The Lord Jesus in the Eyes of our Muslim Friends

In the Quran

- The Lord Jesus is mentioned in 15 Suras. There are 93 verses that speak of Him in various ways where He is given many outstanding names. The main occurrences relate to the Sharia of religion. The Lord Jesus is at the same level of *whiyah* (revelation) with Noah, Abraham and Moses.
- The Lord Jesus is mentioned with Abraham, Ishmael, Jacob, Isaac and Moses in terms of the similarities of the revelations they received and their faith. According to the Quran, David only once cursed unbelievers. Also joining the above are Zacharias and John the Baptist in connection with being "with the righteous". The Lord Jesus comes with Noah, Abraham and Moses in connection with the covenant with the prophets.
- His name is associated with the Holy Spirit and with "wisdom" as well as with having disciples.
- He is honoured with the titles – "the Word of God" and "the Spirit of God".
- He is elevated to a high position as "illustrious in this world and in the world to come". His place is very near to God.
- He is mentioned in connection with His death, His ascension, "beautification" and being superior to all created things.
- He is likened to Adam before the Fall and declared to be a person sent by God.
- He came to confirm what had already been revealed by God. The Injil (Gospel/New Testament) that comes from Him confirmed the Torah and the former Sharia.
- He is called "the Word of Truth", "Al Nabi" (the Prophet) and "the Blessed One". He is mentioned as "the Servant of Yahweh" (God).

In spite of all these great titles and roles the Lord Jesus is placed in the ordinary succession of all the previous prophets. The fundamental and all prevailing doctrine is the Unity of God and His total transcendence with some parallels to the Old Testament. The New Testament modified this concept adding divine grace, love and nearness to us.

The Quran and the Hadith are the two sources from which we can most clearly see the portrayal of the Lord Jesus in Islam.

The first problem we face is the disorder in the Quran since the material is not chronological. Secondly, the picture is incomplete since they only give glimpses of the life of the Lord Jesus and these scattered references would only fill a few pages in the Quran. The reality is that biography is not the intention of the Quran. Its supreme message is to reveal the "Word of God" not through the life of a "man" – the Lord Jesus, but through <u>rules</u> that should be our ultimate concern rather than the messenger.

In the Gospel, it is the Word – the Logos – that is not only a message, but actually the "Word" who became a man – the Lord Jesus. He is the Good News to all mankind and especially to those who are conscious of their sin.

This idea is quite foreign in Islam. There is only one "verse" that slightly touches on this truth. It is in Sura 4:171, *"People of Scripture, do not go to excess in your religion and do not say anything about God but the truth. The Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, was only a messenger, a Word from God which God sent down to Mary – a spirit of God. Believe in God. … God is one sole divinity too transcendent to have a son – in possession of all in the heavens and on earth."* So Jesus is God's Word that God committed to Mary.

There is another verse, Sura 3:45, about the Annunciation by the Angels, *"The angel said, 'O Mary, God gives you good news of a Word from God named the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary honoured in the world and the hereafter and one of the intimates of God."* "A Word" (in Arabic Al Kalima) is a

feminine word – here used for a masculine – the Lord Jesus. This is the only reference in the Quran and even though it isn't clear, one can see that ***"the Word became flesh"*** – i.e. the Word was incarnated.

So breaking the general Semitic rule that the son is always related to the father, Jesus is related to his mother – 'the son of Mary'. There are numerous Muslim traditions that offer other sources for a Muslim understanding about the Lord Jesus. It is noteworthy that few Hadith that refer to the legend/myths that arose in the six centuries after the close of the New Testament writings are incorporated into Islam.

The "Word" (Logos – al Kalima) is special in its meaning. He is not a product of the words of God as in the six days of Creation – ***"And God said, 'Let there be … and there was'*** ". Otherwise all that exists in this universe should be called "the Word of God".

So the Lord Jesus is distinguished by the "Word" and is different from Adam and all the normal descendants from Adam. The Lord Jesus has many outstanding names and titles in the Quran and some of them can only be used of God.

So Jesus is called the Messiah, the Son of Mary, the Apostle of God, the Divine Word and the Spirit of God. Messiah is from a Hebrew word, but how this word was understood by Muhammad and the early Muslims is not clear at all.

Briefly, Islam 'thinks' it knows what original Christianity was – the life of the Lord Jesus and the subsequent 30-40 years after His death. This Messiah is called the Word of God/a Word from Allah.

According to the Quran, the Lord Jesus was born by a direct act of God which Allah "cast" into Mary. The creation of the Lord Jesus is compared with the creation of Adam, but is different.

Sura 3:59, *"Jesus was to God like Adam was: God created him from dust then said, "Be" and he was."* Jesus was born as the Son of Mary. Being the Word of God and the Spirit of God, the Lord Jesus is distinguished from Adam. John's Gospel chapter 1 puts it this way, ***"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."***

He was called the Son of Mary as He took human form in the Virgin Mary, not in any biological way. Muslims often use the terms figuratively. Razi Abu Bakr (died 925 A.D.) said this was a well-known fact because there was no father in the case of the Lord Jesus and He came into being by the Word of God without any human male mediation. There is a great deal of ambiguity on the part of Muslim commentators. The reason is clear. They won't accept the divinity of the Lord Jesus or the title "Son of God". Among Christian circles, the Lord Jesus was known as the Word of God. He is also called the Spirit of God – a direct spirit from Allah. He is also called Abdallah – the slave of God – i.e. being totally subservient and obedient to God.

Muhammad is reported to have seen the Lord Jesus in the second heaven. He is worthy of regard in this world as a prophet and as an intercessor in the next world. He is called "Blessed" bringing much blessing to others. He is "a truthful saying", "a prophet" (nabi) and an apostle/messenger (rasoul).

The Injil is a book that He brought. His coming is a "mercy" – not only the Lord Jesus, but his mother also. He was an example or even a parable and He brought wisdom and knowledge and was aided by God through the angel Gabriel. [Note: the Holy Spirit is sometimes confused with this angel.] It was in this way that the Lord Jesus had the miraculous power to heal the sick and raise the dead making a dead bird fly by breathing life into it!

We find many outstanding titles and names given to the Lord Jesus, but very sadly His true nature has been removed from the Quran and the Hadith. They only give us a few glimpses into a true portrayal of Jesus. These are only hints and only see the Lord Jesus as if He is very far away because in both the Quran and the Hadith the author himself is in the dark!

If you compare this with 1 Jn. 1:1-7 you can clearly see that the writer of 1 John is an eyewitness,

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim, concerning the Word of

Life. The Life appeared. We have seen it and testify to it and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to you to make our joy complete. This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin."

So a believer in the Lord Jesus seeking to share this "Good News" with friends who are using the Quran as a path to understanding who the Lord Jesus is and what he accomplished on the Cross, will find the Quran and the Hadith very little help. It is excellent that in our lifetime the Bible – either in part or as a whole – is in nearly all languages used by our Muslim friends.

It is evident that Muhammad had great respect for the Lord Jesus and His mother Mary. When Muhammad washed the Ka'aba having finally defeated the Meccans, he washed all the pictures and icons and representations of idolatry from the Ka'aba except for Jesus and Mary! Note that perhaps most people who saw and knew Jesus also saw Him as a prophet and this is what Muhammad also thought. But the Lord Jesus never spoke of Himself as a prophet in any of the Gospels. Only others referred to Him in this way.

In the Quran Jesus is called a Messenger in succession to the early messengers – one who ate food (i.e. not an angel). Sura 5:75, *"The Messiah, Son of Mary, was only a messenger. Messengers had already passed away before him. And his mother was a woman who spoke the truth. The two of them both used to eat food. See how we clarify the signs to them, then see how deluded they are."*

Sura 19:33, Jesus is reported to have said, *"And peace is upon me the day I was born and the day I die and the day I am resurrected".* So was the Lord Jesus nothing but a simple messenger? He was a "messenger" in a very special and unique sense according to the Gospels – not only to the Jews as it is claimed in Sura 3:48-49, *"And God will teach him Scripture and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel and to be an emissary to the children of Israel. I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. I will make you a figure of a bird out of clay and breathe into it, then it will become a bird with God's permission. And I heal the blind and the leprous and revive the dead, with God's permission. And I tell you what you consume and what you keep in your homes. Surely there is a sign in that for you if you are believers."*

But the Lord Jesus Himself said, ***"As it is, you are determined to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth that I am from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your father does."*** (Jn. 8:40) ***"So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be. I do nothing on My own, but speak just what the Father has taught Me'."*** (Jn. 8:28)

The story of Jesus begins with Mary his mother who is highly revered in the Quran. There is a whole Sura (19) called 'Mary'. She is the only woman called by her name. She is honoured as pure and as above all women who have been created. She is the recipient of God's Spirit and the Logos (the Word) and is regarded in Islam as sinless (!) together with her son the Lord Jesus.

Al Bukari (a major collector of Hadith – author of Salih al Bukari (died 870 A.D.) relates, "No child of Adam is born without a demon touching him at the moment of birth. The one whom the demon touches gives out a cry, which is why all children cry. There have been no exceptions except Mary and her son Jesus. So because of this, both Mary and Jesus are called "signs to the world". Sura 25:50 says, *"And he it is who sent the winds of glad tidings before his mercy."*

The Quran gives an account of Mary's seclusion, the birthplace of the Lord Jesus and his and her relation with "Aaron" that can't be reconciled with the Biblical account. Jesus spoke in the cradle. He breathed life into clay birds, informed the buyers what their parents were doing, eating and turning other boys into swine and into monkeys. All this is completely absent from the Gospel records.

The Early Childhood of the Lord Jesus

Some references are found in the apocryphal writings of the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. even though the Quranic account may not actually be derived from them. For example: Jesus was ordered by God to follow the religion of submission. God himself taught Jesus the Torah and under inspiration He was given the Injil which was a confirmation of the Torah. The message of the Lord Jesus was the Gospel which is recognised in the Quran. Its revelation is accepted and its validity is never denied, but rather confirmed as were Christian copies of it. Sura 5:47, *"And let the people of the Gospel judge by what God has revealed in it. Any who do not judge by what God has revealed are the ones who go astray"*.

God's book the Injil (New Testament) was given to keep and to witness. The Quran seems to indicate that the Lord Jesus is a sign from the moment of His conception – a sign not only to His own people, but to the whole world. God made Him a pattern to the Children of Israel. Sura 43:59, *"He (the son of Mary) was just a servant whom we blessed and made an example to the Israelites."*

But the Quran is silent on the many parables the Lord Jesus taught, His teachings and sermons, His miracles, His intimate conversations about the Kingdom of God, the significance of His death, the Fatherhood of God and His personal relationship with God the Father. The major role the Lord Jesus has in the Quran is as a servant. The mission of the disciples/apostles is given in Sura 5:111, *"And we inspired the apostles to believe in me and my messenger. They said, 'We believe, witness we surrender to God' "*. How the disciples carried out their role with mercy and compassion to which they were called is given in Sura 57:27, *"Then we sent our envoys after them. We sent Jesus, Son of Mary, giving him the Gospel and we put kindliness and mercy in the hearts of those who follow Him. But the monasticism they invented for themselves was <u>not</u> proscribed by us for them, only seeking the pleasure of God …. But we gave those among them who believed their reward, while many of them were called."*

The Divine Preparation and the Manifestation of the Al Kalima (The Word)

The well-known philosopher Razi Abu Bakr (died 925 A.D.) and a number of other Muslims scholars commenting on Sura 3:32, *"Say, 'Obey God and the messenger …' "* see something of the divine care in selecting Adam, Noah and Abraham for God's purposes. God selected Adam by creating him with His hands and breathing into him His divine breath. The angels prostrated themselves before Adam. There was a promise for his children to gain paradise. Adam was the first prophet in the world as well as the first man. God chose Noah and his family by saving them in the Ark. Noah is considered by our Muslim friends as the first apostle.

Abraham was elected and made a 'friend of God' and from Abraham came two branches – Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac was considered the <u>base</u> and Jacob was seen as the <u>ruler</u> whose descendants were given the rule and the prophethood. Imran (the father of Aaron) became the head of the priesthood. The Quran records that John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth, and her cousin Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, were daughters of this family!

The word *"Al-Imran created"* has caused a great of confusion in the minds of Muslim commentators. Some commentators take Imran to be the father of Joseph and Mary, but some say he was Mary's father who was the son of Matem from the descendants of David. To Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, it was a divine declaration, *"We made her and her son a sign to the world"*. Several miraculous acts were attributed to Mary. She was made superior to all other women of the world.

In the Hadith Elizabeth is the mother of Yahiya (John the Baptist). The Quran states that John served as a witness to the truth of the teaching of the Lord Jesus. He described him as wise, noble, chaste, a prophet, righteous, devout and kind to his parents. Again Elizabeth is said to be related to Mary the mother of the Lord Jesus. The place where the Lord Jesus was born is called, *"a place far away from Bethlehem"*. Mary conceived Jesus when she was a girl of 15. She dwelt in the mosque (!) with her cousin Joseph. Both served as water carriers. Mary was 3 years old when she was brought to the temple and Zachariah was the priest. She got her provisions from Gabriel. Sura 7:32, *"So who is more astray than those who invent a lie against God or repudiate the signs of God?"*

When Gabriel encountered Mary, it was the longest day of the year and the hottest and then follows an indecent account of how she conceived the Lord Jesus.

After the Lord Jesus was born, Joseph took them to the cave and with lived with them for 40 days. Muslim commentators say this birth took place 43 years after the birth of the Emperor Augustus who came to power in 27 B.C. So that would make it 16 A.D.

Joseph took them to Egypt or to Damascus or Ramallah or Jerusalem – all are suggested by Muslim commentators. Mary remained in Egypt for 12 years. When the Lord Jesus was one day old it was as if he was a month old and when he was nine months old he was put into a school not to learn but as the school's teacher.

When Herod died they were advised to return to Palestine. They went to the hill country of Galilee and settled in Nazareth which is why Christians are often called 'Nazara'.

The Miracles of the Lord Jesus in Muslim Traditions

The Lord Jesus is said to have raised the dead, but no details are given in the Quran. There are many details in the traditions and the commentaries by Muslims. In the Gospels there are three cases of the Lord Jesus raising the dead:

Mk. 5:22-43: the raising to life of the daughter of Jairus who was 12 years old

Lk. 7:11-17: the raising to life of the son of the widow of Nain

Jn. 11:2-44: the raising of Lazarus from the dead. He died and was buried in a tomb. Four days later the Lord Jesus came to the house where he and his sisters Mary and Martha lived. He told them their brother would rise again. When they got to the tomb, the Lord Jesus cried out, ***"Lazarus, come out"***. He came out wrapped in his grave cloths.

Some commentaries written by Muslims a few centuries later detailed many more incidents:

- The raising of a dead child who died while playing
- A black African man who came out of the grave
- A woman who came out of the grave
- A Jew used a stick and tried to raise a king to life, but he stayed dead then the Lord Jesus gave him life.
- Three people got a treasure and killed each other. When the Lord Jesus saw them dead, He raised them to life again.
- He gave life to Shem, the son of Noah (Gen. 9) and the father of the Semitic people.
- Ezra was raised from his grave.
- The son of a king died and the king got news of a man whose prayers were heard by God and who turned water into wine. The Lord Jesus was called and was asked if He would raise the son to life. Jesus gave him life.
- The Lord Jesus gave life to a dead deer and at another time to a dead calf.

The Lord Jesus knew Hidden Things

- A blind man and a lame man who were both beggars stole money from a rich man. The Lord Jesus told them the theft had occurred with their co-operation told the rich man.
- The Lord Jesus used to tell the parents what their children were eating when their parents were not there.
- He once filled a picture of water and then turned the water into wine – cf. Jn. 2:1-10.
- He is reported to have turned naughty children into slime and monkeys.

His great signs are the Creation by His Word and the giving of life. Traditional Muslim commentators have accepted His healing and His miracles without difficulty.

Badawi (a Moroccan by birth and the founder of Ahmadi Sufi order – one of the largest in Egypt) said "Thousands used to gather to the Lord Jesus – all who were able to come to Him. While to those who

were unable, the Lord Jesus went Himself to them. Jesus used to heal by prayers only. He healed the sick, raised the dead, walked on the water and made loaves of bread from stones from the ground. His miracles over nature were stilling a storm, walking on the water and changing water into wine. He gave sight to those who were blind from birth and healed the lepers and healed those who couldn't walk. He fed more than 5000 people at one time with five loaves and two small fish."

The Lord Jesus is clearly referred to as "The Word of God" and as a "Word from God".

In Arabic there is a clear distinction between "The Word of God" meaning the Bible that is always called "Kalam Allah" and "The Word of God" who is God's messenger because he communicates God's word and God's will to man. He is born as a prophet.

According to Badawi, Isa is the Arabic form of the Hebrew word Yashua. So this term is evidently taken from the Hebrew and has the Hebrew significance of the "Anointed One". Muslims explain it differently. Imam Musa Khalief Feroz Ibadi says in his book there are no less than 50 (!) explanations of the word "Al Messiah". Yashua means 'God saves' according to Razi-Fakr-al-Din (died 1209 A.D.) who wrote an extensive Quranic commentary in English called, 'The Keys of the Unseen'. To Razi, the ministry of the Lord Jesus was primarily to the children of Israel – the Jews – and His teaching was centred on the worship of God alone.

So the Lord Jesus came to follow in the footsteps of the former prophets, confirming all that was revealed before in the Torah. He was given "the book" (the Injil) at the time of His birth and was born a prophet. Sura 19:30, *"He* (Jesus) *said, 'I am indeed the servant of God who has given me Scripture and made me a prophet …'."* Jesus came to reveal that He had divine wisdom. Sura 57:27, *"Then we sent our envoys after them. We sent Jesus, son of Mary, giving Him the Gospel and we put kindliness and mercy in the hearts of those who follow Him but the monasticism they invented for themselves was not proscribed by us for them, only seeking the pleasure of God. And they did not adhere to it according to its genuine observance. But we gave those among them who believed their reward, while many of them were dissolute".*

The Lord Jesus was also sent into the world to settle existing differences. Sura 43:63, *"When Jesus came with clarifications, He said, 'I have brought you wisdom and to clarify to you some of what you differ about. So be wary of God and obey me'."* He also came to teach us we must keep our duties to Allah. Sura 3:51, *"It is God who is my Lord and your Lord, so serve God. This is the straight path".*

Jesus was taught by God himself directly – wisdom, the Torah (Al Kitab) and the Gospel (Injil). The term "Messiah" occurs 11 times in the Quran. It is said that it is a "foreign" word like the surname of Jesus. The Hebrew original is "The Anointed King of Israel" and it is used later for the coming of the Messiah. The Lord Jesus was anointed with honour and protected from His very birth. Sura 3:36, (speaking about the birth of Mary) *"Then when she gave birth to her, she said, 'My Lord, I have given birth to a girl' though God knew better what she bore and the male is not like the female. And I have named her Mary and I commend her and her progeny to your protection from Satan the accused"*.

The Messiah is compared in his birth with Adam, the father of mankind. Sura 3:59, *"Jesus was to God like Adam was. God created him from dust then said, 'Be' and he was"*. Sura 7:172, *"And when your Lord brought the descendants of the children of Adam from their loins and made them testify about themselves; 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'O Yes! We bear witness lest you should say on the day of resurrection, we were heedless of this!"*

The Origin of the New Birth and a New Spiritual Regeneration

The word 'Messiah' is derived from the word 'Massah'. The Messiah was without sin and was supported by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus preferred to express His role by using the title "the Son of Man". The term 'Son of Man' occurs 69 times in the synoptic Gospels and 13 times in John. In John 12:34 the crowd equated the Son of Man with the eternal Messiah. As Stephen died he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God – clearly the Lord Jesus. (Acts 7:56)

In the Gentile World as in the Muslim World, the term 'Al Messiah' is meaningless unless it is explained. Even when it is explained, it is still rather strange. In Sura 9:31 it says, *"They take their priests and monks for lords instead of God, as well as the Messiah, the Son of Mary. But they were*

only commanded to worship one God, other than whom there is no deity and who is to be glorified beyond any association they make." So here we have a reference to the cult of saints which later affected Islam as well as affecting Catholic and Orthodox Christianity.

The Messianic concept, especially in a 'Royal Kingly' manner is not discussed in the Muslim World. The Messiah is the Son of Mary. Sura 3:45, *"The angels said, 'O Mary, God gives you good news of a Word from God named the Messiah, Jesus Son of Mary, honoured in the world and in the hereafter and one of the intimates of God'."* So the Lord Jesus is mortal just like all the other prophets. There is no stigma in His birth as his mother Mary had, but Mary guarded her chastity as a divinely chosen woman.

The title "Ibn Miriam" was given to some early Muslims by Ethiopian Christians after they had fled from persecution in Mecca as some of these "Christians" only believed in Jesus as a human being into whom some divine qualities were later infused. Sura 5:75, *"The Messiah, Son of Mary, was only a messenger. Messengers had already passed away before Him and His mother was a vivacious woman. The two of them both used to eat food. See how we clarify the signs to them, then see how deluded they are."*

This is a docetic view that the Lord Jesus was not a human being at all, but only appeared to be a man. The reason for this very damaging view is that the material creation was inherently evil. It also implies that, if this is the case, then the Lord Jesus had no mortal needs at all!

Sura 5:116 says, *"And God will say, 'Jesus, Son of Mary, did you tell people, 'Take Me and my mother as deities rather than God?' He will say, 'Glory to you! It is not for me to say what I have no right to do. If I used to say that, you would know that. You know what is my essence, while I do not know what is your essence, for you are the one who knows all secrets'."* This is clearly a statement against the idea of Mary, the mother of God. It is perhaps speaking against the elevation of the position of Mary in many Eastern Orthodox traditions.

The Death of the Lord Jesus

Most Muslims deny the death of Jesus on the Cross as a fact of history. The reality is that secular historians accept the Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus as a fact. The record in all four Gospels is that the Lord Jesus received the full hatred of the Jewish leaders and that He did so willingly as the price of loyalty to God's plan from the beginning that there should be atonement for the sin of the whole world. It is true that this most evil deed in all history – the Crucifixion – was ordained by Father God. This was recognised by the Jerusalem church as they prayed. ***"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the People of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place."*** (Acts 4:27)

In his message at Pentecost, Peter said, ***"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."*** (Acts 2:23)

Despite the good solid evidence, from both Christian and non-Christian sources contemporary with the events, that Jesus did die on the Cross, of all religious communities, Muslims alone hold that the Lord Jesus did not die on the Cross. Earlier Muslims were reluctant to make this assertion about what happened on the Cross in contrast to many later writers who spoke and wrote freely of a substitute being crucified instead of the Lord Jesus.

Interpreting this point, few have vocally opposed the general Muslim belief that Jesus escaped and was taken to heaven. This Muslim understanding of the destiny of the Lord Jesus rests on Sura 4:157, *"And on account of their saying, 'We killed the Messiah Jesus, Son of Mary, Messenger of God' whereas they did not kill him. They did not crucify him although it was made to seem thus to them. As for those who differ on this, they certainly are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it, only following conjecture. But they surely did not kill him."*

To avoid the Quran contradicting itself, all other passages concerning the death of the Lord Jesus or the possibility of His death are interpreted in the light of this single Sura.

The whole passage, in its context, is directed against the Jews and their evil intentions. One point emerges very clearly – the Jews thought that capturing Jesus and having the Romans crucify Him would be a very good way to get rid of Him. But God took Jesus to Himself.

There are two passages indicating the possibility of the Messiah being killed before His ascension. Sura 5:17, *"Those who say, 'God is the Messiah, Son of Mary' have blasphemed. Say, 'Then who can keep anything from God if God wants to annihilate the Messiah, Son of Mary, His mother and everyone on earth? It is God who has the power over the heavens and the earth and what is between them. God creates whatever God wills and God is able to do all things."*

Sura 19:33 indicates the death of the Lord Jesus. *"And peace is upon me the day I was born and the day I die and the day I am resurrected alive."* Sura 19:34 goes on to say, *"That was Jesus, son of Mary, a word of truth about which they doubt."* Muslims explain this by saying that this is an occurrence in the future – i.e. something that will happen.

Similar words are spoken to John the Baptist. Sura 19:15, *"Peace upon him, the day he was born and the day he dies and the day he will be resurrected alive."* So Muslim commentators say that Sura 4:159 refers to the death of Jesus and the time and place of death is unspecified.

Some Muslim commentators have clearly indicated that prior to His ascension, Jesus had died and He rose again alive. The word at issue is "death". Sura 3:55, *"God said, 'Jesus, I will take you unto myself and I will elevate you to Me and clear you of those who scoff and place those who follow you above those who scoff until the day of resurrection. Then you all will return to me and I will judge among you in matters on which you disagree'."* See also Sura 5:117 where, according to the Quran, Jesus is speaking, *"I never told them anything but what you instructed me, 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord'. And I was a witness to them while I sat and among them. And when you (God) took me, it was you who were watching over them and you are witness to all things."*

Ahmadiya Muslims (a sect founded in the Punjab, Pakistan in 1889) say that Jesus actually died on the Cross. In sensing the difficulties of reconciling the various Quranic texts in regard to Jesus, the Cross, His death, the resurrection and His ascension, it comes as no surprise that the commentators write about the other people involved in the circumstances surrounding these events. Most of them agree that God made someone look like Jesus and that person was crucified in the place of the Lord Jesus, there are number of differences as to who this substitute was!

Other Muslim commentators have avoided the topic, mainly because of the ethical issues involved in such a substitution. Many other Muslim commentators provide us with a variety of accounts in regard to the manner in which the Jews and the Romans were deceived in allowing Jesus to escape death and ascend directly to heaven. His eventual confrontations with His disciples are given with various observations. But the vast majority of Muslims continue to agree that Jesus was not crucified on the Cross. He did not die and He was taken alive in His body to heaven and will return to the earth in the future.

The Death of the Lord Jesus and His Resurrection

This is a vital and integral part of faith for believers. The submission of the Lord Jesus to the will of God, even to the terrible death of the Cross, is a major clue to the "mystery" of why He chose to suffer. In the Quran Jesus is called Abdallah – the slave of God. But in the Bible He is called the "Servant of God" His Father, who fully surrendered to God giving us an example of true worship, faith and obedience. This "Servant of God" who came not to be ministered to, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many is the "suffering servant" despised and rejected by men. He is the Son of God, the Messiah long promised and now present, truly human but greatly exalted for God raised Him up to Himself.

The Quranic Jesus is one whose words and person were rejected by all the Jewish leaders who had the intention to kill him. Sura 4:147, *" … and on account of their saying, 'We killed the Messiah Jesus, Son of Mary, messenger of God'; whereas they did not kill him. They did not crucify Him although it was made to seem thus for them to them. As for those who differ in this they certainly are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it, only conjecture; but they surely did not kill him."*

This doesn't say Jesus was not killed or crucified. It merely states the fact that the Jews did not kill him. It was the Roman soldiers who actually did the work. But neither the Jews nor the Romans had the power to do this. The power came from Father God above. The Crucifixion was His plan and the Lord Jesus willingly participated in the plan so that all the sins of all the world, past, present and future could be laid on Him as an atonement for the sins of the world.

There is no mention of a substitute in the Quran. The righteous prophets of the Old Testament could have been and were killed. This is mentioned several times in the Quran. The traditional Muslim interpretation of this has been that the Jews tried to kill the Lord Jesus, but were unable to do so. There is a story of one of His companions being killed in His place.

The design to kill the Lord Jesus, the Last Supper, the denial of Peter, the cup of "His death", the prayer request in the garden, the causes of the Jewish leaders' hatred of Jesus and their efforts to kill Him, details of the house where Jesus and His disciples had the Last Supper were all known. In Muslim records this house was encircled and the difference of opinion as to who was killed is commented on by Muslim scholars.

We read in Jn. 10:15-18, ***"Just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd. The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This is the command I received from My Father."*** The Lord Jesus also remarked that the Shepherd would be taken away and the sheep would be scattered and that there was a person who would betray Him.

The trial before the High Priest and the Roman Governor and the Crucifixion are all recounted by Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab and other Muslim scholars. But then they say that a period of darkness came down at the scene of the Crucifixion to protect Jesus and during this period God substituted Judas in the place of the Lord Jesus. [Compare Lk. 23:44 darkness from noon to 3 in the afternoon.]

There is another view advanced by Muslim scholars that God allowed Jesus to die for three hours after which He was raised up to heaven directly. Another view proposed by other Muslim scholars is that Jesus was crucified for three hours before the darkness descended and after a further three hours He died.

Some Muslim scholars relate that Jesus called all His disciples to a feast that was arranged the previous night and washed their feet saying, "I did this for you, so that it may become an example to you. As you know I am better than you all, but I serve you, and likewise know one of you is greater than the others. As I am going to give my life for you, you should also do likewise for each other."

There are three major sources of concepts of the idea of a substitution on the Cross:

- Tabari (Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Jarie) who wrote a book called, "The History of Rulers and Kings"
- Ibn Itafar (died 1373 A.D.) who was a Quran exegete.
- Salabi

They all mention Peter's denial three times. Ibn Itafar mentions that Jesus prayed three times that "the cup" might be taken away from Him and that Jesus perspired blood. Lk. 22:44 says, ***"And being in anguish, He*** (the Lord Jesus) ***prayed more earnestly and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."*** In the meantime the Lord Jesus asked His disciples to remain awake and in prayer. They quote Jesus saying ***"I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered"***. The meaning of the words ***"fall away"*** in Mt. 26:32-33 are seen in Peter's denial (v. 69-75) and the terrified flight of the other disciples. (v. 56)

Regarding the number of the disciples, there are three different reports: there were 12; there were 13; there were 17. When Jesus was arrested it was a Friday night or Saturday night. One of the sources says that when the house that Jesus was in with His disciples was surrounded by soldiers, Jesus got out of His bath (!) while water was dripping from His head! Simon cut off the ear of one soldier, but the Lord Jesus fixed it back on again.

Two major questions emerge: <u>Did Jesus die on the Cross</u>? and <u>Was there a substitute who suffered and died in His place?</u>

Each of the four canonical Gospels strongly affirms that the Lord Jesus died on the Cross. There is no evidence or suggestion of a second option such as substitutes dying in his place. All four Gospels agree that the Lord Jesus died on the Cross with the centurions being a witness to His death.

Mk. 15:44-45 says, ***"Pilate was surprised to hear He*** (Jesus) ***was already dead. Summoning the centurion he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion it was so, he gave the body to Joseph."*** John adds that the centurion pierced Jesus' side with a spear. (Jn. 19:34)

Muslim commentators find evidence for a substitute who was crucified from the views and writings of Gnostics and Basilites who held these views.

Gnosticism was among the most threatening problems that faced the early church in the eastern Mediterranean region. Basilides (~130 A.D.) was one of their leaders. Another leader, Satornilus, (~120 A.D.) taught that the Lord Jesus came to undo and destroy the God of the Jews. Around 200 A.D. Alexandria became a major centre for these false beliefs. Gnostics wanted a near divorce from all things related to Judaism. There were variations of Gnostics, but in general they sought to take Jesus and Christianity out of its Jewish dress and make it more Hellenistic. They believed in a dualism of good and evil. For them God was pure spirit and the supreme good. All the variations were increasingly non-Biblical.

They also produced a number of spurious Gospels such as the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene etc. In summary, the Gnostic interpretation had very little in common with Biblical faith. To these people the Lord Jesus was "a messenger" from God who would enable people to know God for themselves.

Very sadly, as the church in the Near East and North Africa became more orthodox in their beliefs, they began to 'persecute' heretics such as Gnostics and Basilites. They tended to drive them out of areas controlled by the Roman Empire into the less inhabited places such as Arabia, Babylonia etc.

Some of these heretical groups had the idea of a Divine Intelligence or 'Nus' who had appeared in human form. At the Crucifixion this intelligence changed form with Simon of Cyrene and the Roman soldiers took him and nailed him to the Cross where he died. This idea was strongly opposed by Orthodox Christians at the time of Muhammad and later, but it still survived.

Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, was also heavily influenced by Zoroaster. When he was about 26 years old he claimed he was receiving divine revelations and was a prophet. In the end he was martyred ~223 A.D. He borrowed his concepts from Zoroaster and Jesus and even incorporated a touch of Buddhism. Mani saw Jesus as the underlying light of God. He is reported to have begun all his letters with, "Mani, Apostle of Jesus Christ". He also claimed to be the Holy Spirit.

One Manichean document teaches that the devil was hoping to have the Lord Jesus crucified but was in fact himself crucified instead of Jesus. The Gospel of Barnabas was influenced by the same thinking.

So the idea of substitution was adopted by many Muslim writers. Their motive was to save Jesus from the very shameful and painful death on the Cross. It is related that one of the disciples of Jesus agreed to take His place for 30 dirhams. Again, a disciple called Judah helped the soldiers to arrest Jesus. They bound Him then mocked Him saying, "You raise the dead, cure the blind and lepers, loose yourself from your bindings. They spat upon Him. When they erected the wooden cross and crucified Him everything became dark and God caused a likeness of Jesus to come on one of His disciples."

At this point commentators are in disunity. There are three groups of opinions:

- One group mentions the name of the person on whom the resemblance to Jesus was cast. There are quite a few names: Peter Ous, Titianus, Peternus, Yahodar, Judus Vacrioda, Juds Ascarioti, Yusua ibn Candira, Gerigius and others. Each commentator is seen to be in a competition to produce a new and strange name! By doing this they clearly contradict each other and show that they themselves don't know the truth. Sura 4:156 quite rightly applies to them, *"On account of their scoffing too and their monstrous slander of Mary, only a likeness of that was shown to them."* The implication is that

the commentators are all at variance with each other concerning the surety of his view or in doubt about what really happened on the Cross. They clearly have no knowledge of the facts and merely have various speculations and surmises.

- The second group doesn't know with any degree of surety who the substitute was. Was he a disciple? Was he a man who was there just watching? Or was he attempting to deceive at the cost of his life? Perhaps he was an innocent spectator taken out of the crowd?

- The third group are unanimous on the point that whoever it was – friend or foe – was made to look like Jesus. So it doesn't matter who was crucified in the place of Jesus except for the immorality and other ethical issues involved in the substitution.

So who was crucified in the place of the Lord Jesus? There is no unanimous answer that satisfies even a few people.

Bazari relates that, "When the Jews gathered to kill Jesus, God informed Him that He would take Him up to heaven. Then Jesus asked His disciples, 'Which one of you would like to have My appearance cast upon you and be killed and enter Paradise?' One of them accepted and God put the likeness of Jesus upon him and it was this disciple that was crucified."

According to one Islamic report, the crucified person stayed on the Cross seven days. Mary, the mother of Jesus, came and wept at the foot of the Cross. On the next day Jesus descended from heaven and came and met Mary and the disciples. So Jesus wasn't crucified at all, but one who was made to resemble Him. God raised Jesus back to heaven and both the Jews and the Romans were deceived into thinking they had killed the Lord Jesus.

If there was no substitute, did the Lord Jesus really die on the Cross? Some modern Muslim writers think that Jesus was actually crucified, but did not die on the Cross. He was still alive after several hours and the disciples concealed Him in a very secret place. The two thieves were not dead either. Later Jesus appeared and died in Kashmir. There is a tomb there until this day.

Others hold that when Jesus died, it was only the death of His body – like the many martyrs who have died for their faith. Mt. 10:28 says, ***"Be not afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul."*** This is because of the many killings of the Old Testament prophets that are mentioned several times in the Quran such as Sura 3:31, *"As for those who scoff at the signs of God and kill the prophets unjustly and kill those people who enjoin justice, inform them of a painful chastisement."* See also Sura 2:91, *"And when they are told, 'Believe in what God has revealed' they say, 'We believe in what has been revealed to us and disbelieve anything else even if it is the truth, confirming what is with them'. Say. 'Why have you killed the prophets before if you are believers?"*

It appears that Muhammad himself mentioned the death of Jesus in Sura 5:117. Jesus, Son of Mary is speaking. *"I never told them anything, but what you* (God the Father) *instructed Me, 'Worship God, My Lord and Your Lord.' And I was a witness to them while I sojourned among them. And you took me. It was you who were watching over them. And you are a witness to all things."* It bears the meaning of an ordinary death and not in the future.

The Quran also denies the "adoptionist theory" of some Muslim theologians. This theory proposes that God has taken to Himself "offspring". Adoptionism is the view that the Lord Jesus was an ordinary man until His baptism, but then God "adopted" Jesus as His "Son" and conferred on Him supernatural powers. So the Lord Jesus was not eternal. He was the "Son of God" by adoption. Muslim theologians strongly hold to the fact that Jesus was born from the Virgin Mary and this is sufficient reason to call Jesus "the Son of God". This is true! But long before Mary was born, the Son of God **"is"**!

It is true that through Mary the Son of God became the Son of Man – the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. But the question remains that if we accept His virgin birth and the uniqueness of that birth to the Lord Jesus alone, isn't this enough to define for us the uniqueness of His status? God not only sends prophets, but He also comes to us in **His Word**. The name of this **Word** is the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Quran Al Messiah!