet was on this issue, we find that someone came and began praising the Prophet addressing, “our master, the son of our master, our most beneficent, the son of our most beneficent...” The Prophet immediately warned him and those around, “O people, I am Muhammad b. Abdullah and I am the Servant and Messenger of God. I do not like people putting me a higher place than where God has already put.”<sup>303</sup>

In a report narrated by Abū Saïd al-Khudrī, the Prophet was asked about if people will see God in the Day of Judgment and he began narrating about what will happen. He then said that it will be announced that “let every nation follow that which they used to worship.” The Christians will be called upon and it will be said to them, “who do you use

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<sup>301</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” 48, “*hudūd*” 31; Darimi, “*riqaq*” 68; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I: 23, 24, 55.

<sup>302</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Barī* XII: 149.

<sup>303</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, III: 153, 241, 249

to worship?” They will reply, “we used to worship Jesus, the son of God.” It will be said to them, “you are liars, for God has never taken anyone as a wife or a son...”<sup>304</sup>

The people’s polytheistic religion in Arabia was diametrically opposed to the absolute Oneness of God’s Being that the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed and that is definitely stated throughout the Qur’ān so that any attempt to introduce a different sense of God’s Being would be met by stern rejection and condemnation as a relapse into polytheism. The idea of a “son of God” has echoes of the daughters of Allah in pre-Islamic Arabia.

When Surah 21:98 revealed “You and all the things you deify and worship apart from God are but firewood for Hell. You are bound to arrive in it,” many leading polytheists in Makkah tended to use the fact that Jesus was deified by many Christians as a pretext for their polytheism, and their worship of angels, in particular. But when the Qur’ān clarified Jesus’ identity, making it clear that he was only a human being who worshipped God, they did not like this and desired to continue to use the fact that many Christians deified him as an alleged argument for their polytheism. They even said: “We worship angels, while Christians worship a human being. So our deities are better than theirs.” (al-Zukhruf 43:57-8)

Ibn Hisham in his *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyya* narrates that in an assembly, the Prophet recited the passage mentioned above to the pagan leaders of Makkah among them Walid b. Mughira and Nadr b. Harith that “You and all the things you deify and worship apart from God are but firewood for Hell. You are bound to arrive in it.” Later a man named

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<sup>304</sup> Bukhārī, “*tafsīr-u surah*” 8, “*tawhid*” 24; Muslim, “*īmān*” 302; Tayalīsī, *Musnad* s.289; Ibn Hibbān, *Sahīh* XVI: 377-380.

Abdullah b. Ziba'ra al-Sahmī came and sat down. Walid said to him: “Muhammad alleged that we and our gods are fuel for hell.” 'Abdullah said: “If I had found him I would have refuted him. Ask Muhammad “Is everything which is worshipped besides God in hell with those who worship it?” We worship the angels; [some] Jews worship Uzayr (Ezra)<sup>305</sup>; and the Christians worship Jesus Son of Mary. When the Prophet was told of this he said: “everyone who wishes to be the worshipped to the exclusion of God will be with those who worship him. They worship only Satans and those they have ordered to be worshipped. So God revealed concerning that, “But surely those for whom the decree of ultimate good has already gone forth from us, they will be kept away from it (Hell)” (Surah 21: 101). Jesus Son of Mary, Uzayr and those rabbis and monks who have lived in obedience to God, whom the erring people worship as lords beside God. And God revealed concerning their assertion that:

Yet some say, “The All-Merciful has taken to Himself a child.” All-Glorified is He (in that He is absolutely above doing such things). Rather, those (the angels, whom they regard as God’s offspring) are but His honored servants. They speak only what He has spoken to them and allows them to speak, and they act by His command...If any of them were to attempt to say, “I am a deity besides Him,” We would recompense him with Hell. Thus do We recompense all such wrongdoers. (Surah 21: 26-30).<sup>306</sup>

Moreover, God will ask Jesus in order to honor him and to reprimand those ascribe false claims to him. Jesus will reject any implication that he distorted the message of God and that he said people should worship him:

And (remember) when God will say: “Jesus son of Mary, is it you who said to people: ‘Take me and my mother for deities besides God?’ ” and he

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<sup>305</sup> See 2 Esdras 14 – Ezra anticipates being raised to heavenly rank as was Enoch and Elijah.

<sup>306</sup> Ibn Hisham, *Sirah* II: 204-206; al-Râzî, *Mafâtîh* XIX: 538; Ibn Kathîr, *Tafsîr* III: 199-200, IV: 132; Ibn Kathîr, *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, (*Beirut: Dâr al-Maârif, no date*), III: 88.

will answer: “All-Glorified are You (in that You are absolutely above having a partner, as having any need or deficiency whatever)! It is not for me to say what I had no right to! Had I said it, You would already have known it. You know all that is within myself, whereas I do not know what is within Your Self. Surely You, and You alone, have knowledge of the Unseen (of all that lies beyond sense-perception). “I did not say to them except what You commanded me to (say): ‘Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’ I was a witness over them so long as I remained among them; and when You took me back, You were Yourself the Watcher over them. Indeed, You are Witness over everything. “If You punish them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the All-Glorious with irresistible might, the All-Wise (Surah 5:116-8)

Imam Tabarī presents two different ideas on the time of this conversation between God and Jesus. First, the word “*idh*,” literally meaning when or then, is used for the events took place in the past. Therefore, according to al-Suddī, this conversation between God and Jesus occurred when God raised Jesus up to Himself and Imam Tabarī personally prefers this understanding. Second view is that the word “*idh*” can be used for any time period including future. Thus, Ibn Jurayj and Qatada say that this dialogue will take place in the Day of Judgment.<sup>307</sup> Imam Razī, too, gives these different interpretations and states that he agrees with Suddī.<sup>308</sup> Ibn Kathīr, on the other hand, insists that this will be taking place in al-Akhirah, the Hereafter.<sup>309</sup> Considering that the Qur’ān begins speaking of the Day of Judgment right after these passages and all Christians must be present and witness to this conversation, we believe that God’s addressing to Jesus will happen in the afterlife.

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<sup>307</sup> Tabarī, *Tafsīr* VII: 137-138.

<sup>308</sup> Rāzī, *Mafātīh* XII: 111

<sup>309</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* II: 121

The answer that Jesus will give displays his mission and character. By saying, “If You punish them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the All-Glorious with irresistible might, the All-Wise.” He exhibits his absolute respect for God, while, with the expression, “they are Your servants,” he appeals to God’s compassion. Although it seems more reasonable to refer the matter to God’s being the All-Forgiving and All-Compassionate, where forgiving is mentioned, that chosen Prophet, who refers this matter to God’s being the All-Glorious with irresistible might and to His being the All-Wise, displays his deep submission to God’s absolute authority, will and wisdom. On one occasion the Prophet Muhammad mentions Abraham and Jesus together and likens them to one another. Abraham appealed to God on behalf of his people who disobeyed him, by saying, “He who follows me is truly of me; while he who disobeys me, surely You are All- Forgiving, All-Compassionate” (14: 36). A hadīth reported by Abū Dharr in Musnad of Imam Ahmad states that the Prophet Muhammad kept contemplating this particular passage all night long until the break of dawn.<sup>310</sup>

In a hadīth narrated by Ibn Abbas, The Prophet said, “You will be gathered, [on the Day of Judgment], bare-footed, naked and not circumcised.” He then recited: “We will bring the creation back into existence as easily as We originated it in the first instance.” (Surah 21: 104) He added, “The first to be dressed up on the Day of Resurrection, will be Abraham, and some of my companions will be taken towards the left side, [that is to say the Hellfire], and I will say: “Ashabī (My companions)! Ashabī (My companions)” It will be said: “They renegade from Islam after you left them.” Then I will say as Jesus, the pious servant of God said. “I was a witness over them so long as I

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<sup>310</sup> Ahmad b.Hanbal III:34

remained among them; and when You took me back, You were Yourself the Watcher over them. Indeed, You are Witness over everything. “If You punish them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the All-Glorious with irresistible might, the All-Wise (Surah 5:116-8)

Furthermore, a hadīth narrated in the *Sahihs* of Imam Bukhārī and Muslim, also known as the hadīth of *shafaat* (intercession), describes a scenario from the Day of Judgment:

....The Prophet said: “On the Day of Resurrection the Believers will assemble and say, ‘Let us ask somebody to intercede for us with our Lord.’ So they will go to Adam and say, ‘You are the father of all the people, and Allah created you with His own hands, and ordered the angels to prostrate to you, and taught you the names of all things; so please intercede for us with your Lord, so that He may relieve us from this place of ours.’ Adam will say, ‘I am not fit for this (i.e. intercession for you).’ Then Adam will remember his sin and feel ashamed thereof. He will say, ‘Go to Noah, for he was the first rasul (messenger), Allah sent to the inhabitants of the earth.’ They will go to him and Noah will say, ‘I am not fit for this undertaking.’ He will remember mistake which he made and his appeal to his Lord to do what he had no knowledge of, then he will feel ashamed thereof and will say, ‘Go to the Khalil al-Rahman (Abraham).’ They will go to him and he will say, ‘I am not fit for this undertaking’ and mention to them the mistakes he made, and add, ‘Go to Moses, the slave to whom Allah spoke (directly) and gave him the Torah.’ So they will go to him and he will say, ‘I am not fit for this undertaking.’ and he will mention (his) killing a person who was not a killer, and so he will feel ashamed thereof before his Lord, and he will say, ‘Go to Jesus, Allah’s servant and His messenger and Allah’s Word and a Spirit coming from Him. Jesus will say, ‘I am not fit for this undertaking, go to Muhammad, the servant of Allah’.....

As we see, each prophet in this hadīth mentions a mistake he made during his lifetime. Jesus, on the other hand, does not say anything about his possible mistake and directly sends the believers to the Prophet Muhammad. Now, *Allah A’lam* (God knows the best), Jesus *might* not have put so much emphasis on his servanthood and human

nature, not have given enough warning and left the door ajar for the people who came after. This may have caused the people to interpret Jesus' nature and message improperly. Witnessing from a heavenly realm how the people turned away from his true message later, Jesus might have perceived his action on the earth as a mistake.

#### **5- ) No Passion, No Crucifixion, and No Resurrection**

According to the Christian accounts, Jesus was betrayed to the religious authorities by one of his close followers, taken into custody, and accused by his fellow Jews of blasphemy. The Roman procurator condemned him for rebellion and had him executed by crucifixion. He was declared dead, and was entombed. Within a few days his followers claimed that God raised him from the dead and that they had seen, talked with and touched him. There was a claim that some 500 believers saw him at one time.<sup>311</sup> There are some apocryphal Christian writings considered by Christians to be heretical from the second century<sup>312</sup>, however, that deny that Jesus Christ was crucified. Some hold that the human Jesus was killed but the divine Christ power left him, while others hold that Simon of Cyrene was the unintentional victim, and a few argue for Judas' being mistaken for Jesus.<sup>313</sup>

The Qur'ān narrates the last days of Jesus on the earth in 3 different *surahs*:

(It was part of His executing His will) when God said: “Jesus, (as your mission has ended,) I will take you back (to Myself) [*mutawaffika*] and raise you up to Myself [*rāfi'uka*], and will purify you of (the groundless slanders of) those who disbelieve, and set your followers above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection... (Surah 3:55)

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<sup>311</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-11.

<sup>312</sup> This is probably from Docetic and Gnostic influence.

<sup>313</sup> Wagner, Opening the Qur'an, p. 38.

And their saying “We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God” – whereas they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but the matter was made dubious to them [shubbiha lahum]. Those who differ about this matter and about Jesus are indeed confused; they have no definite knowledge thereof, following mere conjecture; and of a certainty, they did not kill him. (Surah 4:157)

I did not say to them except what You commanded me to (say): ‘Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’ I was a witness over them so long as I remained among them; and when You took me back [tawaffaytani],<sup>314</sup> You were Yourself the Watcher over them. Indeed, You are Witness over everything. (Surah 5:117)

In fact, relevant Qur’ānic passages, the *tafsir* literature on those passages, and the hadīth reports reveal a variety of explanations as to what actually happened at the cross. *I must emphasize that there is not a single hadīth from the Prophet in the Kutub-u Tis’ah regarding Jesus’ death, departure, or ascent.* According to tradition, neither the Jews nor the Romans were able to kill or crucify Jesus.<sup>315</sup> The most widely held Muslim view is that God caused someone else to appear like Jesus, who was then crucified in his place. According to some interpreters of the Qur’ān, one of his disciples, Judas, was likened to Jesus and substituted for him by God because of his betrayal. Another view is that Jesus was nailed to the cross, lost consciousness or died but was later revived. Now I will introduce all the theories about Jesus’s death/departure in Islamic tradition;

It was narrated in the Qur’ānic commentaries that when Jesus showed convincing proofs, miracles, and clear signs to the People of Israel, most people persisted in arrogance and disbelief. They even plotted against him. They told the ruler of the time

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<sup>314</sup> The verb *tawaffa* is understood as death in 25 Qur’ānic passages, and three of them refer to the Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>315</sup> E. E. Elder, “The Crucifixion in the Koran,” in *the Muslim World*, Vol. 13, No. 3, July. With specific reference to the phrase in Surah 4:157, “They kill him not,” at the end of a lengthy article, E. Elder argues that “they” means the Jews did not kill him. Christ had predicted that his death would be at the hands of Gentiles, and it was the Romans who carried it out.

that there was a man who led people astray, incited them to rebel against the king, and sowed the seeds of discord even between a father and his son, apart from other false accusations. To make things worse, they claimed that he was a son of a prostitute. Enraged by their accusations, the ruler sent out some soldiers to detain and crucify Jesus. As soon as the soldiers surrounded Jesus' house, they thought they were about to arrest him. However, God raised him up to Himself and saved him from their plot. Then God made one of those who were in his house look exactly like Jesus. Entering Jesus' house, they thought that man was Jesus. They took him, tortured him, put him to death on the cross.<sup>316</sup>

Many Muslim commentators explain the word *mutawaffika* in Surah 3:55 in the sense of God taking Jesus to Himself. They have justification for this, for in al-Zumar 39:42 the same word is used of God taking the souls of some at the time of death, and of those who do not die, in their sleep. It can thus be used without meaning physical death, so *mufassirs* argue that this passage says that Jesus was taken up to God without being put to death. As an alternative, they say that if the verb does mean to take in death, it refers to the period after Jesus' return in the End Times.

Al-Tabarī (d. 923) thoroughly discusses Surah 3:55. He first lists all the different options in the traditions and then indicates his preference. On this passage he lists various

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<sup>316</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *The Islamic View of Jesus*, p. 72 and *Tafsīr*, II: 78.

possibilities mentioned above (one is a literal dying), prefers the idea that someone else was crucified instead of Jesus, but concedes that real death is a possibility.<sup>317</sup>

Imam Fakhr al-Din al Razī (d. 1210) lists several possible meanings of *mutawaffika* (3:55) and says he prefers the outward sense of “causing you to die.” He also spends a lot of time on Surah 4:157, and leans toward the same idea Al-Tabarī had, but even then lists five different versions of the scenario: 1) The Jews crucified someone else and lied to people about it. 2) Someone by the name of Titus was sent by Judas to kill Jesus. 3) Someone charged with guarding Jesus after the arrest was caused to look like him and killed in his place. 4) Jesus asked the disciples which of them would assume his likeness and be crucified, in return for a guarantee that he would go to Heaven. One of them agreed, and was crucified in place of Jesus, whom God took up to Heaven. 5) A disciple (that is Judas according to Imam Razi) who had agreed to betray Jesus was changed into his likeness and was arrested and crucified in Jesus’ place. Imam Razi, too, goes into great detail and presents his understanding of what Eastern Christians believed about the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>318</sup>

Al-Qurtubī (d. 1272) clearly does not like the idea that Jesus died and rose again, arguing that it is not logical, since Jesus must come back at the end of time and kill the *Dajjāl*. Yet he feels obligated to list real death as a possibility. He also prefers the idea that some else was crucified primarily because of Surah 4:157, but acknowledges that

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<sup>317</sup> Tabarī, *Tafsīr* III: 291. See, also, Warren Larson, “Jesus in Islam and Christianity: Discussing the Similarities and the Differences,” in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXVI, no. 3, July. P.327-341.

<sup>318</sup> Rāzī, *Mafātih* VIII:60. See, also, Warren Larson, “Jesus in Islam and Christianity: Discussing the Similarities and the Differences.”

other theories have had some Muslim support. In reference to Surah 5:117, he says *wafat* indicates a literal death.<sup>319</sup>

Al-Baydawī (d. between 1284 and 1316) lists variable legitimate interpretations of various passages but does not give a preference. In reference to Surah 3:55, he lists five different possibilities: 1) ending your life or killing 2) seizing you from the earth 3) causing to die in the sense of sleeping or fainting 4) causing you to die in reference to worldly desires 5) God literally causing Jesus to die for seven hours and then raising him to heaven.<sup>320</sup> Note the variation on the time. For instance, Wahb b. Munabbih says that Jesus was dead for three hours and then was raised to life. Ibn Ishaq says Jesus was dead for seven hours. Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih, says that Jesus was dead for three days and then raised to life.<sup>321</sup> Again al-Baydawī is very much aware of the general idea, but feels it has theological and grammatical problems.<sup>322</sup>

Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) tries to disprove the Christian understanding of the crucifixion. His dispute with Christians, however, is not over the history of the event as much as its theology. And though he questions Christian accounts in reference to the

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<sup>319</sup> Qurtubi, *al-Jāmi‘*, III:57. See, also, Warren Larson, “Jesus in Islam and Christianity: Discussing the Similarities and the Differences.”

<sup>320</sup> In Jewish thought of the first century and beyond, the soul hovered near the body for several hours after separating from the body. Perhaps the Muslim scholars were aware of that and incorporated into their writings. See, also, Warren Larson, “Jesus in Islam and Christianity: Discussing the Similarities and the Differences.”

<sup>321</sup> Woodberry, “The Muslim Understanding of Jesus.” See, also, Warren Larson, “Jesus in Islam and Christianity: Discussing the Similarities and the Differences.”

<sup>322</sup> Baydawī, *Tafsīr* I: 357

cross, he does not absolutely throw them out. Further, he asserts, this matter is regarding *ghayb* which only God knows what really happened.<sup>323</sup>

Muhammad Asad (1900-1992), a renowned Muslim convert from Judaism, regards the entire crucifixion as only a legend. According to him, in the course of time, long after the time of Jesus, a legend somehow grew up to the effect that Jesus had died on the cross in order to atone for the ‘original sin’ with which mankind is allegedly burdened; and this legend became so firmly established among the latter-day followers of Jesus that even his enemies, the Jews, began to believe it – albeit in a derogatory sense, since crucifixion was a heinous form of the death penalty, reserved for the lowest of criminals.<sup>324</sup>

According to New Testament theology<sup>325</sup>, human beings can never be good enough to deserve God’s favor, to win God’s heaven, because from birth humans are all pre-disposed to rejecting God and living according to their own wills, and both Eastern and Western Christianity agree on this. That is why it was necessary for God himself to become human and die on a cross. The only way to escape judgment and rejection from God according to the Christian tradition is for God himself to have taken the full force of that judgment for humanity, which is what Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the dead accomplished.

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<sup>323</sup> Qutb, II: 92. Warren Larson, “Jesus in Islam and Christianity: Discussing the Similarities and the Differences.”

<sup>324</sup> Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’ān*, (The Book Foundation, 2008), p. 134

<sup>325</sup> The fact is that *not* all Christians accept the idea of original sin. And especially in the Pauline-Augustinian sense. There are a number of themes wrapped up in the atonement theories. For some it is not so much original sin in the Augustinian-Anselmian sense as in original ignorance and immaturity.

Islam disagrees with Christianity on the doctrine of redemption. In Islam, God did not condemn mankind because a sin was committed by a couple at the beginning of time. There is no original sin; therefore, there is no need for redemption to mankind out of a sin that did not exist. The Qur'ān clearly declares that "every soul earns only to its own account; and no soul, as bearer of burden, bears and is made to bear the burden of another" (6:164). Thus the goals of the relationship with God are different in the two religions, since their sacred scripture is different. While Christians believe that Jesus died as a sacrifice for everyone's sins, in Islam sacrifices are not penance for sin but represent one's devotion to God. Therefore, no sacrificial intercessor is possible. Instead, God forgives those who sincerely repent

Lastly, when it comes to the question how old Jesus was when he was raised up to the heaven, again different narrations give us various accounts. For instance, he was believed to be at the age of thirty,<sup>326</sup> thirty three,<sup>327</sup> thirty four,<sup>328</sup> forty,<sup>329</sup> one hundred twenty,<sup>330</sup> or one hundred twenty five.<sup>331</sup> This departure took place on the 21st<sup>332</sup> or 27th<sup>333</sup> night of the month of Ramadan. Assassination of Ali b. Abū Talib, the first

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<sup>326</sup> Hakim, *Mustadrak* II: 651

<sup>327</sup> Tabaranī, *Mu'jam al-Awsat* VII: 53-54

<sup>328</sup> Ibn Asākir, Abū al-Qāsim Thiqatu al-Dīn Ali b. Hasan b. Hibatullah. *Tarikh-u Dimashq*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1417/1996), XLVII: 470

<sup>329</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqât* II: 309

<sup>330</sup> Tabaranī, *Mu'jam al-Kabîr* XXII: 417

<sup>331</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqât* II: 195

<sup>332</sup> Hakim, *Mustadrak* III: 154

<sup>333</sup> Tabaranī, *Mu'jam al-Kabîr* III: 80

revelation of the Qur'ān, the death of Yushā b. Nūn (Joshua), and Jesus' departure have believed to happen upon on the same night.<sup>334</sup>

In short, there are Muslim scholars who point out that Jesus was not killed, taken up to the presence of God with body and spirit, and will physically die after his second coming. Therefore, according to this group, Jesus is still alive, he was purified from his earthly desires and vices and God granted him an angel-like life.<sup>335</sup> There are scholars, on the other hand, state that only Jesus' spirit was taken up and his body did taste the death.<sup>336</sup> Stating the Surah 5:117 in one *bāb* of his *Sahih*, Imam Bukhārī gives an interpretation of Ibn Abbas on the term *mutawaffika*, and says that according to Ibn Abbas, it means a real death.<sup>337</sup> Abū al-Alā Mawdūdī (1903-1979) states that the idea that Jesus is dead does not prevent the fact that God can revive Jesus and send him back to the world.<sup>338</sup>

Larson underlines that it is important to note that the Qur'ān and most prominent Muslim scholars leave room for the possibility Jesus died. Of course, this does not mean that Muslims would automatically admit his death. Over the centuries, there has never been one single correct or well-established view as to what actually took place and how

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<sup>334</sup> Al-Bazzār, Abū Bakr Ahmad b. Amr b. Abd al-Khāliq, *Al-Musnad*, (Beirut: Muassasat al-'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, 1409/1989), V: 179-181; Abū Ya'lā, *Musnad* XII: 124; Tabaranī, *Mu'jam al-Kabīr* III, 80; Tabaranī, *Mu'jam al-Awsat* II: 336, VIII: 224; Hakim, *Mustadrak* III: 154

<sup>335</sup> Tabarī, *Tafsīr* III: 289; Zamahsharī, *Kashshaf* I: 393-394; Baghawī, *Ma'ālim* I: 308; Rāzī, *Mafātīh* VIII, 60; Wāhidī, *Tafsīr* I: 213; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Mathūr* I: 396; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* I: 367.

<sup>336</sup> See Rashid Rīdha, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1954), III: 316-317; Ahmad Mustafa Al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr al-Marāghī*, (Cairo: 1394/1974), II: 169.

<sup>337</sup> Buhārī, "*tafsīr-u surah*" 13. Also see *Tabarī*, *Tafsīr* III: 289.

<sup>338</sup> Mawdūdī, Abū al-Alā, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, (Istanbul: Erkam Yayinevi, 1991), IV: 48.

Jesus left this world. Briefly, Islam has not had a “yes” or “no” answer to the question of whether or not Jesus *physically* died.<sup>339</sup>

## **ISLAMIC JESUS’ RELEVANCE FOR CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS TODAY**

The Islamic perspective on Jesus makes very clear that there is an unbridgeable theological gulf between Christianity and Islam. Neither religion can be merged into the other. The Qur’ān and the Hadīth have some specific objections to Christianity. Given Islamic teachings about Jesus’ relationship to God and human beings, denial of his crucifixion and resurrection, and total rejection of the Trinity, Muslims and Christians need to understand that any interfaith relationships with each other will be limited.<sup>340</sup>

There are some Christians who consider themselves as the only ones whom God will save. To these Christians, Jesus was crucified, resurrected and raised bodily to heaven and has become the only way to salvation. They hold that God is known only through Jesus. According to that position, other religions do not have the power to bring salvation to people, even though they contain some good in them. They conclude that interreligious dialogue has absolutely no value, since no religion outside Christianity has any true message. Instead, they are convinced that any interfaith conversation is undertaken with the purpose of converting others to Christianity. For the most part Christians having this understanding are aggressive and disdainful towards non-

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<sup>339</sup> Warren Larson, “Jesus in Islam and Christianity: Discussing the Similarities and the Differences.”

<sup>340</sup> Wagner, *Opening the Qur’an*, p. 290-300.

Christians. With regard to Islam, they assume that Muslims believe in a false god, the Qur'ān is not divinely inspired, and that Muhammad was untruthful.<sup>341</sup>

The position that only Christians will be saved is not new and it has its analogues in Islam. Muslims engaged in interfaith dialogue might be accused of taking Jews and Christians for their friends by other Muslims.<sup>342</sup> There might be some Muslims who claim that there is no common ground between Muslims and Christians or Jews. Such a position misunderstands the Islamic viewpoint. Otherwise, why would God allow Muslims to marry Christians\Jews or to eat the food offered by them? Today millions of Muslims welcome any approach that might bring Jews, Christians, and Muslims to common ground for cooperation and common action in order to find solutions to problems in the world.<sup>343</sup>

As indicated, Christianity and Islam are and will remain two different religions. Nonetheless, any interfaith dialogue and cooperation is bound to engage in the contrasting views of Jesus held by Christians and Muslims.

According to Walter Wagner, one zone that Christians and Muslims may explore together is the spirituality credited to Jesus in the Gospels and the Qur'ān and the Hadīth. The Muslim view of Jesus' concentration on spiritual depth, mercy and compassion as well as the end of this world and the beginning of the Hereafter have good insights for

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<sup>341</sup> Fatih Harpci, *Gülen's Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue*, (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2013), p. 1-10. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 4: Lectures On Genesis: Chapters 21-25*, (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.), (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), Gen 21:13.

<sup>342</sup> Qur'ān 5:51; "O you who believe! Take not the Jews and Christians for friends and allies (in their Judaism and Christianity, and against the believers)."

<sup>343</sup> Harpci, *Ibid.*

Christians. They may aid Christians to review the New Testament and then re-examine the programs and structures.<sup>344</sup>

It is also important for Muslims to recognize that the 23 other books of the New Testament, especially the letters of Paul, Acts and Revelation to John may determine how the Gospels are interpreted. Further, the struggles in the New Testament were with Jews and with Jesus' believers who wanted to keep Jewish practices. Those believed in Jesus had no notion that there would be another religion that would also accept Jesus to some extent and have another prophet-messenger.<sup>345</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter 3, the doctrine of the Oneness and Uniqueness of God is extremely vital to the religion of Islam, that anything which would seem to weaken it is unquestionably rejected. This is what, Robson writes, sometimes makes conversation with Muslims very difficult, "for Christians and Muslims do not mean the same things by the terms they use." Another major struggle is the fact that the Qur'ān and Hadīth do "not always tally with the New Testament." To a Muslim this simply means that the carelessness of Christians has led them to alter or corrupt their Holy Scripture. So Islam persists in giving us an image of Jesus very different from that which we find in the New Testament. Today while many Muslims may not be prepared to believe in all the stories and accounts about Jesus to be found in the Bible, they all hold that Jesus was a

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<sup>344</sup> Wagner, *Opening the Qur'an*, p.336.

<sup>345</sup> Jesus as prophet is not really a prominent theme in NT.

messenger, and deny his death and resurrection, which mean everything to Christian theology.<sup>346</sup>

To sum up, for Muslims, Jesus is the latest messenger to the People of Israel. His *Injīl* proclaims *tawhid*, God's One-Only-ness with a particular emphasis on spiritual matters such as divine mercy and compassion. In unequivocally clear statements, Jesus is totally and only human. *He is, however, alive in God's heavens, and his return is a sign of the imminent Day of Judgment.*

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<sup>346</sup> James Robson, "Muhammedan Teaching about Jews," in *The Moslem World*. (Hartford, Jan., 1939; Vol. XXIX, No. 1), p. 54.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **NUZŪL-U ‘ĪSĀ (DESCENT OF JESUS CHRIST)**

Chapter 4 opens with an overview of Islamic eschatology and end time expectations and explains the term *fitnah* (tribulation). Following the eschatological overview, I will continue with the description of the Islamic understanding of the Messiah and the events that will take place before the Nuzūl-u ‘Īsā (Descent of Jesus Christ). Then I will deal the appearance of specific figures, such as the Mahdī and the Dajjāl and relate those personalities to the actions that the Messiah will perform after his coming. The discussion will take up the issue of whether the Messiah will descend physically or spiritually. Finally, I will offer a different perspective on the Nuzūl from the writings of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gülen.

#### **A SYNOPSIS OF ISLAMIC ESCHATOLOGY AND END TIME EXPECTATIONS**

Eschatology is the doctrine of last things, especially in *traditional* Judaism and Christianity, concerning beliefs about the end of the world, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and related matters. Derived from the Greek word *eschaton*, meaning “last,” the term eschatology means “last things” or “end times.” Even though the word “eschatology” literally refers the termination of time and space along with all their aspects, and the circumstances leading to such an end, Walter Wagner underlines that there are two eschatological models in both Jewish and Christian traditions. The first model can be understood on the basis of the term *eschaton*, meaning the “last,” “uttermost” and “final”. The second model involves “end” as *telos*, that is, “goal,”

“completion” and “fulfillment”.<sup>347</sup> The two types of end time are presented in the Hebrew Bible, Jewish apocryphal writings, and the New Testament. The eschaton expects the total annihilation of the present universe and its replacement by a new heavens and new earth with a amazingly peaceful and prosperous world for those blessed to live in it.<sup>348</sup> The second type envisions the End as *telos*, that is, the fulfillment of the present world through transformation without wiping it out of existence.<sup>349</sup>

Some of biblical and later Christian precedents have parallels with Islamic eschatological understanding. Nevertheless, eschatology is far more than the study of doctrines and beliefs pertaining to the end of the world and what might follow as the Day of Judgment or *al-Akhirah* (the Hereafter). Eschatology or the end time emphases also involve preparing for the future through seeking to establish mutual understanding and respect in the present.<sup>350</sup> Tim Winter indicates the range of concerns that apply to both Christians and Muslims:

Eschatology embraces not only teachings about death, resurrection, immortality and judgment, but also the tradition’s understanding of beginnings, the meaning of history and the direction and purpose towards which everything in creation tends.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Wagner, *Beginnings and End Times*, p. 19-20.

<sup>348</sup> Isaiah 65:17-25; 1 Corinthians 15:12-58; Romans 8:18-25; 2 Peter 3:11-13; Revelation 21:1-22:7

<sup>349</sup> Isaiah 2:2-5; Zechariah 14; 2 Maccabees 7; Mark 13 and parallel passages; Matthew 22:1-14, 23-33; 24:1-25:46 and parallels in Luke.

<sup>350</sup> Wagner, *Beginnings and End Times*, p. 20-25

<sup>351</sup> Tim Winter (ed.), *Classical Islamic Theology*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 308.

Wagner points out that the writers of eschatological texts often feel constrained by standard language and terms. Consequently, they resort to images, symbols, some numerology, and calculations to express their views about good and evil, God's justice and human fault, the blessings and merits to be bestowed upon the believer, and the terrible fate of the damned. Such writings, in part or whole, are usually called "apocalypses," referred to generally as "apocalyptic," from the core idea that the works contain revelations that could only be revealed by God to special seers and sages.<sup>352</sup> Apocalyptic is a form of eschatology that involves revelations of that which was concealed until disclosed, usually by a divine source to a seer or wise person.<sup>353</sup> Apocalyptic writings frequently offer final scenes for life in the present world that include massive divine interventions, savior-rescuers and their evil counterparts (like Christ and Anti-Christ), resurrection of the dead, and judgment usually based on deeds. In apocalyptic writings, the end of this world serves as the beginning for newly created worlds and realms that promise human beings eternal joy and happiness or warn them about eternal punishment.<sup>354</sup>

For Muslims, as God created the world, so shall He put an end to it and then recreate it to inaugurate the Day of Judgment (Surah 14:48).<sup>355</sup> The Qur'ān is full of

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<sup>352</sup> Wagner, *Beginnings and End Times*, p. 19

<sup>353</sup> Jerry L. Walls, editor, *The Oxford Handbook Of Eschatology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3. Admittedly, there is no single definition for apocalyptic expressions and literature.

<sup>354</sup> Wagner, *Beginnings and End Times*, p. 19

<sup>355</sup> Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 1-31.

warnings about “THE HOUR.”<sup>356</sup> In all Islamic eschatology, the final judgment is the defining highpoint of history and the world. Belief in the Day of Judgment is most essential for Muslims along with the belief in the One God. The Day of Judgment will prove to all in this universe that God is the Creator of all from nothing and is the Absolute Master. Muslims know that the moment will arrive when bodies will be resurrected, and all persons, bodies and souls reunited, will be held accountable for their intentions and actions. On that day all humans will be consigned to eternity either in the gardens of bliss or the fires of recompense.

The Qur’ānic terms *marji’* and *maad* are always related to Islamic eschatology or the end times. Basically the words connote return or final destination. In one aspect, the destination of God’s creation (*al-Kawn*) is the Day of Judgment (*Yawm al-Dīn*) or the Day of Resurrection (*Yawm al-Qiyāmah*) or the Day of Reckoning (*Yawm al-Hisāb*) or the Day of Separation (*Yawm al-Fasl*) that will lead to the Hereafter (*al-Akhirah*). In another aspect, the final destination is either the paradisiacal Garden (*al-Jannah*) or Hell (*al-Jahannam*).

Compared to the Hadīth tradition, the Qur’ān is brief in describing the signs that foreshadow the end of the world, known as *Ashrāt al-Sa’ah* (the signs of the Hour). The Qur’ān *usually* describes the events of the world’s last day rather than the signs that lead up to it. However, some of the Qur’ānic signs are ambiguous as to whether they are on the Day of Judgment or before it. The Qur’ān affirms that the *Yawm al-Qiyāmah* (the Day of Judgment when all human beings shall be raised from the dead and ultimately judged)

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<sup>356</sup> Al-Sa’ah (The Hour) is mentioned 48 times in the Qur’ān

will be announced by a radical disruption of the natural order of events. The overwhelming event will be a calamity filled with noise and disorder that scatters persons and mountains,<sup>357</sup> in the midst of which there will be a great fire and earthquake.<sup>358</sup> The earth will shake, the heavens will be stripped away, the sky will be torn apart, the stars will fall, the sun will fold up and be darkened, the crumpled mountains will disappear, the seas will boil over, and the earth will be flattened as the dead are raised from their graves.<sup>359</sup>

Smith and Haddad state that prior to the calamitous end of the natural order, Muslims anticipate a collapse of the moral order. They expect an escalation of human immorality, such as murder, fornication, and treachery. Indeed, such pre-end degradation is not described in the Qur'ān but is detailed in the Hadīth and eschatological Muslim literature.<sup>360</sup> Muslim scholars have not always had an agreement on the order of events to follow from these signs of physical chaos and moral depravity, “but one can discern a general outline of what is to be expected.” The first category of happenings is often referred to as “the signs of the Hour”, based on numerous references in the Qur'ān to that inescapable time when all human beings shall be raised from the dead and all their good

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<sup>357</sup> Al-Qāri‘ah (The Sudden, Mighty Stroke) 101:1-11

<sup>358</sup> Al-Zilzāl (The Earthquake) 99:1-8

<sup>359</sup> Al-Takwīr (The Folding Up) 81: 1-13, Al-Infītār (The Cleaving Open) 82:1-4, and Al-Inshiqāq (The Splitting Asunder) 84:1-5.

<sup>360</sup> For example, see Bukhārī Volume 2, Book 17, Number 146 and Volume 9, Book 88, Number 237; Muslim Book 41, Chapter 5, Number 6904; and Abū Dāwūd Book 37, Number 4293

and bad deeds shall be ultimately judged and recompensed according to what they have earned.<sup>361</sup>

For Muslims, that such events will take place is an Islamic certainty, although the exact time of such eschatological realities remains unknown. It is clear then that whereas the eschatology of Christianity is characterized by the imminence<sup>362</sup> of the Last Judgment, the eschatology of Islam maintains a distinctive perspective between the certainty of the event and the uncertainty of its schedule, while retaining an air of its proximity to serve as a warning.<sup>363</sup> The Qur'ān specifies that exact knowledge of the event is God's alone: "To Him is referred knowledge of the hour."<sup>364</sup>

Because the Qur'ān does not speak of most of the details of apocalyptic narrative, Muslims mostly have relied on the elaborations of the Hadīth materials. David Cook in his *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* notes that the Qur'ān is an eschatological book, though clearly not an apocalyptic one. Cook details the ways in which the acceptance of eschatological materials from Jewish and Christian traditions combined with Islamic structures to produce a uniquely Muslim set of interpretations. He also describes what he

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<sup>361</sup> For example see Surahs 4:41; 6:61-2; 10:52; 13-31; and 17:34. See Jane Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck. "The Anti-Christ and the End of Time in Christian and Muslim Eschatological Literature" in *The Muslim World*, Volume 100, October 2010.

<sup>362</sup> In 2 Peter 3:8-9, it could be 1,000 years away. In Mark 13:32, Jesus says only the Father knows when but Jesus does not know. In much of the New Testament and generally in Christian history, at least until recently, the emphasis has been on the imminence of Jesus' return and role in the Last Judgment. See also the Nicene Creed "...He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end."

<sup>363</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith, "The Anti-Christ and the End of Time in Christian and Muslim Eschatological Literature."

<sup>364</sup> A'raf 7:167; Nahl 16:77; Ta Ha 20:15; and Fussilat 41:47

calls the “inter-religious transfer” of biblical materials, mainly from the Book of Daniel and Revelation to John, into Hadīth tradition.<sup>365</sup>

The Hadīth collections are very detailed in recalling what the Prophet Muhammad said to his companions around him in regard with the signs of the Hour. Some Muslim scholars discern him enumerating as many as fifty-two minor signs along with ten major signs that precede the Day of Resurrection.<sup>366</sup> Some of these will occur before the very Last Day. The minor signs include torrential rain, destructive storms, earthquakes, floods, and erupting volcanoes. The major signs include the decline of Islam, altering of the natural order such as the sun rising from the West or the eclipse of the sun, and widespread evidence of public evil and immorality such as adultery and homosexuality.<sup>367</sup> They also include the appearance of specific figures, such as the Messiah and the Dajjāl, who, in many ways, parallel those in the millennial Christian eschatological drama.<sup>368</sup>

The term “millennium” literally refers to one thousand. The expression surfaced in the New Testament’s Revelation to John 20:1-15. Christians who accept that there will

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<sup>365</sup> David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, (Princeton: NJ Darwin Press, 2002), p. 2-9

<sup>366</sup> The ten major signs listed by Imam Muslim in his Sahih are the smoke (dukhan); Dajjāl (the Anti-Christ); Dābbat al-Ard (the Beast); the sun rising in the west; the outbreak and attacks by Ya’juj and Ma’juj (Gog and Magog); three landslides in the east, west and Arabia; fire from Yemen, and the descent of Jesus. Muslim, “*fitan*” no. 39-41; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no. 21; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no. 12; Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no. 28; and Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 6, 7, VI.

<sup>367</sup> Bukhārī Volume 2, Book 17, Number 146 and Volume 9, Book 88, Number 237; Muslim Book 41, Chapter 5, Number 6904; and Abū Dāwūd Book 37, Number 429. Also see Layla Mabruk, *Alamat al-Sa’ah al-Sughrawa’l Kubra (Minor and Major Signs of the Hour)* (Cairo: al-Mukhtar al-Islami, 1986), p.50-7; Ali Muhammad, *Ashrat al-Sa’ah al-Sughrawa’l-Kubra (Minor and Major Portents of the Hour)* (Cairo: Dar al-Isra’, 1990), p. 39-44.

<sup>368</sup> Haddad and Smith, “The Anti-Christ and the End of Time in Christian and Muslim Eschatological Literature.”

be a millennial age are divided largely into Pre-Millennialists and Post-Millennialists. Each of these has subdivisions that are beyond the scope of this study. Wagner states that the general millennial scenario describes a period of persecution of Christians during the last days and great turmoil and evil on earth, including the rampages of the false prophet and his lesser minions.<sup>369</sup> According to “Pre-Millennialists,” Wagner writes, the martyrs will be raised from the dead and with the faithful who survived thus far to enjoy a millennium of blessing. Jesus will physically join them and rule during that period. Post-Millennialists, on the other hand, believe that Jesus will not be physically present during the thousand years but will be spiritually influential with the saints from a heavenly realm.<sup>370</sup>

### ***FITNAH* (TRIBULATION)**

The expectation is that after the lesser signs of the hour have been experienced and Muslims have suffered through a period of *fitnah* (tribulation), the major signs of the coming of the final termination become evident. The Islamic term *fitnah* (plural *fitan*) characterizes much of the hadīth descriptions of events that build up to the termination of the world. The entire genre of eschatological hadīths is called *fitan* by early Muslim scholars.<sup>371</sup> Ali Ünal’s definition of *fitnah* fits the Islamic eschatological-apocalyptic context:

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<sup>369</sup> See the Revelation of John, chapters 18, 19, and 20.

<sup>370</sup> Wagner, *Beginnings and End Times*, p. 38.

<sup>371</sup> For example, see Ibn Kathīr, *Al Nihaya fi al-Fitan wa al-Malahim*, (Cairo: Dār al-hadīth, no date) and Nuaym b.Hammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, (Cairo, Maktabah al-tawhīd, 1412/1991).

[Fitnah is] disorder and corruption rooted in rebellion against God and recognizing no laws. It denotes associating partners with God and adopting that as a life-style, spreading unbelief and apostasy, committing major sins with willful, insolent abandon, open hostilities to Islam, destroying the collective security or causing public disorder, and oppression.<sup>372</sup>

The Hadīth materials describe two *fitnahs*. The first *fitnah* involves two bizarre figures, the Dajjāl, also called the al-Masīh al-Dajjāl and the Sufyān (sometimes called the Sufyānī). While there is no specific reference to either the Dajjāl or the Sufyān in the Qur'ān, they have come to play a very important role in the development of the eschatological narrative of Muslim tradition along with the Messiah and the Mahdī. They are often described in terms of being the Great Dajjāl, who will appear in the non-Muslim world and the Final Sufyān, who will appear in the Muslim world, because according to the tradition, there will be minor and earlier Dajjāls and Sufyāns preceding them. These will exhibit the same functions but to lesser degrees.<sup>373</sup> Both beings are the greatest of all the Dajjāls and Sufyāns to appear in the world after the Prophet and the one or ones to emerge before Doomsday will be the most harmful and destructive.

The Dajjāl is the false or imposter messiah, whose appearance is one of the major signs that the Last Day is drawing near.<sup>374</sup> The word “د-ج-ل” (D-J-L) connotes covering, as in coating an item with a precious metal and covering the defects of a product so as to cheat a customer. Dajjāl also means liar, fraud, a seditious and damned person who

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<sup>372</sup> Ali Ünal trans, *The Qur'ān with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, (New Jersey: The Light, 2006), 1337.

<sup>373</sup> Note Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, especially pages 137-188, and 358-378.

<sup>374</sup> According to a hadīth from Bukhārī, about thirty Dajjāls will appear, each claiming to be Allah's messenger. Bukhārī, Book 92, Chapter 25, saying 721 (2).

confuses the minds and hearts by mixing the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. A hadīth in the *Sahih* of Imam Muslim describes a misshapen man-like creature or beast of great power who is chained in a cave in the east. Sometime before the cataclysms of the Last Day, he will burst from his cave to attack and deceive the inhabitants of the world.<sup>375</sup> He will travel throughout the world except for Makkah, Madinah and Damascus. He and his armies will slaughter those who resist his claims to be the One-and-Only God. He will perform great miracles, produce illusions that deceive many, and attack the remnant of the faithful Muslims. He and his forces will besiege the remnant of faithful Muslims in Jerusalem and be on the verge of total victory when Jesus will return from his heavenly place, kill the Dajjāl near Jerusalem, and destroy the Dajjāl's forces. Jesus will then inaugurate a period of prosperity, joy, justice, peace, and true religion (Islam). At the end of that period, Jesus will die and be resurrected with all humanity in the general resurrection at the hour of judgment.<sup>376</sup>

A second figure, the Mahdī, is often associated with Jesus in the struggle against the Dajjāl.<sup>377</sup> Even though some traditions indicate that the Dajjāl will be killed by the Mahdī, major sources on the subject clearly indicate that this role belongs to Jesus.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> See Muslim, Book 92, Chapter 1207-1212, sayings 7005-7041, pp. 1515-1525.

<sup>376</sup> Ibn Mājah, "*fitan*" no 33; Abū Dāwūd, "*malāhim*" no 14.

<sup>377</sup> Belief in the Mahdī plays a special role in Shi'a Islam, a strand of Islam which includes approximately one-eighth of Muslims worldwide. Shi'as predominate in Iran and account for more than half the Muslims in Iraq and Lebanon. Significant Shi'a population also exists in Azerbaijan and Syria. The personality of Mahdī is vital to the Shi'a's views of the Imamate and eschatology. They believe that Allah took the 12<sup>th</sup> and last imam, Abū'l-Qasim Muhammad, into "occultation," that is, Allah hid and protected him in about 874 when he was 4 years old. It is he who will reappear as the Mahdī, and Jesus will reappear with him when the world is full of injustice to restore justice.

<sup>378</sup> Muhammad bin al-Murtaza al-Kasani, *Ilm al-Yaqīn fi Usul al-Din*, (Qum, 1979), vol. 2, 805

While the Hadīth narratives vary in describing the order in which the eschatological figures will appear, most texts indicate that the first will be the Mahdī. He is central to Islamic traditional millennial teachings, although many Sunnī scholars insist that there is no basis in either Qur’ān or Sunnah for assuming his existence. He does feature prominently in many hadīths, however, and is understood by most Muslims to be a great righteous leader who will unite the Muslim community, and begin to lead them to victory against their enemies. Descended from the family of the Prophet Muhammad,<sup>379</sup> the Mahdī is the archetype of what the true Islamic ruler should be; as David Cook puts it, “he is the person who will set things right”<sup>380</sup>. He will restore the Muslim community to the true path by ridding the world of bid’ah, innovation of new religious thought. The Mahdī will reestablish the Sunnah, the path of the Prophet as an integral part of Islam and will teach Islam in a manner consistent with that of the Prophet Muhammad.

Another positive figure mentioned by Abū Dāwūd in his *Sunan* is the *Mujaddid*. He reported “Abū Hurayrah reported the Messenger of Allah as saying: Allah will raise for this community at the end of every hundred years the one who will renovate its religion for it”<sup>381</sup>. The basic meaning of this hadīth has never been controversial; it is interpreted as indicating that God in His wisdom very well knows the weakness of human beings including the Muslim community and sees that the tendency toward moral and spiritual decline is all but unavoidable. Therefore He raises up at the beginning of each 100-year period, beginning with the year of the Prophet’s hijrah (emigration from

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<sup>379</sup> Mabruk, 51-52

<sup>380</sup> Cook, p. 126

<sup>381</sup> Abū Dāwūd, Book 32, Chapter 1587, saying 4278.

Makkah to Medina), one or more persons from among the Muslims to renew the religion of Islam. According to Tim Winter, this is “Centennialism,” that is, a periodic renewal of Islam through a Mujaddid or Renewer every 100 years.<sup>382</sup> The first Mujaddid is often or usually considered to have been the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar II, who reigned during the years 99-101 of the hijrah. The Renewers are sometimes, on the other hand, understood to be scholars and figures not involved in political affairs or struggles. They are spiritually-oriented educators who correct and influence the Muslim community, and, through this society, the world.<sup>383</sup>

A Muslim scholar who functioned as an apocalypticist in certain area of his scholarship was Abū al-Fadl Jalal al-Din al-Suyutī (850/1445-911/1505), a Shafii scholar living in Cairo during the late Mamluk period. He authored over 500 works during the course of his life, ranging over tafsir, hadīth, the Arabic language, and history, among other disciplines. He also dealt with the subject of eschatology-apocalyptic and expanded on the Centennialist concept of Renewers.<sup>384</sup> Al-Suyutī used the Hadīth reports ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad that the Messenger said that the world and Muslim community would deteriorate. People are fallible and will fall away from what is true and good for them. Conduct will worsen, worship will become distorted and lax, ignorance and wickedness will grow. Each century will have to cope with its own fitnah. Yet every hundred years God will send at least one Mujaddid to renew and restore the Muslim

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<sup>382</sup> See Winter, p. 316.

<sup>383</sup> Wagner, *Beginnings and End Times*, p. 34-5

<sup>384</sup> Larry Poston. “The Second Coming of ‘Isa: An Exploration of Islamic Premillennialism” in *The Muslim World*, volume 100, number 1, January, 2010, pages 100-116.

society to what God intends it to be. The concept of the Renewers will give hope and patience to Muslims. They know that the present messes in which they live will end, but they will have to figure out where in the time frame of anticipated future events they live. From the documents he had consulted, Al-Suyutī developed a century-by-century table of persons whom he considered to be the Renewers of their times. He included himself for his own century.<sup>385</sup>

### **AL-MASĪH (THE MESSIAH)**

Masīh, literally meaning *anointed*, is based on the grammatical form which emphasizes the fact of the anointing being possessed by someone or something. W. Wright cites the form “fa‘īl” (the form which “masīh” is from) as being an adjective which is “made like, or assimilated to, the participles, viz. in respect to their inflection.”<sup>386</sup> He also states that adjectives of the “fa‘īl” form express “a quality inherent and permanent in a person.”<sup>387</sup> Based on these definitions and the examples of other Arabic words in the cited book by Wright, “masīh” is grammatically capable of carrying the idea of “very anointed” or “most anointed” both of which would express “a very high degree of the quality which their subject possesses” or even “anointing one” which would express “an act which is done with frequency ... by their subject.”<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Poston, Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> W. Wright (ed.), *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, vol. 1, (L.L.D, 1967), p. 133.

<sup>387</sup> Wright, p. 133.

<sup>388</sup> Wright, p. 136.

There are those who suggest that the term “masīh” is borrowed from the Hebrew language.<sup>389</sup> Obviously there is a connection, as with many other Hebrew and Arabic words, because of the close connection between the Hebrew and Arabic languages. However, to say that it was only a Hebrew word would be unreasonable. The word *masīh* that stems from the Arabic root “م-س-ح” (M-S-H) is a genuine Arabic word. In Arabic, when used as an adjective, it does mean *wiped (mamsuh)*<sup>390</sup>, *cleansed, anointed, truthful, genial, and traveler*; and when used as a verb, it would mean *to measure, to wipe, and to anoint*.<sup>391</sup> Also, in the Qur’ān non-Arabic words are used without the article; however, the word Masīh has the article “al”.<sup>392</sup> But anyway, since the word is referring to a person mentioned to in the Hebrew language, the title “masīh” should not be separated from the fullness of the meaning which it held in the Hebrew context.

The Hebrew word “messiah,” translated as the Greek “christos” means someone who is anointed. The term “messiah” applies to David and Israel’s kings. It is a royal title. Also, in the Qumran materials, there is a Davidic messiah and an Aaronic messiah – apparently a priest-like position. We see that the author quotes the Lord calling the

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<sup>389</sup> Muhammad b. Jarir b. Yazid b. Khalid al-Tabarī, *al-Jāmi al-Bayān*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984), 6:420; Abū Abdullah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Abū Bakr b. Feraḥ al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, (Cairo: Dār al-Sha’b, 1372/1952), 6:11; Nāsir al-Din Abū Said Abdullah b. ‘Umar b. Muhammad al-Baydāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa-Asrār al-Ta’wīl*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), 2:19

<sup>390</sup> In Islamic tradition, *mash* is to wipe one’s head or sometimes feet with the wet palm of one’s hand while performing *wudū*, the ritual ablution. “O you who believe! When you rise up for the Prayer, (if you have no ablution) wash your faces and your hands up to (and including) the elbows, and lightly rub your heads (with water), and (wash) your feet up to (and including) the ankles” (Surah 5:6)

<sup>391</sup> Abū al-Fadl Muhammad b. Mukarram b. Ali al-Ansarī Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-‘Arab*, (Beirut: Dār Sādir, no date), “س ي ح s-y-h” art. (II, 492-493); Abū al-Tāhir Majduddīn Muhammad b. Ya’qūb b. Muhammad al-Fīruzābādī; *al-Qāmūs al-Muhīt*, (Beirut: Muassasa al-Risāla, 1986), I, 288.

<sup>392</sup> Arent Jean Wensinck, “Īsa”, MEB İslam Ansiklopedisi, VIII, 124

Persian king Cyrus His anointed in Isaiah 45:1-19. The Prophet Zechariah in the Hebrew Bible indicates that there will be an anointed king and an anointed priestly leader. A messiah-christ is also considered as a high-ranking angel in 2 Esdras, the 1<sup>st</sup>-Century Jewish apocalyptic. Both “Messiah” and “Christ” are used of Jesus in the New Testament and later Christianity.

The word *al-Masīh* is mentioned 11 times in 10 different Qur’ānic verses when referring to Jesus, either alone<sup>393</sup> or along with the name *‘Īsā*<sup>394</sup>. The Qur’ān never refers to any other prophet as being “masīh” much less “al-Masīh”. He is often called in the Qur’ān *al-Masīh ‘Īsā* – “Jesus Christ” (al-Nisā’ 4:157, 171). The title *al-Masīh* (“the Messiah”) sometimes appears by itself (al-Nisā’ 4:172), and on other occasions he is called *al-Masīh Ibn-u Maryam* (“the Messiah, son of Mary” – al-Tawbah 9:31), but on each of the eleven occasions where it appears, the title *al-Masīh* - the Messiah - is applied specifically to Jesus alone. The Qur’ān even goes so far as to say that right in the beginning, when the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary, he deliberately stated that the name of her son was to be *al-Masīh ‘Īsā* (Surah 3:45). Islam thus joins Christianity in declaring Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah promised to the Jews through the prophets of old. The term Masīh is also used in Hadīth tradition to describe Jesus and most of these hadīths identify Jesus as al-Masīh son of Mary or (quoting Christians) al-Masīh son of God.<sup>395</sup> The Qur’ān declares; “The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was but a

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<sup>393</sup> Al-Nisā, 4; 172; Al-Mâ’idah, 5; 72; Al-Tawbah, 9; 30.

<sup>394</sup> Âl ‘Imran, 3; 45; Al-Nisā’, 4; 157, 171; Al-Mâ’idah, 5; 17 (twice), 72, 75; Al-Tawbah, 9; 31.

<sup>395</sup> Bukhārī, “*tafsir-u surah*” no 8, “*tawhid*” no 24; Muslim, “*imân*” no 302; Ahmad b. Hanbal, V, 72.

Messenger of God, and a Word which He conveyed to Mary, and a spirit from Him...”  
(al-Nisā’ 4:171)

This passage gives Jesus an extremely exalted position and recognizes that he has qualities possessed by no other prophet, and one of these positions or qualities is his being the Messiah.<sup>396</sup> Nevertheless, the word Messiah is neither defined nor explained in the Qur’ān, nor is much made of it by Muslim tradition, and its meaning of anointed is not even given. The meaning of “al-Masīh” is significant when we recognize that Jesus Christ was the only one who is referred to in the Qur’ān as being “the Messiah” which is expressed in Arabic as *al-Masīh*.<sup>397</sup> None of the other prophets are referred to by this title. In Arabic, the article “al” refers to someone or something of pre-eminence, or someone or something previously known and recognized. What was Jesus Christ anointed with, which he was given the responsibility of passing on? The Qur’ān specifically states in Surahs 2:87 and 5:110 that he was strengthened by the Holy Spirit. The Bible, on the other hand, describes how he was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism and began his public ministry. Jesus’ apostle, Peter describes this:

You know what has happened ... after the baptism that John preached how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how

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<sup>396</sup> Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam (Visions of Reality Series)*, (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1994), 170.

<sup>397</sup> Undoubtedly the origin of al-masīh as a religious technical term goes back to the Hebrew, but how does it come into the Arabic? Although Jesus presumably spoke Aramaic as his normal language and probably did not know Greek and certainly not Latin, all of the early Christian tradition about him definitely originates only in Greek. Now the normal term for *masīh* in Greek is *christos*, so where does *masīh* come in? Is it ever used in the Greek? Perhaps it arises as a result of a retranslation of *christos* in Syriac/Aramaic when Christians speaking those languages began to translate and later to write about Christianity in their own languages. It is very unlikely that it could have come through Jewish Aramaic or from Jews, since they denied all association of Jesus with the messiah, nor could it possibly have come from Hebrew directly, a language not used by the Christians and little used by the Jews.

he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. (Acts 10:37-38)

Why was Jesus called al-Masīh in Islamic tradition? Different commentaries on the Qur’ān and Hadīth state that Jesus was anointed with blessing and honor; he was protected from the all kinds of sin; he was protected from the Satan through the wings of the archangel Gabriel since his birth; his touch healed the blind from birth and the leper; he anointed people with the sacred oil; he was anointed with the sacred oil at his birth; he frequently did and will travel and make his divine message heard everywhere.<sup>398</sup> Imam Rāzī (d.606/1210) lists ten reasons why Jesus was called al-Masīh. Among them are to call him “king,” “righteous,” “pure,” touched by Gabriel as protection from Satan, and anointed with sacred oil at birth. Two terms, *al-malīk* (king) and *al-siddīq* (righteous one) seem to be closest to the Bible.<sup>399</sup>

Jesus the Messiah is the most significant figure who will appear at the end of time in Islamic eschatology and will join the Mahdī in destroying the Dajjāl and restoring justice to the world. Some traditions hold that the Mahdī and Jesus are synonymous figures, though most point to their distinct differences.<sup>400</sup> Unlike the gradual rise of both the Mahdī and the Dajjāl, the coming of the Messiah will be sudden. In fact, on surveying the various references to the Last Day in the Qur’ān one is struck by the fact that often it

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<sup>398</sup> Muhammad b. Jarir b. Yazid b. Khalid al-Tabarī, *Jāmi al-Bayān*, III: 270 and VI: 35; Ahmad b. ‘Ali Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalanī, *Fath al-Bārī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifā, 1379/1959), II: 318 and VI: 472; Muhyi al-Din Abū Zakariyya Yahya Bin Sharaf Al-Nawawī, *Sharh Sahīh Muslim* (Beirut: Dār Ihya’ al-Turath al-Arabī, 1929), II:234; Abū Muhammad Badraddin Mahmud b. Ahmad b. Musa al-Hanafī al-‘Aynī, *Umda al-Qārī Sharh Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001), XVI:24.

<sup>399</sup> Fahr al-Dīn Muhammad b. ‘Umar al-Tamīmī al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb, (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2000), VIII: 43.

<sup>400</sup> Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding*, 68

is the suddenness of the event, which is emphasized.<sup>401</sup> Traditionally the role of the Messiah is to kill the Dajjāl, rule the people with justice, break the cross, kill the pig, restore the peace, institute freedom, and establish the true religion.<sup>402</sup> He will inaugurate the period of peace, prosperity and justice before the actual arrival of the Day of Judgment.

According to Poston, the concept of the coming of the Messiah in Islam may be based upon a variety of rational arguments; First, there is the fact that among all the prophets and messengers sent to different nations throughout history, Jesus is the only one *who is stated not to have physically passed away* but was instead taken up to the presence of God.<sup>403</sup> Surah 3:55 states God's proclamation that He would take Jesus and raise him to Himself, and Surah 4:157-158 places this event near the time that Christians claim that he was crucified. "...whereas they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but the matter was made dubious to them . . . but, Allah raised him to Himself...". From these Qur'ānic passages it is concluded that Jesus did not experience death at the time of his first arrival, but was rescued out of his trying circumstances through a supernatural

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<sup>401</sup> For instance, "Whereas those who persistently disbelieve will not cease to be in doubt about it (the Revelation) until the Last Hour comes upon them *suddenly*," (al-Hajj 22:55); "So, it will come on them all of a *sudden*, when they are unaware (and incapable of awareness) of its coming," (al-Shuara' 26:202); and "Do they (who persist in unbelief and evil deeds) wait but for the Last Hour –(waiting) that it should come upon them all of a *sudden*, being unaware and indifferent toward it?"(al-Zukhruf 43:66)

<sup>402</sup> 'Abd al-Latif 'Ashur, *al-Masīh al-Dajjāl Haqiqa la Khayal* (The Anti-Christ is Real not Imaginary) (Cairo Maktabaht al-Qur'ān, no date), p. 46.

<sup>403</sup> According to Islamic tradition, Idrīs (Enoch) and (Idrīs) Elijah were also taken up alive by God. The majority of mufassirs are of the opinion that Idrīs was the Prophet who lived before Noah and was known as Enoch in the Bible. Many hold that the fact that Idrīs was raised to a high station means that God had granted him a high position. However, as we will discuss later, Said Nursi writes that life has five degrees, and the third degree is manifested in the lives of the Jesus and Idrīs, who live in heaven with their bodies. Their bodies are not bound by the necessities of human life and have acquired a sort of refinement and luminosity to the degree of astral bodies and an angelic type of life (Nursi, The Letters, "The First Letter," 1: 2)

event performed by God. It is thus assumed that since he never died, he could possibly return to this state of existence at any time.<sup>404</sup>

Second, as we will discuss later, Qur’ān 43:61 is seen by some to point to the return of Jesus immediately prior to the Last Hour: “And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment)” (Yusuf Ali translation). According to Poston, the passage is clearly an ambiguous one, but such an interpretation seems plausible and more believable than most, given the previous argument.<sup>405</sup>

Third, Jesus’ life and ministry display certain characteristics not seen in any of the other prophets or messengers. Abdullah Yusuf Ali sums up this uniqueness in the following manner:

All the Prophets of whom we have any detailed knowledge, except one, had wives and children.<sup>406</sup> The exception is Jesus, the son of Mary. But his life was incomplete: his ministry barely lasted three years; his mission was limited; and he was not called upon to deal with the many-sided problems that arise in a highly organized society or State.<sup>407</sup>

Thus, so to speak, the descent of Jesus is necessitated by God’s unwillingness to leave the life of one of His “chosen prophets” incomplete. If Jesus was raised up at approximately the age of 30,<sup>408</sup> and upon his return will establish a kingdom of forty

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<sup>404</sup> Poston, *Ibid.*

<sup>405</sup> Poston, *Ibid.*

<sup>406</sup> However, this part is incorrect even in the Qur’ān, as the Prophet Yahyā is described as ḥasūr, meaning celibate and having nothing to do with women. (Qur’ān 3:39).

<sup>407</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Brentwood, MD Amanat Corporation, 1989), 599.

<sup>408</sup> See Abū Abdullah Muhammad b. Abdullah al-Hākīm al-Naysabūrī, *al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Sahihayn*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1411/1990), II: 651. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus starts preaching in the year 27 or 28 at about the age of thirty, but in Matthew, he is born before the death of

years or so duration, the two periods combined yield a lifespan of 60-70 years. While *nothing is said in either the Qur'ān or the sahih Hadīth collections about a possible marriage and family*, these MIGHT not be out of the question given the length of time of his second temporary stay.<sup>409</sup>

Whether the Qur'ān speaks of the second coming of Jesus has always been a matter of discussion. However, some prominent scholars who compiled hadīth narrations related with this issue select several verses that are considered to indicate the descent of the Messiah toward the end of the world. Ibn Kathīr's (d.774/1372) enumerating 15 hadīths in regard to his coming in his interpretation of al-Nisā' 4:159 can be considered the first piece related with this issue.<sup>410</sup> In fact, *Nuzūl-u 'Īsā b. Maryam Akhir al-Zaman* by Jalal al-Din al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) is the first exclusive study in which he lists 69 hadīths from 20 different companions of the Prophet on this matter.<sup>411</sup> In his *al-Tawzīh fī Tawaturi mā jā'a fī al-Muntazari wa-al-Dajjāl wa-al-Masīh*, Abū 'Abdullah al-Shawkanī (d.1250/1834) gives 29 different hadīths.<sup>412</sup> In *Iqāmat al-Burhān 'alā Nuzūli 'Īsā fī Akhir al-Zaman*, Abdullah b. Muhammad Sıddīq al-Ghumārī (d.1413/1993) mentions 61

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Herod the Great in 4 BCE. Luke also states that he was born when Cyrenius=P. Sulpicius Quirinius was governor of Syria, which happened from 6 to 9 CE, not earlier, contradicting Luke's statement that he was about thirty in 28 or so. John further muddies the matter by having Jesus address Peter shortly before the end by saying, "Thou art not yet fifty." Bible scholars have concluded from all this that Jesus was born between 11 and 4 BCE and that he departed between 28 and 36 CE. This would give him a minimum age of 31 and a maximum age of 46 at the end of his mission.

<sup>409</sup> Poston, Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir al-Qur'ān al- 'Azīm*, I:143.

<sup>411</sup> Jalal al-Din al-Suyūṭī, *Nuzūl-u 'Īsā b. Maryam Akhir al-Zaman*, [Tahqīq ve ta'liq: Muhammad Abd Al-Qadīr Atā], (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1985), p. 30-7.

<sup>412</sup> Abū 'Abdullah al-Shawkanī, *al-Tawzīh fī Tawaturi mā jā'a fī al-Muntazari wa-al-Dajjāl wa-al-Masīh*,

hadīths from 24 companions.<sup>413</sup> Nevertheless, some of these works use the secondary hadīth sources instead of citing primary books for their analysis. Moreover, some writers don't hesitate to utilize al-Kashmirī's book as a primary source and make generalizations over this book.

In his work *al-Tasrīh fī mā Tawātara fī Nuzūl al-Masīh*, Muhammad al-Kashmirī of India does not only quote more than 70 hadīths, but also lists four Qur'ānic verses possibly implying the eschatological descent of Jesus;<sup>414</sup>

The first verse is "Mary, God gives you the glad tidings of a Word from Him, to be called the Messiah..... He will speak to people in the cradle and in manhood, and he is of the righteous." (Al-i Imran 3:45-6). The classic *tafsir* scholars including al-Tabarī, al-Qurtubī, and al-Baydāwī assert that speaking in maturity applies to all humans; therefore, the text must be speaking about after the descent.<sup>415</sup> According to al-Kashmirī, the verb tense (*yukallimu*) in the *ayah* indicates the unfinished nature of Jesus' mission. Therefore, he will have to speak to people after his second coming. Furthermore, Jesus preached among his disciples before his departure. The verse here contains the word *al-nās* (the people), indicating that he will speak to humanity and this requires his descent.

The second verse is "Yet there is none of the People of the Book [Jews and Christians] but will, before the moment of his death, believe in him and on the Day of

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<sup>413</sup> Abdullah b. Muhammad Siddiq al-Ghumārī, *Iqāmat al-Burhān 'alā Nuzūli 'Īsā fī Akhir al-Zaman*, (Beirut: Ālam al-Kutub, 1410/1990), p.46.

<sup>414</sup> Muhammad al-Kashmirī, *al-Tasrīh fī mā Tawātara fī Nuzūl al-Masīh*, [Tartīb: Muhammad Shafī' Tahqīq: Abd al-Fattah Abū Ghudda], (Beirut, 1412/1992), p. 20-42.

<sup>415</sup> Al-Tabarī, *al-Jāmi al-Bayān*, 6:420; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, 6:11; and al-Baydāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa-Asrār al-Ta'wīl*, 2:19.

Resurrection, he will be a witness against them.” (al-Nisā 4:159) The Arabic is not clear as to who is the one to be believed in (before his death) and who will be a witness against the Jews on the Day of Judgment. Al-Tabarī thinks it will be the People of the Book who will believe in Jesus before his return, when all believers unite under the banner of Islam.<sup>416</sup> In Islamic understanding, since Jesus was not crucified, his death can be considered real only after his second coming. Al-Zamakhsharī (1070-1143), assigns the pronoun “*bihi*” (in him) to Jesus, and infers the second coming in the context.<sup>417</sup> Al-Suyūṭī and ‘Ali al-Qārī (d. 1605) infer a similar meaning.<sup>418</sup> According to al-Baydāwī, if both “*bihi*” and “*mawtihi*” (his death) refer to Jesus, his death will really take place after his second coming.<sup>419</sup> Al-Kashmirī also points out that Ibn ‘Abbas and Abū Hurayrah interpreted this verse in a way that infers the descent of Jesus. Al-Bukhārī and Muslim narrate;

The Messenger of Allah said, “By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely Jesus, the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you and will judge mankind; he will break the Cross and kill the pigs and there will be no Jizyah. Money will be in Abundance so that nobody will accept it, and a single prostration to Allah (in prayer) will be better than the whole world and whatever is in it.” Abū added “If you wish, you can recite the Qur’ānic verse: “Yet there is none of the People of the Book but will,

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<sup>416</sup> Al-Tabarī, *Jāmi al-Bayān*, VII: 50. See, also Al-Tabarī, Commentary, Part 6, in Neil Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 81.

<sup>417</sup> Abū al-Qāsim Jārullah Mahmud Ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ‘an Haqā’iqi al-Tanzīl*, (Beirut: no date n.d.), 1:432-3.

<sup>418</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Abdurrahman al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-Manthur fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma’thur*, (Beirut: no date), 2:241-2; Ali b. Sultan al-Harawī al-Qārī, *Mirqat al-Mafatih* (Cairo: 1309), 5:221.

<sup>419</sup> Al-Baydāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, 1:240.

before the moment of Jesus death. And on the Day of Judgment He will be a witness against them.” (al-Nisā 4.159)<sup>420</sup>

The third verse is “So peace be upon me on the day I was born and the day of my death, and the day when I will be raised to life.” (al-Maryam 19:33) The resurrection mentioned here signifies Jesus’ second coming, according to those including al-Kashmirī who claim it proves this event. They base their understanding on the fact that the same verse also mentions his future death. As stated above, Jesus did not die on the cross.

The fourth Qur’ānic passage referred to in support of the belief that Jesus will return to earth towards the end of human history is that “(Jesus) shall be a sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): Therefore have no doubt about the (Hour) but follow me: this is a Straight Way” (al-Zukhruf 43:61). In this verse, the phrase “*la ‘ilmun*” can be recited in two variations: *la ‘ilmun*, refers to knowledge of the Day of Judgment; *la ‘alamun*, points to a sign of the Day of Judgment.<sup>421</sup> Pickthall thus translates the verse as, “Verily there is knowledge of the Hour”, as does Ali Ünal: “Surely Jesus is a means to the knowledge of the Last Hour.” The context of this verse does indeed appear to support the interpretation that the ‘ilm (knowledge) of the Hour will be determined by the return of Jesus to the earth. Most Muslim translators, including Yusuf Ali whose interpretation is in the quote above, say that this verse is understood to refer to the second coming of Jesus in the last days just before the Day of Resurrection, when he will destroy the false doctrines that pass under his name and prepare the way for the universal acceptance of

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<sup>420</sup> Bukhārī, “anbiyā” no 49; Muslim, “imān” no 242.

<sup>421</sup> Al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, XXV, 91 and Abū Hayyān, *Tafsīr al-Bahr al-Muhīt*, (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1422/2001), IX, 386.

the religion of Islam and the straight way of the Qur'ān.<sup>422</sup> The official fatwa announced by the University of Al-Azhar on the second coming also refers to the exact same verse as proof.<sup>423</sup> It is possible that this Qur'ānic passage may allude to Jesus as a signal ('alam) of the Hour rather than to the Qur'ān as a knowledge ('ilm) for the Hour. Dr. Parrinder, discussing this passage, concludes that this variant is a 'slender basis' for an eschatological role for the Qur'ānic Jesus.<sup>424</sup> A *mawquf* hadīth narrated by Ibn Abbas in the *Musnad* of Ahmad b. Hanbal and other hadīth corpuses besides the *Kutub-u Tis'ah* also point out that this passage clearly speaks of the second advent of Jesus.<sup>425</sup>

As previously stated, there is no clear expression about the return of Jesus in the Qur'ān, but there are numerous hadīths that Muslim scholars attest to being credible in regard to the second coming of Jesus and which give him a significant role. The primary hadīth collections, including the *Kutub al-Tis'ah*, refer to many hadīths in regard to the second coming. Depending on the collection, these narrations are sometimes mentioned among the hadīths on the Day of Qiyāmah, sometimes along with the Dajjāl, and sometimes as related to another issue.

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<sup>422</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān*, (Istanbul, Turkey: Asır Media, 2002), 335.

<sup>423</sup> Mustafa al-Tair, "Nuzūl al-Masīh min 'Alamati al-Sa'ah," in *Majalla al-Azhar*, Vol. 47 (1971), 6:515.

<sup>424</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān*, (London: 1967), 124.

<sup>425</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 317. See also Abdullah b. Muhammad Ibn Abū Shaybah, *Al-Musannaf fi al-Ahadīth wa al-Āthar*, (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, 1425/2004), VI, 339; Abū Hatim Muhammad al-Busti Ibn Hibbān, *Al-Ihsan fi Taqrīb-i Sahīh Ibn Hibban*, (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Risala, 1988), XV, 228; Abū al-Qāsim Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Tabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, (Mosul: Maktabah al-'Ulum wa al-Hikam, 1404/1983), XII, 153; al-Naysabūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn*, II, 278, 486.

Bukhārī, in the book of Prophets, gives two hadīths under the *bāb* (chapter) “*Nuzūl-u ‘Īsā b. Maryam*” (the descent of Jesus, son of Mary). Muslim, in the book of Faith, mentions six hadīths –if we do not count the repeated variations- under the *bāb* titled “*Nuzūl-u ‘Īsā b. Maryam Hakiman bi Shari‘at Nabīyyina Muhammad*” (the descent of Jesus, son of Mary judging according to the shari’a of the Prophet Muhammad). Muslim also, in the book of Fitān, lists six more hadīths under the chapters “*Fī fathi al-Qusṭantīniyyah wa Khurūj al-Dajjāl wa Nuzūl-u ‘Īsā b. Maryam*” (about the conquest of Constantinople, the emergence of the Dajjāl and the descent of Jesus, son of Mary), “*Fī al-Ayāt allātī takuna qabla al-Sa‘ah*” (about the signs of the Hour), “*Dhikr al-Dajjāl wa Sifatuhu wa man ma‘ah*” (mention of the Dajjāl and his and his followers’ characteristic), and “*Fī Khurūj al-Dajjāl wa mukthuhu fī al-Ard wa Nuzūl-u ‘Īsā wa Qatlihu iyyāh*” (about the emergence of the Dajjāl, his stay on the earth, Jesus’ descent and his slaying the Dajjāl). In addition, Muslim narrates several hadīths which are not directly connected to the return of Jesus in the chapters “*Dhikr al-Masīh b. Maryam wa al-Masīh al-Dajjāl*” (mention of the Masīh, son of Mary and the Dajjāl, the false Messiah) and “*Fadā’il-u ‘Īsā*” (the virtues of Jesus). Al-Tirmidhī opens three different chapters, namely “*Mā jā’a fī Nuzūl-u ‘Īsā b. Maryam,*” (about the descent of Jesus, son of Mary) “*Mā jā’a fī al-Dajjāl lā yadkhūl al-Madina,*” (about the Dajjāl not entering Madina) and “*Mā jā’a fī qatlu ‘Īsā b. Maryam al-Dajjāl*” (about Jesus slaying the Dajjāl) and mentions a hadīth in each one. Abū Dāwūd presents three hadīths on the Second Coming under the chapters “*Amārāt al-Sa‘ah*” (the signs of the Hour) and “*Khurūj al-Dajjāl*” (the emergence of the Dajjāl). Nasāi gives only one hadīth in the chapters “*Ghazwat al-Hind*” (the battle of

India). Ibn Mājah narrates six hadīths in the chapters “*Awwal al-Ayāt*” (the first of the signs) and “*Fitna al-Dajjāl wa Khurūju ‘Isā wa Khurūju Ya’juj wa Ma’juj*” (the tribulation of the Dajjāl and the appearance of Jesus and Ya’juj-Maj’juj/Gog-Magog). Directly proportional to the extent of the book, the *Musnad* of Ahmad b. Hanbal enumerates many more hadīths regarding the descent of Jesus without giving any specific chapter heading. Interestingly, Imam Malik and al-Darimī do not narrate any hadīth on the second coming in their collections.

Furthermore, among the early period hadīth corpuses, *al-Jāmī* of Mi‘mar b. Rāshid (d.154/770), gives seven narrations under the title “*Nuzūl-u ‘Isā b. Maryam.*” *Al-Musannaf* of Ibn Abī Shaybah (d.235/849) mentions several hadīths under the chapter “*Mā dhukira fī fitna al-Dajjāl*”. Al-Tayālīsī (d.204/819), Al-Humaydī (d.219/834), Ishāq b. Rāhūyah (d.238/852), Abd b. Humayd (d.249/863), Al-Bazzār (d.292/904) and Abū Ya’lā (d.307/919) in their *Musnad(s)*; ‘Abd al-Razzaq (d.211/826) and Ibn Abū Shaybah (d.235/849) in their *Musannaf(s)*; Saīd b. Mansūr (d.227/841) in his *Sunan*; Al-Nasā’ī (d.303/915) and Al-Bayhaqī (d.458/1065) in their *Sunan al-Kubra(s)*; Ibn Khuzayma (d.311/923) and Ibn Hibbān (d.354/965) in their *Sahih(s)*; Al-Tabarānī (d.360/970) in his three *Mu’jam(s)*; and Abū Ja’far al-Tahāwī (d.321/933) in *Mushkil al-Athār* all mention hadīth narrations on the second coming.

In total, 152 different narrations are listed in various hadīth collections mentioned above. Of these, the *Kutub-u Tis’ah* has 24 hadīths. Eight of these 24 hadīths are only mentioned in the *Musnad* of Ahmad b. Hanbal. Of these 24 narrations, there are 7 *sahih* hadīths, 9 *hasan* hadīths, and 8 *da’if* hadīths (one of them is considered *mawdu’*- or

fabricated - by some scholars). Among the *Sahaba*, the companions of the Prophet who narrated the most hadīths in regard to the second coming are Abū Hurayrah (37 hadīths) ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbas (13 hadīths), and ‘Abdullah b. ‘Amr (11 hadīths).

When we carefully look at the hadīth narrations and the titles where these narrations are listed, we will see that the word *nuzūl* (descent) has been used speaking of the second coming. Another term relating to the second advent of Jesus is *khurūj* (emergence or coming out) which, however, is used for the Dajjāl most of the time. In addition, *habt* (coming down), *ba‘th* (sending), *jāa’* (come) and *dhuhr* (appearing) are the word phrases we come across in regard with the second coming. In Arabic, the word *nuzūl* literally means “coming down,” “landing,” “arriving,” or “residing.” Nevertheless, the word *nuzūl* does not mean only physical descent, but communicating, directing and governing, as we see in the hadīth that speaks of God coming down to the nearest level of Heaven to pardon His servants.<sup>426</sup> We should definitely take into consideration this metaphorical and figurative connotation of the term *nuzūl* when interpreting the hadīths on Jesus’ second coming.

## **WHAT WILL HAPPEN BEFORE THE NUZŪL?**

It seems almost impossible to put the events and circumstances regarding the *nuzūl* in an exact chronological order. However, here are the incidents that will occur before and after Jesus’ descent with a possible arrangement;

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<sup>426</sup> The Prophet said, “Our Lord comes every night down to the nearest Heaven to us when the last third of the night remains, saying: ‘Is there anyone to invoke Me, so that I may respond to invocation? Is there anyone to ask Me, so that I may grant him his request? Is there anyone seeking My forgiveness, so that I may forgive him?’” See Bukhārī, “*tahajjud*” no 14, “*daawât*” no 14, “*tawhid*” 35; Muslim, “*musâfirun*” no 168-170; Tirmidhī, “*salat*” no 211, “*daawât*” no 78; Abū Dāwūd, “*tatawwu*” no 21, “*sunnah*” no 19; Ibn Mājah, “*iqâmat*” no 182; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 264, 266.

Muslims will fight Romans and Hindus; Constantinople will be conquered; the Dajjāl will appear, causing extraordinary and surprising events; the Mahdī will lead the Muslims; Muslims will have difficulties fighting the Dajjāl. Later Jesus will descend and slay the Dajjāl; he will temporarily lead the Muslims in place of the Mahdī, break the cross, kill the pig, and abolish the jizyah; wars will end and there will be an age of peace, justice, and prosperity; Jesus will go to Makkah to make a pilgrimage; Gog and Magog will appear and be destroyed by God; and Jesus will die and be buried.

As previously explained, the Qur’ān and the Hadīth speak of the Day of Judgment and describe the signs that foreshadow the end of the world, using the very exact term “signs of the Hour”. Speculation regarding the sequence of these events and how they would be fulfilled was and continues to be diverse. The “signs of the Hour,” including the appearance of Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj (Gog and Magog), the coming of the Mahdī, the appearance of the Dajjāl (Antichrist), the return of Jesus, the establishment of a peaceful kingdom, the Resurrection and the Judgment Day, and the eternal abode in either the *Jannah* or the *Jahannam* almost all find parallels in Judaism and Christianity.

A *sahih* hadīth narrated by Hudhaifa b. Usaid al-Ghifārī, states that the Prophet Muhammad witnessed his companions discussing the Last Hour beneath his window and said, “The Last Hour will not come until you see ten signs before [it],” and he then mentioned “the smoke (dukhan), the Dajjāl, the beast, the rising of the sun from the west, the descent of Jesus son of Mary, Gog and Magog, and land-slidings in three places, one in the east, one in the west and one in Arabia, at the end of which fire would burn forth

from the Yemen, and would drive people to the place of their assembly.”<sup>427</sup> However, there is a mention of the descent of Jesus Christ in one version of this hadīth, and in the other there is a mention of the blowing of a violent wind that will drive the people to the ocean. Considering the various signs in different narrations, hadīth interpreters agree that the smoke probably will be first, then the Dajjāl, and finally Jesus’ coming.<sup>428</sup> We should also acknowledge that even though the descent of Jesus Christ is the tenth sign in one version of the hadīth, these signs are not given by the Prophet Muhammad in their chronological order of occurrence. Imam Qurtubī, too, states that the signs are not given in a specific order and that this hadīth narrated by Hudhaifa b. Usaid is the soundest one in regard with an order, if necessary.<sup>429</sup>

A *hasan* hadīth narrated by Ibn Masud speaks of Jesus’ coming in terms of the signs of the Qiyāmah. According to the narration, on the night of Isra’<sup>430</sup>, the Prophet Muhammad met with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus and they all began discussing about the Day of Resurrection. The other three asked Abraham about the Hour, but he replied that he has no knowledge. Then they asked Moses and he gave the same answer. Jesus said

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<sup>427</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no. 39-41; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no. 21; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no. 12; Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no. 28; and Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 6, 7, VI.

<sup>428</sup> See Ahmad b. ‘Ali Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalanī, *Fath al-Bārī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifā, 1379/1959), XI: 352-354; Muhammad Shams al-Hakk al-‘Azîmâbâdî, ‘*Awn al-Ma’bud*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1994), XI, 289; Abū al-‘Ula Muhammad b. Abdurrahman Ibn Abdurrahman Ibn Abdurrahim al-Mubârafûrî, *Tuhfa al-Ahwazî*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, no date), VII, 195.

<sup>429</sup> Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, VII, 147; al-Azîmâbâdî, ‘*Avn al-Ma’bud*, XI, 289; al-Mubârafûrî, *Tuhfa al-Ahwazî*, VI, 346, VII, 195. There is another version of the same hadīth reported by Wāsila b. Asqa. However, this narration is not in al-Kutub al-Tis‘ah. Al-Hākīm al-NaysAbūrī points out that even though it has a *sahih isnad*, Imam Bukhārī and Imam Muslim did not take this hadīth into their *Sahihs*.

<sup>430</sup> In Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad’s night journey from Makkah to Jerusalem. As alluded to in the Qur’ān (Surah 17:1), a journey was made by a servant of God, in a single night, from the “sacred place of worship” (al-masjid al-haram) to the “further place of worship” (al-masjid al-aqsā)

that “I have been given knowledge regarding the signs that foreshadow the end of the world. Yet, exact knowledge of the event is God’s alone.” After talking about the emergence of the Dajjāl, Jesus stated that “Then I will descend to slay the Dajjāl and people will go back to their homes. This time wild, aggressive masses of Gog and Magog will be attacking the civilized world.”<sup>431</sup>

In addition, having a *sahih isnad*, a hadīth narrated by Abū Hurayrah reports that the Prophet Muhammad wished to see Jesus before the end, if he lived long enough. Otherwise, he wanted his companions to send his greetings and best regards to Jesus. The phrase “I wish to see” in the hadīth, which is repeated three times in different places in the *Musnad* of Imam Hanbal, is believed to belong not to the Prophet, but the reporter Abū Hurayrah himself, because other hadīths clearly show that the Prophet will not be alive during Jesus’ coming.

The hadīths regarding the events that will take place before the descent of Jesus are narrated by Thawbân,<sup>432</sup> Abū Hurayrah,<sup>433</sup> ‘Abdullah b. ‘Amr,<sup>434</sup> Jabir b. ‘Abdullah,<sup>435</sup> ‘Imran b. Husayn,<sup>436</sup> ‘Uthmân b. Abî al-Âs,<sup>437</sup> and Abū Umama<sup>438</sup>.

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<sup>431</sup> Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no 33; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 375. See also Ibn Abū Shaybah, *al-Musannaf*, VII, 498-499; Ahmad b. ‘Ali b. al-Muthanna Abū Ya’lā, *al-Musnad*, (Damascus: Dār al-Ma’mun li al-Turath, 1984), IX, 196-197; al-Hâkim, *al-Mustadrak* II, 416, IV, 534, 588.

<sup>432</sup> Nasāi “*jihad*” no 41; Ahmad b. Hanbal, V, 278.

<sup>433</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 34.

<sup>434</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 116; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 166.

<sup>435</sup> Muslim “*imân*” no 247; Ahmad b. Hanbal, III, 345, 384.

<sup>436</sup> Abū Dāwūd, “*jihad*” no 4; Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 429, 434 (mawquf), 437.

<sup>437</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 216-217. See also Ibn Abū Shaybah, *al-Musannaf*, VII, 491.

The report narrated by Sawban mentions the two groups of people whom God will prevent from entering the hellfire; the people who will fight with the Hindus and the people who will act with Jesus. The hadīth reported by Abū Hurayrah, on the other hand, states that Muslims will fight with the Romans. The Romans will come to a place called A'maq or Dabiq between Antioch and Aleppo. An army consisting of the best soldiers of the earth at the time will come from Madinah to counterattack the Romans. When they have arranged themselves in ranks, the Romans will say: "Do not stand between us and the Muslims who took prisoners from among us. Let us fight with them; and the Muslims will say: Nay, by God, we will never get aside from you and from our brothers that you may fight them." They will then fight and the one-third of the army will run away, whom God will never forgive. A second one-third, which will be constituted of excellent martyrs in the sight of God, will be killed and the last one-third who will never be put to trial will win and conquer Constantinople (or start the process of the conquest which will be destined for later generations to accomplish). And as they will be busy in distributing the spoils of war after hanging their swords by the olive trees, Satan will cry: "The Dajjāl has taken your place among your family." They will then come out, but it would be of no avail.<sup>439</sup>

The narration of 'Uthman states that the Muslims will be in three different locations and humanity will face three terrible incidents. It is highly possible that the first

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<sup>438</sup> Ibn Mājah, "*fitan*," no. 33; Abū Dāwūd, "*malāhim*," no. 14.

<sup>439</sup> Another hadīth, not mentioning the descent of Jesus, gives a detailed account on the conquest of Constantinople. See Muslim, "*fitan*," no. 78. The battle against the Romans and the conquest of Constantinople is also described in a weak hadīth narrated by 'Amr b. 'Awf in the Sunan of Ibn Mājah. Furthermore, it states that there will be two battles with the Romans: Ibn Mājah, "*fitan*" no 35.

two would be the wars which the Muslims will make with the Romans and the Hindus. The hadīth in which Ibn ‘Amr narrates that the Ka’bah will be burned down and other events will take place, and the hadīth narrated by Abū Umama that there will be three years of famine and drought before the appearance of the Dajjāl, can be considered to be related to these three incidents.

In the report of Jabir, the Prophet mentions a group of people who will not cease fighting for the truth and will prevail until the Day of Resurrection and says, “Jesus the son of Mary would then descend and their Muslim leader would invite him to come and lead them in prayer, but he would say: No, some among you are leaders over some among you. This is the honor from Allah for this ummah.” We do not know exactly who these people are and where they are from; therefore it could be any group of people who fight and stand for the truth. ‘Imran b. Husayn narrates that the same group of people will continue to fight for the truth and overcome their opponents until the last of them fights with the Dajjāl.

## THE MAHDĪ

A Mahdī literally means one who has embraced the faith and has thus been led to “the straight path.” The word simply means “a guided [one].” A Mahdī is someone to whom God has granted the truth.<sup>440</sup> If preceded by the definite article “al”, *al-Mahdī* becomes a particular title, used for the person whom the Prophet Muhammad foretold would come at the end of time. The plural *al-Mahdiyyūn* was also the title given to the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, and ‘Ali) and those who

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<sup>440</sup> Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-‘Arab*, art. H-D-Y.

followed in their way the Prophet himself.<sup>441</sup> According to the hadīth narrations, the Mahdī will appear at a time when tyranny and injustice dominate all around the world, and he will fill the earth with justice and make Islam the dominant religion.

We find that this Muslim savior who will emerge at the end of the world is also called *Imam* and *Khalīfah* in the Hadith literature. A hadīth narrated in Muslim refers to a period of plenty and prosperity at the end of time, and mentions a *Khalīfah* who will distribute unbounded wealth. Abū Nadra reports that “there would be a caliph in the last period of my ummah who would freely give handfuls of wealth to the people without counting it.”<sup>442</sup> Some Muslims scholars have interpreted this hadīth in light of the abundance that people witnessed in the time of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (d. 720), who was also considered the fifth rightly-guided *khalif*. However, the phrase in the hadīth “in the last period of my ummah” indicates that this plenty will occur in the last times of the Muslim community. Given different names, the most significant characteristic of al-Mahdī is to save society from oppression and establish justice toward the end of the world.<sup>443</sup>

In the Sunnī tradition the Mahdī has been seen as he who will come to rid the world of innovation and to replace the low morality evidenced as one of the signs of the Hour with the high standards of true religion of Islam. Sunnī positions stress the Mahdī as

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<sup>441</sup> The Prophet says: “I urge you to adhere to my Sunnah and take the path of my well-directed and well-guided (*Mahdī*) Caliphs (*khalif*).” See Tirmidhī, “*ilm*” no 16; Ibn Mājah, “*muqaddima*” no 6; Abū Dāwūd, “*sunnah*” no 5.

<sup>442</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 67-9

<sup>443</sup> Saritoprak, “The Mahdi Question According To Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” in *Nursi Studies*. <http://www.nursistudies.com/teblig.php?tno=324>. Accessed on December 22, 2012

the one who will introduce a golden age as a glorious time between a first and second fitnah. The latter fitnah will lead to the Last Hour. He is mentioned as coming after the great turmoil that will shake the Muslims and the world. God will raise up the Mahdī from the family of Muhammad bearing his name. He will reign with equity and justice for seven or nine years. Neither number needs to be taken literally. The Mahdī will be a spiritual leader. When the remnant of true Muslims will be besieged by the Dajjāl and his army, the Mahdī will lead the faithful in prayer as Jesus Christ returns. The Mahdī will continue the *salat* prayer as Jesus proceeds to annihilate the Dajjāl and his forces.<sup>444</sup>

The Mahdī is not mentioned in the Qur’ān as the title of a person expected at the end of time. However several major hadīth corpuses, such as Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, and Ibn Mājah explicitly mention the Mahdī. The Sunan of Abū Dāwūd expanded on the Mahdī for Sunnī Muslims. Al-Shawkanī, the famous Yemeni scholar, says there are fifty hadīths about the Mahdī. He divides these into *sahih*, *hasan*, and *da’if*. On the other hand, Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832-1890) mentions thirty-three hadīths on the subject, including the ones which are considered *da’if*-weak.<sup>445</sup>

According to a hadīth narrated by Umm Salama, the Prophet said: “The Mahdī will be from my seed, and will be a descendant of my daughter Fatima”.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no 33; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; and Abū Dāwūd, Book (The Promised Deliverer – Al-Mahdī) 36, Numbers 4266-77.

<sup>445</sup> Siddiq Hasan Khan, *al-Idha’a lima kana wa ma yakunu bayna al-yaday al-Sa’ah*, (Cairo, 1407/1986), 114. See, also, Saritoprak, “The Mahdi Question According To Bediuzzaman Said Nursi,” in *Nursi Studies*

<sup>446</sup> Abū Dāwūd, “*Mahdī*” no 1.

In another narration recorded by Abū Dāwūd, he said: “If the world has only one day left, God will lengthen it and send that person from me.” And in another: “... someone from my family whose name is the same as mine, and whose father’s name is the same as my father’s name. Contrarily to the world being filled with oppression and wrongdoing as it was previously, that person will fill it with justice and right”.<sup>447</sup>

In another tradition, the Mahdī’s lineage, physical features, and activities are described as follows: “The Mahdī will be one of us. His forehead will be broad and his nose fine. He will fill the face of the earth with justice, as it had previously been filled with wrongdoing”.<sup>448</sup>

In a hadīth narrated by Ali b. Abū Talib, God will bestow knowledge, understanding, and guidance on the Mahdī in a short period of time, even in one night. The Prophet said: “The Mahdī will be of us. God will bestow guidance on him in a single night”.<sup>449</sup>

While no hadīth gives any information regarding the time when the Mahdī will appear, one narration in Tirmidhī states that he will appear in the east.<sup>450</sup> Imam Qurtubī (d. 671/1272) states that the Mahdī would appear in North Africa, but the report he chose to support his claim is not considered authentic.<sup>451</sup> Considering that Qurtubī passed away

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<sup>447</sup> Abū Dāwūd, “*Mahdī*” no 1; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no 52; Ahmad b. Hanbal, “*fitan*” I: 99.

<sup>448</sup> Abū Dāwūd, “*Mahdī*” no 1; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no 52; Ahmad b. Hanbal, “*fitan*” I: 99.

<sup>449</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, “*fitan*” I: 84.

<sup>450</sup> Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no 79.

<sup>451</sup> Abū al-Abbas Ahmad b. Hajar al-Haythamī, *al-Qawl al-Muhtasar fī al-Mahdī al-Muntazar*, (Cairo, 1406/1986), 24.

in a time when Granada was the only part of Spain left to the Muslims, it is concluded that al-Qurtubī's statement that the Mahdī will appear in North Africa might have arisen from the need for a Mahdī or a renewer at the time in the region.<sup>452</sup>

Ibn Hajar Al-Haytamī (d. 973/1565) emphasizes that as opposed to what is thought, the Mahdī's struggle will be nonviolent and bloodless. He says: "Those who pay allegiance to him will do so between the Rukn and Maqam by the Ka'ba. They will not awake those who are sleeping, and will certainly spill no blood".<sup>453</sup>

Imam Mawdudī (1903-1979), a Sunnī Pakistani scholar, questions the authenticity of the hadīths mentioned above due to the fact that al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and Imam Malik did not include these hadīths into their works. He also states that the majority of transmitters in these hadīths were Shi'is.<sup>454</sup> He adds that, in principle, the Prophet did not go into details. Mawdudī points out that these hadīths could have been fabricated in the Abbasid period for the purpose of supporting the Caliphate. He particularly considers the hadīths about the support of "the black bannered ones," a sign of the Abbasids, to be false.<sup>455</sup> The Egyptian scholar Ahmad Amin, too, asserts that they are narrations that had been fabricated in connection with the power struggle between the Umayyads and 'Abbasids.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Macdonald, D. B., "Mahdi," in *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, (Istanbul: Milli Egitim Bakanligi, 1997), vii, 477

<sup>453</sup> Al-Haytamī, *al-Qawl al-Muhtasar*, 53.

<sup>454</sup> Charges are often made that such-and-such a transmitter is a Shī'ī in order to delegitimize his traditions. Yet the actual evidence for early transmitters is rather flimsy, apart from the fact that Shī'ism as we know it did not crystallize yet in that early period.

<sup>455</sup> Abū al-'Ala Mawdudī, *Meseleler ve Çözümler*, [Turk. trans: Yusuf Kara], Istanbul 1990, 45.

More importantly, Imam Mawdudī concludes that there is no special status or position in religion for the personality of Mahdī. It is completely unacceptable to think that one must believe in the Mahdī as one must believe in the prophets of Islam: “Whenever the Mahdī does come, he will have thorough knowledge of the learning, culture, conditions, and necessities of the time, he will take steps appropriate to that time, he will take advantage of the scientific discoveries and technology of the time, and employ them in the best way”.<sup>457</sup>

### **WHERE AND WHEN WILL JESUS DESCEND?**

The hadīth narrated by Samura b. Jundub generally states that Jesus will come from the West.<sup>458</sup> He will descend among the Muslims and he will judge people by the law of the Qur’ān and not by the law of Gospel.<sup>459</sup> When Jesus descends, the Muslims will already have a leader, the Mahdī. Most traditions report that Jesus confirms the Mahdī as the true leader and that he prays behind him, recognizing the Mahdī’s supremacy.<sup>460</sup> Another narration, however, states that Jesus will come in order to be a leader to the Muslims. It is narrated by Abū Hurayrah that The Prophet said “What would you do when the son of Mary would descend amongst you and would lead you as one amongst you?” Ibn Abi Dhi’b on the authority of Abū Hurayrah narrated: Your leader

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<sup>456</sup> Ahmad Amin, *Duha al-Islam*, (Beirut, no date), 3: 237-8.

<sup>457</sup> Mawdudī, *Meseleler ve Çözümler*, 47, 50, 51.

<sup>458</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, V, 13.

<sup>459</sup> Bukhārī *Volume 4, Book 55, Number 658*. See also Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, vol. 7 p. 304-5.

<sup>460</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, “Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Islamic History,” in Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhardsson, eds , *Imagining the End Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, (London IB Tauns, 2003), 113

amongst you. Ibn Abi Dhi'b said: Do you know what the words: 'He would lead as one amongst you' mean? I said: Explain these to me. He said: He would lead you according to the Book of your Lord and the Sunnah of your Messenger."<sup>461</sup>

According to the report of Abū Hurayrah, after the conquest of Constantinople, the Muslims will come back to Syria when they heard that the Dajjāl has come among their families. The Dajjāl will come out while they will be still preparing themselves for battle drawing up the ranks. The time of prayer will come and then Jesus, Son of Mary will descend and lead them in *salat*, the prescribed ritual Muslim prayer.<sup>462</sup> Let's recall that the Qur'ān states that as one of his miracles, Jesus spoke in the cradle, as an infant boy and said "He has made me blessed (and a means of His blessings for people) wherever I may be, and He has enjoined upon me the Prayer (the Ṣalat) and the Prescribed Purifying Alms (the Zakat – and to enjoin the same upon others) for as long as I live."<sup>463</sup> The hadīth narrated by Jabir b. 'Abdullah, on the other hand, states that Jesus will descend and the leader of the Muslims will invite him to come and lead them in prayer, but he will say: "No, some among you are leaders over some among you. This is the honor from Allah for this ummah." The Mahdī will continue the prayer as Jesus proceeds to defeat the Dajjāl and his army.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Muslim, Book 1, Chapter 72, Number 0292

<sup>462</sup> Muslim, "*fitan*" no 34.

<sup>463</sup> Maryam 19: 29. According to the generally-received doctrine of the Muslims, all the Prophets and Messengers came with the same essentials of belief, worship, morality, and behavior. The only difference was in some secondary laws pertaining to the time and conditions they were in. Like all other Prophets, Jesus also mentioned the Tawhid (Oneness and Uniqueness of God), Divine Books, Prophethood, the Prescribed Prayer, and Prescribed Purifying Alms as the primary essentials of his mission.

<sup>464</sup> Muslim "*imān*" no 247; Ahmad b. Hanbal, III, 345, 384.

In the report of Abū Umama, while the remnant of the Muslims with their pious leader are about to perform the dawn prayer in Jerusalem, Jesus will descend. The pious leader will invite Jesus to lead the prayer, yet Jesus would say “the *iqāmah*<sup>465</sup> is called for you” and the Muslim leader would lead the prayer.<sup>466</sup>

Who really will lead the prayer? This question seems to have caused some discussions, and scholars have believed that there is an obvious contradiction among the reports in regard with this issue. Al-Ghumārī proposes that Jesus will be among the congregation and behind the Mahdī in the first salat and he will be the imam in the second one.<sup>467</sup> On the other hand, the report of Anas b. Malik underlines that the Mahdī is Jesus’ very self.<sup>468</sup>

We find that Jesus will descend to Jerusalem in the report of Abū Umama, Jabal al-Duhan in the hadīth by Jabir, or Aqabat al-Afik (somewhere between Damascus and Tabariyya)<sup>469</sup> in the narration of ‘Uthmān, b. Abū al-‘As. Al-Nawwas b. Sam’an goes further and pinpoints the precise location of Jesus’ descent, which he states to be the white minaret of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.<sup>470</sup> Al-Nawwas reports that Jesus will descend onto a minaret of the Umayyad Mosque, the grand mosque of Damascus,

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<sup>465</sup> A shortened form of adhan, calling the start of a particular instance of prayer.

<sup>466</sup> Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no 33; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14.

<sup>467</sup> Al-Ghumārī, *Iqāmat al-Burhana lā Nuzūl-u Isā fi Akhir al-Zaman*, p. 37.

<sup>468</sup> Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no 24.

<sup>469</sup> The actual location is the present-day ruined Syrian town of Fīq in the Golan Heights occupied by Israel

<sup>470</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 110; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no 59; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no 33; Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 181.

dressed in two yellow sheets, while leaning on the shoulders of two angels. This has been taken literally by many scholars. Therefore, some Muslims believe that he will appear at the Great Mosque in Damascus, though others hold that he will come first to Jerusalem. Note the different hadīth reports give various locations as the place where Jesus will descend. Damascus (al-Shām) was not only the capital of modern-day Syria in the past. It was a vast area covering five important *junds* or subdivisions, namely Damascus, Hims, Jordan, Filastīn, and Qinnasrīn.<sup>471</sup> Therefore, all reports indicate the same region with different names. Another possibility is that these might be the locations that Jesus will pass by on his way to Jerusalem. Furthermore, these reports may have been fabricated to give some merit to the mentioned places.

A widely held view among Muslims is that when Jesus returns, he will appear in Jerusalem. Some populist and certain untraditional or even anti-traditional writings proclaim the Jews to be the Dajjāl; after all, Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah. In these scenarios the Jewish occupation of Jerusalem is viewed as an essential dimension of the Zionist Antichrist movement.<sup>472</sup> However, although these Jerusalem-centric apocalyptic eschatologies may enjoy some popularity to a certain degree, there are also powerful voices within the Muslim world that strongly disagree. The distinguished Al-Azhar University in Egypt totally condemns such apocalyptic eschatology.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Khalid Yahya Blankinship, *The End of the Jihād State*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 47-50.

<sup>472</sup> Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, pp. 184-5.

<sup>473</sup> Cook, *Ibid*, p. 1-7.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER THE NUZUL?

Even if we accept that Jesus will not lead the Muslims in prayer, he will be treated as if he is the real leader due to a set of actions he will perform;

### 1- ) Jesus Killing the Dajjāl

As briefly mentioned, the Dajjāl is another important figure in Islamic eschatology. It is generally believed that he will appear at the end of time and will rise up against the Mahdī and the faithful. The Dajjāl is indicative of all that is wrong with the world in the final days. The Dajjāl, as the complete antithesis of the Mahdī, seeks to lead the believers away from the principles of true religion and to establish a powerful kingdom with himself in charge.<sup>474</sup>

The hadīths in the Kutub-u Tis'ah on the Dajjāl and afterwards related to Jesus' coming are narrated by Nawwas b. Sam'an,<sup>475</sup> Abdullah b. Amr,<sup>476</sup> Samura b. Jundub,<sup>477</sup> Jabir b. Abdullah,<sup>478</sup> Aishah,<sup>479</sup> Abū Umama al-Bâhilî,<sup>480</sup> and 'Uthman b. Abū al-Âs<sup>481</sup>. There are roughly two hundred hadīths of varying lengths on the Dajjāl in other hadīth collections. Almost all authoritative hadīth collections dedicate a chapter to the *fitan*, with

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<sup>474</sup> Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding*, 68

<sup>475</sup> Muslim, "*fitan*" no 110; Tirmidhī, "*fitan*" 59; Abū Dāwūd, "*malâhim*" no 14; Ibn Mājah, "*fitan*" no 33; Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 181.

<sup>476</sup> Muslim, "*fitan*" no 116; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 166.

<sup>477</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, V, 13.

<sup>478</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, III, 367.

<sup>479</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, VI, 75. See also Ibn Abū Shaybah, *al-Musannaf*, VII, 490.

<sup>480</sup> Ibn Mājah, "*fitan*" no 33; Abū Dāwūd, "*malâhim*" no 14.

<sup>481</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 216-217. See also Ibn Abū Shaybah, *al-Musannaf*, VII, 491;

a special focus on the Dajjāl. The hadīth reports that explore the emergence of the Dajjāl almost always examine the struggle between Jesus and the Dajjāl as well. It is significant to note that most of these hadīths have daif (weak) isnad.

According to these hadīths, the Dajjāl will emerge in a period of time when the Islamic faith weakens, the number of the righteous rapidly decreases, and people turn their backs on knowledge. Along with his followers consisting of mostly Jews, the Dajjāl will march on Makkah and al-Madinah, defeating everyone. He then will come with the intention of attacking Madinah until he will get down behind the mount of Uhud. The dwellers of the city will be divided into three different groups. The Muslims who did not join the Dajjāl's army will take refuge in a place called Aqabat Afk (or Jabal-i Duhan in another version). They, however, will temporarily face a severe drought and hunger under the siege. Then the angels will prevent the Dajjāl from entering the city and turn his face towards Syria and there he will perish.<sup>482</sup>

One of these traditions indicates that the Prophet very often warned His companions about the arrival of the Dajjāl that they started to think that the Dajjāl was in the outskirts of Madinah, waiting to attack the Muslims. Even a young Jewish man named Ibn Sayyad (d. 683) was believed to be the Dajjāl himself and was nearly killed by 'Umar, the second khalif. The young Jewish man was saved by the Prophet's intervening words: "If he is indeed the Dajjāl, then you cannot kill him, because Jesus will kill him. If he is not the Dajjāl then again you may not kill him simply because he has the features of

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<sup>482</sup> Another hadīth narrated by Abū Hurayrah, without mentioning Jesus, states that the Dajjāl will come to the foothill of the mount of Uhud, yet again he will not be able to enter the city of Madina. See Muslim, "*hajj*" no 486; Tirmidhī, "*fitan*" no 61; Ahmed b. Hanbal, II, no 407.

the Dajjāl”.<sup>483</sup> The conversation between the Prophet and his companions and this personality, who is believed to be the son of a Jewish family of Madinah, is found in many hadīth narrations.<sup>484</sup>

Almost all traditions depict the Dajjāl as a personality. In some, he is even said to resemble a specific person whose name was Abd Al-Uzza bin Qatan with curly hair and bulging eyes. Al-Dajjāl is known as ugly, dirty and one-eyed (*a’war*). Anas b. Malik narrates that the Prophet said, “No prophet was sent but he warned his community against the one-eyed liar, al-Dajjāl: ‘Beware, he is *a’war*, and your Lord is not *a’war*. And the word Kafir (unbeliever) will be written on his forehead””.<sup>485</sup>

A hadīth narrated by Nawwas b. Sam’an also mentions his emergence and the period of his reign on the earth, which will be forty days. Indeed, “the forty days” here is to be understood differently from the days we understand in today’s world. The word “day” in Arabic also means a long period of time. According to this hadīth, one day will be like one year, the second will be like one month, the third like a week, and the others like regular days.<sup>486</sup> The rest of the hadīth indicates that the Dajjāl is to appear somewhere between Damascus and Iraq. He will claim to be a god and will command clouds to bring rain, and it will rain, and he will command the earth to grow grass, and

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<sup>483</sup> Bukhārī, “*adab*” no 97; Muslim, “*fītan*” no 85-88, 95; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 16

<sup>484</sup> David J Halpern, “The Ibn Sayad Traditions and the Legend of Al-Dajjāl,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96 (1976), 213-25. See, also, Zeki Saritoprak, “The Legend of al-Dajjāl (Antichrist): The Personification of Evil in the Islamic Tradition,” in *the Muslim World*, April 2003, Vol. 93.

<sup>485</sup> Bukhārī, “*fītan*,” no. 26.

<sup>486</sup> A similar concept appears in the Qur’ān, such as Surah 32:5: “He rules (all) affairs from the heavens to the earth: in the end will (all affairs) go up to Him, on a Day, the space whereof will be (as) a thousand years of your reckoning.” Note the parallel with 2 Peter 3:8.

grass will grow. He will claim to heal the leper and the blind from birth and revive the dead, as Jesus did. He will strike a young man with the sword and cut him into pieces. He will then call the young man and he will be resurrected laughing. Later Jesus will pursue and slay the Dajjāl. The Prophet warns Muslims against the Dajjāl's wives, and recommends them to recite the first 10 Qur'ānic verses of Sūrah al-Kahf (Ch. 18) in order to be protected from the Dajjāl and his *fitnah*.<sup>487</sup>

In another hadīth, the Dajjāl is mentioned in "The Story of the Beast." The authenticity of this hadīth is much debated among Muslim scholars, although it is found in an accepted hadīth source, because it is unclear whether the story of the beast is to be understood as a vision or a reality. Unlike other traditions, in this particular hadīth, the Prophet narrates what Tamim al-Dari, one of his companions, a Christian who converted to Islam, has said. The tradition is narrated by Fatima bint Qays, one of the early immigrant women from Madinah. In this narration, the Prophet says that Tamim talked to him about something which was compatible with what the Prophet said about the Antichrist. At the end the hadīth, the Prophet asks His companions "Did I tell you this?" and they say "Yes." The Prophet then says: "I am excited about the story of Tamim, because it is similar to what I have told you about the Dajjāl and Madinah and Makkah. Beware he is in the sea of Damascus or the sea of Yemen. No, on the contrary he is coming from the east, he is coming from the east, he is coming from the east pointing

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<sup>487</sup> This very long narration is found in Muslim, *fitan*, no. 110.

with his hand towards the east.” Fatima, the narrator says, “I have memorized this from the messenger of God”.<sup>488</sup>

The Dajjāl will bear the title K-F-R (unbeliever) on his forehead.<sup>489</sup> According to several narrations, these letters will be written exactly between his eyes. Some traditions add that all believers will be able to read and understand this word, whether or not they are illiterate. In some versions of the same hadīth, only those who reject his endeavors will be able to read it. Hadīth interpreters disagree on the meaning of these letters. There are those who interpret the description literally and those who interpret it metaphorically. According to Imam Al-Nawawī, God will put this writing as a sign to believers to reject the Dajjāl. Every faithful Muslim will be able to read it. However, those who accept his endeavors will not.<sup>490</sup> Bernard McGinn argues that the concept of the Dajjāl having three letters on his forehead parallels a number of Christian physiognomies, especially those of the pseudo-John and the pseudo-Daniel apocalypses.<sup>491</sup>

The death of the Dajjāl is directly connected to the descent of Jesus, who is expected in the traditions to descend and kill the Dajjāl in a place called Lydda, a small

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<sup>488</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 119, 120, 12; see also Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*,” no. 15; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*,” no. 66. See, also, Zeki Saritoprak, “The Legend of al-Dajjāl (Antichrist): The Personification of Evil in the Islamic Tradition,” in *the Muslim World*.

<sup>489</sup> Bukhārī, “*fitan*” no 26 See also Muslim “*fitan*” no 95, 101, 102; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no 656-62

<sup>490</sup> Al-Nawawī, *Sharh Sahīh Muslim* (Cairo, 1929), 18:60.

<sup>491</sup> See Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist. Two Thousand Years Of The Human Fascination With Evil*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994.112, ft. 165 and Zeki Saritoprak, “The Legend of al-Dajjāl (Antichrist): The Personification of Evil in the Islamic Tradition,” in *the Muslim World*. There are analogues to the KFR in the New Testament, too. In the Revelation of John, the number 666 is the mark of the beast. In Hebrew that would be the letter wāw/vāv and in Greek the revived digamma (looks like an F). The letter wāw/vāv equals 6 in numerical value. It is usually theorized that the 666 refers to the sum of the letters spelling Nero Caesar in Hebrew, namely Nrwn Qsr=Nerōn Qesar.

town near Jerusalem.<sup>492</sup> As mentioned, the Prophet indicates that “only Jesus can kill the Antichrist.” Furthermore, when the Prophet ascended to heaven, he met with Jesus who told him that he will come at the end of the world and kill the Antichrist.<sup>493</sup> In such traditions, one can see a strong relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus, who will come to help the Muslims community and protect them from the siege of the Dajjāl.

## **2- ) Jesus as a Just Ruler and Imam**

The hadīths narrated by Abū Hurayrah, Aishah, and Abū Umama in Bukhārī, Muslim, Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, and the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal use the following titles for Jesus and indicate that he will rule and guide with justice; *hakam muqsid*, *hakam ‘ādilan*, *hakam wa ‘adl*, *imam muqsid*, *imam ‘adl*, *imam ‘ādil*, and *imam Mahdīyy*. According to hadīth interpreters, these statements show that Jesus will not come with an independent shariah, a code of law, but he will follow the shariah that the Prophet Muhammad introduced to his people.<sup>494</sup>

## **3- ) Jesus Struggling for Islam**

The report of Samura clearly states that Jesus will come to confirm the prophethood-messengership of Muhammad.<sup>495</sup> Abū Hurayrah also reports that Jesus will call all people to Islam and struggle in the name of Islam.<sup>496</sup> Again in the several hadīths

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<sup>492</sup> Lydda (Greek)=Lod (Hebrew)=al-Ludd (Arabic), a city which is still there and still partly inhabited by Arabs.

<sup>493</sup> Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no. 33.

<sup>494</sup> Al-Nawawī, *Sharh Sahīh Muslim*, II: 190, and Aynī, *Umda al-Qārī*, XII, 35, XIII, 28, XVI, 39.

<sup>495</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, V, 13.

narrated by Abū Hurayrah, we find that Jesus will strive for Islam to be the supreme religion and people will realize that the true religion with God is Islam.<sup>497</sup> In addition, all wars will be abolished. There will be no oppression and no need to fight oppressors.

The expressions in the following hadīth have been understood symbolically by the majority of Muslims scholars.

...By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely Jesus, the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you and will judge mankind; he will break the Cross and kill the pig and there will be no Jizyah. Money will be in Abundance so that nobody will accept it...<sup>498</sup>

#### 4- ) Jesus Breaking the Cross

This signifies the end of the doctrines that Christians introduced concerning Jesus Christ after his crucifixion or departure from this world. The cross, with or without the corpus or body of Jesus, is revered in Christianity. Jesus, upon his return, will end this worship and restore his teaching of the wholehearted worship of, and commitment Islam to, the one true God. He will trample the cross, thereby symbolically and simply repudiating Christianity. By doing so, Jesus will also negate the doctrine that the salvation comes through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, as well as the very claim that the Jews crucified or killed him.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 406.

<sup>497</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 482. Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 394. Also Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 406.

<sup>498</sup> Bukhārī, “*anbiyā*” no 49; Muslim, “*imān*” no 242.

<sup>499</sup> Al-Nawawī, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, II, 189-190; Ib. Kathīr al-Dimashqī *Al-Nihaya fi al-Fitan wa al-Malāhim*, *Fitan* I, 162; Abū al-Fadl Zayn al-Din Abdurrahim b. Husayn al-Iraqī, *Tarh al-Tathrib fi Sharh al-Taqrīb*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2000), VII, 256; Ibn Hajar al-Asqalanī, *Fath al-Bārī*, VI, 491; al-‘Aynī, *Umda al-Qārī*, XII, 35, XIII, 28, XVI, 39.

## 5- ) Jesus Killing the Pig

This may mean that the eating of pork will be abolished. Some Muslim scholars deduced from this hadīth that pigs should be killed. I believe that this deduction must be structurally unsound for the following three reasons: a) The word for pig in the hadīths comes in the singular format (al-khinzīr, not khanāzīr); b) The time of Jesus' return will be a special time and what will take place during such this time should not become a general rule now; c) on the other hand, there is a vast body of hadīth traditions that encourage Muslims to be kind to all animals and living beings including dogs, wolves, snakes, and so on.<sup>500</sup> Furthermore, we have the following hadīth in al-Muwatta':

Malik related to me from Yahya ibn Said that [before his departure] 'Īsā ibn Maryam encountered a pig on the road. He said to it, "Go in peace." Somebody asked, "Do you say this to a pig?" 'Īsā said, "I fear lest I accustom my tongue to evil speech."<sup>501</sup>

## 6- ) Jesus Abolishing the *Jizyah*

*Jizyah* means a tax that non-Muslims living in a Muslim state are required to pay in exchange for security provided to them as the *Dhimmīs* (Protected People) and their exemption from military service. That Jesus will abolish the *jizyah* does not mean that *jizyah* is something undesirable, since normally all including Muslims have to pay some type of tax, such as *zakat*. It also does not mean that Jesus will take liberties with the Islamic law. As indicated above, "he will judge people by the law of the Qur'ān." This abolishing is connected with the end of the hadīth mentioned above, which states that there will be abundance of wealth, which means that taxes will not be needed. And

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<sup>500</sup> Bukhārī Vol. 8, Book 73, no 38 & Muslim Book 26, Chapter 39, no 5577.

<sup>501</sup> Muwatta', Book 56, Number 56.1.4.

presumably there will be no need for protection because it will be a time of peace. It is also that because Jesus will follow the law of the Prophet Muhammad and abrogate the various Christian-specific teachings, and that everyone will be Muslim.

#### 7- ) Extraordinary Abundance and Fertility

According to the report of Abū Hurayrah, all forms of sustenance and blessing will be coming from the earth and the heaven.<sup>502</sup> All people will have considerable wealth so that no one will be in need. Every human being will be well-off and no one will accept charity. Even the most valuable cattle and camels will be unconfined and there will be no need to distribute the *zakat* or any other tax.<sup>503</sup> Imam Muslim narrates this abundance that will take place after the appearance of Gog and Magog;

...Allah would send rain which no house of clay or the tent would keep out...Then the earth would be told to bring forth its fruit and restore its blessing and, as a result thereof, there would grow such a [gigantic] pomegranate that a group of [people] would be able to eat that, and seek shelter under its skin and milch cow would give so much milk that a whole party would be able to drink it. And the milch camel would give such (a large quantity of) milk that the whole tribe would be able to drink out of that...<sup>504</sup>

This copiousness and wealth will occur due to the fact that oppression and tyranny will be superseded by justice and righteousness. Eventually, the earth will open its treasures to all people.

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<sup>502</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 482.

<sup>503</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 110; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no 59; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no 33; Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 181.

<sup>504</sup> Muslim Book 41, Chapter 18, Number 7015. There are parallels in a Jewish apocalyptic, II Baruch.

## 8-) No More Animosity and Hatred

The hadīths narrated by Abū Hurayrah,<sup>505</sup> Abdullah b. Amr,<sup>506</sup> and Abū Umamah<sup>507</sup> state that after Jesus kills the Dajjāl, people will live for seven years without rancor, enmity, or jealousy between two persons. Another report by ‘Ata’ in al-Bukhārī states that mutual hatred, jealousy and grudge will disappear.<sup>508</sup>

## 9-) Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj (God and Magog)

Another eschatological constituent are the figure(s) Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj, who are sometimes seen as one personality. They are mentioned both in the Bible<sup>509</sup> and in the Qur’ān.<sup>510</sup> The Muslim interpreters suggest that Qur’ān 21:96 refers to the formidable wall built somewhere in the northeast by Dhu al-Qarnayn,<sup>511</sup> who is mentioned in connection with Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj in Qur’ān 18:95-99, to contain the creatures. One of the indications that the end times have arrived, then, will be Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj breaking out of that barrier. Portrayed as cannibals of enormous size, they will sweep down upon the earth like a plague, devouring humans and railing against God. The creatures will

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<sup>505</sup> Muslim, “*imān*” no 243; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 493.

<sup>506</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 116; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 166

<sup>507</sup> Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no 33; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14.

<sup>508</sup> Bukhārī, Vol. 4, Book 55, No. 657. See also Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, VII:302

<sup>509</sup> Genesis 10:2; Ezekiel 38:2; 29:6; I Cor. 1:5; Rev. 20:8.

<sup>510</sup> Al-Kahf 18:94 and Al-Anbiya 21:96-97.

<sup>511</sup> Some people believe that this figure refers to Alexander the Great. It is not certain whether he was a Prophet or not, However, what is clear concerning Dhu al-Qarnayn is that, as narrated by Ali, he was a righteous servant of God who loved and was loved by God (Elmalili Muhammad Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dîni Kur’ân Dili*, (İstanbul: Eser Neşriyat, 1979), 5: 3279). In fact, it is not of great importance who he really was in history. What is important is what the Qur’ān intends to teach by this narration.

ultimately surrender to fire and natural disasters.<sup>512</sup> The Mongols, who invaded the Muslim world and went as far as central Europe, were considered as Gog and Magog by the Muslims and Christians of that time.<sup>513</sup> Since a great number of hadīth traditions go into the overall narrative, with emphasis on different details, it is *unclear* what the precise relationship of these creatures is to the Dajjāl. They are generally said to be one of the major fitan by which the coming of the Hour will be evident.<sup>514</sup>

Only the hadīths narrated by Nawwas<sup>515</sup> and Ibn Mas‘ud<sup>516</sup> mention the emergence of the Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj as pertaining to the coming of Jesus. According to the latter, the demise of the Dajjāl and the coming out of the Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj seem to happen back to back and some scenarios have the Dajjāl allied with Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj in a vicious global anti-Muslim alliance. The former, on the other hand, gives us a very detailed account;

...Allah would reveal to Jesus: I have brought forth from amongst My servants such people against whom none would be able to fight; you take these people safely to [the mount] of Tur, and then Allah would send Gog and Magog and they would swarm down from every slope. The first of them would pass the lake of [Tabariyya] and drink out of it. And when the last of them would pass, he would say: There was once water there. Jesus and his companions would then be besieged here (at Tur, and they would be so much hard pressed) that the head of the ox would be dearer to them than one hundred dinars and Jesus, and his companions would supplicate Allah, Who would send to them insects (which would attack

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<sup>512</sup> Smith and Haddad, “The Anti-Christ and the End of Time in Christian and Muslim Eschatological Literature” in *The Muslim World*.

<sup>513</sup> Ünal, *The Qur’ān with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, p. 623.

<sup>514</sup> Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding*, 68-69.

<sup>515</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” no 110; Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” no 59; Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no 33; Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV, 181.

<sup>516</sup> Ibn Mājah, “*fitan*” no 33; Ahmad b. Hanbal, I, 375. See also Ibn Abū Shaybah, *al-Musannaf*, VII, 498-499

their necks) and in the morning they would perish like one single person. Jesus, and his companions would then come down to the earth and they would not find in the earth as much space as a single span which is not filled with their putrefaction and stench. Jesus, and his companions would then again beseech Allah, Who would send birds whose necks would be like those of Khorassan camels and they would carry them and throw them where God would will.”<sup>517</sup>

#### 10- ) Jesus performing Hajj or/and ‘Umrah,<sup>518</sup> (pilgrimage to Makkah)

In both Muslim and Musnad of Ibn Hanbal, Abū Hurayrah narrates that the Prophet Muhammad said: “By Him in Whose Hand is my life. Ibn Maryam (Jesus Christ) would certainly pronounce Talbiyah<sup>519</sup> for Hajj or for ‘Umrah or for both in the valley of Rauha.”<sup>520</sup> Other version of the same hadīth narrated only in the Musnad speaks of the pilgrimage of Jesus after mentioning him breaking the cross, killing the pig, and abolishing the *jizyah*.<sup>521</sup> Another hadīth narrated by ‘Awf al-Muzanī in the sources apart from the Kutub-u Tis’ah also talks about Jesus’ pilgrimage to Makkah.<sup>522</sup> Furthermore, according to a hadīth in Bukhārī, the Prophet says that the people will continue

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<sup>517</sup> Muslim Book 41, Chapter 18. Number 7015. Also, see Ezekiel chapter 37 in the Bible for the disposition of the bodies and the role of the birds.

<sup>518</sup> Lesser/minor hajj or visitation that can be performed at any time, except the days of hajj in the month of Dhu al-Hijjah of the Islamic calendar.

<sup>519</sup> The pronouncement of “Labbayk!” which means: “Here I am! At your service!” during the hajj.

<sup>520</sup> Muslim, “*hajj*” no 216; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II: 240, 272, 513, 540. See also (in English) Muslim Book 7, Chapter 22, Number 2877. Rauha is located between Makkah and Madinah.

<sup>521</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, II: 290

<sup>522</sup> Ahmad b. Abdullah al-Isbahānī Abū Nuaym, *Hilya al-Awliyā waTabakāt al-Asfiyā*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitab al-Arabī, 1985), II: 10 and al-Tabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr* XVII: 16.

performing the Hajj and ‘Umrah to the Ka’bah even after the appearance of the Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj.<sup>523</sup>

### 11- ) The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Abdullah b. Amr narrates that people will live for seven years after the doom of the Dajjāl.<sup>524</sup> Al-Nawwas in al-Tirmidhī reports that people will utilize the bows and arrows left after the destruction of Ya’jūj and Ma’jūj as firewood for seven years.<sup>525</sup> Considering the narrations, we conclude that Jesus will live on the earth for a while after his descent. One version makes this period of time unconditional with the phrase “as long as God wills”<sup>526</sup> and another version puts a 40-year limit on the life of Jesus.<sup>527</sup> The same hadīths also assert that Jesus will die, a funeral prayer will be held for him, and he will be buried. Some claim that he will marry, remain married for 19 years, beget children, and die after living on earth for 40 years, yet there is nothing in the sound hadīth materials about his marriage.

A *mawquf* hadīth having the weak isnad narrated by Abdullah b. Salam affirms that stating the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus, the Torah declares that Jesus will be buried next to the Prophet.<sup>528</sup> According to another weak hadīth, Aishah tells the Prophet that she wishes to be buried next to him, but the Prophet says that it would be impossible since the owners of the four graves are already designated, namely

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<sup>523</sup> Bukhārī *Volume 2, Book 26, Number 663*

<sup>524</sup> Muslim, “*fitan*” 116; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 166.

<sup>525</sup> Tirmidhī, “*fitan*” 59.

<sup>526</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 437.

<sup>527</sup> Abū Dāwūd, “*malāhim*” no 14; Ahmad b. Hanbal, II, 406.

<sup>528</sup> Tirmidhī, “*manâqib*” no 1.

the Prophet himself, Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and Jesus.<sup>529</sup> However, after being mortally wounded, ‘Umar said to his son Abdullah b. ‘Umar that he should go to Aishah and say: “‘Umar sends his salutation to you and asks permission to be buried with his two friends, the Prophet and Abū Bakr.” Aishah said that “I had the idea of having this place for myself, but today I prefer ‘Umar to myself.” After receiving the good news from his son, ‘Umar said that “when I die, take me, greet Aisha and ask her permission one more time. And if she gives the permission, bury me there, if she refuses, then take me to the graveyard of the Muslims.”<sup>530</sup>

Yes, as human beings, Jesus and all believers will die before the advent of the Day of Judgment and the other prophecies reported in Islamic tradition will take place. On the Day of Judgment, after being resurrected, Jesus will reject any implication that he distorted the message of God or said people should worship him:

And (remember) when God will say: “Jesus son of Mary, is it you who said to people: ‘Take me and my mother for deities besides God?’ ” and he will answer: “All-Glorified are You (in that You are absolutely above having a partner, as having any need or deficiency whatever)! It is not for me to say what I had no right to! Had I said it, You would already have known it. You know all that is within myself, whereas I do not know what is within Your Self. Surely You, and You alone, have knowledge of the Unseen (of all that lies beyond sense-perception). (Qur’ān 5:116)

If we summarize the hadīth reports regarding the Nuzūl-u ‘Īsā;

1. The Awaited Messiah (al-Masīh) is none other than Jesus Christ;
2. His descent is a sign for the closeness of the Day of Judgment (Surah 43:61);

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<sup>529</sup> Abū al-Qāsim Thiqatu al-Dīn Ali b. Hasan b. Hibatullah Ibn Asākir, *Tarikh-u Dimashq*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1417/1996), XLVIII, 521-522.

<sup>530</sup> Bukhārī, “*fadāil-ü ashāb*” no 8. See also Ibn Hibbān, *Al-Ihsan fī Taqrīb-i Sahīh Ibn Hibban*, XV, 352; Abū Abdullah Muhammad b. Sa’d al-Mani, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, (Beirut: Dār-i Sādir, no date), III, 338.

3. He will descend among Muslims, near the White Eastern Minaret of Damascus, Syria, clad in two yellow sheets, while leaning on the shoulders of two angels;
4. He will pray behind the Mahdī;
5. He will chase, fight with, and kill *al-Dajjāl* (the Anti-Christ) at the gate of Lydda;
6. Al-Masīh will rule justly according to the law of Islam;
7. The People of the Book will accept him as a Messenger of God and will embrace Islam (Surah 4:159); subsequently, the Cross and *Jizyah* tax (on non-Muslims) will be abolished;
8. He will battle Gog and Magog and will be victorious;
9. Islam and justice will rule, oppression will be eliminated, and fighting and war will be abolished;
10. Everyone will be prosper and hatred, jealousy, and grudge will disappear;
11. Al-Masīh will perform *Hajj* and/or *‘Umrah*;
12. He will die after living on earth for 40 years or so and will be buried in a grave.
13. Afterwards, all believers will die before the advent of the Day of Judgment and the other prophecies will take place.

### **A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON THE NUZŪL-U ‘ĪSĀ**

Muslim thinkers who hold to traditional understandings of the Qur’ān’s inspiration and authority plus the authority of the sahih Hadīth collections accept the end time and Hereafter positions revealed in the Qur’ān and expressed in the Hadīth while not neglecting allegorical or spiritual interpretations along with the literal texts. Some Muslim scholars regard the coming of Jesus as a person would be contrary to the divine

wisdom of God. They rather consider that it will take place only as an arrival of a *shakhs ma'nawī* (collective spiritual personality or rather a conceptual personage), that is, a concept of an individual person who is represented by a community of individuals.

As we will explain with examples, the term “*shakhs ma'nawī*” stands for a community who are representative of what, in this case, the Messiah is expected to do. Some translate the term as “the collective mind” while some translate it as “collective personality.” *Shakhs ma'nawī*, therefore, comprehends both the spiritual and collective elements of community in the sense that the religious idea of the Messiah is not the sole purview of any one individual, nor of a concrete entity or structure. With this concept, the religious idea of the Messiah is refocused from being expectations of a specific personality to representing a more collective sense of purpose.<sup>531</sup>

The earliest known Muslim scholar who preferred to make inner and esoteric meanings and interpretations on the hadīth materials in regard to the second coming of Jesus was Abū ‘Abdullah al-Halīmī (d. 403/1013). According to him, Jesus will temporarily descend and only those around him will hear and see him.<sup>532</sup> Imam Sa’d al-Din al-Taftazanī (1322-1390) in his *Sharh al-Maqāsid* says that some Muslim scholars understood the Dajjāl as the emergence of evil and mischief and the Messiah as this malice superseded by good and righteousness.<sup>533</sup> Having a similar approach, Shaykh

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<sup>531</sup> M. Hermansen, “Understandings of “community” within the Gülen Movement” in *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, November 12-13, 2005, Rice University, Houston, TX

<sup>532</sup> Abū Abdullah al-Husayn b. Hasan al-Halīmī, *al-Minhāj fī Shuab al-Imân*, (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1400/1979), II, 425.

<sup>533</sup> Sa’d al-Din Mas’ud b. ‘Umar b. Abdullah al-Taftazānī, *Sharh al-Maqāsid I-II*, (Pakistan: Dār al-Maarif al-Nu’māniyya, 1401/1981), II, 307-309.

Mahmud Shaltut (d.1383/1963), the former president of Al-Azhar University and prominent Egyptian Sunnī religious scholar and Islamic theologian, asserts that what is meant by the Messiah might be good deeds and what is meant by the Dajjāl might be evil deeds.<sup>534</sup>

On the other hand, there are Muslim scholars who never accept the esoteric exegesis of the hadīth reports. They claim that the hadīths speaking of the end of the world and especially the descent of Jesus have something to do with *ghayb*, the unseen and the matters pertaining to *ghayb* cannot be comprehended by senses. All we can do is to believe in them without question and avoid any further forced interpretation. Otherwise, all people would resort to interpreting the issues that they cannot understand with their senses. Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869-1954), the last Shaykh al-Islam of the Ottoman State underlines that the reports on the coming of Jesus are very clear and need no further interpretation.<sup>535</sup> Al-Kawtharī (1879-1951), the adjunct to Mustafa Sabri Efendi, emphasizes that the idea that these hadīths can allegorically be interpreted is no more than an imagination.<sup>536</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawī affirms that describing the descent of Jesus as an age of peace and prosperity must be considered a bid'ah, that is unacceptable, heretical or at least to be rejected.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> Mahmud Shaltut, *al-Fatâwâ*, (Cairo: Dâr al-Shuruq, 1978), 77-78.

<sup>535</sup> Mustafa Sabri, *Mawqūf al-Aql wa al-'Ilm wa al-Ālam min Rabb al-Ālamîn*, (Beirut: Dâr Ihya al-Turath al-Arabî, 1401/1981), Vol. IV, p 229.

<sup>536</sup> Muhammad Zâhid al-Kawtharî, *Nazrah Ābira fî Mazâim Man Yunkiru Nuzūl'Īsâ Qabla al-Akhirah*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1425/2004), 74-75.

<sup>537</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawī, *Sünneti Anlamada Yöntem* (çev. Bünyamin Erul), (İstanbul, 1991), 182-189.

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir (1878-1942), the prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkish *mufassir* and *faqīh*, makes a distinction between Jesus' body and spirit and concludes that what was taken up to the presence of God was Jesus' body and what ascended to heaven was only Jesus' spirit, which had not yet been extracted from his body. This is the fourth level of the heaven where the Prophet Muhammad met with Jesus in his *Mi'rāj*-Ascent according to Islamic tradition. Therefore, Elmalili states, the hadīths materials regarding the ascent of Jesus and his descent before the end of the world have nothing to do with Jesus' mortal body, but have to do with Jesus' spirit.<sup>538</sup>

Bediuzzaman<sup>539</sup> Said Nursi (1876-1960) and Fethullah Gülen (b.1941) on the other hand, while not neglecting the possibility of Jesus' descent as a person, stress the collective spiritual personality much more. They assert that if Jesus will be coming from heaven, then this coming will not be an ordinary one, with an ordinary body like ours. According to the Qur'ān and the Hadīth, the enemies did not kill Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God, nor did they crucify him. They had doubt, confusion and were uncertain about the person they persecuted, even as God raised him to Himself.<sup>540</sup> All Muslims believe that not only his coming into the world but also his departure from the world was miraculous. Like his departure from the world, Jesus' second coming will be unusual. He did not die as other people do, but God took back his spirit and body, which took on the form of, or changed into, an *astral body*.

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<sup>538</sup> Elmalılı Muhammad Hamdi Yazir, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, I-X, (İstanbul: Eser Neşriyat, 1979), 1113.

<sup>539</sup> Because of his extraordinary intelligence, he was known as Bediuzzaman "Wonder of the Age"

<sup>540</sup> al-Nisā 4:157-159

Said Nursi, the Turkish-born Islamic scholar who wrote a six-thousand page commentary on the Qur'ān called the *Risāla-i Nur*, explains this phenomenon as the third level within the five degrees of life and considers Jesus in the third level.

...The first degree is as we live here and now, which is bound by certain conditions. The second degree is manifested in the lives of Khadir<sup>541</sup> and Elijah. To a certain extent it is free, for those who have it can be in different places at the same time and are not bound by ordinary human life's necessities. For example, they do not have to eat or drink. The experiences that some godly persons who can discern the hidden truths have had with Khadir suffice to illuminate and prove this degree of life. Further, one spiritual degree or station that saints reach in their spiritual journey is the Station of Khadir... The third degree is manifested in the lives of the Prophets Jesus and Enoch, who live in heaven with their physical bodies. Their bodies are not bound by human life's necessities and have acquired a sort of refinement and luminosity to the degree of astral bodies and an angelic type of life....<sup>542</sup>

Note Jesus' luminosity and angelic way of life. This concept of astral body can be analogous with the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascent (*Isra' and Mi'rāj*). The Prophet Muhammad, guided by Archangel Gabriel, traveled in spiritual time with speed of spirit to Masjid al-Aqsā (The 'Furthest Mosque' built by the first patriarch Abraham in Jerusalem, on or near where the Temple of Solomon once stood) and with his guide, ascended through six heavens. He went further; he entered into the very presence of God. As he and Gabriel passed through the various heavens, the Prophet was unencumbered by the earthly limitations and saw spiritual worlds. He encountered

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<sup>541</sup> Khadir or Khidr, literally meaning "the Green One", is a revered figure in Islam, whom the Qur'ān describes as a righteous servant of God, who possessed great wisdom or mystic knowledge. He can be present in different places at the same time. The 18th Surah (The Cave) presents a narrative where Khadir accompanies Moses and tests him. The revival of the fish in the narration implies al-Khadir's special mission and represents enduring life.

<sup>542</sup> Said Nursi, *Risāla-i Nur Collection, The Letters*, (Somerset, New Jersey: The Light Publishing, 2007), p. 3-4.

previous prophets and messengers who were the gatekeepers in the several heavens. The guardians of the second (another narration says the fourth) heaven were Yahya (John the Baptist) and Jesus. Jesus then, is in a heavenly spiritual dimension close to the earthly realm. He, as well as others in the spiritual worlds, is in a position to influence earthly matters as God wills.

The Prophet made the Ascent in all the higher dimensions or worlds of existence with *his spirit and his body*, which became so refined as to be almost identical with the “astral” body of the spirit. After the Ascent, he preferred to return to the world to continue to guide people and to complete proclaiming the message of Islam. As for Jesus, since his mission as a prophet-messenger had ended, and he was taken from the world with *his spirit and body*, which also became identical with the astral body of his spirit and remained in “heaven” to which he had been elevated. Commenting on the Ascent of the Prophet Muhammad, Said Nursi writes;

Like ordinary human beings travel in the mind with the speed of imagination, and saints journey in the heart with the speed of lightning, like angels, which are luminous bodies, circulate with the speed of spirit from the Throne [Kursī] to the earth and from the earth to the Throne [Kursī]; and like the people of Paradise will rise to Paradise from the resurrection with the speed of Buraq<sup>543</sup> through a distance greater than five hundred years;<sup>544</sup> of a certainty the body of Muhammad went together with his elevated spirit as far as the Divine Throne. For the body of Muhammad was the treasury of the faculties of the spirit of Muhammad, and the means for the performance of its duties, which is light and has the characteristics of light, is subtler than the hearts of the saints, more

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<sup>543</sup> In Islamic tradition, a creature said to have transported the Prophet Muhammad to heaven. Described as “a white animal, half-mule, half-donkey, with wings on its sides . . . .”

<sup>544</sup> Bukhārī, “*salat*” no 147; Ibn Mubarak, *al-Zuhd*, II: 122.

insubstantial than the spirits of the dead and the bodies of the angels, and more ethereal than the astral bodies and subtle bodies.<sup>545</sup>

Speaking of metaphysical beings, Fethullah Gülen, the contemporary Turkish-Muslim thinker points out that our body is not the cover of the spirit. Rather, the spirit has its own cover or envelope and when it leaves the body in the time of death, it is not left naked, without a cover. This cover is like the negative of the material body and is called by various names, such as the envelope of light, the ethereal figure of the human individual, the energetic form, the second body, *the astral body*, the double, or the ghost.<sup>546</sup>

Fethullah Gülen asserts that '*Ālam al-Mithāl*, the incorporeal realm of “forms,” or “ideas,” or “symbols” is the spiritual dimension immediately above and around this visible world and it is also the dimension where Jesus has been dwelling.<sup>547</sup> According to Gülen, *Mithāl* is the immaterial world of Divine Laws and Commands, the realm of the symbols, representations, archetypes and forms of what will appear on the earth within objects and faculties of specific things and particular persons. It is possible that archetypes and forms in '*Ālam al-Mithāl* may be expressed in *al-Dunya* not as material individuals but as ideologies and systems.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Nursi, *Risāla-i Nur Collection, The Words*, (Somerset, New Jersey: The Light, 2010), 591.

<sup>546</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, translated by Ali Ünal. (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2006), 41–49

<sup>547</sup> The discussion on '*Ālam al-Mithāl* is drawn from *Essentials*, pages 41 – 49. For Gülen's further exposition from a Sufi perspective, see *Sufism*, volume 3, pages 79 – 85.

<sup>548</sup> Gülen, *Essentials*, pages 169-171.

Earlier Al-Ghazzalī (1058–1111), the Sunnī Islamic philosopher, theologian, and Sufi, in *al-Asma' al-Husnā* (the Beautiful Names) and *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (the Niche for Lights) recognized that literalistic interpretations of Qur'ānic passages and portions of the Hadīth often were problematic. Islam had hard experiences with those interpreters who took literally and anthropomorphically poetic metaphors about God and other metaphysical beings. In the Twenty-Fourth Word in *The Words*, a volume in Risāla-i Nur collection, Nursi spends considerable time arguing the case for symbolism, similitudes and metaphorical meanings to passages. He recognizes that what had been revealed to the Prophet, what he said and his companions wrote down were understood in their proper, non-literalistic ways, but later believers took them literally. He is especially concerned about misunderstandings and dissensions that might arise from those who calculated the end of the world and sought to identify the signs and personages such as the Sufyān, Dajjāl, Mahdī and Messiah.

In *The Words*, Nursi lists twelve interpretative principles. In the sixth, seventh and tenth principles he holds that Qur'ānic statements and hadīth reports may have their fullest meanings in the dimensions we consider as spiritual realms and/or in the Hereafter. Here in our world, the terms may be expressed in material terms such as the Dajjāl or Mahdī. Gog and Magog, for example may refer to any of numerous groups that arose from time to time in the east instead of a specific people. The progress of the Dajjāl from the north may not be of a person but of the spread of materialist ideologies or recurrent crises or natural disasters. In other words, the figures may be representatives of ideologies and not individuals. He writes in the Seventh Principle:

Now, the difference in the narrations about individuals like the Mahdī, and their meaning, is this: those who expounded hadīths applied the text of the hadīths to their own interpretations and commentaries. For example, since the center of power at that time was Damascus or Madinah, they imagined the events connected with the Mahdī and Sufyān in places like Basra, Kufa, and Syria, which were in the region of those centers, and expounded them accordingly. Moreover, they imagined the mighty works belonging to the collective identity or community which those individuals represent to be in their persons and expounded them in that way, so that they ascribed a form to them whereby when those extraordinary individuals appear, everyone will recognize them. However, as we said, this world is the arena of trial. The door is opened to the reason, but the [free] will is not taken from the hand. So, when those individuals, and even the terrible Dajjāl, appear, many people and himself even will not know to start with that he is the Dajjāl. Those individuals of the end of time will be known through the insight and the light of belief.<sup>549</sup>

Regarding the question whether people will know Jesus in person when he will return, Nursi, too, adds that there will be a few people who know Jesus. When Jesus descends, everyone will not necessarily know him to be the true Jesus. His chosen companions and those close to him will recognize him through the light of belief. It will not be self-evident enough so that everyone will recognize him.<sup>550</sup>

Nursi discusses that toward the end of the world two currents of irreligion will gain strength. The first will be from among the Muslims represented by the collective personality of the Sufyān. As to the second current, Nursi says that at the end a tyrannical current born of naturalist and materialist philosophy will gradually become strong and spread by means of materialist philosophy, and will start denying God. The leader of the second current is called the Dajjāl, who will manifest awesome wonders, a sort of spiritualism and hypnosis. The Dajjāl will assume a tyrannical, superficial rule in a sort of

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<sup>549</sup> Nursi, *Risāla-i Nur Collection, The Words*, p. 364.

<sup>550</sup> Nursi, *Risāla-i Nur Collection, The Letters*, p. 79

dominion, proclaiming his godhead. Bediuzzaman adds that at that point when the current appears to be very strong, the religion of true Christianity, which comprises the collective personality of Jesus will appear.

The killing of the Dajjāl, too, is taken by many Muslims only in a literal sense, yet Nursi suggests that the killing of the Dajjāl might be symbolic rather than literal. Therefore, it is not the killing of a personality but of a movement of irreligion or materialism. According to Nursi, “at the end of time, while Christianity is purified, and rid of superstitions and united with Islam against the movement of disbelief and denial of God which stems from naturalistic philosophy, the collective personality of Christianity will kill the collective personality of irreligiosity with the sword of divine revelation. Jesus, representing the collective personality of Christianity will kill al-Dajjāl, who represents the collective personality of disbelief.”<sup>551</sup> As stated, even though Nursi does not totally deny the literal meaning of the hadīths speaking of the Dajjāl, he is very clear about this spiritual struggle between belief and disbelief. For Nursi, the hadīth “Jesus will kill the Dajjāl” refers to a community of Christians who will wage a war against worldwide disbelief. These people will combine the original message of Jesus with Islam, and by doing so, the religion of God will have a strong power through which those Christians will be able to kill the collective personality of materialism.

Nursi explains some of the Prophetic reports about the Dajjāl and the Sufyān based on the different levels or degrees of authenticity of ‘ilm al-Hadīth (science of Hadīth). He points out again that the narrations of such diabolical beings are not

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<sup>551</sup> Nursi, *Risāla-i Nur Collection, The Words*, p 347.

exclusively about their persons. Rather, they are about the ideologies, committees, and systems they will establish in all aspects of life:

“It is reported that the hands of the Sufyān will be holed, meaning that the Sufyān will be a prodigal one and encourage prodigality and dissipation.

Another report: A terrible person will appear before the end of time and when he gets up one morning, he finds on his forehead is inscribed: This is an infidel. This means that the Sufyān will be an apostate and, in imitation of unbelievers, he will compel people to be dressed after the style of the non-Muslim world.

Another report: When the Dajjāl appears, everyone will hear him. He will have an extraordinary mount and travel throughout the world within 40 days. This means that the Dajjāl will appear when the means of communication and transportation develop as much as an event happening in one part of the world will be heard in other parts and travelling throughout the world within around 40 days is possible.”<sup>552</sup>

Nursi, along with earlier Muslim scholars, provided the precedent for understanding figures such as the minor and major dajjāls and sufyāns, messiahs, Mahdīs and *mujaddids* (renewers) not only as specific figures but as types of persons, movements, ideologies and events. Fethullah Gülen’s vision makes fine use of the same interpretation with Gülen’s own insights, teachings, and discernment in its application. In doing so, Gülen keeps the theological bases of the vision intact, relevant to changing times and consonant with Islam’s tenets.

Specifically and with regard to the end, Gülen indicates that Jesus, the Messiah, who is in the dimension immediately surrounding al-Dunya, will exercise spiritual influence on the world and be engaged in raising up the new generation of believers. In addition, he feels that Jesus will return soon, but not in the apocalyptic sense. The sense

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<sup>552</sup> Nursi, *The Rays*, p. 356-361. See also Ali Ünal, *The Resurrection and the Afterlife*, (New Jersey: The Light, 2006), p. 169-171.

is rather as a God-provided influence and as persons, sometimes spiritual beings who take on human appearance will guide others in the present. Gülen wrote:

I believe the descent of Messiah as a spiritual personality is not too distant a future. It may indeed take place that this spirit, or meaning, may descend, and nobody should oppose this possibility. The coming of the Messiah as a spiritual personality simply means that a spirit of compassion or a phenomenon of mercy will come to the foreground, a breeze of clemency will waft over humanity, and human beings will compromise and agree with each other. The signs of such a phenomenon are already present: Muslims are sometimes invited to churches to read the Qur'ān, it is now an accepted fact that Prophet Muhammad is a Messenger of God, and that the Qur'ān is a divine revelation. Some people as well may come to declare themselves as "Muslim-Christians." It does not seem improper to me to regard these as an introduction to the spirit of Messiahhood.<sup>553</sup>

According to Nursi and Gülen, the Mahdī, too, is not a single person, but rather the name of a global Islamic revival. The Mahdī/Mahdīs role will be to be the renewer, restorer, and protector of Islam so that it would be brought back to its original purity in preparation for the coming Judgment. In Nursi's understanding, this revival has three stages, each of which will be represented by a person and his group. Its leaders will be well-versed in religious sciences; have the highest moral standards; know the social, political, and economic conditions of their times; and be equipped with the necessary qualities of leadership. Together with his followers, the leader of the first period will defend Islamic principles against materialistic trends and expose them. In the second stage, the revived Islamic principles will gain ascendancy in many parts of the world, and Islamic life will experience a significant revival. The third stage will see the global revival of religious life.

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<sup>553</sup> Gülen, *Questions And Answers About Islam*, (Clifton, NJ: Tughra Books, 2008 and 2009), 148-149.

Furthermore, Gülen constantly and firmly warns against identifying any particular person as the returned Messiah or as the Mahdī. Those who make such a claim are by that very claim Abusers of the concepts of Messiah-hood and Mahdī-hood and are heretics. Gülen does not expect Jesus to be manifested as an apocalyptic demon-slaying warrior. The one who came as the messenger of spirituality to what the Qur'ān and Hadīth materials characterize as almost totally materialistic continues in the end of the world the same message and purpose. Gülen sometimes connects Jesus only to Christians yet in the following Jesus also sets the style and action for Muslims:

When Jesus was sent to the Israelites, the spirit of religion had been reduced to a device used to rob the common people. So before putting the Law into effect, Jesus concentrated on faith, justice, mercy, humility, peace, love, repentance for one's sins, begging God's forgiveness, helping others, and purity of heart and intention and sincerity....The reliable books of hadīth contain many sayings of the Prophet that Jesus will return before the end of time and practice the law of Islam. Although those Traditions have so far been interpreted in different ways, Fethullah Gülen interprets them to mean that before the end of time, Islam must manifest itself mostly in the dimension represented by Jesus. In other words, the main aspects of the Messengership of Jesus, ...[such as] call[ing] people to the way of God with wisdom and fair exhortation, mercy, love, and forgiveness... must be given prominence in preaching Islam.<sup>554</sup>

The figures of the Messiah and the Mahdī as well as the Dajjāl as spiritual influences and presences are engaged in leading humanity into the new age. Gülen makes clear that Jesus' influence from his heavenly dwelling would to motivate Muslims and others to actions consonant with Jesus' earthly time, that is, mercy, love and forgiveness with emphasis on spirituality. Jesus' second role, according to the tradition with which Gülen agrees, was to so influence Christians that they would become Muslim-Christians.

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<sup>554</sup> Ünal, *The Resurrection and the Afterlife*, p. 177-179.

For Gülen, the period in which the global revival of religious life occurs will result from the gracious, merciful, compassionate, just and almighty power and will of God Who raises a new group of people who will serve God, humanity, and society. This new period will come with the development and education of spiritually aware and talented persons in gradual, dedicated steps; the spread of ideas and attitudes grounded in altruism and love; and the reconciliation of science and reason with revelation and belief. Religion will be purified of disorder, superstition and error so that all persons will recognize and willingly adhere to the divine truth of the One-Only God. For Muslims, that truth is Islam. Islam will be the unifier of humanity and it will not be forced on any one. This will be an “Isaiah-like [period] when swords will be beaten into plowshares and the reign of a king in a peaceable kingdom or a millennial period with Jesus influencing a peaceful world [will emerge] while remaining in a heavenly realm...”<sup>555</sup>

In that time, as indicated in the hadīth reports above, the earth will yield abundantly, economic and social systems will be transformed so that there will be neither hunger nor ethnic enmities. Sciences will realize their full development. Cities will be built in the sky, and it will be easy to travel there. Probably as a result of developments in genetics, one pomegranate will suffice for as many as twenty people, and its rind will provide shade for them. Wheat produced in a small house balcony will be enough to feed a family for a year. Christianity, according to the relevant Islamic sources, will be freed from borrowings from certain ancient religions and philosophies and draw closer to Islam. Christians and Muslims will cooperate to repel the attacks of

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<sup>555</sup> Wagner, *Beginnings and Ends*, p.34.

the Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj and free the world from their invasion. Of course, getting to that new age will require peaceful, diligent efforts, universal education, justice and dialogue.

Nursi and especially Gülen are eschatological rather than apocalyptic thinkers and they have a comprehensive and unified eschatological vision. They point out that the new age that will come before the end of the world has its preludes and analogues in Jewish and Christian eschatologies. Those resemblances and resonances would provide grounds for dialogue among the believers and collaboration in mutual projects that will advance the fulfillment of God's plan for the today's world. Together individuals, groups and organizations drawn from all religions and ideologies will dedicate their abilities and resources to seek God, to seek peace and to seek life in the present world and they transform the present world into a realm of justice, mercy, peace, and love.

In this chapter, we have seen how within Islam scholars populate a wide spectrum of thinking about the end of the world, with some believing in a literal, personal Messiah and others believing in a messianic age. The religion of Islam apparently absorbed several of the eschatological themes of both Judaism and Christianity early on. Some of these concepts appear in the Qur'ānic commentaries and others are found in the Hadīth literature. According to Poston, the parallels between the Christian scenario and that outlined by Muslim scholars are so precise that it is *almost* impossible to conceive of the Muslim concept being developed independently of the Jewish and Christian traditions. It is admittedly difficult, however, to trace a clear direct connection.<sup>556</sup>

Poston writes that Muslim scholars might have encountered premillennial thinking through several ways: During and after the Umayyad caliphate, Muslims

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<sup>556</sup> Poston, Ibid.

encountered all of the Jewish and Christian thinking contained in the various libraries that came under Islamic dominion. Some Christians having a strongly premillennial understanding, who sought refuge in the Eastern regions of the Roman Empire in areas later conquered early on by Muslims, may also have played a role in this “inter-religious transfer”.<sup>557</sup>

Indeed, there might be some references in the Qur’ān which some contemporary and even medieval scholars believe speaking of the eschatological figures, such as the Messiah. In the Hadīth literature, there is no doubt that al-Dajjāl and the Messiah are extensively mentioned. What is to be argued here is not the existence of the Messiah or al-Dajjāl but the ascription of these narratives to the Prophet Muhammad. There is no doubt that there are some common aspects in the Hadīth literature as far as the characteristics of the Messiah, al-Mahdī, and al-Dajjāl are concerned. Still, there are many contradictory traditions. It is most likely possible that the narrators have transmitted their own interpretations of the Prophet’s hadīths rather than the hadīth themselves, and this is the reason for many contradictions in Islamic eschatological scenario. Therefore, we cannot accept the authenticity of all hadith reports. That is why the belief in the Messiah or Mahdī has never become a significant part of the Muslim creed

Unfortunately, almost all hadīth narrations on the subject were understood literally. The possibility of the Prophet speaking in an allegorical or symbolic way was underestimated or ignored despite the fact that the Hadīth tradition and Islamic history show that the Prophet taught in a parabolic or allegoric manner. Some medieval scholars

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<sup>557</sup> Poston, Ibid.

such as al-Taftazānī opened the door to symbolic interpretations of the hadīth. Nevertheless, many Muslim scholars insisted to only interpret these texts literally.

## CONCLUSION

If the Qur'ān, the Holy Book of Islam speaks little of the life of Jesus Christ, the same cannot be said of the Hadīth narrations. They tell many extraordinary stories. Some are similar to those of the Gospel, others to apocryphal Gospels, and others might be due to oral tradition.

The term “Hadīth” in Islam refers to the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad or the reports of his companions that related his actions. This is a both vast tradition and science studied all over the Muslim world and involves many branches. The Hadīth tradition is an indispensable part of Islam because it serves to define the details of general statements in the Qur'ān, the first authoritative source.

The Hadīth collections show that the Prophet spoke substantively and figuratively about the creation, the End Times, the eschatological role of Jesus (‘Īsā) towards the end of the world, and the eschatological descriptions of paradise and hell. The Hadīth, therefore, has always been significant for Muslims generally.

Based on the many references to Jesus in the Qur'ān and the Hadīth tradition, this dissertation shows that Islamic teachings offer both Christians and Muslims a great deal of material upon which to build an effective Christian-Muslim dialogue. Alan Godlas summarizes the points about which Islam and Christianity agree and disagree. Both Islam and Christianity a-) revere Jesus Christ and emphasize his holiness, in the sense that he lived in this world as “being pure and free of sin” and, in fact, he occupies a distinctive place among those who have revealed God’s will to humanity; b-) believe that Mary (Maryam), Jesus’ mother, was decent, upright, and pure, and furthermore, Jesus’s mother

Mary occupies a place of unique honor in Islam, being the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'ān; c-) assert that Mary's conception of Jesus was accomplished by God's miraculous intervention; d-) declare that Jesus performed many miracles (especially his ability to heal the sick and revive the dead); and e-) refer to Jesus, variously, as Spirit from/of God, Word from/of God, and the Messiah.<sup>558</sup>

On the other hand, Godlas writes, Christian and Islamic traditions differ: a-) While Christianity declares that Jesus has both human and divine nature, Islam refuses the belief in Jesus' divinity. Therefore, while most Christians worship Jesus, Muslims instead only revere Jesus and believe in him as a prophet-messenger, using the Qur'ān and the Hadīth tradition as a reliable record of knowledge about Jesus; b-) Even though most Christians believe that Jesus is the son of God, Muslims assert that God does not beget a son and "therefore has no sons or children"; c-) Christianity declares that Jesus was crucified. On the other hand, Islam says that it only seemed like Jesus was crucified, and that God "took him up to God Himself." d) Whereas Christianity asserts that Jesus was crucified "in order to redeem the original sin" and sins of all human beings, Muslims do not believe in original sin.<sup>559</sup>

I have frankly acknowledged that Christian and Muslim accounts of Jesus Christ contain noteworthy and, likely, permanent differences, particularly around the centrality, for Christians, of his crucifixion and resurrection. Nonetheless, there are also broad areas where they overlap, and that there is much room for mutual dialogue and engagement.

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<sup>558</sup> Alan Godlas, *Islam and Islamic Studies Resources*, <http://godlas.myweb.uga.edu/>. Accessed on November 24, 2012. For a more detailed exposition of these points see: *Where Islam and Christianity Agree and Differ on Jesus* by Imam Mohamad Jawad Chirri

<sup>559</sup> Godlas, *Ibid.*

Through this study, I aimed to provide the structure, background, and careful exposition of Qur'ānic passages and Hadīth reports on the birth, life, departure/death, and return of Jesus Christ. The discussion included many references to the Hadīth tradition and gave some attention to Jesus' honored titles, miracles, and sinless nature as a prophet-messenger. Rather than avoiding problematic issues, such as Trinity, Son of God, Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, the thesis included a discussion on those points of greatest disagreement. Most importantly, the study will be useful for readers seeking to think more deeply and search more diligently for the Messiah, one of the most important aspects of both Christian and Islamic eschatology.

The Messiah is connected with many signs of the End Times and there are Muslim scholars who believe that the Qur'ān makes reference to Jesus' second coming in at least four verses. The Hadīth accounts have much to add about Jesus' return. This study showed several points essential to the role of the Messiah in peace-making with reference to eco-justice and future inter-religious dialogues and actions.

Muslims do have many beliefs in common with Christians, concerning the oneness of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, creation, the End Times, or the Day of Judgment, but in the end, I believe, dialogue mostly centers on Jesus Christ. The Qur'ān and the Hadīth tradition unquestionably leave the door open for dialogue. This means that Muslims can recognize bridges from the Islamic portrait of Jesus to the New Testament. It also means that Christians should consider the Qur'ānic titles, like the Messenger of God, Word from God, and Spirit from God. Indeed, Jesus of the New

Testament is primary and powerful, but the Christians are urged to seek Jesus Christ above and beyond the New Testament.

Jesus is an essential figure in the Islamic narrative of the last stages of God's master plan. In any event, according to the Qur'ān and Hadīth, Jesus was taken by God and is in a celestial place or dimension. During the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascent into heaven, he met John the Baptist and Jesus in the second (or fourth) heaven.

The full import of the Hadīth tradition cannot be overlooked as a subject for inter-religious dialogue. According to the Hadīth, the Messiah will inaugurate a time of prosperity and abundance during which the divisions between the People of the Book and Muslims will be eliminated, and the true religion will be held by all. Injustice will cease, that is, equity and peace will prevail before the Day of Judgment. Since the Messiah is not an apocalyptic warrior or slayer, the pre-End Time conditions will not occur through violence but through education, reform and peaceful means.

In addition, some of Biblical and later Christian instances have parallels and analogues in Islamic eschatology and the End Time scenario. The eschatological precedents and the contrasts will contribute to the openness and limitations of interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims yet point toward creative and responsible ways to look at the present with an eye to the future.

The purpose of this study is to take Christians and Muslims from mutual ignorance to sincere dialogue. Mutual ignorance has been a long-standing problem between Christians and Muslims in many places in the world. But since these two

religious traditions claim to follow the One Creator and since they both hold a common commitment to proclaim a divine message, neither Christians nor Muslims can justly continue to ignore each other. Chawkat Moucarray writes that we need to move toward mutual understanding, and that requires sincere conversation. But since both Christians and Muslims claim to hold the truth, a truly honest dialogue has to go beyond merely “an attempt to exchange information without any effort to argue for a position”<sup>560</sup>. The open interfaith dialogue not only faces similarities and distinctions, but it also entails helping Christians and Muslims understand one another better and thus concentrate on their common theological and historical heritage.

In today’s world, the lack of mutual engagement, the ignorance of the basics of our creeds and the practices of our faiths, in some way, prevent Christians and Muslims from having a constructive interreligious dialogue. A large part of today’s conflict proceeds from ignorance. People of different faiths and cultures should get to know each other. If people do not get to know each other, if they do not want to change their decisions, they will remain closed to learning, and this resistance gives birth to hostility and violence and not dialogue.<sup>561</sup>

I am not merely highlighting the differences and similarities. Yes, there are dogmatic differences between Islam and Christianity. I do not propose to eliminate or resolve those differences but to understand them so as to move our partners in dialogue to mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. Again, there are distinctions between the

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<sup>560</sup> Chawkat Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah: An Arab Christian’s Perspective on Islam and Christianity*, (Downers Grove, III: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p.19.

<sup>561</sup> Harpci, p. 3

religions and these differences are components for learning. We should forget misinformation and misconception about each other and begin to know each other.<sup>562</sup>

*Bismillāhirrahmānirrahīm,*  
In the Name of God, the All-Merciful and the All-Compassionate

O humankind! Surely We have created you from a single (pair of) male and female, and made you into tribes and families so that you may know one another (and so build mutuality and co-operative relationships, not so that you may take pride in your differences of race or social rank, and breed enmities). Surely the noblest, most honorable of you in God's sight is the one best in piety, righteousness, and reverence for God. Surely God is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (*al-Hujūrat* 49:13)

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<sup>562</sup> Harpci, p. 11.

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