

In the Footsteps of Abraham

The Prophets of God

Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad
(Peace Be Upon Them)

Sabir Nakhuda

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The **front cover** of the book represents the imagery of the terrain likely traversed by the Prophet Abraham in his journeys across the Middle East. The image used in place of the two O's in "Footsteps" is the actual imprint of his blessed feet on stone placed in a golden metal enclosure (**see back cover**) at Islam's holiest mosque, the 'Haram Al Shareef' in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Millions of pilgrims will perform prayers in the vicinity of this enclosure, known as 'Maqam Ibrahim' (Station of Abraham) throughout the year.

Cover designed by Suleiman Bulbulia

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents, Ismail and Mariam Nakhuda, and to my 'Desi' brother, Mohammad Iqbal Nakhuda

May Allah grant them the highest abode in Paradise.

Review

This book is a commendable effort to seek some common bonds linking the religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. It reflects a good level of research as well as a passion for these religions to engage in a conversation with each other.

In a world where it is easier to see differences rather than commonalities, to destroy bridges rather than build them, this book is engaged in highlighting commonalities and building bridges that can strengthen conversations between the three religions.

Written from an Islamic perspective, the book offers understandings of Judaism and Christianity that lay the ground for some interesting conversations. The world needs far more conversations between the religions. This book provides a good point at which to start.

The Most Rev'd Dr. John W.D Holder - Retired Bishop of Barbados and retired Archbishop of the West Indies.

Preface

All praise and thanks are due to Allah for giving me the courage and determination to complete my third book entitled: “In the Footsteps of Abraham.”

The genesis of my interest in the study of comparative religions began from third form at the Modern High School. During my Scripture class, there was a difference in opinion between my ‘Scripture teacher’ and myself on some verses of the Holy Bible. My teacher became furious and ordered me to leave his class and not to return as long as he was teaching this subject. I now apologise and admit that it may not have been the difference of opinion but my rudeness that may have prompted his action.

As I could not take part in my Scripture class, I would go and sit under the tamarind tree and study what was being taught in the class. I became interested in learning more about the

(Holy) Bible and even memorised many verses of the King James Version.

Over the years, I began to study comparative religion and for many years I have been involved in interfaith dialogue with adherents of various religions, especially Christianity, as it is one of the three Abrahamic faiths besides Judaism and Islam.

God sent Prophets to every nation on the face of the earth to guide humanity to worship One God. I have chosen four of these Prophets, namely Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them) for they are the cornerstones of the three Abrahamic faiths.

Abraham is considered as the Patriarch of these faiths and given a high position of respect. They trace their origins to the first two sons of Abraham; for Jews and Christians it is his second son Isaac, and for Muslims, it is his eldest son Ismail.

Abraham was a pure monotheist; he did not associate any partners with God and became a paradigm of faith. Abraham's pure monotheism was followed by Prophets Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them). Although

they came at different times in human history, their message was submission to the will of God, because that it is the message God prescribed for humanity and that is the message Abraham followed with intense devotion and faith. They all followed the way of Abraham and encouraged their respective followers to do the same. These Prophets were, in reality, following in the footsteps of Abraham.

The purpose of writing this book is not to proselyte my faith, but to build bridges between the adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths, that make up more than half of the world's population. It is only by learning about each other's teachings that we can gain knowledge and greater understanding, thereby removing myths and misconceptions which lead to ignorance, suspicion, intolerance and absence of peace in the world.

Finally, let me thank all of the individuals who gave me valuable information. I pray that the Almighty will reward them for their kindness.

Peace be with you.

Foreword

In a world filled with disputes, hatred and even religious based violence, people are looking for ways to escape the confusion and live in peace and harmony. The younger generation is retreating to a fantastic world of cyberspace heroes and synthetic solutions. Escape, however, will never solve our problems or equip us to face our challenges. Our new direction needs to be built on living examples of courage, tolerance and the willingness to face the unknown with solid conviction and practical solutions.

People who do not know their history will be unsure of themselves in the present and unable to make the right choices for the future. Many of the great Prophets and Messengers of God, who came to all nations and tribes, have been written out of human history or forgotten in the annals of time. Their names and legacies have been covered up by opportunists who use the religious zeal of the common people to fuel their material desires and solidify their earthly empires.

Sabir Nakhuda's new book, "In the Footsteps of Abraham", comes as a breath of fresh air in an atmosphere of impending gloom and doom. His unique background of being schooled in a Christian-based school in Barbados, West Indies and being raised in a Muslim household in India and the Caribbean gives him a natural way of comparing the great world religions and drawing penetrating insights. Most of all, his thirst for the truth and tireless efforts in research have given him the ability to present the stories of four of the great Prophets and Teachers (Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad) in a clear, unbiased fashion.

Sabir's intention of building bridges, opening doors to understanding and setting an example of providing information for clarity and not debate, is an example for us all. He states, "The purpose of writing this book is not to proselytize my faith but to build bridges." That is the type of thinking that our world needs today!

This book also brings a clear Islamic reading of the lives and beliefs of the four great Prophets of Monotheism by showing the Islamic perspective on their lives, yet moving seamlessly through the Biblical and Jewish Sources. It is rare to find this methodology in presenting the life and times of the Great Ones, since it seems that their followers are focusing more

on differences than similarities. In reality these great Prophets are from the same family and the same Monotheistic belief system.

The student of history and world religion can also find important details, not known or understood by the majority of people, written in a simple, easy to grasp writing style. In today's tensions surrounding Islam and Muslims in the modern world, open minded readers can get a well-researched look at the life and times of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and connect them to the lives of Abraham, Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them).

Sabir Nakhuda needs to be commended for his penetrating look at this important history. I'm confident that this work will be a useful tool for comparative religion and a fresh reminder for students of knowledge.

Finally, I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my friend and Brother for his valuable contribution and I pray that it will be put on his scale of good deeds on the Day of Judgment.

Dr Abdullah Hakim Quick
Islamic Institute of Toronto
Canada

Table of Contents

Prophet Abraham	12
Prophet Moses (Musa)	48
Prophet Jesus (Isa)	78
Prophet Muhammad.....	166
Conclusion.....	217
Appreciation.....	219
Bibliography	220
About the Author.....	222

Prophet Abraham

(Peace Be Upon Him)

The followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam consider Abraham to be the father of ‘monotheistic religions.’ However, both the Quranic and Biblical commentators believe that Abraham was not the ‘pioneer’ of the concept of monotheism which had preceded him.

In the Quran, the only name given to Abraham is ‘Ibrahim’ and ‘Ibrahim.’ Abraham was the son of Azaar or Terah. Some scholars of exegesis suggest that he may have been called Azaar after an idol he was devoted to. The Quran does not mention Abraham’s genealogy, but mentions that God promised him an exalted station and that his descendants should be held in a very high position.

Abraham was born in or around the Samaritan City of Ur; today it is known as Al-Muqayyar or Mughair. It is about 200 miles south-east of Baghdad

in Lower Mesopotamia, which is a historical region of Iraq.

In Islam, Abraham is considered part of a line of Prophets beginning with Adam and culminating with Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). He is seen as a strict monotheist who called his people to the worship of God alone. The Quran ascribes Abraham's monotheistic call to be the 'Path of Abraham', although Prophets before him, such as Noah, called his people to the same monotheistic faith. God gave Abraham a special title of 'Khalil' or 'Friend,' a title which was not given to any other Prophet before.

The Jews referred to Abraham as 'Avraham Avinu'; 'Abraham our father.' He is considered to be their revered Patriarch or Ancestor to whom God made several promises; that he would have numberless descendants and that they would receive the land of Canaan, the 'promised land.' Abraham is also known as the first post-flood person to reject idolatry. The Jews also see him to be the embodiment of virtue, as he fulfilled all the commandments before they were revealed and was the first to come to the realisation of the One True God. He is also seen as the father of the 'chosen race.'

The followers of Christianity see Abraham as the father of all believers and a model of faith. His trust in God and sacrifices is taken as a model. His

intention to obey God by offering up Isaac is seen as a foreshadowing of God's offering of his son, Jesus. In the Bible, Abraham is known as 'Abram' at first and later God changed his name to 'Abraham.' The Quran is silent on the subject of name change, neither affirming or nullifying it.

Knowledge of God

Although Judeo-Christian scholars have differed as to when Abraham came to know God, the Quran does not mention the exact age at which Abraham received his first revelation. It seems he was young in age, as the Quran calls him a young man when his people tried to kill him for rejecting their idols.

Abraham and his Father

Abraham was a young man when he invited his father to the worship of One God and to abandon the worship of the idols. He was urging his father to follow him because he (Abraham) had knowledge which his father did not possess. Abraham said *“Why do you worship something that can neither hear nor see nor benefit you in any way? Father, I have been*

given some knowledge which has not come to you, so follow me: I shall guide you along a straight path. Father! Do not worship-Satan-for, truly, Satan is a rebel against the Most Gracious one!” (Quran 19:42-44). The reply from his father was total rejection: His father said: *“Do you reject my deities, Abraham? If you do not desist, I shall surely stone you to death. Keep out of my way!”* (Quran 19:46).

Abraham’s Call to his People to Worship One God

After endless attempts in calling his father to worship of one God and leave the worship of the false idols, Abraham began to call people of his tribe to the worship one God. He asked them: *“What is that which you worship?”* They said, *“We worship idols and will continue to cling to them.”* He asked, *“Do they hear you when you call to them? Do they help or harm you?”* They replied, *“But we found our father’s doing the same.”* (Quran 26:70-74).

Destruction of the Idols

Then the time came when preaching had to go with physical action. Abraham planned a daring and decisive blow against idolatry. He put his plan into action when the people of his tribe left their homes and travelled to a nearby town for a religious festival, where they would worship their gods. They asked Abraham to go with them but he declined. When they all had left, he followed through on his plans.

As the temple was deserted, Abraham went into the temple and approached the golden plated wooden idols which had a variety of meals left in front of them by the priests. Abraham mocked them. *“Do you not eat? What is the matter with you that you do not speak?” Then he turned on them, striking them down with his right hand.*” (Quran 37:91-93). He took an axe and smashed all of their idols except for the large one. Abraham left this one untouched and hung the axe on the shoulder of the large idol. When the people returned and saw all the idols destroyed except the large idol. They asked who did this act? Someone said that young Abraham was plotting to destroy our idols.

They brought him before the people and asked him if he is the one who destroyed their idols, and he

said No! Abraham said that it is not him but the big idol who did it, so go and ask him. The biggest one did it. Ask the other idols who did it, if they can speak. (Quran 21:62-63). They debated with Abraham but lost in the battle of dialogue and resorted to force. (Quran 21:65-68).

Abraham in the Fire

They started gathering firewood from everywhere, placed it in a huge open space and lit the fire. It turned into a huge flame and its sparks seemed to be touching the sky. Abraham was shackled in chains, placed into a catapult and thrown in the fire. God frustrated their effort and ordered the fire to be cool for Abraham. (Quran 21:69). When Abraham was in the fire, he prayed to God: *“Allah is sufficient for me and He is the best disposer of affairs.”* (Sahih Al-Bukhari). Abraham later said that the most pleasant moment of his life was when he was sitting in the fire.

Jewish Perspective

In the Jewish tradition, ‘Midrash,’ there are a number of stories about young Abraham destroying

his father's idols: "Terah was an idol manufacturer who once went away and left Abraham in charge of the store. A man walked in and wished to buy an idol. Abraham asked him how old he was and the man responded, "Fifty years old." Abraham then said "You are 50 years old and would worship a day old statue!" At this point the man left ashamed.

Later, a woman walked into the store and wanted to make an offering to the idols. So Abraham took a stick, smashed the idols and placed the stick in the hands of the largest idol. When Terah returned, he asked Abraham what happened to all the idols. Abraham told him that a woman came to make an offering to the idols. The idols argued about which one should eat the offering first, then the largest took the stick and smashed all the other idols. Terah responded by saying that they are only statues and have no knowledge, whereupon Abraham responded by saying that you deny their knowledge, yet you worship them! At this point, Terah took Abraham to Nimrod." (Genesis Rabbah Chapter 38:13).

The Quranic account is slightly different than what is mentioned in the Jewish traditions. The Quran tells that he destroyed the idols of his people at the religious altar, while the Jewish traditions tells of Abraham destroying his father's idols.

Another well known 'Midrashic' story relating

to Abraham's early life concerns his miraculous deliverance from a fiery furnace, into which he was cast by Nimrod, the notorious Babylonian-Assyrian biblical figure. One of the earliest rabbinic versions of this story is preserved in Genesis Rabbah 38:11

Abraham Debates with Nimrod

After Abraham was saved from the burning furnace by God, King Nimrod felt that he was in danger of losing his throne because he was pretending to be God. He sent for Abraham and wanted to debate with him to show his people that he was indeed God and Abraham was a liar. He asked Abraham "What can your God do that I cannot?" "My Lord is He who gives life and death!" Abraham said. "I give life and death, I can bring a person from the street and have him executed and I can grant my pardon to a person who was sentenced to death and save his life," the king responded. "Well, my Lord makes the sun rise from the east. Can you make it rise from the west?" Abraham responded. (Quran 2:258). The

king was speechless. This was another indication of the wisdom of Abraham.

Abraham and the Celestial Bodies

In advancing his call to prove to his people that the only divine being worthy of worship was Almighty God, Abraham demonstrated another example for his people to think about: “When night descended on him, he saw a star. He said, ‘This is my Lord!’ Then when it set, he said, ‘I do not love things that set.’ (Quran 6:76). Abraham put forth to them the example of the stars, seen by many as greater than humanity, possessing various powers. However, in the setting of the stars, Abraham saw their powerlessness to appear as they desired, but rather only at night.

He then gave another example of the moon, a heavenly body more beautiful, and larger than the stars, which could appear during the daytime as well: “When he saw the moon rise and spread its light, he said ‘This is my Lord!’ But when it sets, he said ‘If my Lord does not guide me, I will be one of the misguided people.’” (Quran 6:77)

Then as his final example, he focused on the sun, one of the most powerful of God’s creation, and

without which life itself is an impossibility. “Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, ‘This is my Lord! This is the greatest of all!’ Then when it set, he said, ‘My people, I disown all that you worship besides God.’ (Quran 6:78). Abraham proved to them that the Lord of the worlds, the Creator, was not to be found in the creations that their idols represented, nor the celestial bodies and that the Lord does not necessarily, need to be seen in order to be worshipped. He said “You worship idols besides God and fabricate falsehood. Those whom you worship besides God have no power to provide sustenance for you. So seek your sustenance from God and worship Him and be grateful to Him, for to Him you shall return.” (Quran 29:17).

God shows Abraham a Miracle from Dead

Birds

Abraham was a strict monotheist with unshakeable belief in God. He rejected his people and their idolatry, and later proving true to the trials he faced. His beliefs in one true God were tested by being thrown in the burning fire, but he did not lose faith. Abraham had ‘knowledge of certainty’ (Ilm Ul

Yaqeen). He knew that it is God who gives life and it is He who takes it away. But Abraham wanted to reach ‘certainty of knowledge by seeing/witnessing’ (Ayn Ul Yaqeen). He was aspiring to be stronger in his belief. Abraham said, “My Lord, show me how you give life to the dead.” God said, “Have you not believed?” He said, “Yes, but I ask only that my heart be satisfied.” God said, “Take four birds and commit them to yourself. Then after slaughtering them put on each hill a portion of them; then call them-they will come flying to you in haste. And know that God is exalted in might and wise.” (Quran 2:260). Abraham therefore witnesses the miracle of life in front of his eyes.

A similar story is told in the Bible but it is not in reference to God giving life to the dead birds but rather God’s response to Abraham’s doubtfulness whether he will truly inherit the land God promised him. The story ends abruptly as Abraham falls asleep. (Gen 15:4-12).

After years of inviting people to the worship of one God with all of his efforts and miracles, no one believed in him except his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot (Lute). God commanded Abraham to separate himself from his idol worshipping family and people and journey to a blessed land. They migrated to a

blessed land of Canaan.

“And we saved him and Lot and brought them to a land which we had blessed for all.” (Quran 21:71). It was in this land that God blessed Abraham with progeny and chose Prophets from amongst them for the guidance of humanity. (Quran 21:73).

God’s first call to Abraham is also mentioned in the book of Genesis of the Bible when God called on him to leave for the promised land. (Genesis 12:1-3).

Abraham in Canaan & Egypt

Abraham stayed in Canaan for several years travelling from city to city preaching and inviting to people to God until famine forced him and Sarah to migrate to Egypt. When they entered Egypt, Pharaoh asked Abraham about his relationship with Sarah and Abraham said that she was his ‘sister.’ What Abraham meant was that Sarah was his ‘sister’ in faith and humanity, in order to ward off Pharaoh’s passionate desire. The answer may have lessened his passion but he still took her in his harem and rewarded Abraham.

When Pharaoh ordered Sarah to act out his perverted desires, Sarah prayed to God saying, “Do not let this pagan overpower me.” (Sahi Al-Bukhari). The moment Pharaoh reached for Sarah, his hands

were paralysed. He asked to be healed (released) but only after a failed third attempt did he finally desist from his evil desires. He eventually released Sarah with gifts and a slave girl named Hagar (Hajar in Arabic). Sarah came to Abraham while he was in prayer, he asked her “What happened?” She answered, “God thwarted his bad plans in front of him, and granted me a slave girl.”

According to the Jewish tradition, “Abraham decided to take his family to Egypt until the famine ended. Aware of the immorality of the Egyptians and Sarah’s stunning beauty, Abraham hid his wife in a box, but she was discovered and taken to the king’s palace. However, G-d sent an angel to ensure that Pharaoh could not have an opportunity to defile Sarah. Whenever Pharaoh attempted to be with her, the angel would strike Pharaoh.” (Midrash Tanchuma, Leeh Leecha 5).

The story continues, “After Sarah’s miraculous escape, Pharaoh gave Abraham and Sarah many gifts, and most importantly, he gave his daughter Hagar to Sarah as a maid servant. Pharaoh told his daughter, “It is better that you be a servant in Abraham’s home than a princess in the land of Egypt.” (Midrash Breishit Rabbah 45:1).

The Bible also relates the arrival of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt and their encounter with Pharaoh.

It also relates the story of their departure from Egypt with gifts from Pharaoh, including the gift of Hagar to Sarah. (Genesis 12:11-20).

Abraham Marries Hagar and the Birth of Ishmael.

After they had returned to Canaan, Abraham and Sarah continued to be childless. Sarah told Abraham that he can have Hagar as his wife, so that they may have off-spring from her as Sarah was barren. Abraham married Hagar and was later given glad tidings of having a son whose name was Ishmael (mild, gentle and forbearing).

According to the Jewish traditions, “When Abraham was 85 years old and Sarah was 75 years old and they had been married for 60 years without having children (dates and years based on Sedar Olam & Sedar Hadrot), Sarah selflessly decided to give her maid servant Hagar to Abraham so he could have children with her.” A year later, when Abraham was 86, Hagar gave birth to a baby boy, whom she named Ishmael (G-d will hear) as G-d had commanded her. (Commentary of Rashi to Genesis 16:15).

The Bible also mentions the marriage of Abraham to Hagar and the birth of Ishmael in Genesis

Chapter 16. In regard to the marriage of Abraham to Hagar, the Bible states, “Then Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan.” (Genesis 16:3).

The Bible then mentions the birth of Ishmael, “And the angel of the Lord said to her (Hagar): ‘Behold you are with child and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction.’” (Genesis 16:11). Again in Genesis, “So Hagar bore Abraham a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.” (Genesis 16:15-16).

God’s Covenant & Circumcision

The first mention of circumcision appeared in the book of Genesis where God appeared before Abraham and promises that his descendants will inherit the land of Canaan and will become a great nation. (Genesis 17:6-8). He (God) went on to state that the price for this covenant is that Abraham, male members of his household and his descendants must all be ‘circumcised in the flesh of your skin.’ No exception. Those who choose not to obey this

commandment, will be cut off for breaking the ‘everlasting covenant.’ (Genesis 17:9-27).

However, the New Testament abrogated the precondition of physical circumcision. At the council of Jerusalem (Act. Ch. 15), the issue of circumcision was discussed. There were those who believed that circumcision was necessary for salvation while others disagreed. Many of the New Testament references to circumcision have to do with being “circumcised in heart.” (Colossians 2:9-12). Christians are therefore urged to trust in Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross. They believe that circumcision has been fulfilled in Christ and circumcision now refers to a spiritual indicator rather than physical indicator.

Judaism & Circumcision

According to the Torah, Abraham was commanded by God to circumcise himself, all male members of his household, his descendants and slaves in an everlasting covenant. (Genesis 17:9-14).

Jewish scripture states, “When Abraham was 99, G-d appeared to him and commanded him to circumcise himself as well as his off-spring. Ishmael, who was 13 at the time, allowed his father to circumcise him without any objection.” (Talmud

Sanhedrin 896). The Major Jewish Ceremony associated with the birth of a baby boy is circumcision (Brit Milah or Bris), Milah Hebrew for ‘covenant of circumcision.’ The importance of Brit Milah is such that circumcision can take place on the Sabbath or a holy day even though the drawing of blood is not normally allowed on these days under the Jewish Law.

The ritual is performed by a Mohel (circumciser), on the eighth day after birth, though it may be delayed for medical reasons. Under the Jewish Law, failure to follow the commandment given to Abraham incurs the penalty of ‘Karet’ (being cut off from the rest of the community of God).

Circumcision in Islam

Khitan or Khatan is the Islamic term for circumcision and is carried out as a recommended practice of Islamic culture by Muslims.

The Quran does not mention circumcision explicitly in any verses but it is mentioned in Hadith (traditions) literature and the Sunnah (daily practice). Scholars are not unanimous on the question of male circumcision; some maintain that it is obligatory while others say it is recommended. Those who say that it is an obligation cite a number of proofs in

evidence. One evidence cited is the saying of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) when he said, “Abraham circumcised himself at the age of eighty using a hatchet.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari and Muslim). The scholars also use the following verse of the Quran; “Then we revealed our will to you O Muhammad, saying ‘follow the religion of Abraham, the upright in faith; he was not one of the Polytheists.’” (Quran 16:123).

Abraham also circumcised his son, Ishmael but there are different opinions regarding the age when he was circumcised. One opinion suggests that it was the age when he could help his father while others state that when he reached the age of puberty. However, the majority of the scholars agree that he was 13 years old when he was circumcised by his father, Abraham. Today, Islam is the largest single religious group which the practice of circumcision is widespread.

Hagar & Ishmael Leave Hebron

When Ishmael was a baby, God again chose to test the faith of Abraham by commanding him to take Hagar and Ishmael to a dried barren infertile land of Becca (now known as Mecca), over 750 miles (1,222km) south-east of Hebron.

The Quran affirms that this was yet another test for Abraham leaving his family in the wilderness, but Judeo-Christian traditions claim it was a result of the rage of Sarah who requested Abraham to banish Hagar and Ishmael when she (Hagar) saw Ishmael 'mocking' at Isaac after he was weaned. (Gen 21:8-16). The above Genesis passages suggest that Ishmael was a teenager at the weaning ceremony of Isaac. It would, therefore, be very difficult for Hagar to carry a teenager hundreds of miles on her shoulders until she reached the wilderness of Paran and laying him down 'under one of the shrubs.' In the above verses Ishmael is referred to by a different word than the one used to describe his banishment (a matter of contradictions). This also indicates that Ishmael was possibly a baby rather than a teenager.

Abraham arrived in the wilderness of Paran (Becca Valley) with Hagar and Ishmael and left them there with a skin of water and leather sack full of

dates. As Abraham started walking away from them, Hagar became anxious and started to chase him. “O Abraham, where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person, whose company we can enjoy, nor is there anything here?” Abraham hurried his pace. Finally, Hagar asked, “Has God asked you to do so?” Suddenly, Abraham stopped, turned around and said “Yes!” Feeling a degree of comfort in this answer, Hagar asked, “O Abraham, to whom are you leaving us?” “I am leaving you to God’s care,” Abraham replied. Hagar then submitted to her Lord, “I am satisfied to be with God.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari).

While Hagar traced her way back to Ishmael, Abraham carried on walking until he reached a narrow pass in the mountain where he would not be seen. He stopped and supplicated in prayer; “O Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley near your Sacred House, Lord so that they might establish their prayers. So make people’s hearts incline towards them and provide them with fruits so that they may be grateful.” (Quran 14:37).

The above prayer of Abraham certifies that in order to fulfil the Prophetic mission of building the Sacred House of God, where prayers would be established, it was incumbent for him to leave a part of his family in this barren wilderness. He was certain

that this uninhabited land will be populated and fruitful. His prayer also indicates that those whom he is leaving behind will find sustenance in their new environment.

Abraham departed, leaving Hagar and her child in the wilderness. Hagar then sat down, breast-fed Ishmael, ate some dates and drank water. Soon she ran out of dates and water and there was also no milk left to breast feed the child. As Ishmael started crying from hunger, Hagar's desperation increased, unable to quench her thirst or to breast feed her son, Hagar began searching for water, leaving Ishmael under a tree. She began climbing the rocky incline of a nearby mountain, running between the two mountains, now known as Safaa and Marwa, seven times looking for a sign of water or help (this running between Safaa and Marwa is now symbolised by all the pilgrims at Hajj). Then looking in the valley, she saw angel Gabriel (Gibrael) standing next to Ishmael digging into the ground next to the child and water came out gushing. Hagar started by making a pool around the gushing water and shouting "Zam-zam!" (Stop, stop!). This well of Zam-zam is still providing water for the pilgrims at Mecca.

Narrated by Ibn Abbas, the Prophet said; "May Allah bestow His mercy on the mother of Ishmael! Had she not hastened (to fill her water-skin with

water from the Zam-zam well), Zam-zam would have been a stream flowing on the surface of the earth.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari). It was not long afterwards that the tribe of Jurhum, moving from Southern Arabia, stopped by the Becca Valley after seeing the unusual sight of birds flying in its direction, which could only mean the presence of water, and found a woman and a child. They asked Hagar’s permission to camp there and she said yes but she made it clear that they had no rights over the water. They agreed, that’s how the tribe of Jurhum came to settle in the area, and that was the beginning of human settlement in the Becca Valley (Mecca). The tribe of Jurhum raised Ishmael and taught him the Arabic language. They loved him very much due to his virtues and married him to one of their daughters. Hagar later passed away and Ishmael continued to live with them.

A similar account of the well is given in the Bible. In this account, the reason for moving away from baby Ishmael was to avoid seeing him die from thirst rather than searching for help. Then after the baby had begun crying loudly with thirst, she asked God to relieve her of seeing him die. The appearance of the water was said to have been in response to the crying of Ishmael rather than her supplication. The Bible also states that the well was in the wilderness of Paran, where mother and child dwelt afterwards.

(Genesis 21:16-21).

The Judaic tradition also mentions the journey of Hagar and Ishmael; Abraham gave Hagar and Ishmael some food and a flask of water and sent them on their way. As they wandered in the desert of Be'er Sheva, Ishmael became very feverish and dehydrated. His mother, unwilling to witness his death placed him under a bush and waited in the distance. Both mother and son began to pray to G-d. At that moment, the angels turned to G-d and asked, "Will you cause a well of water to spring up for him whose descendants will let your children perish with thirst?" But G-d replies, "Was Ishmael at this moment- righteous or wicked?" When the angels proclaimed him righteous, for he had repented, G-d continued, "I judge man according to his current deeds." So God caused a well of water to appear and Ishmael was saved." (Midrash Breishit Rabbah 53:14).

Hagar

The figure of Hagar (Hajar in Arabic) that come from various traditions, is that of a woman of exceptional faith, love, fortitude, and strength of character. Once she hears from Abraham that God commanded her and her infant son to be left in the

wilderness, she does not beg Abraham not to abandon her and Ishmael. Instead, she surrendered immediately and totally to what she believes to be God's will who will never neglect her. Hagar is viewed by the Muslims as the pioneer woman who led the way to the establishment of a new civilisation. She is not only seen as the mother of Ishmael but of all those who later became the followers of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), a descendant of Prophet Ishmael (p.b.u.h). She has achieved one of the highest places of honour in the Islamic tradition.

A Jewish writer, Nissan Mindel, states "Hagar, as our sages picture her, was a woman of humility and piety. Indeed, few others were privileged to have an angel of G-d speak to them twice, and produce miracles for them." (Writing in Kehat Publication Society).

Abraham Visited Ishmael

The Biblical account in Genesis 21:8-14 tends to give the impression that Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away in order to appease the jealous wrath of Sarah and had nothing more to do with them.

On the contrary, the story as told in the books of both Islamic and Jewish traditions show that

Abraham had a continuing relationship with Ishmael and his family, and periodically visited them. The following narration is in the Islamic Tradition; “After Ishmael’s mother had died, Abraham came after Ishmael’s marriage in order to see his family that he had left before, but he did not find Ishmael there. When he asked Ishmael’s wife about him, she replied, “He has gone in search of our livelihood.” Then he asked her about their way of living and their condition, and she replied, “We are living in misery; we are living in hardship and destitution,” complaining to him. He said, “When your husband returns, convey my salutations to him and tell him to change the threshold of the gate (of his house).” When Ishmael came, he seemed to have felt something unusual, so he asked his wife, “Has anyone visited you?” She replied, “Yes, an old man of so-and-so description came and asked about our state of living, and I told him that we were living in a hardship and poverty.” On that Ishmael said, “Did he advise you of anything?” She replied, “Yes, he told me to convey his salutation to you and to tell you to change the threshold of your gate.” Ishmael said, “It was my father, and he has ordered me to divorce you. Go back to your family.” So, Ishmael divorced her and married another woman from amongst them (i.e. Jurhum). Then Abraham stayed away from there for a

period as long as Allah wished and called on them again but did not find Ishmael. So, he came to Ishmael's wife and asked her about Ishmael. She said, "He has gone in search of our livelihood." Abraham asked her, "How are you getting on?" Asking her about their sustenance and living. She replied, "We are prosperous and well-off (i.e., we have everything in abundance)." Then she thanked Allah. Abraham said, "What kind of food do you eat?" She replied, "Meat." He said, "What do you drink?" She said, "Water." He said, "O Allah bless their meat and their water." The Prophet added, "At that time they did not have grain, and if they had grain, he would have also invoked Allah to bless it." The Prophet added, "If somebody has only these two things as his sustenance, his health and disposition will be badly affected unless he lives in Mecca." Then Abraham said to Ishmael's wife, "When your husband comes, give my regards to him and tell him that he should keep firm the threshold of his gate." When Ishmael came back, he asked his wife, "Did anyone call on you?" She replied, "Yes, a good-looking old man came to me." So she praised him and added, "He asked about you, and I informed him, and he asked about our livelihood and I told him that we were in a good condition." Ishmael asked her, "Did he give you any piece of advice?" She said, "Yes, he told me to give his regards to you and

ordered that you should keep firm the threshold of your gate.” On that Ishmael said, “It was my father, and you are the threshold (of the gate). He has ordered me to “keep you with me.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari-583).

Jewish tradition also mentions Abraham’s visit to Ishmael; “Three years after he had sent Ishmael away, Abraham went to visit his son, swearing to Sarah that he would not dismount his camel in Ishmael’s vicinity. Abraham arrived midday and met Ishmael’s wife, a Moabite woman. He asked her, “Where is Ishmael?” She replied, “He and his mother went to bring fruits and dates from the wilderness.” “Give me some bread and water,” Abraham asked her, “for I am tired from the rigours of the journey through the wilderness.” “I have neither water nor bread,” she answered. He told her, “When Ishmael comes, say to him, an old man came from the land of Canaan to see you and he said that you should change the threshold of your house, which is not good for you.” When Ishmael returned from the wilderness, she told him what had happened. Ishmael understood his father’s message and he sent his mother to find a wife for him from his father’s house.”

Three years later, Abraham again went to visit his son and again swore to Sarah that he would not get off his camel while there. Abraham arrived at

midday and found Ishmael's new wife, Fatima. He asked her, "Where is Ishmael?" She replied, "He and his mother went to herd camels in the wilderness." "Please give me some bread and water," he asked of her, "for I am tired from the rigours of the journey through the wilderness." She brought forth bread and water and gave them to him. Abraham stood and prayed to G-d, and Ishmael's house was filled with bounty and blessing. When Ishmael came back, his wife told him what had happened, and he understood that his father still loved him, even though he was a bandit." (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 29).

Sacrifice of Ishmael

God commanded Abraham through a dream to sacrifice his son. Abraham consulted his son, Ishmael, to see if he understood what he was commanded by God. The son responded by telling Abraham to do what he has been commanded by God and that he will be steadfast. (Quran 37:100-102).

Abraham then took his son to the place where he was to be sacrificed and laid him face down. Just as Abraham's knife was poised to descend, a voice stopped him and told him that he had fulfilled the dream. Indeed, it was the greatest test of all, the

sacrificing of his ‘only son.’ (Quran 37:103-106).

Ishmael was ransomed with a ram.

On the contrary, Judeo-Christian scriptures clearly mentioned Isaac and not Ishmael who is the one who was to be sacrificed. “And he said, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” (Genesis 22:2).

Islamic scholars are of the view that the ‘only son’ who was to be sacrificed by Abraham was Ishmael and not Isaac as Ishmael was born some thirteen years prior to Isaac’s birth and hence, the ‘only son’ of Abraham for thirteen years. They further assert that the good news of the birth of Isaac was given by the angels to Abraham and Sarah only after Abraham returned from the Becca Valley (Mecca). The Quran states, “But when he saw that they made no move to eat, he found this strange and became afraid of them. They said, “Do not be afraid, for we have been sent to the people of Lot.” His wife, who was standing nearby, laughed when we gave her the good news of Isaac, and after Isaac, Jacob.” (Quran 11:70-71).

The book of Genesis also records the birth of Isaac given by the angels to Abraham and Sarah.

“Then they said to him, “where is Sarah your wife?”

Abraham said, “Here in the tent.” And He said, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.” (Genesis 18:9-10).

As all scholars of Judaism, Christianity and Islam agree that Ishmael was the first born of Abraham, it would, therefore, not be appropriate to call Isaac ‘only son’ of Abraham. The Jewish and Christian traditions have disregarded Ishmael in favour of Isaac because they do not give to Hagar the same status of being Abraham’s ‘wife’ as they do to Sarah. They also assert that since Ishmael was born to a ‘concubine,’ he is not a legitimate son.

Conversely, God himself, considers Ishmael as a valid heir. In many places of the Bible Ishmael is mentioned as a ‘seed’ and ‘first born’ of Abraham. “Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed.” (Genesis 21:13). It is also written in the book of Deuteronomy, “If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the first born son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day of bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, who is truly the

firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.”
(Deuteronomy 21:15-17).

Building the Ka’ba

Abraham again visited Mecca and told his son, Ishmael that God have commanded them to build the “House of Allah.” It is narrated by Ibn Abbas in Sahih Al-Bukhari 583 Vol. 4; “Then Abraham stayed away from them for a period as long as Allah wished, and called on them afterwards. He saw Ishmael under a tree near ZamZam, sharpening his arrows. When he saw Abraham, he rose up to welcome him (and they greeted each other as a father does with his son or a son does with his father). Abraham said, “O Ishmael! Allah has given me an order.” Ishmael said, “Do what your Lord has ordered you to do.” Abraham asked, “Will you help me?” Ishmael said, “I will help you.” Abraham said, “Allah has ordered me to build a house here,” pointing to a hillock higher than the land surrounding it.” The Prophet (p.b.u.h) added, “Then they raised the foundations of the House (i.e the Ka’ba). Ishmael brought the stones and Abraham was

building, and when the walls became too high, Ishmael brought this stone and put it for Abraham who stood over it and carried on building, while Ishmael was handing him the stones, and both of them were saying, “O our Lord! Accept (this service) from us, verily, You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.” The Prophet (p.b.u.h) added, “Then both of them went on building and going round the Ka'ba saying “O our Lord! Accept (this service) from us, verily, You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.” (Quran 2:127). Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) said, “Indeed this place has been made sacred by God the day He created the heavens and the earth and it will remain so until the Day of Judgement.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

Abraham also prayed that a Prophet be raised from the progeny of Ishmael; “Our Lord, send forth to them a messenger of their own to recite Your revelations to them, to teach them the scripture and wisdom, and purify them. You are the mighty, the wise one.” (Quran 2:129). God accepted Abraham’s prayer and sent among them (Arabs) a Prophet (Muhammad) who was the seal of all Prophets. His message is for all people regardless of time and place, and irrespective of colour, language or ethnicity.

Hajj (Pilgrimage)

Yearly, Muslims from around the world gather from all walks of life at Mecca to answer the call to pilgrimage. This rite is called Hajj and it commemorates many events of God's 'Khalil' (friend) Abraham and his family. After circumambulating (Tawaf) the Ka'ba (cube-like structure built by Abraham and Ishmael) seven times, Muslims pray behind the 'station of Abraham', known as 'Muqam-e-Ebrahim', the stone on which Abraham stood to build the Ka'ba. Muslims then drink from the same well, ZamZam, which flowed in answer to the prayer of Abraham and Hagar, providing sustenance for Ishmael and Hagar. The rite of running/walking between the two mountains of Safaa and Marwa, called 'sa'y' (seeking/searching) in commemoration of Hagar's desperate search for water when she and Ishmael were alone in the wilderness of the Becca Valley (Mecca). The sacrifice of an animal in Mina (6.8km from Mecca) during Hajj and by Muslims around the world, emulating the example of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son for God's sake. Lastly, the symbolic stoning of the stone pillars at 'Jumarat' (the place of pebbles) at Mina exemplifies Abraham's rejection of satanic temptations to prevent

him from sacrificing Ishmael.

The story of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael, which is commemorated and celebrated by the world Muslim community on the occasion of 'Eid-al-Adha' (feast of sacrifice), remains an enduring source of strength and courage, hope and faith, not only for Muslims, but also for Jews, Christians and others who can understand its (Hajj) symbolism and what it can mean for those who consider themselves seekers and servants of God.

Scrolls of Abraham

The scrolls of Abraham known as the Suhuf of Ibrahim are believed to have been one of the earliest scriptures which were revealed to Prophet Abraham from God which he would have transmitted in writing. Muslim scholars have generally agreed that no scrolls of Abraham survived till today.

The 87th chapter of the Quran (87:9-19) concludes, saying that the subject matter of the Surah (Chapter) has been in the earlier scriptures of Abraham and Moses. It is indicative of what was in the previous scriptures. Similarly, another Surah (Chapter) of the Quran (53:36-62) also mentions some more subject matters of the earlier scriptures of

Abraham and Moses.

Qualities of Abraham

In the Quran, Abraham is presented by God as a role model for all mankind in the matter of their religion and religious quest. God explained the nature of the religion of Abraham; that he did not belong to any tribes. His religion was to submit himself to the will of God without forming any set of fixed ideologies. The Quran states, “People of the Book, why do you dispute about Abraham when the Torah and Gospel were only sent down after him. Do you not use your reason? You are those disputed about things of which you had some knowledge. Must you now argue about things of which you have no knowledge? God knows, but you do not know. Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was an upright man, one who had surrendered himself to God. He was not one of those associate partners with God. Surely, the people who are closest to Abraham are those who follow him and this Prophet (Muhammad), and those who believe in him. God is the guardian of the believers.” (Quran 3:65-68).

God has included Abraham as one of the five great Prophets who are mentioned in the Quran; “He

has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which we have revealed to you, (O Muhammad), and what we enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus- to establish the religion and not be divided therein.” (Quran 42:13).

Marriage & Death

After the death of Sarah, Abraham married a third time to Keturah (Qanturah) who bore him six children. Then Abraham fell ill and died at the age of 175 years. Ishmael returned to Hebron to bury his father with his brother Isaac in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, Hebron West Bank.

The book of Genesis also relays the burial of Abraham, “And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite.” (Genesis 25:9).

It is stated by the Jewish scholars that when it came to bury their father Abraham, Ishmael honoured his brother Isaac by letting him go first in the grave.

Prophet Moses

(Musa)

(Peace Be Upon Him)

Prophet Moses or Musa in Arabic, is revered in Islam as ‘Kalim U Allah’, meaning the one who talked with God (Quran 4:164). He is loved and respected as a messenger. He is a Prophet of God, who is mentioned the most among the Prophets in the Quran. He is among the ‘Ulu’l-azm ’Prophets. These are Prophets that are favoured by God and are described in the Quran to be endowed with strong will and perseverance.

Islamic tradition describes Moses as being given two miracles, the glowing hand and his staff. The staff could be turned into a snake/serpent. He is also seen

as a Prophet who was specially favoured by God. Unlike other Prophets who received revelation from God through the intervening angel, Moses received the Torah (Tawrat) directly from God.

Moses was born into a family of Israelites in Egypt and was from the tribe of Levi. The name of Moses' father was Imran, which is similar to Amran in Hebrew. Moses was described by Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) who said, "On the night of my ascent (Miraj) to heaven, I saw Moses, who was a tall brown curly haired man as if he were one of the men of Shnu'ah tribe." (Al-Bukhari & Muslim).

The life of Moses is often described as parallel to that of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). He is considered in Islamic tradition as the most obvious forerunner of Muhammad (p.b.u.h).

In Judaism, Moses is considered the most important Prophet. The name Moses in the Greek translation of Hebrew name Moshe (which means 'drawn out'). Moses is called Moshe Rabbena (Moses our teacher) in Hebrew. He is said to have received his name from Pharaoh's daughter. She named him Moshe saying, "I drew him out (meshitihu) of the water." (Exodus 2:10).

Moses is regarded as the author of the first five books known as 'Torah 'or 'Chameesha Choomshey Torah 'in Hebrew. These five books are Bresheit

(Genesis), Shemot (Exodus), Vayicra (Leviticus), Bamidbar (Numbers) and Devarim (Deuteronomy). The Jews consider Moses to be the greatest Prophet who ever lived. Despite his importance, Judaism emphasises that Moses was a human being and is therefore not to be worshipped. Only God is worthy of worship in Judaism.

In Christianity, Moses is mentioned throughout the New Testament more than any other Old Testament Prophet. He is seen as the law giver who exemplifies a man of God. For example, Moses features prominently in the famous story Jesus tells concerning Lazarus and the rich man in the gospel of Luke.

In many New Testament stories, Moses is held up as an example and a representative of God's will. Moses is also seen as a symbol of God's Law, as reinforced and expounded on in the teachings of Jesus. New Testament writers often compare Jesus' words and deeds with Moses' to explain Jesus' mission.

Moses is a central figure in both Judaism and Christianity. He led the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, communicated with God and received the ten commandments. Moses is also known as both a religious leader and law giver.

The children of Israel (Bani-Israel) were living

under a very harsh and oppressive condition imposed by the Pharaoh of Egypt who was very arrogant and haughty, and referred to himself as a god. He called his people and told them, “I am your supreme lord.” (Quran 79:24).

Moses was born into one of the most challenging times in the history of Israelites in Egypt. The tyrant Pharaoh was killing the male children of the Israelites because he had heard the beliefs of the Israelites that there will arise a male child from the progeny of Abraham who will destroy his kingdom. Pharaoh reacted with arrogance and ordered that all male children born to the Israelites must be killed. His ministers advised him that this would lead to the complete elimination of the Israelites thereby leading to the economic ruin for Egypt. How, they asked Pharaoh, would the empire function without slaves and servants? There will be no Israelites left to do their work and the Egyptians may have to do the work themselves. Pharaoh changed his order and issued a decree that from now on, male Israelite children will be killed one year and those born the following year will be spared.

It is stated that Aaron (Harun in Arabic) was born in the year of Pardon while Moses was born in the year where the male children were killed. Moses' mother was very worried from the time she became

pregnant with Moses for fear that her child would be put to death. Moses' mother was a righteous woman, pious and God-fearing. Therefore, in her darkest hour, she turned to God and he inspired her to cast him (Moses) into the river. (Quran 28:7).

Moses' mother put her trust in God. She made a waterproof basket, placed her tiny son inside and put him into the Nile river. Moses' sister was told by her mother to follow the basket as it sailed through the reeds without anyone noticing her.

The basket with baby Moses sailed down the Nile river unnoticed until it stopped at Pharaoh's palace. Moses' sister watched in fear as someone from Pharaoh's household picked up the basket from the river. Although the Quran is silent on who picked up Moses from the river, many Islamic scholars are of the view that one of Pharaoh's slave girls picked up Moses and took the basket to Asiyah, wife of Pharaoh. Asiyah, unlike her proud and arrogant husband, was a righteous woman. The Quran describes her as a believer and a role model. (Quran 66:11).

When Asiyah opened the basket and saw a bright-faced boy, she immediately fell in love with him. When Pharaoh came and saw the child, he immediately commanded his guards to slay the baby. Asiyah intervened and asked Pharaoh to give the child as a gift to her, and as they had no children, the child

will be a “joy to the eye for me and you! Do not slay him.” (Quran 28:8).

Pharaoh accepted the child, who was part of God’s plan to bring down the royal house. Far from abandoning him, God set Moses up as a royal son of Egypt. He provided Moses with the strongest human support by the very person who sought to kill him.

The Book of Exodus (Exodus 2:5) states that it was Pharaoh’s daughter who picked up the basket with Moses from the Nile river. She later called his name ‘Moses’, saying, “Because I drew him out of the water.” (Exodus 2:10).

After baby Moses was taken inside the Pharaoh’s palace, Asiyah summoned wet nurses to the palace to suckle the child. However, he did not feed from any foster mother. This was a cause of great distress; the royal palace was in turmoil, the women of the household of Pharaoh were fussing over Asiyah and her newborn baby, therefore no one noticed the presence of Moses’ sister amongst the servants. She mustered up all her courage and went forward offering a solution. She told them that she knew a woman who would suckle the child affectionately. She was ordered to rush and bring the woman to the palace; she quickly left and fetched her mother. When Moses was handed to his real mother, he settled immediately and began to suckle as soon as she put

him to her breast. (Quran 28:13).

Some scholars believe that Moses and his mother returned to their home among the children of Israel. Others, including Ibn Kathir, believe that Moses and his mother lived in the palace while she was breast feeding him and that as he grew up, she was given the privilege of visiting him. The Quran and Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) are silent about this period of Moses' life.

Moses had many privileges in Egypt because of his relation to Pharaoh's household. One day while walking the city, Moses saw two men fighting; one was an Israelite and the other a Coptic Egyptian. The Israelite recognised Moses and asked him for help and Moses assisted him and struck the Egyptian one powerful blow which killed him. The next day, Moses saw the same Israelite man involved in yet another fight with a Coptic Egyptian. Moses realised that the Israelite was a troublemaker and approached him to warn him of his behaviour. When the Israelite saw Moses walking towards him, he got scared and cried out, "Would you kill me as you killed the wretch yesterday?" The Egyptian heard the remark and reported it to the authorities. Pharaoh sent his men to arrest him but before the men could catch him, Moses hastily left the city heading into the desert toward the town of Midian, located on the eastern

shore of the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea. He walked and walked until his sandals wore away and the hot sand burned the soles of his feet. Moses was exhausted, hungry and thirsty but he continued walking until he arrived at the well of Midian where the people of the town would draw water for themselves and their flocks. Moses saw men watering their flocks while two women, who also came to water their flocks, were trying to keep their flocks away from the well. The Bible states there were seven sisters who came to water their flocks. (Exodus 2:16).

When Moses enquired as to why they are not drawing water for their flocks, the woman said that they could not water their flocks until all the men left the well so as not to get involved in a dispute with them (men). They added that they had to come to draw water as their father is old and is not able to do it. Moses took the women's flock to the water hole and drew water for them.

Moses was totally exhausted. He went and sat under the shade of the tree and prayed, "Lord, I am truly in need of whatever blessing you may send down on me." (Quran 28:24). No sooner had he finished his supplication to God, one of the two women came to Moses and told him that their father, having heard their story, would like to reward him for his kindness and invite him to their home. Moses

accepted the invitation and went to see the elderly man, who some Islamic scholars believe to be Prophet Shuaib, although there are no authentic sources either confirming or denying this belief. In the Bible, the father of the women is known as 'Jethro', a high priest of Midian. (Exodus 3:1).

Moses related his story to the elderly man who after listening to Moses' story relieved his fears and told him that he was now in Midian and safe from the Egyptian authorities.

One of the daughters suggested to her father to hire Moses as he was strong and trustworthy. The father agreed but also gave one of his daughters in marriage to Moses provided that he worked for him (father) between eight to ten years. Moses agreed to the terms. (Quran 28:26-28). Moses married one of the women he had helped at the water hole and spent the next ten years working with his father-in-law and raising his own family.

After working for his father-in-law for ten years, Moses was longing to see his family in Egypt. He started his return journey with his family on a cold, dark night across the desert back to Egypt. Moses got lost and could not see anything. While wondering in the night, Moses saw what appeared to be a fire burning in the direction of Mount Tur Sinai (Sinai). He told his family to stay where they were.

He had hoped to get burning fire from it or to get some direction from the people. (Quran 20:10).

Moses Appointed A Prophet

Moses walked toward the fire and as he came close to it, a voice called out, “Moses, I am your Lord. Take off your sandals, for you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa. I have chosen you. So listen to what is being revealed. I am God. There is no deity save me; so worship me alone, and say your prayers in my remembrance.” (Quran 20:11-14). The Book of Exodus also records the above incident. (Exodus 3:2-6).

God asked Moses about his wooden staff which he always carried with him. Moses said that he used it to pull down leaves from the trees to feed his flocks and it served other purposes as well. God told him to throw down his staff, so when Moses threw it down, it turned into a snake wiggling from side to side. Moses was afraid and he ran away without looking back. God told him to turn back and hold the staff and it will return to its former shape. God then asked Moses to put his hand into his armpit and then asked him to take it out and when he did so, the hand turned shining white without any blemish. (Quran

27:10-12). These two signs are from among the nine signs God gave to Moses for Pharaoh and his people.

The Bible also records Moses asking God for proof, which would verify his claim as a Prophet when he goes to Pharaoh of Egypt. (Exodus 4:1-7).

Mission of Moses & Aaron

When God asked Moses to go to Pharaoh as His messenger, Moses asked God to send his brother Aaron (Haroun in Arabic) with him as his assistant because Aaron may be able to convey the message to Pharaoh in a better way as he was more eloquent in speech than him. (Quran 20:24-36).

The mission of Moses and Aaron was to go to Pharaoh with the Divine message and to invite him and his people to the way of God and toward His worship alone. Their other task was to tell Pharaoh to release the children of Israel from their bondage. They were to support their claim by two great miracles. (Quran 7:104-112).

Moses spoke kindly to Pharaoh about the existence of God, His mercy and His paradise. When the message of the worship of one God was given to Pharaoh, he totally rejected the existence of God out of pride and arrogance. He claimed godhood for

himself knowing within his heart that God exists.

Pharaoh and his chiefs considered the two miracles of Moses as ‘magic.’ Pharaoh decided to challenge the ‘magic’ of Moses with the magic of his magicians and asked Moses to choose a day and time so that everyone could attend and judge for themselves who is right. Moses chose the famous, festival day in Egypt known as ‘the festival of Atonement.’ On that day, the streets would be crowded with people who would be able to witness the events. Moses was sure of the divine mission and had the confidence of defeating Pharaoh’s magicians. Pharaoh would be exposed to the truth that there is none worthy of worship except God alone and that there would be no excuse for Pharaoh to disbelieve. Before the start of the contest, Moses went to Pharaoh’s magicians and rebuked them for exercising magic against God’s signs and warned them of divine punishment. Moses asked the Pharaoh’s magicians to perform first. They threw their sticks and ropes in the name of Pharaoh and the ground was filled with serpents wriggling on the ground. The crowd looked in amazement. Moses was afraid seeing that the people were bewitched by the spell of the magicians but he was steadfast in his mission, confident that God will make his task easy. God then told Moses to throw down his staff on the ground and it turned into

a huge serpent, quickly devouring all of the illusionary serpents that covered the ground. (Quran 7:117). People were astonished and began to cheer and shout for Moses. Pharaoh's magicians were astonished.

The magicians began their day as disbelievers interested in only riches and fame but within a few hours they recognised the truth. They fell in prostration to God, the Lord of the world and repented for their erroneous ways. They proclaimed in front of the people without fearing any punishment from Pharaoh and said, "We believe in the Lord of the universe, the Lord of Moses and Aaron!" (Quran 7:121-122).

Pharaoh was full of anger and threatened the magicians, saying that he would cut off their hands and feet and crucify them. They challenged Pharaoh to punish them in whatever way he wished, even by crucifixion and they prayed that God would cause them to die in a state of submission. (Quran 7:124-126).

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it was not Moses who threw down his staff, but his brother Aaron who was asked by Moses to throw down his rod which swallowed the rods of Pharaoh's magicians. (Exodus 7:8-12).

Pharaoh returned to his palace full of anger and

rage. He quarrelled with his ministers and advisors and continued to believe himself to be god. He called his chief minister commanding him to build a tower for him so that he can look upon the God of Moses. (Quran 40:36-37). Pharaoh ordered more killing, plundering and imprisoning anyone who spoke out against his oppression. The Israelites were victimised because of their association with Moses. They complained to Moses that they were ill-treated when he was born and he has caused them to be oppressed once again.

God commanded Moses to warn Pharaoh that he and his people would suffer a severe punishment if the Israelites were not set free but Pharaoh continued to be stubborn and remained in his false practices and beliefs. The signs of God's power began to descend. God afflicted Egypt with severe drought, flood, locusts, lice and frogs among other kinds of suffering. Whenever the Egyptians went through the trial, they promised to change their ways and believe in God and also free the children of Israel. However, they broke every promise and continued in their evil ways. Then the final sign of God's anger was revealed, the water of the Nile river turned to blood only for the Egyptians. Even after this most devastating sign, the Egyptians were unrepentant. (Quran 7:130-136).

The Book of Exodus mentions ten plagues

upon the Egyptians to convince them to release the children of Israel. However, the Quran does not mention every single plague mentioned in Exodus (Chapter 7-11).

The children of Israel led by Moses and Aaron began preparing to leave Egypt. However, according to the Biblical sources, God instituted and regularised the Jewish Passover with the children of Israel before their departure from Egypt. God also commanded the Israelites to ask the Egyptians for jewellery of gold and silver, and surprisingly, the Egyptians give it to them. (Exodus Chapter 12 & 13).

The children of Israel left under the cover of darkness carrying their possessions and heading across the desert toward the Red Sea. When Pharaoh heard about the departure of the Israelites, he was extremely angry and commanded the chief of the army to make preparation to follow them and punish them. When Pharaoh and his army moved closer and closer and the Israelites could see the dust stirred up by Pharaoh's army, they complained to Moses about their fear. He told them not to fear for God was with them.

As Pharaoh and his army drew closer and closer, God commanded Moses to strike the sea with his staff. He did as he was commanded and it parted into twelve paths, each path for each tribe of

Israelites. The water of the Red Sea stood like a mountain on each side and then the wind blew drying the path for the children of Israel to pass through it. When the last Israelite had crossed, Pharaoh and his army were still following the Israelites into the dry seabed corridor. When all of them were in the dry seabed, God commanded Moses to strike the sea with his staff and as soon as Moses obeyed, the sea returned to its former state and drowned Pharaoh and his army (Quran 2-:77-78). As death approached Pharaoh, he proclaimed his belief in God and began to repent for his evil deeds but it was too late for any repentance to be accepted and he was drowned with his army.

Islamic scholars state that some Israelites were doubtful of Pharaoh's death. Some of them even said that he could not die. So God commanded the sea to raise his body high on the wave. He was wearing his armour with which he was recognised, and therefore, his death was confirmed. (Quran 10:92).

This raising of Pharaoh with his full body armour was a sign not only for the Israelites but a sign for a coming generation that it was God who destroyed Pharaoh and his kingdom.

The book of Exodus also relates the story of the children of Israel getting permission from Pharaoh to leave Egypt but changed his mind and pursued them

with his army. When the Israelites saw Pharaoh with his army coming toward them, they were afraid and began to chastise Moses. (Exodus 14:10-12). God then commanded Moses to strike the Red Sea with his staff and the sea parted, allowing Moses and the Israelites to pass on the dry land and reach the other side of the sea. (Exodus 14:21-22). Pharaoh and his army began to follow the Israelites, but the sea returned to its normal position and Pharaoh and his army drowned in the Red Sea. (Exodus 14:23-29).

In The Wilderness

On their journey out of Egypt, the Israelites saw people worshipping idols and they wanted to be like these people whom the Israelites perceived to be happy. They asked Moses to let them have an idol that they can worship, completely forgetting the miracles of God they had earlier witnessed. (Quran 7:138-141).

God favoured the children of Israel in many ways. He led them safely out of Egypt and they had witnessed the drowning of Pharaoh and his army. When they needed water, God commanded Moses to strike the rock and twelve springs of water gushed forth for the twelve tribes so that there would be no

dispute in sharing the water. (Quran 7:160). God also sent clouds to protect them from the scorching sun. (Quran 2:57). He sent a special delicious food called 'manna' and quail (a small, short-tailed bird) to alleviate their hunger. (Quran 2:80-81).

God providing manna (an edible substance) for the Israelites is also mentioned in the book of Exodus (16:35) and also God providing water for the Israelites when they were thirsty as recorded in the Book of Numbers (20:8-11). Sadly, in spite of God's many favours, the Israelites complained and wanted the food they used to eat under bondage in Egypt like onions, garlic, beans and lentils.

God was providing bounties and making life easy for the Israelites while they made their way to the promised land but they were stubborn and ungrateful. When Moses and the Israelites left the land of Egypt and travelled in the direction of Jerusalem, they met Hittites and Canaanites. Moses commanded the Israelites to enter their cities and fight with them and expel them from the land which God had promised to their father Abraham and his descendants. They refused to fight and disobeyed God's command. Moses was able to find only two men who were willing to fight, and in desperation, he turned to God. (Quran 5:20-25). As punishment, God left them in the wilderness for forty years wandering with each day

like the one before it without any destination and in a total state of bewilderment. (Quran 5:26). It is said that everyone who went wandering died in that forty-year period; none save their offspring could survive.

The Book of Numbers in the Bible also relates that God had commanded the Israelites to go and take the land of Canaan which He had promised them, but they did not do so and believed the report of the doubters. (Numbers 13:31-33). They began to rebel against Moses and Aaron wishing that they had died in Egypt or in this wilderness. (Number 14:2).

God was furious and He wanted to strike them with a plague and destroy them (Numbers 14:12) but Moses interceded for them and turned away the wrath of God. (Numbers 14:13-20). Although God forgave them, He declared that not one of them will see the promised land but would suffer by wandering in the wilderness for forty years, one year for each of the forty days they explored the land. (Numbers 14:33-34).

The Ten Commandments

Moses left his brother Aaron (Harun) to look after the Israelites and ascended Mount Sinai as God had commanded him. On the mountain, Moses fasted for thirty days and God then commanded him to stay for further ten days to make it forty days. God spoke to Moses from behind a curtain. However, Moses desired for the curtain to be lifted so that he could see God. But God answered him, “You cannot see me,” giving him the reason that he would not be able to withstand, because even the mountain being stronger and firmer than humankind is unable to endure it. (Quran 7:143).

The Book of Exodus also records Moses’ desire to see God, but He refused, saying, “You cannot see my face; for no man shall see me and live.” (Exodus 33:20). God then gives Moses the tablets: “And we wrote for him upon the tablets an admonition and details of all things. (Quran 7:145). Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) said, “Allah wrote Torah with His hands, and there was admonitions and detail injunctions of halal and haram.” (Al-Bukhari). The Arabic word ‘halal’ translates to ‘permissible’ by Islamic law while the Arabic word ‘haram’ translates to ‘forbidden’ or ‘prohibited.’

The commandments are reiterated in the following verses of the Quran:

“Come! I will tell you what your Lord has forbidden you! Do not associate anything with Him; be good to your parents; and do not kill your children for fear of poverty - we shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them - refrain from committing indecent deeds, whether openly or in secret; and do not kill the life which God has made sacred, save by right. That is what He has enjoined upon you, so that you may understand. Stay well away from an orphan’s property, except with the best intentions, before he comes of age. Give full measure and weight, according to justice - we never charge a soul with more than it can bear - when you speak, observe justice, even though it concerns a close relative; and fulfil the covenants of God. That is what He has enjoined upon you so that you may take heed. (He Has enjoined) ‘This is my straight path; so follow it, and do not follow other ways: that will lead you away from His path. That is what He enjoins upon you, so that you make guard yourselves.’” (Quran 6:151-153).

According to the Book of Exodus, Moses climbed Mount Sinai as God had commanded him to do. He received the ten commandments first and later received numbers of other instructions which became the basis of the Jewish Law, the Torah. (Exodus 20:1-

17). In total there are six hundred and thirteen commandments, out of which two hundred and forty-eight of them are considered 'positives' (Do's) and three hundred and sixty-five of them are considered as 'negatives' (Don'ts). These commandments are the standards of morality still set by the Christian church. The Ten Commandments were inscribed on a tablet. Later, God asked Moses to make two copies of the Tablets (Exodus 34:1).

Israelites Worship Calf

Moses had been absent for forty days. Israelites had become restless and began to act impulsively. Samiri, an evil man, suggested that they should find another leader/guide as Moses had broken his promise. He told them that in order to find the guidance, they needed a god and he was willing to provide one for them. He collected all of their jewellery which they had received from the Egyptians before their departure from Egypt and melted it down and moulded it into a calf. It was hollow and when the wind passed through its mouth it mooed like a cow and the Israelites sang and danced around it. Aaron was left in charge by Moses but he was afraid to stop them. When he saw the idol and realised what

a great sin was being committed, however, he spoke up. He reminded them that only God alone should be worshipped and he warned them of the divine consequences for their actions from Moses and from God. When Moses returned to his people and saw them worshipping the calf, he was so angry that he threw down the tablets which contained the teachings of Torah. Moses was full of rage, turned toward Aaron and grabbed him by his beard and demanded an explanation. Aaron explained that Samiri, who was later banished by Moses, bewitched the Israelites. Aaron explained that he reminded the Israelites to worship God alone but they did not listen to him. Then Moses turned to the calf and burnt it in fire and scattered it in the sea. Then he commanded the Israelites to drink the water. Islamic scholars are of the view that Aaron, a Prophet, did not participate in the making or worshipping of the calf and is innocent.

Moses once again turned to God and said: “My Lord, forgive me and my brother and admit us to Your mercy, You are the most merciful of the merciful.” (Quran 7:151). Moses, Aaron and the Israelites once again experienced God’s mercy and all their relationships are strengthened through Divine compassion. (Quran 7:148-154).

The book of Exodus states that when Moses saw the calf and the dancing, he was very angry and

cast the tablets out of his hands at the foot of the mountain and broke them. He then took the calf, burned it and scattered the ashes into the water and made the Israelites drink it. (Exodus 32:19-20).

According to the book of Exodus, God did not accept their repentance. One morning, Moses separated the Levites from the rest of the Israelites and asked the men from the tribe of Levi to kill the calf worshippers. The sons of Levi did as Moses had commanded them and about three thousand of the calf worshippers were killed that day before God sent them a plague for good measure. (Exodus 32:26-35).

Moses chose seventy of the most pious elders from among the children of Israel to go with him to apologise to God for the misdeeds of their people and repent to God on their behalf. They waited while Moses moved into a cloud to speak with God. When he came back to the elders, instead of feeling repentant and apologetic, the elders told Moses that they would not follow him until they see God with their own eyes. (Quran 2:55). The ground shook and the seventy elders were struck by a lightning bolt and they fell to the ground dead. These seventy elders were the most pious from amongst the Israelites. Moses felt that now the children of Israel had no hope. He stood in front of his Lord and prayed to Him. He beseeched God: "You are our protector.

Forgive us, therefore, and have mercy on us, for You are the best of those who forgive.” (Quran 7:155). Moses’ prayer was answered and God raised up the seventy dead elders.

Moses Forbidden to enter Canaan

Prophet Moses (Musa) suffered greatly at the hands of his people (Israelites). He endured mutiny, belligerence and idolatry. He suffered purely for the sake of pleasing his Lord. Moses followed God’s commandments with valour and determination. Moses was sincere in all of his efforts.

Moses is honoured and revered in the Quran. While the story of Moses in the Quran has similarities with the Bible, the Quran clears him from any blame of his people’s actions and deems him innocent as all Prophets of God are considered innocent.

Judeo-Christian scriptures state that the reason for God forbidding Moses and Aaron from entering the Promised Land had to do with an episode at the water of Meribah. The Israelites angrily demanded that Moses provide water for them. God commanded Moses to assemble the Israelite and “speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water.” (Number 20:18). Moses became angry with his people, calling

them rebels and in anger struck the rock twice instead of ordering it to yield its water. (Number 20: 2-13). It is this episode of disobedience, unbelief and a failure to sanctify God before the Jewish people that God punished Moses and Aaron and deprived them from entering the Promised Land.

According to Rabbi Elaine Rose Glickman: “The Torah is quite clear that what Moses done at a certain point prompted God to forbid him from crossing the Jordan. We read the unequivocal divine decree first in Numbers 20:12. After devoting his life to serving God’s chosen nation, Moses shall not set foot in God’s chosen land. Moses’ fate is painful, even tragic, standing before the people he has so steadfastly led, he prepares not to shepherd them triumphantly into the promised land, but to install a new leader who will bring them to their destiny. It is, for Moses, a moment of enormous loss.”

A New Prophet Like Moses

Before Moses’ departure to Mount Nebo where God showed him the promised land which He would give to the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 34:1-4) God gave him the glad tidings of “a new Prophet like Moses” who will have identifiable characteristics like

him (Moses). God told Moses, “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”

(Deuteronomy 18:18).

Islamic scholars are of the view that although there are more verses in the Old Testament that foretell the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, the above prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:18) is not one of them. The prophecy predicts the coming of a “new Prophet like Moses” from among ‘the brethren ’of Israelites.” The Hebrew dictionary of the Bible defines ‘brethren ’as “personification of a group of tribes who were regarded as near kinsmen of Israelites.” There is therefore, no nearer kinsmen tribe to the Israelites other than the Ishmaelites as they are their brethren; descendants of Ishmael, the elder brother of Isaac. The life of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) can be described as similar to that of Prophet Moses. They are both regarded as ethical and exemplary Prophets. They both spoke to God directly. They were both given scriptures The book of Torah (Tawrat) was given to Moses and Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was given the Holy Quran. They were both religious as well as secular leaders of their people. Moses was given Prophethood at the age of forty years (Acts 7:23) and Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was also appointed a Prophet of

God at the age of forty (27th Rajab, 610 C.E). The migration of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) known as Hijra to Medina from Mecca in 622 C.E is parallel to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

Apart from being a 'Prophet like Moses,' the other prerequisite for recognising the coming Prophet mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:18 is that the new Prophet would speak words and commands put in his mouth by God. Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was not the author of the Quran, He was repeating the words of God that were exactly dictated to him by Angel Gabriel. In the Quran, there are many verses stating, "I am your Lord, so worship me." (Al-Ambia 92) and "Verily, I am Allah." (Taha 14). There are many other verses like it which are not preceded by, "And God said..." or other statements. Therefore, Muhammad was speaking with his mouth the words of God. Similarly, one can find verses in the Quran like, "Say (O Muhammad)..." or "Say 'He is God, the One, God, the self-sufficient one....'" (Al-Ikhlās 112).

The other sign of the new Prophet is that 'he will speak in the name of God.' For those who are not familiar with the Quran, it contains one hundred and fourteen chapters or surah and one hundred and thirteen of these surahs starts with, "Bismilahir-Rahmanir-Raheem," which translates as, "In the name of God, most compassionate, most merciful." Prophet

Muhammad (p.b.u.h) spoke in the name of God and not in his name or any other name.

If the above details are scrutinised of the characteristics of the foretold Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:18) and those of Muhammad (p.b.u.h), there will be no doubt, that Muhammad was that “new Prophet like Moses.” The late Rev. James A. Dow (1908-1977) who authored the Collins Gem Dictionary of the Bible, wrote under the entry of ‘Moses’: “The only man in history who can be compared even remotely to him is Muhammad.”

It is also worth reading the following verse in the book of Deuteronomy: “But since then there has not arisen in Israel a Prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.” (Deuteronomy 34:10). According to the Bible, Moses died in the land of Moab at the age of one hundred and twenty years. (Deuteronomy 34:5-7).

Death of Moses

Moses accomplished a great deal during his lifetime. He freed the children of Israel from the bondage of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He brought code of ethics and law from God. He suffered with the children of Israel through the wilderness and

brought them to the plain of Moab, only the Jordan river separated them from the promised land of Canaan.

It is narrated from Abu Hurairah (R.A) saying of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), concerning Moses' death: "The angel of death was sent to Moses, when he arrived, Moses punched him in the eye. The angel returned to his Lord and said, "You have sent me to a slave who does not want to die!" God said, "Return to him and tell him to put his hand on the back of an ox and for every hair that will come under it, he will be granted one year of life!" Moses said, "O Lord! What will happen after that?" God replied, "Then death." Moses said, "Let it come now!" Moses then requested God to let him die close to the Holy Land so that he would be a distance of a stone's throw away." (Al-Bukhari and Muslim). Abu Hurairah (R.A) added that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) said, "If I were there I would show his grave below the red sandhill on the side of the road." (Bukhari).

Moses, Prophet of God, and to whom God spoke directly, met his death with a faithful heart.

Prophet Jesus

(Isa)

(Peace Be Upon Him)

Mary (Maryam)

A brief history of Mary is considered appropriate in order to learn about the life of Prophet Jesus (Isa). The house of Imran descended from the progeny of David. Imran was a pious and righteous man. Mary's mother was Hannah who was a god-fearing and pious person.

Ibn Ishaq and other Islamic Scholars stated that Hannah made a vow that if she had a son, she will consecrate him in the service of God and he would live in the Temple of Jerusalem. It was the custom of

that time that some people would dedicate some of the children for the service of the temple, hoping to gain reward from God.

Although Hannah was disappointed to have given birth to a baby girl, whom she named Mary (or Maryam in Arabic) and prayed to God, "I have named her Mary and placed her and her children in Your protection from the rejected Satan." (Quran 3:36). Hannah kept her vow and brought Mary to the temple and handed her to Prophet Zakariya (father of John the Baptist), who was a close relative and who was chosen to be the guardian of Mary.

Ibn Kathir narrates that Zakariya built a separate room for Mary inside the temple which was forbidden for anyone else except her. She worshipped God in her solitude and looked after the temple whenever it was her turn to do so. Mary was very pious and her piety became so well known that people began to emulate her.

God also bestowed upon her his special favours. Whenever Zakariya entered her chamber to see after her needs, he found fresh fruits out of any season. He was very surprised to see them in her chamber and whenever he asked her about it, she would say to him that the fruits were given to her by God. "God provides for whoever he wills without measure." (Quran 3:37). It is stated in the Quran that

God chose Mary, purified her, and raised her above all other women of the world. "The angel said, "Mary, God has selected you and purified you. He has selected you over (all) the women." (Quran 3:42).

The Annunciation & Birth of Jesus

One day while Mary was in seclusion, the Angel Gabriel came to her in a form of a man and informed her that she was to be the mother of Jesus. Her response was one of fear, shock and dismay. 'When the angel said, "O Mary, your Lord gives you good news of a word from Him. His name is the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, honoured in this world and the next and one of those who are granted nearness to God. And he speaks to men in his cradle, and as a grown man, shall be one of the righteous." (Quran 3:45-46). "Lord", she said, "how can I have a child when no man has touched me?" (The Angel) replied, "Thus it is: God creates what He wills, when He wills a thing He need only say, 'Be', and it is. God will instruct him in the Book and in Wisdom and in the Torah and in the Gospel. He will make him a messenger to the children of Israel. He will say: "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. I will make the shape of a bird out of clay for you then

breathe into it and, by God's love, it will become a living bird, and by God's leave I will heal the blind and the leper and bring the dead to life. I will tell you what you eat and what you store up in your homes. Surely in this there is a sign for you, if you are believers. I come to fulfil (the prediction) of the Torah which preceded me and to make lawful for you some of what was forbidden to you and I come to you with a sign from your Lord. So, fear God and obey me. God is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. That is the straight path." (Quran 3:47-51).

Though not using the exact words of the Quran, a similar incident is also recorded in the Gospel of Luke, where the Angel of the Lord went to Mary and gave her the glad tidings of the birth of a son whose name shall be Jesus. Astonished, Mary replied, "How can this be, since I do not know a man." (Luke 1:26-38).

According to the Gospel, Mary was living in Nazareth at the time of the annunciation, but later moved to Bethlehem where Jesus was born.

God blew the Spirit of Jesus through the angel Gabriel, into Mary, and Jesus was conceived in her womb. "God gave another example in the story of Mary, 'Imran's daughter, who preserved her chastity and We breathed Our spirit into her, she testified to the words of her Lord and His scriptures, and was

truly devout." (Quran 66:12).

Mary's pregnancy was normal with nine months which was no different than any other woman and delivered her child (Jesus) as others do.

The birth of Jesus was a sign of the omnipotence of God and that He creates what He wants without the fact of cause and effect. He had created Adam before without father and mother, and now He was going to create Jesus out of a woman with no father. (Quran 3:59).

When the time came for Jesus to be born, Mary isolated herself from her people and travelled toward Bethlehem. At the foot of a date palm tree, Mary gave birth to her son, Jesus. She cried of her pain and mental stress. She was not only suffering from the pain of childbirth but also the pain of slandering. She was aware of what people were saying about her, how a woman from a reputable household of priests and Prophets could commit such indecency. This stress led her to wish for her death. "The pains of labours drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said, 'O, if only I had died before this passed into oblivion!'" (Quran 19:23).

While she was under stress and wishing for death, she heard a voice from beneath that told her to eat and drink and be comforted and if anyone tried to speak to her, she should indicate that she was fasting.

(Quran 19:24-26).

Mary was afraid and anxious as she wrapped the child and cradled him in her arms as she made her way back to the family in Jerusalem. How could she explain the birth of a child without a male intervention to her people? She heeded the words of God. (Quran 19:26)

From the first moment, her people saw Mary carrying a babe in her arms, they began to accuse her of doing something terrible. ‘They said, “O Mary, you have indeed done something terrible! Sister of Aaron, your father was not an evil man, nor was your mother an unchaste woman!” (Quran 19:27-28)

Mary wisely followed God's instructions and refused to respond to their accusation. She pointed to the child in her arms. They looked at her in disbelief and wanted to know how they could possibly speak to a babe in arms. (Quran 19:29).

The newborn baby Jesus surprised everyone and by the permission of God, performed his first miracle, he spoke, “I am God’s servant. He has given me the book and made me a Prophet, He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving throughout my life. He has made me dutiful toward my mother, and has not made me arrogant or wicked.” (Quran 19:30-32).

The first miracle performed by Jesus, according

to the Gospel of John, was transforming of water into wine at the wedding at Cana of Galilee. (John 2:1-10).

Jesus as a Prophet of God

Jesus is mentioned very early in the Quran when God says, "To Moses we gave the Book and sent a succession of messengers after him. We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit." (Quran 2:87).

In the following passages of the Quran, God reminds us of the lives of messengers, of which Jesus was a part. "We have sent revelation to you (Prophet) as we did to Noah, and the Prophets who came after him, to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and David to whom we gave the Psalms. We have told you of some messengers sent previously, while we have not yet told you about others. God spoke to Moses directly. They were messengers, bearing good news and giving warning, so that mankind would have no excuse before God, after the coming of the messengers. God is mighty wise." (Quran 4:163-165)

All the Prophets were aware that they had been sent by God for the same purpose and with the same message. Thus, the picture which unfolds is not that

of some remarkable man who appeared on earth as an isolated episode in otherwise chaotic world, but a messenger who, like all the messengers before him, was sent for his time, his age, and to his people (Jews).

Throughout the Quran, Jesus is referred to as a messenger of God, “And remember when Jesus, the son of Mary, said, ‘O children of Israel, Indeed I am the messenger of God to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bringing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmed.” (Quran 61:6)

There are many verses in the New Testament supporting the Quranic view that Jesus was only a messenger/Prophet of God.

The Gospel of Matthew states: “So the multitudes said, ‘This is Jesus, the Prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.’” (Matt 21:11). When the multitude asked the blind man who was healed by Jesus, “What do you say about him because he opened your eyes?”, he said, “He is a Prophet.”

While addressing the unbelieving Pharisees, he told them: “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the father who sent me give me a command, what I should say and what I should speak, and I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the father has told

me, so I speak." (John 12:49-50).

At the most critical juncture in his life as stated in the Gospel of John, Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and reaffirmed that eternal life (heaven), can only be achieved by believing that God alone is worthy of worship and that Jesus is a messenger of God, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3).

It is clear again from the above verse that Jesus always considered himself as a messenger of God. His role as a messenger was defined even before his birth by Divine direction as set out in the Gospel (Luke 1:32-33) and in the Quran (Quran 3:49-50).

Jesus' Mission & Miracles

Submission

The Foundation of Jesus' message was submission to the will of God, because that is the foundation of all religions which God prescribed for humanity since the beginning of time. In Arabic, 'submission to God's will' is expressed by the word 'Islam.' God says in the Quran: "The only true religion in God's sight is complete submission to God." (Quran 3:19). Similarly, in the Gospel of John,

Jesus is quoted as saying, "I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is righteous, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of the Father who sent me." (John 5:30).

Divine Law

The 'Will of God' is contained in the divinely revealed laws which all the Prophets taught their followers. Thus, obedience to divine law is the foundation of worship. The Quran declares the need for obedience to the divinely revealed laws. The Quran says, "We have revealed the Torah in which there is guidance and light. By the Prophets who were obedient to us judged the Jews, and so did the Rabbis and the priests, according to God's Book which has been entrusted to their care, and to which they were witnesses. Have no fear of man, fear me, and do not sell my revelations for a paltry sum. Those who do not judge by what God has sent down are deniers of truth." (Quran 5:44)

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus emphasised obedience to Divine law as the key to Paradise: "Now behold, one came and said to him, 'Good teacher, what good things shall I do that I may have eternal life?.' So he said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want

to enter into life, keep the Commandments." (Matthew 19:16-17).

This was the message conveyed by Jesus; the message of submission to the will of God by obeying His commandments. Jesus stressed to his followers that his mission did not cancel the law received by the Prophet Moses but to confirm the Torah, to make lawful things that were previously unlawful and to proclaim and re-affirm the belief in one God: "I come to fulfil [the Prediction] of the Torah which preceded me and to make lawful for you some of what was forbidden to you and I come to you with a sign from your Lord, so worship Him. That is the Straight Path." (Quran 3:50-51).

Jesus emphatically stated in the Gospel of Matthew that he has come to fulfil the law and not to destroy it. He said: "Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes

and pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 5:17-20).

In order to successfully spread his message, Jesus understood the Torah, and he was given a revelation from God "the Injeel" or "the Gospel." God also favoured Jesus with the ability to guide and influence his people with signs and miracles.

At the time of Jesus, the Israelites were very knowledgeable in the field of medicine. Therefore, the miracles Jesus performed (by God's Permission) were of this nature. His miracles included returning sight to the blind, healing lepers and raising the dead. Jesus moulding a figure of a bird from clay, blew into it and by God's permission it becomes a bird. He would also tell Jews what they eat and what they store up in their houses. (Quran 3:49).

The New Testament texts confirm that Jesus did not act on his own but that these miracles were performed with the permission of God (Luke 11:20 and Act 2:22).

While the Quran mentions the miracles of Jesus, the importance is clearly on God's final authority, whether it is his miraculous birth or his miracles.

The Disciples

When Jesus' teachings began to spread some accepted the guidance and some did not. The disciples (also known as Al-Hawariyeen) submitted and followed his message and others rejected his message: "Believers, be God's helpers, as Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples, 'Who will be my helpers in the cause of God?' The disciples said, 'We shall be God's helpers.' Some of the children of Israel believed in him and some denied the truth; we supported the believers against their enemies and they triumphed over them." (Quran 61:6)

The Quran does not name the disciples or their numbers as the Bible does (Luke 6:13), but call them true believers (Submitters).

The Story of Al-Ma'idah (The Table)

The story of Al-Ma'idah or 'The Table spread with food', is mentioned in the Quran (5:112-115) and also recorded by Ibn Kathir in his book, 'Stories of the Prophets.' Ibn Kathir relates: "The story of Maidaah started with Jesus commanding his disciples to fast for three days. When they completed their fasting, they asked Jesus to ask his Lord to send down a table

spread with food from heaven so that they may eat from it, knowing that God has accepted their fasting. They also wanted that the day when the table with the food comes down, to be a day of festival for all Israelites, and every one of them, the poor as well as the rich, could eat from it. Jesus rebuked them for the demand and feared that they might reject it and will not show their gratitude, but the disciples persisted.

When they did not cease from their demand, Jesus prayed to God to send a table spread with food for them from heaven. So, God sent it down from out of the clouds while people were looking at it with their naked eyes (They witnessed the miracle). Jesus also watched it coming and kept praying to God that he might make it a mercy and blessing and not a punishment for them.

The table was covered and it slowly came down till it landed in front of Jesus. He uncovered the table saying: "In the name of God who is the best of provider." It consisted of seven fishes, seven bread and some fruits as well.

Jesus asked them to eat from it but they refused to eat until he ate. Jesus said: "You were the one who asked for this table", but they still refused to start eating. Jesus then asked the poor, destitute, disabled and sick people who were about thirteen hundred, to come and eat from it. They all came forward and ate from

it, and they were all cured and healed. Those who did not eat were regretful when they saw them healed. Then, as it is said, the table came down once every day and people ate from it. Everyone found himself satiated, though their number is said to be about seven thousand people. Then it was sent down on every alternate day, and then it was restricted only for poor and destitute. People started bickering about it and speaking against Jesus, and so it was stopped and those who spoke against him were disfigured.

The Gospels also mention feeding of the multitude by Jesus. He fed five thousand people on one occasion as related in the Gospel of Mark 6:30-44, and on another occasion, it is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew 15:32-39, that he fed four thousand men, besides women and children who were on the mountain listening to his preaching.

Commandments

In the Gospel of Mark when Jesus was asked about the first commandment of all, Jesus responded: “The first of all the Commandments is: ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your

strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: you shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these", (Mark 12:29-31). So, the scribe said to him, "Well said, Teacher, you have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He."

The above quotation of Mark is also the first two words, "Shema" or "Shema Yisrael", (Hear, O Israel) of a section of the Torah that serves as a center piece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer service. (Deut 6:4-5).

Most Christian denominations consider these two commandments to be the most important part of correct Christian lifestyle. (Catholic LDS great Bible Study).

The most important belief in Islam is based on the oneness of God and universal messengership of Prophet Muhammad. In one of the passages of the Holy Quran God says: "This is God, your Lord, there is no God but Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him. He is the Guardian of all things. No vision can grasp Him, but He takes in overall vision, He is a subtle and aware one." (Quran 6:102-103).

Islam considers the rights of the neighbour to be extremely important. The Quran recommends treating neighbours kindly. (Quran 4:36).

According to Prophet Muhammad, loving

goodness for one's neighbour is considered a part of faith, when he said: "By the one in whose hands my soul is, no slave of Allah has true faith unless he likes for his neighbour what he likes for himself." (Bukhari)

Murder

Most often during his sermon on the mount, Jesus mentioned the prohibitions against murder and of adultery. Many religious scholars describe Jesus as explaining the Ten Commandments as issues of the heart's desires rather than merely prohibiting certain outward actions.

Relating to murder, Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'you shall not murder' and whoever murders will be in danger of the Judgement, but I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the Judgement." (Matthew 5:21-22).

Jesus told the multitude who were gathered on the mountain that whether the sin be murder or any other sins, they are as bad as murder, and these sins are subject to judgement in the eyes of the Lord. Being angry with someone or having malice, no matter how big or how small, is still a sin. The overt act of murder has its roots in anger, hostility or

contempt for another human being.

Islam considers murder as a crime by law in this world and is a major sin in the hereafter. God upholds the sanctity of life as a universal principle. (Quran 17:33). Prophet Muhammad said, "The first cases to be decided among the people on the day of Judgement will be those of bloodshed." (Sahih Muslim no 4159).

Adultery

Nowhere in the Bible is the inwardness of Jesus' teaching as noticeable as with the following sayings of Jesus: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'you shall not commit adultery', but I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28).

The likeness of lust with adultery is very similar to the equation of anger and murder. Like the previous verse, Jesus is expanding on the requirement of Mosaic Law (Torah) but not rejecting it.

The person condemned by Jesus is the one who deliberately uses his eyes and mind to arouse his lust so that desires are stimulated.

In Islam, fornication and adultery (Zina) are forbidden and classified as major and destructive sins.

The Holy Quran says, “Nor come nigh to fornication/adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils).” (Quran 17:32).

Coveting

The Hebrew Bible contains a number of warnings and examples of negative consequences for lusting or coveting. Jesus warned the Jews to guard against covetousness. He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” (Luke 12:15). Prophet Muhammad said, “Among the causes of dryness of eyes and toughness of heart and covetousness for obtaining provision and insistence on sin.”

The Model Prayer

When Jesus had finished his prayers, one of his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, so he told them to pray like this manner:

“Our father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and

forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” (Matthew 6:9-13).

As a true messenger of God, Jesus taught his disciples and everyone present on the mountain that all of our prayers must be directed towards God, who is the only one worthy of worship.

Al-Fatihah

In Islam, Surah Al- Fatihah is the first chapter (Surah) of the Quran and has acquired broad usage in Islam.

Al Fatihah is that which opens a subject or a book or any other thing (A preface). Its seven verses (ayat), are prayers for the guidance, lordship and mercy of God:

“In the name of God, the most Gracious, the most merciful. All praise is due to God, the Lord of the universe; the Beneficent, the merciful; Lord of the Day of Judgement. You alone we worship, and You alone we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path, the path of those You have blessed, not of those who have gone astray.” (Quran 1:1-7).

Both ‘The Model Prayer’ and ‘Surah Al-Fatihah’ have comforted and will continue to provide comfort

in its own way. The spiritual life of many adherents of the Abrahamic Faith, throughout history, both have in common the genuine desire to glorify God and enthusiasm to please Him.

Jesus was the last of the Jewish Prophets. He lived according to the law of Torah, the law of Moses. The following are some examples of teachings which Jesus followed and taught, but some of which were later rejected by the church. However, most of his teachings were revived in the final message brought by Muhammad, the final messenger, and remained a basic part of Islamic practices.

Prostration in Prayer

Jesus is described in the Gospel of Matthew as prostrating during prayer when he went to the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples. "He went a little further and fell on his face and prayed, saying, "O my father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:39). According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus went three times to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane (see Matthew 26:42, 44; Mark 14:35-36; Luke 22:42-44).

The method of prostration in Prayer by Jesus was the same method of prayer followed by other

Prophets before him. Abraham is recorded to have fallen on his face in prayer (Genesis 17:3), and in the book of Numbers both Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in worship. (Numbers 16:22,20:6).

Similarly, there are many verses in the Quran where God instructs the believers to worship Him. "Glorify your Lord morning and evening, and during the night prostrate yourself before Him, and extol His glory for a long part of the night." (Quran 76:25-26).

Fasting

According to the Gospel of Matthew Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights and afterwards he was hungry and recommended others to fast. (Matthew 4:12, 6:16-18). By fasting, Jesus was following the practices of the earlier Prophets. Moses fasted for forty days when he went to receive the commandments from his Lord. (Exodus 28:34).

In the Quran, the believers are told to fast regularly. The sole purpose of fasting is clearly defined as to inculcate God-consciousness in oneself. Quran says: "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may develop God-consciousness." (Quran 2:183).

Charity

The Gospel stresses that one should give to the needy but in the following verses of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus emphasised to do it in private and not for show. Jesus says, “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them, otherwise, you have no reward from your father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret, and your father who sees in secret will himself reward you openly.” (Matthew 6:1-4)

Charity forms the third of the obligatory Five Pillars of Islam- also known as Zakat. It is the act of giving a portion of one profitable wealth to those in need each year.

Many times in the Quran, reference is made to ‘charity.’ Examples of charitable acts were things like helping those in need, sharing one’s wealth with others, and supporting orphans and widows.

God says in the Quran: “The parable of those

who spend their substance in the way of God may be compared to a grain of corn which sprouts into seven ears, with a hundred grains in each ear, for God grants manyfold increase to whom He wills: God is infinite and all-knowing. Those who spend their wealth for God's cause and do not follow their almsgiving with taunts and insults shall be rewarded by their Lord, they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve." (Quran 2:261-262). While touching on certain deeds that will earn God's mercy and protection on the day of judgement, Prophet Muhammad said, "A person who practices charity so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given." (Sahih Al-Bukhari No 504).

Jesus - a Jewish Prophet

God send messengers or Prophets to humanity at various stages in human history to guide us to Godliness and righteousness and one such messenger was Isa Ibn Mariam, (Jesus, son of Mary) who was sent to the children of Israel. He was a national Prophet and this was made very clear from the time Angel Gabriel announced his miraculous birth to Mary. Angel Gabriel gave glad tidings of a son to Mary, and told her, as it is stated in the Gospel of

Luke, that he will be king of Israel. (Luke 1:32-33).

Jesus was the Messiah that the Jews were expecting for centuries (Luke 3:15). He was born into a Jewish family and was circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21), in accordance with Torah and ‘Halakha’ (Jewish religious law), where ritual circumcision of all male Jews and their slaves is a commandment from God that Jews are obliged to perform on the 8th day of birth. (Genesis 17:10-13).

Jesus was brought up according to the Jewish law in a Jewish town of Galilee in Nazareth (Luke 2:39-40). He travelled mostly in Jewish areas speaking in synagogues (Matthew 9:35) and he chose twelve Jewish disciples to assist him with his mission (Luke 6:13). His mission, in fulfilment of the Jewish Prophets, was the Jewish people. Jesus’ focus was on reforming Israel, not taking his Kingdom message to the rest of the world.

When a woman from the Canaan region asked Jesus to heal her demon possessed daughter, he didn't answer her and even the disciples urged him to send her away. He later answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24)

The Canaanite woman was very adamant and pleaded to him (Jesus) to help her, but he told her, “It is not good to take children's bread and throw it to

the little dogs." (Matthew 15:26). Her response was such that he eventually healed her daughter. (Matt 15,27:28)

While Jesus preached in the various synagogues, he also sent out his disciples to preach. He gave them clear instruction where they should go. "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." (Matthew 10:5-6).

The Jewish Christians who fled the persecution in Jerusalem after Jesus' departure, went into the Gentile regions of Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, and spreading the word to no one but Jews only. (Acts 11:19). Jesus made his particular focus on Israel clear; he came for Jews only.

Prophecies of Jesus about Prophet

Muhammad

Jesus was the last Israelite Prophet. He was born of the Virgin Mary, performed many miracles by the permission of his Lord and invited the Israelites to the same message of the 'Submission to the will of God', (Islam), as preached by all of the Prophets before him.

He confirmed the laws of the Torah, which was

taught by Moses. He lived by these laws and he commanded his disciples to follow them to the finest details.

Before his departure, he told his followers of the coming of the last Prophet Muhammad, who will come after him, and instructed them to observe his teachings. He said, “O children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of the messenger to follow me, whose name will be Ahmed.” (Quran 6:16).

This is confirmed further in one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, when asked about his birth, he said, “I am the answer of the supplication of my father, Abraham, and the glad tidings given by Jesus.” (Bukhari)

There are many passages in the Gospels which refer to the coming of Muhammad. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, “and I will pray the father and He will give you another helper, that may abide with you forever.” (John 14:16)

The Greek word ‘paraclete’ is translated as ‘helper’ in King James version and ‘advocate’ or ‘comforter’ in other versions. Christian scholars interpret the ‘helper’ as the “Holy Spirit”, however, for centuries Muslim interpreters have seen Muhammad as the “Advocate” based on the above

verse (61:6) of the Quran. Ahmad, which was another name for Muhammad is very close etymologically to the Greek word Parakletos, so that Jesus' farewell discourse in the gospel predict Muhammad.

The phrase "another helper" implies that it will be someone else like Jesus and not the Holy Spirit, especially considering what Jesus is reported to have said in the later chapter of the same gospel, that the coming of the helper depended on Jesus going away. (John 16:7). The Holy Spirit, therefore, could not be the helper, because the Holy Spirit, unlike the helper, was already present in the world, even at Jesus' birth. (Luke 1:15). Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41) and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism by John the Baptist. (Luke 3:22).

According to Jamal Badawi, who is an author, preacher and speaker on Islam, "that not all early Christians subscribed to this early theory that the paraclete is the Holy Ghost. Those Christians were already familiar with what occurred during the Pentecost. Many people have risen claiming to be the paraclete prophesied by Jesus. If they believe that the paraclete was a spirit, then there would be no point in doing this. In fact, Johann Mosheim says in his book, 'An Ecclesiastical History', some such as saint Augustine and Father Tertullian, at some point in their lives, followed some of those who claimed to

being the comforter. This shows that the comforter was not really regarded as a spirit, but rather a person to come. The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, which is a very major and credible source for Christian theology, admits that the original Greek wording of the gospel's masculine pronoun and adjectives are used. The word 'another' is used, and it shows that this spirit is regarded as fully personal. Of course, the main point here is that there is recognition that the passage is talking of another, and not something that is part of the Trinity." (pgs 654-655).

The word "Paraclete" is also applied to Jesus as recorded in the first epistle of John: "My little children these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John 2:1)

Jesus's declaration that the helper "may abide with you forever", means that there will be no need for additional Prophets to succeed this 'helper' as he will be the last of the Prophets of God whose message will be preserved until the end of the world.

Muhammad is alive through his teachings and through the vast collections of his sayings (Hadith) recorded from him during his lifetime on various topics. One of the last verses revealed to Muhammad (Helper) says, "...today I have completed your

religion for you and completed my blessing upon you. I have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (Quran 5:3). In the above verse God makes it clear that the messages of all the Prophets are completed in Islam. Paul also admits in 1 Corinthians the greatest gift is yet to come when he says: "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." (1 Corinthians 13:9-10).

Again, in the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "but the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name, he will teach you all things. And bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (John 14:26).

Author Misha'al Ibn Abdullah in his book, 'What Did Jesus Really Say?' states "that John 14:26 is the only verse of the Bible which associates the Parakletos with the Holy Spirit. But if we were to go back to the 'ancient manuscripts' themselves, we would find that they are not all in agreement that the 'parakletos' is the Holy Spirit. For instance, in the famous 'Codex Syriacus' written around the fifth century and discovered in 1812 on Mount Sinai by Mrs. Agnes S. Lewis and Mrs Bensley, the text of John 14:26 reads, "Paraclete, the spirit" and not "Paraclete, the Holy Spirit." A "Spirit" according to the language of the Bible, simply means a 'Prophet.' See for

example (1 John 4:1-3).

The Prophecy of this coming helper requires that he shall remind mankind of the words of Jesus. The coming helper will come in a time when the teachings of Jesus have been forgotten and require him to 'remind' the followers of Jesus of his teachings. The Quran confirms it when it says, "it is we who have sent down the reminder and we will most surely safeguard it." (Quran 15:9).

Rev Dr Mevorah writes that "In most manuscripts this Advocate is even directly called "the Holy Spirit as in John 14:26, but as Jesus' farewell discourse proceeds these, titles become multivalent and in John 15:26-27 and 16:7-15 they began to refer more to a future Prophet than the Holy Spirit." (Did Jesus predict Muhammad? A Biblical Portal between Christianity and Islam).

The author of 1st Epistle of John mentions the Holy Spirit and speaks at length about testing the spirits. John writes: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false Prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have

heard was coming, and is now already in the world." (1st John 4:1-3).

In referring to the above three verses, Rev Dr Mevorah states that, "In these verses the word 'spirit' is used to talk about Prophets and how to tell whether they are true or false." (1st John 4:2)

Rev Dr Mevorah continues, "the author (John) contrasts 'the Spirit of God' with the 'Spirit of antichrist' those who are 'from God' with those who are 'from the world' and 'the Spirit of Truth' with 'the Spirit of error.' This discourse is strikingly similar to the discourse of Deuteronomy about the future Prophets. In Deuteronomy 18:20-22, after the promise of a future Prophet in 18:18 and the commandment to listen to that Prophet in 18:19 criteria are laid out to distinguish a true from a false Prophet.

Deuteronomy threatens that a Prophet who speaks for another God or who falsely speaks on God's behalf "shall die" (18:20). It also advises the Israelites to ignore Prophets who prophesy falsely (18:22)

In the same way, but using different criteria, the author of 1 John defines true Prophets and false Prophets relative to their allegiance to Jesus, God and early followers of Jesus. Part of the dynamic of the early community of Jesus' followers was that many claimed the inspiration of the Spirit and prophesied.

The author of 1 John is especially worried about Docetic versions of Christianity that had developed denying that Jesus, “came in the flesh”, in these versions of Christianity, Jesus was not an actual human being but rather an angelic being that only appeared to be human. Such a version of Christianity, obviously, would have been quite disconnected from the actual teachings and values of Jesus of Nazareth and his earliest followers, who knew him as a real human being. It is worth noting that Muhammad meets these criteria insofar as the Quran affirms that Jesus is the Messiah and that he “came in the flesh.”

“In the history of Christianity, all of the negative terms in 1 John 4:1-6 have been used against Muhammad. He has been identified with “the Spirit of Anti-Christ” and the “spirit of error.” However, the time has come for Christians to recognise how wrong we have been in these assessments and to correct and record by affirmatively identifying Muhammad with “the Spirit of Truth,” wrote Rev Dr Ian Mevorach in his article “Did Jesus Predict Muhammad? A Biblical Portal Between Christianity and Islam”. Dr Mevorach, who is the founding minister and Director of the Common Street Spiritual Centre in Natrier, further wrote, “There is no better candidate than Muhammad, no one in fact that comes even close in terms of fulfilling Jesus's promise of the Spirit of Truth

who would bring forth a new promise of the Spirit of Truth who would bring forth a new revelation from God."

In the Gospel of John there is another prophecy by Jesus of the coming of the "Spirit of Truth." Jesus says, "But when the helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of me." (John 15:26).

The title, 'Spirit of truth' in the above verse of John's Gospel fits Prophet Muhammad like a hand to a glove because even before Prophet Muhammad received his Prophethood from God Almighty, he was known among his people, the Arabs, as 'Al-Amin' which literally means 'the trustee.' This was the title given to Prophet Muhammad before his rise to Prophethood.

According to historical sources, the polytheists of Mecca never accused Muhammad of lying, although they denied his Prophethood. They even entrusted their valuable goods to him because he was trustworthy and truthful. Whenever the Arab tribes of Mecca were about to fight each other, they would seek his help as impartial arbitrator. Prophet Muhammad would also remind the followers of Jesus that he, (Jesus) was a great Prophet of God who came to the children of Israel to revive the Law of Torah

and to guide them to righteousness.

The following verses in the Gospel of John, Jesus prophesied the advent of the last messenger to mankind as understood by the adherent of Islam. Jesus says: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I don't go away, the helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you." (John 16:7)

According to the Islamic scholars, the above verse can't be applied to the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit was always present. There are many verses in both the Old Testament and the New Testament which bear testimony to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus as a dove at his baptism (Matthew 3:17) and when Jesus met his disciples in the upper chamber, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:22).

This proves that the Holy Spirit was always present during Jesus' ministry, while in the case of Muhammad, he was not present. This means that the coming of this helper (Muhammad) depended on Jesus going away. He will not come unless Jesus goes.

The writer of John's Gospel quoted Jesus as saying: "And when He has come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and judgement: of sin, because they do not believe in me; of

righteousness, because I go to my Father and you see me no more; of judgement, because the ruler of this world is judged.” (John 16:8-11).

From the above passages, it is clear that the paraclete or helper will indicate the error of the world with regard to “sin, righteousness and judgement.”

In explaining the above verses, author Misha’al Ibn Abdullah in his book, “What did Jesus Really Say?” writes: “He (Muhammad) came to the world to show them how they had been misguided in ‘sin’ by believing that mankind can inherit sin (Ezekiel 18:19-20) and that someone’s sin can be forgiven by the sacrifice of others. He also showed them how they have been misguided in “righteousness” by believing that a righteous person is the one who has “faith” in the crucifixion and does nothing else. (Romans 3:28) or who believes that another man’s death will make him a righteous person. (Romans 5:19). And they were misguided in “judgement” by believing that they will be judged by “faith” and deeds of others and not their own deeds. (Mark 16:16). Or that God’s “judgement” was to punish all of Mankind for the sin of one man. (Romans 5:18). Muhammad taught that the words of Jesus were unscrupulously altered (Mark 16:15-20). He taught that no one will be held accountable by God for the sin committed by others. He stressed that God had made this a life of work and

the next life one of reward and no work. He also stressed that mankind will be judged individually according to their individual deeds and actions and not by the deeds and actions of others.

Islam stresses on personal moral responsibility to be one of its most profound and liberating philosophies. The Quran is unambiguous in its vision of individual moral responsibility and accountability. The Holy Quran says: "No bearer of burdens shall bear another's burden, and if some overladen soul should call out for someone else to carry his load, not the least portion of it will be borne for him, even though he were a near relative. (Quran 35:18). The Quran again remind us, "People of the Book, our Messenger has come to you to make things clear to you after an interval between the messengers, lest you say, 'No bearer of glad tidings and no warner has come to us', so a bearer of glad tidings and a warner has indeed come to you. God has the power to do all things." (Quran 5:19)

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is quoted as saying: "I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify me, for He will take of what is

mine and declare it to you." (John 16:12-14).

In many verses of the Bible where Jesus sighs/sighed at the lackadaisical attitude shown by his disciples (Matthew 16:8). Even after continuously trying to simplify matters for them, they continue to misunderstand him. They were unable to understand his parable (Matthew 15:15), even after being with him, nor did they have enough faith to cast out the demon. (Luke 9:41). He finally, out of frustration, said: "Are you also still without understanding? (Matthew 15:16). Jesus came to the children of Israel but many of his people did not accept him nor his teaching even to this day. (John 1:11).

Jesus is talking about a spirit of truth who will bring forth new revelations, who will say the "many things" that Jesus does not say because his followers "cannot bear them now." The Spirit of truth will come after him who will guide them unto "all truth." This spirit of truth is not the "Holy Ghost" but Muhammad, who was known to his people as "Al Amin" (The Truthful One) even before he was chosen as a Prophet of God.

The Quran says, "These are the revelations of God which we recite to you in all truth, for you are truly one of the messengers" (Quran 2:252). There are seven masculine pronouns "He" and "Himself" in John 16:13 and these masculine pronouns refers to a

male gender and not a spirit or a ghost. The Greek word for “spirit” is ‘Pneu’ma’ and is of a neutral gender and is always referred to by the pronoun “it.”

Author Jamal Badawi, in stating that in the Gospel of John, this Paraclete is mentioned more than once, that this spirit of truth, will ‘not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that he shall speak’, shows that this comforter is receiving instructions, knowledge and revelation from another source – God.

If the comforter is the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost in part of Godhood, according to the belief of majority of Christians, then he doesn’t need another source to receive revelation from. One of the main points is that Muhammad does not speak of his own accord. The Quran says, “By the setting star, your companion has neither strayed nor is he misguided, nor does he speak out of his own desire. It [the Quran] is nothing but revelation sent down to him. He was taught by an angel who is mighty in power.” (Quran 53:1-5).

Furthermore, it is fully consistent with the Mission of Muhammad as the Holy Quran makes it clear that it is the most complete scripture revealed by God. “We have sent down the book to you to make everything clear, a guidance, and a mercy, and glad tidings for those who submit to God.” (Quran 16:89).

Rev Dr. Ian Mevorach, in his article “Did Jesus Predict Muhammad?” further writes that:

“The Gospel of John plays a similar role for the New Testament as Deuteronomy does for the Torah. Deuteronomy is the latest text of the Torah- it reiterates the law of Moses as told in the four earlier books, and, like the Gospel of John, it predicts a future Prophet:’ I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the month of the Prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.’ (Deuteronomy 18:18-19 NRSV).

Both Deuteronomy and the Gospel of John are reflections on the specific revelations - the Torah and Gospel - and both indicate that there is more revelation to come. The Gospel of John’s Language for the Spirit of Truth or Advocate is strikingly similar to Deuteronomy’s: “he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:13 NRSV).

In the Bible verses: “Whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak” (John 16:13) means that the Paraclete will “hear” and “speak” not “inspire.” There is a distinct difference between “inquiring” something and him “speaking” something.

Muhammad did fulfil this prophecy. Whatever

he “heard” from Angel Gabriel (the Quran), the same did he physically “speak” to his followers. (Quran 53:1-4).

Part of John 16:13 reads: “He will tell you things to come.” There were many prophecies made in the Quran which was revealed to the Prophet during his twenty-three years of Prophethood and in the tradition (Hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad. In the Quran we read; “the Romans have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory within a few years: [for] with God rests all power of decision, first and last. On that day the believers too will have cause to rejoice, with the help of God. He helps whom he pleases: “He is the Mighty and the Merciful.” (Quran 30:2-5).

The Romans were defeated by the Persians but the Romans would come back and defeat the Persians within “Bidh’u” years, (between three to four years) as predicted by the Quran. At the same time, the Muslims were victorious against the pagans of Arabia in the first battle known as the Battle of Badr (13th March 624 C.E.).

Prophet Muhammad prophesied that Muslims would capture Egypt and commanded his followers when this happens, that they should treat the people well. (Egypt was captured by the Muslims between 639 and 646 C.E.). He also prophesied that the

Muslims would overthrow the Persian Empire and seize the treasures of their Emperor Choseros. He also told one of his companions, Suraqa bin Malik, that he would be given the bracelets of Caesar. Many years after the death of the Prophet, these bracelets fell into the possession of Umar Ibn Khattab (Leader of the Muslims), and he called upon Suraqa and placed the bracelets on his arms and reminded him of the Prophet's words.

Jesus told his audience that the paraclete will glorify him and bear testimony of him. Muhammad did testify of Jesus and glorify him and raised him and his mother Mary to their well-deserved status, honour and piety. He even made it an article of faith for every Muslim to bear witness to it. The Quran says: "when the Angel said, 'O Mary, your Lord gives you good news of a word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, honoured in this world and in the next and one of those who are granted nearness to God.'" (Quran 3:45).

Whenever Muslims pronounce the name of Jesus, they add, "peace be upon him" as a sign of utmost respect. The Holy Quran refer to Jesus as 'Ruh Allah' or 'the Spirit of Allah.'

Abu Hurraira narrated from the Prophet; "I am most close to Jesus, son of Mary, among the whole of mankind in this worldly life and the next life." He

said, "Allah's messenger, how is it? Thereupon he said: "Prophets are brothers in faith, having different mothers, their religion is however, one and there is no apostle between us (between I and Jesus)." (Sahih Muslim No 5836).

Atonement & Salvation

Christianity

According to the teachings of Christianity, atonement is what Jesus accomplished on the cross and salvation is what God accomplished when he raised Jesus from the dead, and which they (Christians) gained, when they accepted Christ's sacrifice on the cross. They then entered into a relationship with God through faith in Christ.

Christians believe that, through disobedience to God by Adam and Eve, sin entered the world. In order to resolve the problems between man and God, Jesus came to earth to save humankind from sin and restore their broken relationship with God.

According to Christianity, in order for this relationship between humans and God to be repaired, God gave His only son, Jesus, who was a perfect human without sin, and placed all of humanity's sin on Jesus when he was crucified. Jesus' death,

therefore, atoned for human sins. Jesus' death was a means of reconciliation between God and humanity which was broken by the original sin. As a result of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, humans now have the possibility of obtaining God's grace and an opportunity for salvation and an avenue by which they can go to heaven. Paul says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus Our Lord." (Romans 6:23).

Christians believe that salvation does not need to be earned through good works. Instead, it can be achieved by believing in God and His son, Jesus Christ. However, not all Christian denominations agree with the above belief.

A leading unitarian theologian of the 19th Century, Ellery Channing (1780-1842) believed that "Atonement should be made to and not by God." He quoted the Bible; "Everyone must appear before the judgement seat..." (2nd Corinthians 5:10) and again, "Everyone must give account." (Romans 14:10).

"If by the crucifixion of Jesus, God's justice is satisfied for sins past, present and to come, then God has lost all power to enjoin godliness and a virtuous life, and all prerogative in punishing disobedience. If God punishes a sinner on the Day of Judgement, then it clearly means that either God commits a breach of faith or else the doctrine of atonement is not true."

Judaism

In Judaism, atonement is the process of causing a transgression to be forgiven and ‘yom kippur’ (Day to Atonement) is considered a ‘day of atonement.’

According to the Jewish tradition, God writes each person’s fate for the coming year into a book, the ‘Book of Life’ on ‘Rosh Ha-sha-nah’, the Jewish New Year Festival, held on the first or second day of Tishri’ (in September). It is marked by the blowing of the ‘shofar’ (ritual musical instrument) and the start of the ten days of penitence culminating in ‘yom kippur’ to ‘seal’ the verdict.

During the ten days of repentance and renewal, known as the ‘Days of Awe’, Jews try to amend their behaviour and seek forgiveness from wrong done against God and other human beings. The evening and the day of Yom Kippur are set aside for private and public petitions and confessions of guilt (vidui). At the end of Yom Kippur, one hopes that they’ve been forgiven by God.

“For sins against God, the Day of Atonement brings forgiveness; for sins against one’s fellowman, the Day of Atonement brings no forgiveness till he has become reconciled with the fellowman he wronged.” (Mishnah Yama 8:9).

According to Maimonides (A Jewish philosopher and Torah scholar), in order to achieve true repentance, the sinner must abandon his sin, remove it from his thoughts, and resolve in his heart never to repeat it, as it is said, “Let the wicked forsake his way and the man of iniquity his thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:7). Likewise, he must regret the past, as it is said, “Surely after I turned, I repented” (Jeremiah 31:18). He must also call Him who knows all secrets to witness that he will never return to this sin again.”

“Judaism holds that man is born to strive for perfection, and to follow the words of God. A person who sins can repent of that sin and, if he repents full heartedly, regrets the sin, and commits to never sin again, will have the sin forgiven.” (The Gates of Repentance).

Islam

There are fourteen verses in the Quran on the subject of atonement. The theologians explain atonement as a covering or veil. This explanation is near to the thoughts of the Old Testament. It is a fact that personal work in Islam, as in Judaism, plays an important part in the matter of atonement for sins. The Quran says: “And who, when they have committed an indecency or have wronged their souls,

remember God and pray that their sins be forgiven-for who but God can forgive sins?-And do not knowingly persist in their misdeeds.” (Quran 3:135).

According to Islam, one can be forgiven of sins through genuine repentance (Tawbah) which literally means ‘to return.’ “Seek forgiveness from your Lord: then turn towards Him (in repentance). He will make generous provisions for you for an appointed term and will bestow His grace on all who merit it!” (Quran 11:3).

Unlike the Catholic concept of atonement, ‘tawbah’ does not need formal, ecclesiastical confession to a religious leader. There are three conditions for repentance a person must meet. A fourth condition steps in when the sin committed involves another human being. Firstly, when one realises it is a sin, give it up. Secondly, a person must feel remorse within the heart. Thirdly, is to make a genuine promise to God that he will not repeat the sin. The fourth if one wronged any individual, then one should ask for pardon from that person. God says in the Quran that He will accept sincere repentance, “Why do they not turn to God and ask for His forgiveness? God is forgiving and merciful.” (Quran 5:74).

Christians believe that they are born sinners and that Jesus died on the cross to compensate for

their sins. Islam on the contrary, teaches us that every individual shall carry their own burden. This means that humanity will be judged upon their own deeds.

Sin

Christianity

The concept of 'original sin' is an Augustine Christian doctrine, which says that everyone is born sinful. This concept was based on the teachings of St. Paul in many passages of his writings (Romans 5:12-21 and 1st Corinthians 15:21-22) and which was explained in depth by St. Augustine (a theologian philosopher and the bishop of Hippo, in Roman North Africa). He says that original sin was transmitted from generation to generation through sexual intercourse.

The doctrine of original sin as taught by St. Augustine was formalised as part of Roman Catholic doctrine by the Council of Trent in the 16th Century (1545-1563).

In traditional Christian teaching, original sin is the result of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God when they ate a forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. They believed that when Adam and Eve sinned and turned away from God, they brought sin into the world and turned the whole human race away from

God. Christians believe human beings can't cure themselves of original sin. They believe that the first Adam sinned and caused humanity to fall from God's grace and the second Adam, Jesus Christ, atoned for the sin of the first Adam with his death on the cross and redeemed humanity. (1st Corinthians 15:21-22)

The Hebrew Scriptures say nothing about the transmission of hereditary sin to the entire human race. In the Gospels, there is nothing but allusions to the idea of the fall of man and universal sin. Jesus didn't believe in original sin, neither did his disciples or the early church. The main scriptural affirmation of the doctrine is found in the writings of Paul and particularly in Romans 5:12-19, a difficult passage in which Paul establishes a parallelism between Adam and Jesus, stating that whereas sin and death entered the world through Adam, grace and eternal life have come in greater abundance through Christ.

Judaism

According to Alfred Kolatch, an American Rabbi, "The doctrine of 'original sin' is totally unacceptable to Jews. Jews believe that man enters the world free of sin, with a soul that is pure and innocent and untainted. Jews believe that man sins because he is not a perfect being, and not as

Christianity teaches, because he is inherently sinful.”

As a scholar of Jewish Liturgy, author and lecturer, Rabbi Dr. Reuven Hammer, believes that human beings are not basically sinful. He writes that “We come into the world neither carrying the burden of sin committed by our ancestors nor tainted by it. Rather, sin (Chet) is the result of our human inclinations, (the yetzer), which must be properly channeled. ‘Chet’ literally means “something that goes astray. It is a term used in archery to indicate that the arrow has missed its target. This concept of sin suggests straying from the correct ways, from what is good and straight.” (The Jewish View).

According to Judaism, all people are descended from Adam and Eve, so no one can blame his own wickedness on his ancestry. On the contrary, each and every one of us has the ability to make our own choices and we will all be held responsible for the choices we make.

The Bible says, “The father shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.” (Deuteronomy 24:16). Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the Almighty clearly stated that the children of Israel are to come closer to Him with great love and faithfully keep His commandments. (Deuteronomy 30:16)

In Judaism, sins can be ‘erased’ altogether by sincere repentance and a firm resolution never to repeat the mistakes.

Islam

The concept of ‘original sin’ is not part of the Islamic doctrine. Muslims believe that we are born without sin and with a desire to please God. We are endowed by the Almighty with free will, which causes us to go astray at times, but God is always willing to forgive.

Islam teaches that sin is an act and not a state of being. In the Quran, a clear distinction is made between major sins and minor sins (Quran 53: 31-32), showing that if an individual stays away from major sins, then that person will be forgiven of the minor sins.

Islam teaches that Adam and Eve disobeyed or as some scholars believe, forgot their covenant with God, repented and asked for forgiveness. “Our Lord, we have wronged our souls: If you do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we shall be among the lost.” (Quran 7:23). God forgave them “Then His Lord had mercy on him, accepted his repentance and guided him.” (Quran 20:122).

They had to suffer the consequences of their

actions by living a mortal life on earth, but their relationship with God never changed. Islam strictly promotes the idea that the punishment of sins will only be faced by those who commit them. Sin is not a hereditary trait or 'stain' passed to one's progeny from one generation to another. The Quran says, "Everyone must bear the consequence of what he does and no bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another." (Quran 6:164).

As for the sin of Adam, he repented for his sin and God revealed to him (Adam) words with which to repent, which God then accepted from him. (Quran 2:37).

Through God's acceptance of Adam's repentance, Adam was cleared of the sin which he committed. In the Quran, God repeatedly assigned to Himself attributes of mercy and forgiveness. "Say, (God says) 'O my servants, who have committed excess against their souls, do not despair of God's mercy, for God surely forgives all sins. He is truly the most forgiving, the most merciful.'" (Quran 39:53).

Crucifixion, Resurrection & Ascension

Christianity: Crucifixion

According to the Gospels, Jesus was put on the cross, which was set up on a mountain at a place called 'Golgotha' (place of a skull) and they drove nails through his hands and feet. On the cross, Jesus then cried out with a loud voice saying "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" That is, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) (Also see Mark 15:34).

Ruthledge Fleming, an American episcopal priest, author, theologian, and preacher writes in relation to Jesus' crucifixion "The crucifixion is the touchstone of Christian authenticity, the unique feature by which everything else, including the resurrection is given its true significance...It is the crucifixion that marks out Christianity as something definitely different in the history of religion. It is in the crucifixion that the nature of God is truly revealed. We can attest that the crucifixion is the most important historical event that has ever happened."

She went on to state that "In his death, Paul declares, Jesus was giving himself to the enemy-to sin, to its ally the law, and to its wage, death. (Romans 6:23, 7:8-11). That Jesus was crucified, for no other

mode of execution would have been commensurate with the extremity of humanity's condition under sin."

Christianity teaches that through the crucifixion and ensuing resurrection of Jesus, that God offered human salvation and eternal life. They believed that Jesus, a sinless lamb, died to atone for sin to make humanity reconcile with God. St. Paul states in his epistles "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"). (Galatian 3:13).

Christianity: Resurrection

For Christians, the resurrection is the belief that Jesus came back to life three days after he died on the cross. The Gospel of Matthew (28:1-10) has a detailed account of Jesus' followers discovering that he had been resurrected. Belief in the resurrection is central to Christianity. It proves that Jesus overcame death, and it is considered by many Christians to be a proof that there is life after death. In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul tried to convince the people of Jesus' resurrection and stressed the importance of this belief. He explained that he saw Jesus after his

resurrection and that Jesus also appeared to the Apostle and over five hundred people also saw Jesus after his crucifixion. (1st Corinthians 15:3-8).

Paul even boasted that resurrection was his idea, “Remember that Jesus Christ of the Seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my Gospel.” (2nd Timothy 2:8). However, there were some among the people who didn’t believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, Paul writes in 1st Corinthians “Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain. (Ch 15:12-14). Paul wanted to reaffirm the reality of Jesus’ resurrection to those who doubted or denied that Jesus rose from the dead, that the resurrection is the very foundation of Christian faith.

Christianity: Ascension

Christians believe that after Jesus rose from the dead, he did not die a second time, instead, forty days after his resurrection, Jesus left the earth by being taken up, body and soul, to heaven to re-join God the father. This event is known as the ascension of Jesus

and was witnessed by his eleven disciples. (Mark 16:19) The meaning of the ascension is derived from the Christians' belief in the glorification and exaltation of Jesus following his death.

The book Acts of the Apostles, in the Bible, describes this event of ascension and how angels, described as (men dressed in white) helped the disciples to understand what was happening. (Acts 1:9-11). The events that took place around Jesus' death and resurrection are commemorated by Christians each year during the Easter Season. They believe that Jesus truly defeated death by ascending to heaven after his resurrection. They remember the events of the last week of Jesus' life (before his crucifixion) during Holy Week, ending with Easter Sunday, a day when Christians celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

According to Christianity, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus is considered a 'paschal mystery' and all three events are celebrated together.

Islam

When Jesus preached his message, some of the children of Israel believed in the message while others violently opposed him, especially the elite of the

society. They misled those in authority and provided false information about Jesus. They plotted to kill and crucify him, but God also plotted and protected him from their evil intentions. The Holy Quran says “And they (i.e., the disbelievers) planned but Allah planned. And Allah is the best of planners.” (Quran 3:54).

Muslims believe that Jesus did not die on the cross, in the Quran we read “They declared, ‘we have put to death the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of God.’ They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them (as if it had been so). And those who differ in this matter are in doubt concerning it. They have no definite knowledge about it, but only follow mere conjecture. But they certainly did not kill him.” (Quran 4:157). There is no mention in the Quran on who actually died on the cross but Islamic commentators widely vary on their opinions, from Judas Iscariot to Simon of Cyrone.

Muslims believe that Jesus was not crucified but raised to heaven directly without resurrection before ‘Ascension.’ The Holy Quran states “God said, ‘O Jesus, I shall take you to me and will raise you up to me and shall clear you (of the calumnies) of the disbelievers, and shall place those who follow you above those who deny the truth, until the Day of Judgement; then to me shall all return and I will

Judge between you regarding your disputes.” (Quran 3:55).

The majority of Muslim scholars and interpreters of the Quran are of the opinion that the message in the Quran is that God will not allow His faithful servant to suffer and yield to the enemies’ plots and allow the enemies of Jesus and in turn of God, a final victory. The Quran does not make any mention of the resurrection of Jesus except that such resurrection will take place on the Day of Judgement.

The Second Coming

Christianity

Most Christians believe in the second coming known as ‘Parousia,’ the notion that Jesus will return to judge everyone who has lived and died. At the ascension of Jesus, angels explained to his disciples that Jesus will return to them in the same manner as they see him ascend to heaven (Acts 1:11). Jesus himself comforted his disciples and told them that he would return and take them to be with him. (John 14:1-3).

Jesus is also reported to have told his disciples “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not

pass away until all these things have happened.” (Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30). Jesus is also recorded as saying “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the son of man coming in his kingdom.” (Matthew 16:28). Jesus made similar predictions in five other places in the Bible; Mark 9:1, 13:30, Matthew 24:34, Luke 9:27 and 21:32. Certainly, Jesus’ disciples and the earliest Christians took from his message the belief that Jesus will return in their lifetime.

Paul also told the early Christian communities that some of them would live to see the return of Jesus and the end of the world (Apocalypse). He also believed that Jesus would return in his own lifetime. (1st Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Many Christian denominations consider the second coming of Jesus to be the final and eternal judgement of people of every nation, resulting in the glorification of some and punishment of others. This concept is found in all canonical gospels. This idea is based on Messianic prophecies and is part of most Christian eschatology. The Nicene Creed, which was established in the early 3rd Century, also included the following eschatological view, “He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the father. He will come again in his glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end...We

look for the resurrection of the dead, and life of the world to come.” (Nicene Creed).

However, when decades passed and the second coming did not occur, Christianity went through a major period of re-assessment and a reinterpretation of the apocalyptic texts.

Judaism

Christians and Muslims believe that Jesus is the Messiah and await his second coming. On the contrary, Judaism teaches that Jesus is one of the false Messiah claimants because he failed to fulfil any Messianic prophecies, which includes:

Build the third temple (Ezekiel 37:26-28)

Gather all Jews back to the land of Israel (Isaiah 43:56)

Usher in an era of world peace and end of all hatred, oppression, suffering and disease (Isaiah 2:4)

Spread universal knowledge of the God of Israel, which will unite humanity as one (Zechariah 14:9)

Regarding the Christian idea that these prophecies will be fulfilled during a 'second coming,' one of the Jewish writers, Rabbi Meir Simcha, in his book 'Ohr Somayach,' states “We find this to be a

contrived answer, since there is no mention of a second coming in the Jewish Bible. Second, why couldn't God accomplish His goals in the first time around?"

Another Jewish writer, Rabbi David Wolpe (Rabbi of Sinai Temple, Los Angeles, USA) believes that the second coming of Jesus was grown out of genuine disappointment – when Jesus died, true believers had to be theologically compensated for the disaster.”

Islam

The second coming of Jesus is another shared belief between Christians and Muslims. In the Quran, the second coming of Jesus is proclaimed as a sign of the Day of Judgement: “He is a sign of the Hour. Have no doubt about it. But follow me. This is a straight path; do not let Satan bar your way. He is truly your sworn enemy.” (Quran 43:61-62).

After rejecting the claim of the enemies of Jesus, and in turn of God, that they killed Jesus, son of Mary, the Quran states “There is none among the People of the Book but will believe in it before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he shall be a witness against them.” (Quran 4:159).

The Islamic beliefs about the return of Jesus as

the Messiah, are mainly based on a number of Hadith (Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) which deals with the events near the end times. Abu Huraira, one of the companions (sahabah), narrates that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) said “The Hour will not be established until the son of Mary (i.e Jesus) descends amongst you as a just ruler, he will break the cross, kill the swine, and abolish Jizya tax. Money will be in abundance so that nobody will accept it (as charitable gifts).” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol. 3).

Islamic traditions states that Jesus will descend at the point of a white arcade, east of Damascus, Syria, dressed in Safron robes and his head anointed. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) said “He will come down from the heavens, and when you see him you will recognise him. He is a man of middle height with a complexion of red and white, of graceful stature. His head will seem to be dribbling of water though it will not be wet, he will be having two staffs. He will break the cross, kill the swine, abolish the levy (Jizya), and will destroy all other religions till you find none of them except Islam (Submission to the will of God). God will destroy ‘Dajjal’ (Anti-Christ) at his hand, and peace will prevail. You will see camel grazing alongside with lions, tigers together with cows, and sheep with wolves. Children will be playing with snakes, and they will not be harming each other. Jesus

will stay for an appointed time, then will die. Muslims will offer his funeral prayer and then bury him.”

(Imam Ahmad narrated by Abu Hurrairah).

Islamic texts also mention the appearance of Gog and Magog (Ya’juj and Ma’juj), ancient tribes that will spread and will cause upheaval on earth. God, in response to Jesus’ prayers, will kill them by sending a type of worm in the back of their necks. He will perform the pilgrimage (Hajj), marry and have children and will eventually die a normal death and will be buried in a grave left vacant besides Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) in Madina, Arabia.

The Trinity

The life of Jesus cannot be completed without addressing the issues relating to the Trinity. The following discussion is undertaken objectively, but with the greatest care and sensitivity, understanding its central importance among many adherents of Christianity.

The English word ‘trinity’ comes from Latin ‘trinus’ (threefold) which holds that God is one God, but three coeternal co-substantial persons; the Father, the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit as ‘one God in three divine persons.’

Council of Nicea

The first council of Nicea was summoned by the pagan Roman Emperor in 325 C.E and held in Bithynia (present day Turkey). It was the first ecumenical conference of bishops of the Christian church. Emperor Constantine presided over the opening session and took part in the discussion. He hoped a general council of the church would solve the problem created in the Eastern Church, by Bishop Arius of Alexandria, which affirmed that Jesus is not a divine being but a created being. “The council condemned Arius and with some reluctance on the part of some, incorporated the non-scriptural word ‘homousias’ (of one substance) into a creed to signify the absolute equality of the son with the father.” (Encyclopedia Britannica).

The confession of the first council of Nicea, the Nicene creed, said very little about the Holy Spirit. All attention was focused on the relationship between the father and the son, without making any similar statement about the Holy Spirit. The deep divisions created by the disputes were an ironic consequence of Emperor Constantine’s efforts to unite Christianity and establish a single imperially approved version of the faith during his reign.

Arius sparked the controversy that bears his name (Arian Controversy) when Bishop Alexander of Alexandria (Egypt), gave a sermon stating the similarity of the son to the father. Arius condemned the speech, and then told them that Jesus had always affirmed the divine unity. He argued that “There was a time when Jesus did not exist, whereas God existed even then. Since Jesus was created by God, his being was finite and so he could not possess the attributes of eternity. Only God is eternal. Since Jesus was a creature, he was subject to change like another rational creature. Only God is unchanging.” Thus, he asserted that Jesus was not God. As well as his appeal to logic, Arius backed up his arguments with numerous verses from the Bible which nowhere teaches the doctrine of Trinity. "If Jesus said, ‘My father is greater than I,’ (John 14:28), then to believe that God and Jesus were equal,” argued Arius, “was to deny the truth of the Bible.”

He (Arius) argued that, “If Jesus was in reality the ‘son of God’ then it followed that the father must have existed before the son. Therefore, it followed that the son was a creature composed of an essence or being which had not always existed. Since God is in essence eternal and ever-existent, Jesus could not be of the same essence of God.” (Jesus- A Prophet of Islam).

The Emperor then exiled Arius for heresy, an act that underscored the importance of secular patronage in ecclesiastical affairs.

Several decades later, at the first council of Constantinople (381 C.E), the second ecumenical council of the Christian Church was summoned by the Emperor Theodosius I. At the meetings in Constantinople, the Nicene Creed (325 C.E) was expanded and became known as ‘Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed’ by stating that the Holy Spirit is worshipped and glorified together with the father and the son, suggesting that the Holy Spirit was also consubstantial (of the same essence) with them (Father and son).

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, “Neither the world ‘Trinity’ nor the explicit doctrine appears in the New Testament, nor did Jesus and his followers intend to contradict the ‘Shema’ in the Hebrew Scriptures: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord Our God is One Lord.” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Father, Son and Holy Spirit were associated in such New Testament passages as the Great Commission; “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19); and in the apostolic benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit

be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:13). Thus, the New Testament established the base for the doctrine of the Trinity.”

The Christian scholars are quick to point out that the Trinity is not tritheistic idolatry and that the doctrine calls for one God, who appeared in three forms.

Nontrinitarianism is the name given to monotheistic belief systems within Christianity which reject the doctrine of the Trinity. Nontrinitarians disagree with the findings of the Council of Nicea (325 C.E) for various reasons, including the belief that the Bible as they understand it takes precedence over creeds. They emphasise the historical Jesus and strive to live as Jesus had lived.

Some of the most important of these followers of Jesus were Unitarians (Unitarianism as an organised church grew out of the protestant reformation of the 16th Century).

John Milton (1608-1674) in his ‘A Treatise Relating to God’ writes about the attributes of God and in particular the Divine Unity and then lists some of these attributes; Truth, Immensity, Infinity, Spirit (I am that I am), Eternity, Omnipresence, Omnipotence and Unity, which, he says, “...proceeds necessarily from all the foregoing attributes.” Milton then lists

the following proofs from the Bible: “Jehovah, He is God, there is none besides Him.” (Deuteronomy 4:35).

“Jehovah, He is God in the heavens above and upon the earth beneath: there is none else.” (Deuteronomy 4:39).

“I, even I, am He and there is no God with me.” (Deuteronomy 32:39).

“...Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the Kingdoms of the earth.” (2 King 19:15).

“There is no God else besides me...there is none besides me.” (Isaiah 45:21).

“I am God and there is none else. I am God and there is none like me.” (Isaiah 46:9).

Commenting on the above verse, Milton says “that is, no spirit, no person, no being besides Him is God for ‘none’ is a universal negative.” He continued, “Nothing can be said of One God which is inconsistent with His unity, and which assigns to him at the same time the attributes of unity and plurality.” (Mark 12: 29-32). “‘Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.’ To which answer the scribe asserted, ‘Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is One God; and there is none other than He.’” Milton agrees with Arius that Jesus was not eternal. He says that it was in God’s power to create or not to create Jesus.

On the topic of the Holy Spirit, Milton draws

the following conclusions from his knowledge of the Bible; “The Holy Spirit is not omniscient, the Holy Spirit is not omnipresent. It cannot be said that because the Holy Spirit carries out the work of God, therefore it is part of God. If this was so then why is the Holy Spirit called the comforter, who will come after Jesus, who speaks not of himself nor in his own name, and whose power therefore is acquired? (John 16:7-14). It therefore becomes clear that instead of accepting the term ‘comforter’ in its obvious sense as a Prophet who will come after Jesus, to call him Holy Spirit and yet call him God create a confusion which cannot be ended.” (The Christian Doctrines - J Milton).

Thomas Emlyn (1663-1774) was a Presbyterian minister and preached his first sermon in 1682. He was arrested in 1703 and charged with being a heretic for publishing a book on unitarianism entitled: ‘A Humble Inquiry into the Scripture Account of Jesus Christ.’ The entire book is based on the text in John 14:28 in which Jesus says, “My father is greater than I.”

Emlyn felt that those points had to be elaborated in a way which would be understood by general public. “First, Jesus speaks of another God distinct from himself. (Matthew 27:46 and John 8:42).

Secondly, Jesus owns, not only another than himself to be God, but also that he is above or over himself, which is plainly intimidated by his apostles. He loudly declared his father to be greater than himself. (John 14:28). Thirdly, Jesus disclaims those infinite perfections (underside power, absolute goodness, unlimited knowledge) which belong only to ‘the Supreme God of Gods.’ And it is most certain that, if he lacks one or any of these perfections that are essential to the Deity, he is not God in the same sense. If we find him disclaiming the one, he cannot challenge the other, for to deny himself to have all divine perfections, or to deny himself to be the infinite God is the same thing.”

Emlyn then went on to give some instances for the proof of this last point, “Now it is most evident, that Jesus, confesses again and again, that he had no infinite power by himself: “of myself I can do nothing.” (John 5:30)

Emlyn also examined the statement attributed to Jesus in Mark 13:32, speaking of the Day of Judgement, he says “of that Day knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, not the son, but the Father only.” Emlyn observed that for anyone who believed in the divinity of Jesus, this statement would imply that God had two natures, or two different states of awareness simultaneously. It would put Him in the

ridiculous position of knowing and not knowing something at the same time. If Jesus was divine and God had this knowledge then Jesus would not have made this statement, since by having this nature, he too would have possessed that knowledge.

Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808) was born in 1723. He was the organiser for the first unitarian congregation in England. In his writings, Lindsey made the following points to establish the fact that Jesus Christ is not God, “Jesus never styles himself as God; nor does he drop the least information that he was the person by whom all things were made. The scriptures of the Old Testament throughout speak of but one person, One Jehovah, as God by Himself, Alone and Creator of all things. Jesus made mention of no other God but Jehovah, and never took upon himself to speak anything of himself; but as the father, whose messenger he was, gave him commandment what he should say and what he should speak.” (John 12:49)

Lindsey went on to state that an examination of Luke’s Gospel shows that he believed that Jesus had no existence before he was born of his mother, Mary, since in Luke 3:23-38, a lineal descent of Jesus is given. In Luke 4:24 and 8:33, Jesus is acknowledged to be a Prophet of God. In Luke 7:16 and 24:19, Jesus

is called a Prophet. In Luke 3:13, 26 and 4:27-30, Peter and some of the other apostles call Jesus the servant of God. In Luke 17:24-30, Luke describes him as the “son of man”, anointed to an important office under God that made the world. Lindsey asked those who worshipped Jesus what their reaction would be if Jesus appeared to them and asked the following questions: “Why did you address me? Did I ever direct you to do it, or propose myself as an object of religious worship? Did I not uniformly and to the last set you an example myself of praying to the Father, to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God?” (John 20:17). When my disciples requested me to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1-4), did I teach them to pray to myself or to any other person but the Father? Did I ever call myself God, or tell you that I was the maker of the world and to be worshipped? Solomon, after building the temple said, ‘Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee: how much less this house which I have built.’” (I Kings 8:27) (A List of False Reading of the Scripture, T. Lindsey).

Lindsey’s belief in the Divine Unity is evident from these words of his, “The infinite creator should be worshipped in all places for He is everywhere...no place is more sacred than another, but every place sacred for the prayer. The worshipper makes the

place. Whenever there is a devout humble mind that looks to God, God is there. A mind free from sin is the true temple of God.” (Two Dissertations, T. Lindsey).

Today, the Non-trinitarian denominations comprise a minority of modern Christianity. They include Oneness Pentecostal, Unitarian Christians, Jehovah Witnesses, La Luz del Mundo, the Iglesia ni Cristo, and Christadelphians.

Although ‘trinity’ does not explicitly appear in the New Testament, Christian scholars cite numerous passages from the Gospels to support the doctrine of Trinity.

Pre-existence of Christ

The verse in support of Jesus’ divinity is in the Gospel of John 8:58 which reads “Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’” This verse is taken to suggest that Jesus existed prior to his birth on earth. The conclusion drawn from it is that Jesus must be God, since his existence predates his birth on earth. However, the concept of the pre-existence of man subsists in both the Old Testament as well as in the Quran. In the Book of Jeremiah, we read “Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying “Before I formed you in the womb, I

knew you; before you were born, I sanctified you; and I ordained you a Prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:4-5)

In the Quran, God informed us that man existed in the spiritual form before the creation of the physical world: “When your Lord brought forth offspring from the loins of the children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said “Am I not your Lord?” They replied, “We bear witness that You are.” This He did, lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, “We had no knowledge of that.” (Quran 7:172). Therefore, Jesus spoke about God’s knowledge of His Prophets and men, which predates the creation of this world.

One with God

Another verse quoted by the adherents of the Trinity is John 10:30, which states “I and my father are one.” Out of context, this verse implies Jesus’ divinity. In order to find out the common ground, we need to look at the context in which the above verse (John 10:30) came. “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me. But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they

follow me. And I gave them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my father's hand. I and my father are one." (John 10: 25-30).

As can be seen from the verses (John 10:25-29) prior to Verse 30, that he and God share something in common, which was their purpose in leading the children of Israel toward righteousness and Godliness and not one of essence. Four chapters later in the same Gospel of John, Jesus is reported to have said "At that day you will know that I am in my father, and you in me, and I in you." (John 14:20)

The symbolic interpretation of oneness in purpose is further emphasised by Jesus when he said "that they (disciples) all may be one, as You, Father, are in me, and I in You; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that You sent me. And the glory which You gave me I have given them, that they may be one just as we are one." (John 17:21-22).

Islam does not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Quran totally rejects the idea that Jesus is God, or the Son of God. It says that the birth of Jesus was similar to the birth of Adam, the only difference is that Adam was created without a father and a mother. The Holy Quran states "Jesus in the sight of

God is like Adam. He created him from dust; then said to him, ‘Be!’ And he was.” (Quran 3:59).

The Quran further mentions that Jesus was a Prophet who taught the oneness of God (Tawhid), a fundamental belief taught by the respective Abrahamic Prophets and included in the Holy Books. The Quran emphasises oneness of God; “Say, ‘He is God, the One, God, the self-sufficient one. He does not give birth, nor was He born, and there is nothing like Him.’” (Quran 112:1-4).

He Accepted Worship

It is contended that since Jesus is presumed to have accepted the worship of some of his followers, he must be God: “And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying “Rejoice!” And they came and held him by the feet and worshipped him.” (Matthew 28:9).

They “worshipped him” does not mean that they worshipped Jesus as one worships God. Such an act would be regarded sacrilegious and a serious breach of the first commandment (Shema) in the eyes of the Jews. But they knelt before him in token and gratitude. It is simply false to equate an act of someone bowing to another as worship. In the middle eastern culture, bowing is not necessarily worship,

many times it is simply an act of honour.

In the Old Testament it is stated that when Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey, and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. (1 Samuel 25:23) and in Verse 41 of the same book, “She fell at his feet...”(1 Samuel 25:41). In Acts 10:25-26, the text clearly says, “When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him.”

The Quran clarified the issue of worshipping or not worshiping Jesus, by quoting a conversation which will take place between Jesus and God on the Day of Judgement; “When God says, “Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, “Take me and my mother as two deities besides God?” He will answer “Glory be to you! How could I ever say that to which I have no right? If I had ever said so, You would surely have known it. You know what is in my mind, while I do not know anything that is within Yours. You alone are the Knower of the unseen things- I told them only what you commanded me to: ‘Worship God, my Lord and Your Lord.’” (Quran 5:116-117)

The Son of God

Another evidence used for the divinity of Jesus is the implementation of the title ‘Son of God’ in

many places throughout the Gospels.

Those against the Trinity argue that the Jews often referred to people as ‘son of God’ and ‘sons of God.’ There are numerous places in the Old Testament where these titles have been given to others. In Psalms 89:26-28, David called God his father, God in turn told David that He will name David his first-born and highest King of the earth.

In the Genesis flood narrative, refer to ‘sons of God’ who married the daughters of men. (Genesis 6:2).

The Biblical judges are called Gods and the Sons of God. (Psalm 82:1-8) and Adam the first man was called the son of God. (Luke 3:38). The opponents of the Trinity also ask why there is such a long lineage (Luke 7:16) if one is to accept the ‘Son of God’ dogma? Some Trinitarian scholars claim that what is unique in the case of Jesus is that he is “only begotten son of God” (John 3:16), while others are merely ‘Sons of God.’ However, God is reported to have told David in Psalms 2:7 “I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to me, “You are my son, today I have begotten you.”

God says at the end of the chapter called Surah Maryam in the Quran that it is an abominable assertion to claim that God has a son: “They say, “The Gracious One has begotten a son.” Assuredly you

have uttered a monstrous falsehood: The heavens might well-nigh burst thereat, and the mountains fall down in pieces, because they ascribe a son to the Gracious One. It does not become the Majesty of the Compassionate God to take to Himself a son.” (Quran 19:88-92). The Islamic viewpoint is very clear in this regard, that it is an incorrect belief and contrary to the Majesty of God that He either has a son or have any partners.

Muslims and Christians share very similar beliefs about Jesus. Both believe in the miraculous birth of Jesus and that he was the Messiah sent to the children of Israel. Both faiths also believe in the second coming of Jesus. However, in one major detail, they are worlds apart. Muslims believe with certainty, that Jesus is not God nor is he the son of God.

Excellence of Jesus

Throughout human history, God, the creator sent a great number of Prophets or messengers to guide human beings. Each Prophet conveyed the same Divine message of worshipping One God and living a morally upright life.

The first of these Prophets was Adam and the last of them was Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h).

Amongst the chain of Prophets was Isa Ibn Maryam (Jesus, son of Mary). The significance of Jesus in Islam is reflected in his being mentioned in the Quran in 93 Verses with various titles such as ‘son of Mary’ and other rational terms being mentioned, directly and indirectly, over 187 times. He is thus one of the most mentioned people in the Quran by references; 25 times by the name Isa, 48 times in third person, 35 times in first person and the remainder by titles and attributes. Jesus is also known as ‘Messiah’ in the Quran and is mentioned 25 times. He was given the Holy Book, Injeel or Gospel. Most Christians will be surprised to learn that a part of the article of faith in Islam is to believe in the miraculous birth of Jesus, his many miracles performed by the permission of God, the Gospel (Injeel) given to him by God, his message of the Oneness of God (Tawheed), his ascension and his second coming at the end of time.

Muslims love and admire Jesus and will not speak the name of Jesus without respectfully adding the words “may peace be upon him.” The Quran refers to Jesus as ‘Ruh Allah’ or “the Spirit of Allah,” in that God favours him with many unique miracles, reflecting some of God’s attributes. Prophet Jesus was the second last Prophet to be sent into this world. He was the seal of the Prophets to the children of Israel, simply because he was the final Prophet sent to them

by God.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) spoke of Jesus many times, even describing him as his brother; “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 him (Jesus).” (Sahih Al- Bukhari).

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) said, “I saw in my dream a man of brown colour, the best one can see amongst the brown coloured, and his hair was long and it fell between his shoulders. His hair was curly and water was dripping from his head, and his hands were on the shoulders of two men while circumambulating the Ka’bah. I asked, ‘who is this?’ They replied, ‘This is Isa, son of Maryam.’” (Bukhari).

Some of the characteristics of Prophet Jesus are:

He is among the Prophets who are recognised as strong-willed or possessors of strong resolve. (Ulul’azm).

He was of average height; neither tall nor short.

His appearance was clean and radiant as if glowing with beads of water.

His hair was curly, long and reached halfway down his back, glistening as if it were wet or oiled.

His physical frame was well built with a broad chest and shoulders.

He was the most handsome of people.

Prophet Jesus (Isa) was honoured with many great qualities and characteristics, and he was also endowed with ‘Jawami al-Kalim’ (Short statements with profound meanings). From amongst his profound statements are:

“Do not speak a great amount without remembering Allah, for the reason that your hearts will harden. Undoubtedly a hard heart is distance from Allah although you may not know it. Do not look at the faults of others like aristocrats. Rather, like servants, look at your own faults. In truth, humanity is comprised of two types: the afflicted and the sound. So, show mercy to the afflicted, and praise Allah for well-being.” (Kitab al-Zuhd of Imam Ahmad).

“Righteous action does not consist of doing good to someone who has done good to you, that is simply returning a favour. Rather, righteous action is doing good to those who have wronged you.” (Kitab al-Zuhd of Imam Ahmad).

“Once the disciples asked Isa, ‘Who is it best for us to sit with?’ He replied, ‘A person whose sight makes you remember Allah, and whose words

improve your deeds, and whose deeds remind you of the hereafter.” (Kitab al-Zuhd of Imam Ahmad).

“Isa said: ‘O the weak son of Adam! Fear Allah wherever you are. Stay in this world like a guest and treat the Masajid as your homes. Teach your eyes to cry, your body to remain patient, and your heart to contemplate.’” (Qasas Al-Anbiya of Ibn Kathir).

“Isa said: ‘Love of this world and love of the next world can never reside in the heart of a believer simultaneously, just as fire and water cannot be contained in a single vessel at the same time.’” (al-Majalisah wa Jawahir al-Ilm).

“Isa said: ‘Glad tidings for the one who weeps over his sins, guards his tongue, and whose house is sufficient for him.’” (Qasas Al-Anbiya of Ibn Kathir).

“Isa said: ‘When any one of you is fasting, he should oil his head and beard and wipe his lips so that people do not know that he is fasting. In addition, when one gives with the right hand, let him hide it from his left hand. Also, when one prays, he should lower the curtain of his door, for Allah distributes praise, just as he distributes provision.’” (Kitab al-Zuhd of Imam Ahmad).

It is narrated 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 slave and His apostle, and that Jesus is Allah’s slave and His apostle 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.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari. No. 3435).

Judaism’s View of Jesus

Traditional Judaism has no specific doctrinal view of ‘Jeshu’ as he is called in Hebrew since the central belief of Judaism is absolute unity and singularity of God. Judaism forbids the worship of a person as a form of idolatry, and therefore contemplation of Jesus as deity is not a significant issue in traditional Jewish thought because Jewish eschatology holds that the coming of the Messiah will be associated with a specific series of events that have not yet occurred.

Historically, some Jewish writers and scholars have considered Jesus as the most influential ‘false Prophet’ and traditional views of Jesus as a Messiah

have been mostly negative. The word ‘messiah’ is an English rendering of the Hebrew word ‘mashiach’ which means ‘anointed.’ It refers to a person initiated into God’s service by being anointed with oil.

Jews do not accept Jesus as the Messiah because Jesus did not fulfil the messianic prophecies. Jews believe that the Messiah will fulfil the messianic prophecies of the Prophet Isaiah and Ezekiel. The Messiah is expected to return the Jews to their homeland. (Isaiah 43:5-6) and build the third temple (Ezekiel 37:26-28). According to Isaiah, the Messiah will be the paternal descendant of King David and will reign as King. He will usher in an era of world peace, and end all hatred, oppression, suffering and disease. (Isaiah 2:4). He will also spread the knowledge of the God of Israel, which will unite humanity as one. (Zechariah 14:9).

If anyone who claims to be the Messiah but fails to fulfil even one of these conditions, then he cannot be the Messiah, and because no one has fulfilled the Bible’s description of this future King, Jews still await the coming of the Messiah.

Christians respond that Jesus will fulfil these in his second coming. Jewish sources indicate that the Messiah will fulfil the prophecies outright; in the Bible no concept of Second Coming exists.

Jesus did not embody the personal qualification

of Messiah; the Jewish view of the Messiah is that he will be the greatest Prophet in history, second only to Moses (Targum-Isaiah 11:2). Jesus appeared on the scene approximately 350 years after the prophecy had ended upon the death of the last Prophets- Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and therefore, could not be a Prophet.

The Messiah must be descended on his father's side from King David and will rule Israel during the era of perfection (Ezekiel: 37:21-28 and Jeremiah 23:5). According to Judaism, the Messiah will be born of human parents and possess normal physical attributes like other people. He will not be a Demi-god nor will he possess supernatural qualities. The Messiah is supposed to lead the Jewish people to full Torah observance. The Torah states that all mitzvot remain binding forever, and anyone coming to change the Torah is immediately identified as a false Prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).

Many of the original Hebrew texts reveal discrepancies in the Christian translation; mistranslated verses 'referring' to Jesus in the Bible. For example, "the Christian idea of a virgin birth is derived from the verse in Isaiah 7:14 describing an 'alma' as giving birth. The word 'alma' has always meant a young woman, but Christian theologians came centuries later and translated it as 'virgin.' This

accords Jesus' birth with the first century pagan idea of mortals being impregnated by Gods.

Another example is when Christianity claims that Isaiah Chapter 53 refers to Jesus, as the 'suffering servant.' In actuality, Isaiah directly follows the theme of Chapter 52, describing the exile and redemption of the Jewish people. The prophecies are written in the singular form because the Jews (Israel) are regarded as one unit." (See Isaiah 43:8)." ('Why Jews Don't Believe in Jesus' by Rabbi Michael Skobac and Rabbi Shrug Simmons).

Judaism is based solely on National Revelation i.e., God speaking to the entire nation. Maimonides, also known as 'Rambam', was a medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher and one of the most influential Torah scholars of the middle ages. He states "The Jews did not believe in Moses, our teacher, because of the miracles he performed. Whenever anyone's belief is based on seeing miracles, he has lingering doubts, because it is possible the miracles were performed through magic or sorcery. All of the miracles performed by Moses in the desert were because they were necessary, and not as proof of his prophecy. What then was the basis of Jewish belief? The revelation at Mount Sinai, which we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears, not dependent on the testimony of others...as it says,

“Face to face, God spoke with you...” the Torah also states: “God did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us- who are all here live today.” (Deuteronomy 5:3).” (Foundation of Torah, Chapter 8).

“Judaism is not miracles. It is the personal eyewitness experience of every man, woman and child, standing at Mount Sinai thirty-three hundred years ago.” (Rabbi Michael Skobac and Rabbi Shrug Simmons).

Judaism teaches that it is heretical for any man to claim to be God, part of God, or the literal son of God. The Jerusalem Talmud (Ta’anit 2:1) state explicitly: “If a man claims to be God, he is a liar.”

Prophet

Muhammad

(Peace Be Upon Him)

The Age before Islam

The sixth century of the Christian Era represented the darkest period in the history of our race. Humanity had reached a steep cliff towards which it had been tragically moving for centuries, and there was no way to rescue it from violently crushing into the 'bottomless pit' of destruction.

Man in this wretched state had forgotten his true state of being and became indifferent to the real purpose of his creation and destiny. He had forgotten the teachings of the messengers of God. The lamps that they ignited had been extinguished by the storms of moral decay and disorder, with only a weak

flickering light in the hearts of a few who sought shelter in apathy and resignation. Having thoroughly been defeated in the battle between spiritualism and materialism, they secluded themselves in monasteries or disappeared into the wilderness.

There were others who associated themselves with the rich and the ruling classes, participating in maintaining unjust political and economic systems in order to reap the unlawful benefits from the wealth of the masses. Great religions became a toy in the hands of the unscrupulous clergymen who twisted them beyond recognition.

Christianity had failed to provide a morally based society, only consisting of basic outlines of the teachings of Jesus. It did a little more than to reflect the simple creed of monotheism and eventually fell under the teachings and influence of St. Paul. Gradually, the flickering flame of the Divine message of Isa-Ibn-Mariam (Jesus) was extinguished and replaced by the old pagan rites and customs introduced into Christianity.

Centuries of extreme disintegration had pushed Christianity into the lap of paganism. It became a curious mixture of Greek Mythology, Roman Idolatry and Monasticism, in which the pure and simple teachings of Jesus were lost.

On the other hand, the children of Israel were

still able to maintain a large part of their spiritual inheritance. They were still capable and knowledgeable in interpreting theological and scriptural terms and symbols. Unfortunately, they were unable to command or influence a position in the fields of religion, culture and politics. They (Jews) lived in subjection to other nations and were exposed to injustice, oppression, chastisement, extradition, troubles and hardships.

Arabs

For centuries, the Arabs were isolated and shunned by the nations around them that considered them to be barbaric without any morality or spirituality. They were indulging in every kind of vice, perversion, idolatry and living a primitive life. The belief of One Supreme Being was restricted to a very few amongst them while the majority of them practiced complete idolatry. The idols that were meant to serve as intermediaries were raised to divine status. Each tribe, city and locality had their own God. Al-Kalbi, in his book 'Kitab al-Asnam', stated that "every household in Makkah had its own idol. When Makkahns started on a journey, his last act at home would be to invoke the blessings of the family deity, and the first thing he did on return was to pay

reverence to it.”

People would compete with each other in collecting idols and constructing temples for them. They worshipped stones and upon finding a better stone, they would discard the old one and take up the better one for worship. Again, it is stated that “when a traveller halted at a place, he used to collect four stones, worship the most beautiful of them, and used the other three to rest his pot on for cooking.” (Kitab-al-Asnam).

Angels, stars, spirits and all other objects of reverence found in polytheistic faiths were adored as divine beings by the Arabs. The Kaaba, the holiest shrine in Islam, which was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael, was filled with many idols. The chief idol’s name was Hubal and Allah was considered as one of the gods, but was called upon only in crisis. There was not the same monotheistic concept of Allah as was taught by the Prophets or as believed by the Muslims today. In addition, there were three goddesses in Kaaba named al-Lat, Manat and al-Uzza. The pagan Arabs considered them daughters of Allah. Despite covered with gods by the pagans, in contradiction of monotheistic intentions of its founders, the Kaaba continued to retain its sacred status (though for entirely different deities) and was an essential and important centre for pilgrimage.

Drinking alcohol among the Arabs was very common, so much so that even their poetry revealed how passionately they were in love with their liquor. Usury was rampant, gambling was a matter of pride and adultery was not considered an immoral act. The conditions of women were horrible and they were not even entitled to any inheritance rights. Daughters were buried alive; pride and poverty had created the reprehensible crime of female infanticide among all the Arab tribes. Fear, chaos and lawlessness completely covered the entire Arabian Peninsula prior to the birth of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h).

The Advent of Muhammad (p.b.u.h)

Man had lost self-respect to the point that he was shamelessly prostrating before stones, trees and many other helpless signs of nature. He had become so confused and his senses had become so corrupted, that he could not distinguish the real from the unreal and disputed about that which was obviously right and true.

In humanity's confusion and corruption, God raised up Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), whose lineage was from Abraham through his first son Ishmael, through Kedar (Qedar) (Genesis 25:13), one of the twelve sons of Ishmael.

His mission was to breathe new life into humanity and to deliver it from darkness into light. The Quran says “Alif. Lam. Ra. We have revealed to you this Book so that, by their Lord’s command, you may lead men from darkness into light: to the path of the Mighty, the Praiseworthy One, to God, who possesses whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. Woe to those who deny the truth, for they shall be sternly punished!” (Quran 14:1-2).

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) broke the shackles of ignorance and superstition and invited man to a servitude that released them from every other form of bondage. He restored to them the legitimate comforts of life from which they had deprived themselves under the false ethical and spiritual notions. The Holy Quran states “Also for those who follow the messenger- the unlettered Prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel- who commands them to do right and forbids them to do wrong, who makes good things lawful to them and bad things unlawful, who will relieve them of their burdens and of the shackles that weigh upon them. Those that believe in him and honour him, those that aid him and follow the light sent down with him, shall surely triumph.” (Quran 7:157).

Abdul Hassan Ali Nadawi writes “His advent

gave to humanity a new life, a new light, a new faith, a new warmth, a new society, and a new culture. It ushered in a new era in the human history marking the commencement of the real mission of man upon earth.” (Islam & the World).

The Birth of Muhammad (p.b.u.h)

Abd al-Muttalib, the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), had ten sons and six daughters from five wives. Abdullah, the father of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was the youngest of the ten sons and was mild tempered, very sociable and a man of high moral values. When Abdullah reached adulthood, he was married to Aminah, the daughter of the chief of the Zurah Clan. It was a happy marriage as both partners became fond of each other.

The family was in the trading business and, as Abdullah was preparing to join the trade caravan to Syria, Aminah gave him the good news of her pregnancy. He was overjoyed and set off on his journey with the hope of a bright and a happy future. The trip to Syria was very difficult, especially travelling in the blazing hot sun. Although Abdullah was in his twenties, he contracted some sort of disease which sapped his strength. When the caravan arrived in Yathrib (later to be known as Madinah), he was left

there to be taken care of by his family but he eventually succumbed to his illness and passed away.

Soon after the death of Abdullah, Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was born. The exact year of his birth is not known, but most reports suggest that it was 570 C.E, the year when Abraha, the Abyssinian ruler of Yemen, launched his attack on Makkah. As for the date, it was probably on the 12th Rabbi-al-Awwal in the year 53 B.H (Before Hijra; migration to Madinah). When Amina delivered her baby, she sent for his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib to come and see him. Aminah also told him that she heard a voice commanding her to call her child Muhammad, which means 'often praised' or 'worthy of praise' and was an unfamiliar name in Arabia.

Upbringing of Muhammad (p.b.u.h)

Muhammad (p.b.u.h) lived with his mother, who adored him and looked after him with much care, giving much of her attention to him, as she did not remarry after her young husband died. When Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was six years old, Aminah decided to take him to Yathrib (Madinah) along with Umm Ayman, a slave girl of Abdullah and whose real name was Barakah. The purpose of the trip was to meet his maternal uncles, but most importantly,

Aminah wanted him to visit his father. Abdullah's grave in Yathrib was a long way from Makkah.

Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and his mother, along with Umm Ayman, stayed in Yathrib for a month before leaving to return to Makkah. They had not travelled far before Aminah became seriously ill and died at al-Abwa, where she was buried. She was leaving a six-year-old Muhammad (p.b.u.h) behind with a sorrowful heart to return home with Umm Ayman.

After his mother's death, Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was left in the care of his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib and Umm Ayman. Two years later, his grandfather also passed away, leaving him with one of his uncles, Abu Talib, who was a respected tribal leader in Makkah. Abu Talib continued to look after Muhammad (p.b.u.h) until he became a man. He also continued to give Muhammad (p.b.u.h) sound advice and guidance. Abu Talib was not rich and had a large family to support, so Muhammad (p.b.u.h) started to assist his uncle by working as a shepherd.

Muhammad's (p.b.u.h) Character

Muhammad (p.b.u.h) continued to set for himself, very early in his life, a high code of honour. His noble character and high ethical and moral

standards were clearly noticeable, long before his being chosen as a universal Prophet. He was respected by his society for his honesty, kindness and trustworthiness. It was customary for people to leave their wealth and other valuable belongings in his care for safe keeping, without any witnesses or agreements, trusting him that he would return their belongings without any issue. In doing so, he gained the title/nickname, al-Sadiq (the Truthful) and al-Amin (the Trustworthy)

After working as a shepherd, Muhammad (p.b.u.h) decided that he should find work in trade and business. He soon found employment as an agent for a rich widow named Khadijah bint Khuwaylid. She began sending him on trade missions to Syria with quantities of goods. He continued to gain experience in his early travels and Khadijah was very pleased with his work, paying him more than her other employees. She realised that she was fortunate to have a person working for her who possessed the combination of honesty and integrity, with a keen eye for business.

Muhammad's (p.b.u.h) Marriage to Khadijah

Khadijah, being a wealthy widow, received many marriage proposals but she knew that it was her wealth that enticed her suitors, so she declined the many proposals she received. However, after having started a business relationship with Muhammad (p.b.u.h), she realised that there was a man for whom money was not the greatest priority and began to think of him from a different perspective.

After consulting a few close relatives regarding her intention, Khadijah sent a close friend of hers to make an indirect approach to Muhammad (p.b.u.h), who reacted positively to Khadijah's proposal. When she was sure of Muhammad's (p.b.u.h) reaction, she sent him a message asking him to come and see her. After their conversation, she proposed that they should get married. Muhammad (p.b.u.h) went to inform his uncle Abu Talib about the marriage and he was very pleased with the marriage.

Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and Khadijah were married and Muhammad (p.b.u.h) gave her twenty young camels as a dowry. Most biographers put the age of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) to be twenty-five years old while Khadijah was about forty years. From all reports, it was a happy marriage. Muhammad

(p.b.u.h) was a most caring and loving husband who attended to his family duties and unlike the polygamous practices in Arabia, Muhammad (p.b.u.h) did not have a second wife while Khadijah was alive. Muhammad (p.b.u.h) spent twenty-five years of marriage with Khadijah before she passed away. During the twenty five-years of marriage, Khadijah had given him four daughters and two sons.

Khadijah first gave birth to a boy who was named Al-Qasim, followed by four daughters; Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthum and Fatimah and finally the last to be born was their son Abdullah. Al-Qasim lived only a few years while Abdullah died before it was time for him to be weaned. The first three daughters died in Madinah, while Fatimah was the only daughter of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) to survive him. She died six months after his death.

Life in Makkah & Prophethood

The people of Makkah were mostly illiterate though they excelled in poetry. The pre-Islamic culture of Makkah was known as 'Jahiliyyah' or 'the age of ignorance;' indulging in all types of vice. They started to drift away from the pure faith of Abraham and Ishmael long before the birth of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). The Arabs borrowed idolatrous

worship from other nations and forgot their monotheistic faith.

The prevailing conditions of the Arabs was such that he wanted no part of it and began going for days to a cave called Hira, which was only a few miles away from Makkah and offered him complete seclusion. There he meditated deeply and worshipped God for a long period of time. When his supply of food and drink was exhausted, he would go back home for a fresh supply and return for another few days.

In the year 610 C.E when Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was forty years old, his whole life changed; starting a new episode in the history of religion, when angel Gabriel came to him, pressed him and told him “read” but Muhammad (p.b.u.h) replied “I cannot read.” This exchange was repeated until eventually the first five verses of the Quran were revealed to him through Archangel Gabriel; “Read! In the name of your Lord, who created: created man from a clot (of blood). Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.” (Quran 96:1-5).

Muhammad - Prophet of Allah

Trembling, Muhammad (p.b.u.h) rushed home

to Khadijah in a state of complete exhaustion and asked her to cover him with a cloak. She covered him and comforted him with reassuring words that God will not let him suffer humiliation. She then took him to her paternal cousin Waraqah Ibn Nawfal, who was a Christian convert and a scholar with good knowledge of Arabic, Hebrew and the Bible. Muhammad (p.b.u.h) told him what he experienced, and Waraqah assured him that “it was the same revelation as was sent down to Moses.”

The Preaching

After the initial revelation on Mount Hira, revelation stopped for a while and it resumed with the following verse commanding the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) to call the people of Makkah to Islam; “O, you, wrapped in your cloak, arise and give warnings! Proclaim the glory of your Lord; purify your garments; shun uncleanness; do not bestow a favour in the expectation of receiving more in return; and for the sake of your Lord, be patient.” (Quran 74:1-7)

Muhammad (p.b.u.h) initially had kept his prophecy to his own circle of family and close friends who confirmed his Prophethood and mission. Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) stood on the hill of Safa and said to the people “Supposing I now told you that just

behind the slopes of this hill there is an enemy calvary force charging on you, would you believe?” “We never knew that you lied,” they replied. Then he said, “I warn you; I have a message from God, and I have come to you as a Warner and as a forerunner of a dreadful punishment. I cannot protect you in this world, nor can I promise you aught in the next life, unless you declare that there is no God but the One God.”

They refused his message, mocked him and went away. They called him crazy, a sorcerer and a liar to discredit him. They incited the ignorant masses against him, to spit on his face, swear at him and throw dirt on his face.

The leaders of the Quraysh began torturing those who converted to Muhammad’s (p.b.u.h) message. Among them was Bilal Ibn Rabab, an African slave from Ethiopia. He was dragged on hot desert sand; heavy rocks were placed on his chest and he was asked to renounce his newfound faith preached by Muhammad (p.b.u.h). Like all other converts, he refused.

Despite the hardship faced by the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and his small band of followers, he did not stop preaching to his people of a punishment that would come upon them, if they did not turn away from their idols and serve God alone.

The Quraysh called for a social and economic boycott of Muslims, causing many poor and vulnerable Muslims to die from lack of food and other hardships. This difficult experience took a heavy toll on Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and his family, and in 619 C.E, both his wife Khadijah and his uncle Abu Talib died from their failing health caused mainly by the boycott. This year is called ‘The Year of Sorrow’ as Muhammad (p.b.u.h) lost two of his most beloved and staunch supporters.

The purest form of monotheism, which is the essence of Muhammad’s (p.b.u.h) faith, was an impossible doctrine for the Quraysh to accept. But Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was not sent to the aristocrats alone; he was a messenger to all mankind as God ordered “Mankind! We have created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes, so that you might come to know each other. The noblest of you in God’s sight is the one who fears God most. God is All Knowing and All Aware.” (Quran 49:13)

Migration to Abyssinia (Ethiopia)

The early Muslims were facing intensive persecution which prompted Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) to advise them to seek refuge in Abyssinia (present day Ethiopia), whose Christian King, Negus or 'Al-Najashi' in Arabic will give them shelter. This emigration of eleven men and four women took place in the fifth year of the Quranic revelations and it is known as the first Hijrah (migration) which preceded the emigration to Madina by eight years.

When the Quraysh learned that the Muslims could practice their religion in Ethiopia, they (Quraysh) did not remain idle. They sent emissaries with presents to the Ethiopians and petitioned them for the return of the escaped Muslims. However, the King refused to hand over people who had asked for his protection, until he heard their side of the story.

Ja'far Ibn Talib spoke on behalf of the Muslim refugees and told the king about their life before Islam and what Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) taught them and also the persecution they faced at the hands of the Quraysh. The king asked them if they had with them anything which had come from God. When Ja'far confirmed, the king asked him to read it. Ja'far then recited a passage from 'Surah Maryam' (Chapter

of Mary). When the king heard it, he wept and exclaimed “Verily, this and what Jesus brought (Gospel) has come from the same source of Light (Miskat).” He then affirmed that he would never give up the Muslims. (Siratu Rasulillah by Ibn Ishaq).

Muhammad’s visit to Ta’if

Preaching in Makkah became hopeless and difficult, so he turned his hopes away from his tribe and city to other cities and tribes. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) along with his servant Zayd Ibn Harithah decided to go to the city of Ta’if, about fifty miles southeast of Makkah. They walked up the rugged mountains to the city and visited the tribal leaders to invite them to Islam, but they paid no heed to his message.

Muhammad turned to the common people of Ta’if to invite them to Islam. They also rejected the message of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and ordered their children to throw rocks and stones at Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and Zayd to make them leave the city. Both men were wounded and bleeding as they left Ta’if with Muhammad so profusely that his feet became clotted to his shoes. They went to a short distance outside of the city and stopped in an orchard. His feet bleeding, he sat and supplicated to his Lord for His

mercy. It was in the orchard that the angel Gabriel came to him with the angel of the mountains and said that if Muhammad (p.b.u.h) wanted, he would crush people of Ta'if between the mountains. Muhammad (p.b.u.h) responded, "Even if these people do not accept Islam, I do hope from Allah that there will be persons from among their progeny who would worship Allah and serve His cause." (Sahih Muslim). They later gathered enough strength and continued their journey back to Makkah, arriving in three days.

The Significance of Isra & Miraj

Isra and Miraj were the most miraculous and dignified journeys of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) before his migration to Yathrib (Madinah). This miraculous journey took place in the year in which he lost his beloved wife Khadijah and uncle Abu Talib, leaving him and his small band of followers to face the hostility from the Quraysh in Makkah. He was even mercilessly persecuted by the pagan Arabs in Ta'if when he invited them to Islam.

It was during these difficult and trying times that God sent angel Gabriel to take the Prophet (p.b.u.h) on the most glorious journey ever experienced by anyone on earth. On that blessed night, Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was taken physically

from the grand mosque in Makkah to Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem (Al-Quds), which is about 1230km from Makkah; this part of the journey is called Isra. After reaching Jerusalem, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) entered the Masjid Al-Aqsa where God had assembled for him all of the Prophets, from Adam to Jesus (Isa). Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) then led them in prayer.

This journey is mentioned in the Quran; “Holy is He who took His servant at night from the sacred place of worship to the remote house of worship- the precincts of which we have blessed, so that we might show him some of our signs. Surely, it is He who is All Hearing, and All Seeing.” (Quran 17:1). Isra also fulfilled the Prophetic tradition of the Book of Malachi (3:1); “Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: And the Adonai (Lord) whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the YHWH sabaoth (Lord of the Hosts).” The Jewish Bible, in the Book of Haggai (2:7), also makes this prediction; “And I will shake all nations, and the Ahmad (Himdah) of all nations will come; and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.” Prophet Muhammad’s (p.b.u.h) other name was Ahmad, so the prophecies mentioned in the Books of Malachi and Haggai are

referring to none other than Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) who was suddenly taken from Makkah and brought to Jerusalem by Archangel Gabriel to sanctify the Temple Al-Aqsa.

The second part of the night journey, called Miraj, took Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) from Jerusalem to the heavens, passing the boundaries of the physical universe to be in the divine presence of God and witnessing the Great Signs (Al-Ayat Ul-Kubra). During this journey, fifty daily prayers were prescribed by God upon the Ummah (community). However, upon the request from Muhammad (p.b.u.h), the number of prayers were reduced to five a day, with the reward of it being fifty times.

This blessed journey of Isra and Miraj is very significant for Muslims for its miraculous nature, and most importantly, for the establishment of the second pillar of Islam; the five daily prayers. It is also important because it shows Islam's connection and importance to Masjid Al-Aqsa, which is Islam's third holiest mosque.

Converts from Yathrib

All the difficulties and hardships that Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) faced did not stop him from calling the people to Islam and he continued to

preach his message of monotheism (Tawheed) to the various tribes that came to Makkah for pilgrimage. A group of people from Yathrib, a small city north of Makkah, known later as Madinah, believed in him and pledged to support him. The following year, more people from Yathrib met the Prophet (p.b.u.h) at Aqabah, including the representatives of the tribes of Aws and Khazraj, who, in Muslim terminology, became known as the Ansar (helpers). They made the pledge that “We will not worship save One God; we will not steal nor commit adultery nor kill our children; we will in no way slander, nor will we disobey the Prophet in anything that is right.” This pledge was called the ‘First Pledge of Al-Aqabah.’ These new converts promised to spread Islam in Yathrib, so Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) sent Masab bin Omair to teach Islam to the residents.

In the 13th year of the Prophethood, a delegation of about seventy people, including some women, came from Yathrib to take the same pledge, which was called the ‘Second Pledge of Al-Aqabah.’ They pledged to defend the Prophet (p.b.u.h) as they would defend their own wives and children. They invited him to migrate to Yathrib. The pledges of Al-Aqabah gave hope to the Muslims and the Prophet (p.b.u.h.).

Emigration to Yathrib

Makka became a very dangerous place for the Muslims to live and practice their faith. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) decided to ask the newly converts, along with those who had returned from Abyssinia (Ethiopia) to migrate to Yathrib. Secretly, within a few months, more than one hundred families left their homes and migrated to Yathrib.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), his trusted friend Abu Bakr and his cousin Ali stayed behind in Makkah to deceive the spies of the Quraysh. Before Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and Abu Bakr left Makkah, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) gave Ali the responsibility of returning people's deposits which were given to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) for safe keeping. Despite all of the hostility from the people of Makkah toward Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and his message, they had no doubt of his integrity and honesty. Anyone who had something of value would entrust it to Muhammad (p.b.u.h), knowing that their items would be returned safely whenever they wanted them.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and Abu Bakr secretly left Makkah and hid in a neglected cave located on Mount Thaur, a few miles south of Makkah. When the Makkans discovered that the

Prophet (p.b.u.h) had eluded them, they immediately organised a search party but failed to find him. After hiding in the cave (Thaur) for three days from the spies, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and Abu Bakr reached Yathrib. When Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and Abu Bakr entered Yathrib, there were many leading Ansar (helpers) and a few hundred others that were already converted to Islam. They were greeted with enthusiasm, warmth and happiness by the Makkan Muslims (Mujahirun who had earlier migrated to Yathrib). The pagans and Jews also gave him a good reception, each for a different reason.

Al-Madinah - Capital of Islam

The city of Yathrib was called ‘Madinah al-Rasul’ (The City of the Prophet) or simply Al-Madinah (The City). A new era dawned with the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) to Madinah. It became the capital of the new Islamic state from where Islam spread.

Conscious of the importance of the Hijrah (Emigration) of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and his followers from Makkah to Madinah, Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the Second Caliph of Islam, introduced the Hijrah Era in 639 C.E. He initialled the Hijrah Era with A.H (in the year of Hijrah) and began the first

year with the first day of the lunar month of Muharram, which corresponds to July 16th, 622 C.E. The journey of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and his followers to Madinah was seen as a landmark event for Islam, hence 622 C.E is the year in which the Islamic Calendar begins.

After thirteen years of intensive struggle as a consequence of preaching the Oneness of God, he had finally found a city where he could openly preach and defend himself from his enemies. Prophet Muhammad's (p.b.u.h) first priority in Madinah was to build a place of worship, the Masjid, where the faithful can worship God and can also meet to discuss various matters. Unlike other great religions, Islam, a universal faith, subscribes to a political, social and moral order (set by God), which is to be carefully established and observed on earth as a road to the hereafter. The life of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) in Makkah had been primarily concerned with the fundamentals of faith, the unity of God, that God is the only one worthy of worship (Tawheed), resurrection, the Day of Judgement where everyone will have to give account for their actions on earth and purification of the soul. Throughout his preaching, he was guided by the revelation (Quran).

In Madinah, the same concern continued but now the 'Ummah' (community) could be organised as

an independent entity. Once again, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), guided by the revelation, began to implement moral, social and political order of the new Ummah (community) despite the constant fear and exposure to a war of complete obliteration.

Firstly, he amalgamated the Muslim Community comprising of various clans and tribes into a solid nation based on one loyalty, Islam, and one brotherhood, overcoming many tribal differences and customs. Secondly, he formed an alliance with the Jews and pagan Arabs for a common defense and for peace and security in Madinah. He achieved his objectives by using the Quran as his guide. The charter gave equality to all citizens and accepted the coexistence of different religions in the community. It was known as the 'Constitution of Madinah' and was created by the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) in 622 C.E. It was the first written constitution in Islam and the first documented case of constitutional law. It can also be termed as a historical example of conflict resolution in Islam. It resembles in certain aspects that of the League of Nations or the United Nations, which aimed at maintenance of peace and security among the various nations.

A Changing of Qibla

In the second year of Hijra, God instructed Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) in several verses of the Quran (2:144-150) to change the direction of Qibla (direction of prayer) toward the Kaaba in the sacred mosque in Makkah. Prior to these revelations, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and his followers in Madinah faced Jerusalem when praying.

The Kaaba was built by the two Prophets, Abraham and Ishmael, as a place devoted to the worship of God alone. Thus, the changing of Qibla toward Kaaba came into being as the answer to Abraham's prayers to raise among his seed a Prophet who would teach them the true religion; "Our Lord, send forth to them a messenger of their own to recite Your revelations to them, to teach them the scripture and wisdom, and purify them. You are the mighty, the wise One." (Quran 2:129).

This change of Qibla made the Muslims aware that they are heirs of Abraham and his religion, which is based on total submission to One God.

Battle of Badr

The Battle of Badr took place on March 13th,

624 C.E (17th Ramadan 2 A.H) and was the first major clash between the young Islamic state of Madinah and the Quraysh, who wanted to uproot the faith. This was the battle between the truth and falsehood. The importance of this battle could not be exaggerated. A win for the Quraysh would be the demise of Islam and the win for the Muslims would be a triumph of truth over falsehood and it would also establish the Muslim Community as a major force in Arabia.

Muslims had an army of 313 men and were not well equipped, with only two horses and seventy camels, while the Quraysh had around 1300 men, 100 horses and a large number of camels. This explains the Prophet (p.b.u.h) turning earnestly to his creator and began to beseech Him; “O Allah, grant me what You have promised me, O Allah give me what You have promised me. O Allah, if this small band of Muslims perishes, You will not be worshipped on earth.” (Muslim). He kept on crying to his Lord, stretching forth his hands and facing toward the Qibla until his cloak fell from his shoulders, at that point Abu Bakr picked up the cloak, put it back on his shoulders and said, “O Prophet of Allah, you have cried out enough to your Lord, He will surely fulfil what He has promised you.” Allah honoured the promise and the Muslims were victorious as

prophesied by Isaiah 21:16-17; “For thus the Lord has said to me: “Within a year, according to the year of a hired man, all the glory of Kedar will fail; and the remainder of the archers, the mighty men of the people of Kedar will be diminished; for the Lord of God of Israel has spoken it.” Many leading Quraysh leaders were killed in the battle. The Quraysh losses amounted to seventy dead and seventy taken prisoners, while fourteen Muslims achieved martyrdom in the battle.

Most of the prisoners were released upon payment of ransom while those who were literate were also set free on the condition that they teach ten Muslims how to read and write. William Muir wrote of this period; “In pursuance of Mahomet’s commands, the citizens of Medina, and such of the refugees as possessed houses, received the prisoners, and treated them with much consideration. ‘Blessings be on the men of Medina!’ said one of these prisoners in later days, “They made us ride, while they themselves walked: They gave us wheaten bread to eat when there was little of it, contending themselves with dates.” (The Life of Mahomet)

Umrah & The 10 Year Truce

In the sixth year of his migration to Madinah

(Hijra), the Prophet (p.b.u.h) moved in force toward Makkah to make his lesser pilgrimage (Umrah) to the Kaaba. Although the Kaaba housed pagan idols, it was still considered by Muslims as sacred, because in the view of the Prophet (p.b.u.h), the Kaaba was built by the Patriarch and his son Ishmael for the worship of One God. It was in the proximity of Kaaba and the well of ZamZam that Abraham had settled his Egyptian wife Hagar (Hajar) with her son Ishmael. The Muslims therefore believed that they had the right to perform the pilgrimage started by Abraham for the worship of one God. However, the Makkans prevented the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and his companions from performing Umrah and prevented them from entering Makkah. A ten-year truce was concluded with the Quraysh whereby the Prophet (p.b.u.h) agreed, among other things, to postpone his pilgrimage until the following year.

A year after the conclusion of the truce, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and two thousand Muslims entered Makkah, which, according to previous agreements, was evacuated temporarily of its inhabitants while the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and his companions completed their pilgrimage (Umrah). The Muslims' behaviour during the lesser pilgrimage was so admirable and exemplary that the Makkans were very impressed and many of them began to come into the fold of Islam.

Leaders of the many Arabian tribes pledged their loyalty to Muhammad (p.b.u.h).

Conquest of Makkah

The ten-year truce with the Quraysh was broken after two years when they attacked one of the tribes which was allied with the Muslims. This violation of the truce by the Quraysh led the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) to march upon Makkah on Wednesday 10th of Ramadan in the 8th year of Hijrah (630 C.E) with ten thousand men as prophesied in Deuteronomy 33:2; “The Lord came from Sinai and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran. And He came with ten thousands of saints; From His right hand came a fiery law for them.” Only eight years earlier he had to flee the city and its people who had harmed and tortured him and his followers with every conceivable cruelty. Now his forces were entering the most powerful city in Arabia without any resistance. Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) entered the city with his head bowed very low until his head nearly touched the neck of his she-camel, repeatedly reciting the Quranic Surah entitled ‘Al Fath’ or ‘The Victory’ (Quran 48:1-29). This amazing event was unparalleled in human history as no conqueror would march into his enemy’s city with

such humility.

When the authority of the Muslim army was fully established in Makkah, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) went straight to the Kaaba and encircled it seven times as prescribed while breaking the idols with the short stick he was carrying, reciting the verse of the Quran; “Say, truth has come and falsehood has disappeared. Falsehood is always bound to wither away.” (Quran 17:81).

After performing his tawaf, performing two rak’ah (units) of prayers at ‘Maqam Ibrahim,’ which was the place used by the Prophet Abraham, he then went to the Well of ZamZam where he drank some water and made ablution. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) then called Uthman Ibn Talha, who kept the keys of the Kaaba to open the door of the Kaaba and Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) then had all of the pictures and idols within it erased and destroyed. After purifying the house for the worship of one God only, as it was always meant to be, he then prayed inside the Kaaba and prayed two ra’kah (units) of prayer. When he finished his prayers, he came out and returned the keys of the Kaaba to Uthman Ibn Talha, the traditional custodian, and addressed the people in a long speech clarifying a number of rulings. He then recited the Quranic verse; “Mankind! We have created you from a male and a female and made you into

peoples and tribes, so that you might come to know each other. The noblest of you in God's sight is the one who fears God most. God is all knowing and all aware." (Quran 49:13).

He then addressed the Quraysh and asked them, "What sort of judgement do you think I am going to press against you?" They replied, "A benevolent one. You are an honourable brother and a son of an honourable brother of ours." He then said, "You may go free. You are all pardoned." This was a general pardon, including those who fought against him in the battles. Stanley Lane-Poole writes, "...the day of Muhammad's greatest triumph over his enemies was also the day of his grandest victory over himself. He freely forgave the Koreysh all the years of sorrow and cruel scorn in which they had afflicted him, and gave an amnesty to the whole population of Mecca. Four criminals whom justice condemned made up Muhammad's proscription list when he entered as a conqueror to the city of his bitterest enemies. The army followed his example, and entered quietly and peaceably; no house was robbed, no woman insulted. One thing alone suffered destruction. Going to the Kaaba, Muhammad stood before each of the three hundred and sixty idols, and pointed to it with his staff, saying, "Truth is come, and falsehood is fled away!" And at these words his

attendants hewed them down, and all the idols and household gods of Mecca and roundabout were destroyed. It was thus that Muhammad entered again his native city. Through all the annals of conquest there is no triumphant entry comparable to this one.” (The Speeches & Table-Talk of the Prophet Muhammad. P. XLVII).

The Prophet (p.b.u.h) remained in Makkah for nineteen days, teaching the religion of God and explaining its many legislations. While in Makkah, he sent his deputies to destroy all the idols and also received individuals and delegations pledging allegiance to God and His Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). Even after he returned to Madinah delegations from various tribes were coming to profess the faith of Islam, thus was the whole of Arabia won over to Islam.

Inviting World Leaders to Islam

From the time Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) began to receive his message of Islam, the universal nature of Islam was confirmed early in the Prophet’s (p.b.u.h) mission, while a small number of his followers were being oppressed in Makkah. He always told the Arabs that his message was to all mankind and that he was appointed as the ‘Universal

Messenger.’ At that time God had revealed, “We have sent you forth as a mercy to all mankind.” (Quran 21:107). Again, while in Makkah, God instructed him; “Say, “O mankind, Indeed I am the messenger of Allah to you all, (from Him) to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. There is no God except Him; He gives life and causes death. So, believe in Allah and His messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believes in Allah and His words, and follow him that you may be guided.” (Quran 7:158).

The reason why the message of Islam had not gone beyond the borders of Arabia earlier was because Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was still fighting to consolidate his base in Madinah and to win supremacy in Arabia. Profiting from the period of peace, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) launched an intensive program for the propagation of Islam and extended his message into lands beyond the borders of Arabia with the intention for the return to pure monotheism and to divinely ordain moral values among the peoples of the world.

He sent emissaries who had the knowledge of Islam and who were familiar with the culture and language of the people to whom they were sent. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) dispatched letters to rulers of Byzantium, Persia, Abyssinia, Egypt, Damascus, Bahrain, Oman, Yamamah and other provinces. Some

of them responded favourably while others refused out of arrogance or fear of losing power.

Farewell Pilgrimage

In the tenth year of Al-Hijra, when the time of pilgrimage drew near, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) made it known that he intended to go to pilgrimage. Thousands of Muslims from every corner of Arabia came to perform pilgrimage with the Prophet (p.b.u.h), which is known as ‘Hajjatul-Wadaa’ or the ‘Farewell Pilgrimage’ because it was the final pilgrimage before the Prophet (p.b.u.h) died. On the 9th of Dhul- Hijjah, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) delivered what is known as his ‘farewell sermon’ at Mount Arafat.

After praising Allah, he said “O people! Listen attentively to me for I do not know whether I will be among you after this year! Listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and convey these words to those who could not be present here today. O people! Just as you regard this month, this day, this city as sacred, so regard as sacred the life and property of every Muslim. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember, that you will indeed meet your Lord and He will indeed reckon your deeds. Allah has

forbidden you to take usury; therefore all interest (and usury) obligations henceforth are abrogated. Your capital, is however yours to keep. You will neither inflict nor suffer inequity (in this affair). Beware of Satan for the safety of your religion. He has lost all hope that he will ever be able to lead you astray in great things, so beware of following him in small things. O people! It is true that you have certain rights with regards to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with his permission. If they abide by your right, then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not take as intimate friends whom you do not approve of as well as to never be unchaste. O people! Listen to me in earnest; worship Allah, perform your five daily prayers, fast the month of Ramadan, give alms and perform pilgrimage (Hajj) if you can afford to. All mankind is from Adam and Adam is from clay. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, or for a non-Arab over an Arab, or for a white over a black, or for black over a white, except through piety. Know that every Muslim is a brother to every other Muslim and that the Muslims are one community. Nothing shall be legitimate to a

Muslim that belongs to another unless it was given freely and willingly: therefore, do not do injustice to yourselves. Remember that one day you will appear before Allah and answer for your deeds. So beware! Do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone. O people! And understand the words that I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, if you follow them, you will never go astray: The Book of Allah (i.e., The Quran) and my Sunnah. All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed Your message to Your people.”

The farewell sermon on Mount Arafat while sitting on his she-camel, highlighted the main concept of Islam and the basis of Islamic society. After every point of his law-giving speech, the Prophet (p.b.uh) asked those present “Have I delivered my message?” They answered with one voice, “Yes!” He then said, “God, you are my witness.” At the end of the sermon and as a final word, he recited this revelation from Surah Al-Ma’idah, “...Today I have completed your religion for you and completed my blessing upon you. I have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (Quran 5:3).

His dear friend Abu-Bakr and others wept for

they felt that his end was near, that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) had fulfilled his mission. Several statements and incidents of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) showed that the great and noble life was approaching its end. When the Prophet (p.b.u.h) went for stoning at ‘Aqabah,’ he said to the massive crowd of pilgrims that were surrounding him, “Learn from me your rites, for I may never offer the Pilgrimage (Hajj) again after this year.”

The Prophet’s (p.b.u.h) Illness & Death

Late in the month of Safar, the second month of the Islamic Calendar in the 11th Year of Hijra, Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) went with his servant to the graveyard of Madinah known as Baqi al-Gharqad. He stood there praying to God to forgive those who were buried in that graveyard, as they had served Islam during their lives. This act of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) showed his love and compassion for those who recognised the truth of Islam and moulded their lives accordingly.

In the morning, Aysha (R.A) was complaining to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) that she had a headache, but he also told her that he too had a very bad headache. The Prophet’s (p.b.u.h) illness got worse and he became feverish. He asked Aysha and others to give

him a cold bath, so they put him in a tub and poured cold water on him until he asked them to stop. When he felt that his temperature had come down, he asked his cousin to take his hand and walk him to the mosque. He sat on the mimbar (pulpit) with a band around his head. He then asked his cousin to call the people. They came to listen to their beloved Prophet (p.b.u.h) who had been teaching them and who had been with them in every situation they faced. He told his listeners that injustice in any way is not admissible in Islam. He put the message very clearly, “I praise God, the One other than whom there is no deity. If I have ever beaten any if you on his back, let him come and avenge himself by beating me on my back. If I ever abused anyone, let him come and abuse me. To dispute is not part of my nature, nor does it appeal to me. The one of you who is dearest to me is the one who has a right against me and claims it. By so doing, he releases me, and I will be able to meet God with nothing held against me by any person.”

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was always eager to stress, time and time again, that justice was the main characteristic of Islamic society. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) stayed indoors as his health gradually began to deteriorate and only sometimes when he felt a little better, he would go to the mosque to take a glance on the community he had moulded and loved. When

he was too ill to lead the prayers, Abu Bakr, his beloved friend, led the prayers in his absence seventeen times.

Aysha, the wife of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) is reported as saying that Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) passed away with his head between her chest and her neck while uttering in a faint voice, “The highest company in heaven.” The Prophet (p.b.u.h) passed away on Monday 12th of Rabi al-Awal in the 11th year of Al-Hijrah and was buried where he died.

Thus, the life of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) ended. However, his message of pure monotheism remains alive and intact for posterity as God has guaranteed its preservation in its original form. May God Almighty, the Merciful, reward Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), His final messenger and a mercy from Him to all mankind, grant him peace and blessings.

Reference in the Quran

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) lived in Makkah for forty years before being chosen as a Prophet. After being chosen as a universal messenger, he lived in Makkah for another thirteen years, calling people to the worship of One God only. He and his small band of followers were persecuted by the Quraysh so he

migrated along with his followers to Madinah and lived there for ten years, continuing to receive revelation and inviting people to Islam until the completion of Quranic revelation and Islam.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was unlettered; he did not know how to read or write. God says in the Quran, “You were not able to read any book before this, nor did you write one down with your hand. If you had done so, the follows of falsehood would have had cause to doubt it.” (Quran 29:48)

There are many proofs confirming the truthfulness of the Prophethood of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) in the Quran. The Quran considers Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) as a universal messenger sent for the whole of humankind, and not for a specific group of people (Arabs). “...we have sent you forth as a messenger to mankind; and God suffices as a witness.” (Quran 4:79). Like all the Prophets who came before Muhammad (p.b.u.h), the Quran refers to him frequently as a Warner and a conveyer of glad tidings; “You are but a Warner- we have sent you with the truth as a bearer of good news and a Warner- there is no community to which a Warner has not come.” (Quran 35:23-24).

Muslims believe that Muhammad (p.b.u.h) is the seal of the last Prophet to humanity. Jesus also prophesied the coming of the Prophet or the final

messenger, “Remember when Jesus, son of Mary, said, “O children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me, whose name will be Ahmad.” Yet when he came to them with clear signs, they said, “This is merely sorcery.” (Quran 61:6). Again the Holy Quran emphasises that “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but is God’s messenger and the seal of the Prophets. God has knowledge of all things.” (Quran 33:40)

Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)

Apart from the Holy Quran, which is considered by Muslims as unadulterated words of God, the Hadith is a collection of traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) based on his sayings and actions or practice (the Sunnah, and constitutes the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Quran.

Manners & Characteristics of the Prophet

(p.b.u.h)

The Prophet's (p.b.u.h) beloved wife, Aysha, said of her selfless husband, "He always joined in household chores and would at times mend his clothes, repair his shoes and sweep the floor. He would milk, tether and feed his animals." (Bukhari).

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) has emphasised on treating parents with good manners repeatedly in his life. "A man came to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) asking his permission to take part in Jihad (A struggle or in this context, a fight against the enemies of Islam). The Prophet (p.b.u.h) asked him, "Are your parents alive?" He replied in the affirmative. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) said to him, "Then, exert yourself in their service." (Bukhari 4:248).

The Prophet (p.b.u.h) would kiss and embrace children often, as an expression of his tender love and mercy towards them. Abu Huraira reported that Al-Aqra bin Kabis saw Allah's messenger (p.b.u.h) kissing Al-Hassan. He said, "I have ten children, but I have never kissed any of them," whereupon Allah's messenger (p.b.u.h) said, "He who does not show mercy (toward his children), no mercy would be shown to him." (Muslim).

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) advocated mercy, forgiveness, tolerance and avoiding revenge; “May Allah have mercy on a man who is lenient when he sells, lenient when he buys and lenient when he requests payment.” (Bukhari). “Those who are merciful will be given mercy by the Most Merciful. Have mercy upon those on the earth and you will obtain mercy from Him in the heaven.” (Abu Dawud). “Do not envy one another; do not deceive one another; do not hate one another; do not turn your backs on one another; and do not intrude on the transactions of one another, but be, O servants of Allah, brothers.” (Muslim).

The first word of the revelation revealed to Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) in the cave of Hira was “Read.” It was no accident that the first word of the Quran to be revealed was “Read.” Education, study and research are all held in high esteem in Islam. Abu Huraira reported that the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h) said, “The word of wisdom is the lost property of the believer, wherever he finds it, he is most deserving of it.” (Sunan Tirmizi, 2687). Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) also said, “If anyone travels on a road in search of knowledge, God will cause him to travel on one of the roads of paradise. The angels will lower their wings in their great pleasure with one who seeks knowledge, the inhabitants of the heavens and the

earth and the fish in the deep waters will ask forgiveness for the learned man. The superiority of the learned man over the devout is like that of the moon, on the night when it is full, over the rest of the stars. The learned are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets leave behind no monetary wealth, leaving only knowledge, and he who takes it, takes an abundant portion.” (Abu Dawud).

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) led by example in showing kindness to everyone around him. He said, “Those who are kind and considerate to Allah’s creatures, Allah bestows His kindness and affection on them. Show kindness to the creatures on the earth so that Allah may be kind to you.” (Abu Dawud).

The Description of the Prophet (p.b.u.h)

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) was of a slightly above average height. Amazingly, in gatherings, he would appear taller than those actually taller than him until the people dispersed. In complexion, he was light skinned brown (Abyad), tan or of medium colour. His hair was jet black and wavy, but stopped short of curling, and was kept between his earlobes and shoulders. Sometimes he would part his hair at the middle. Other times, he would wear it braided. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) had the physique of a powerful

man. He had a broad upper back and shoulders, between which was the seal of Prophethood. He had long muscular limbs, large joints and girth. His lean stomach never protruded out past the profile of his chest. His face was radiant “as if the sun were following its course across and shining from his face,” as one of his companions explained. His forehead, prominent; his pupils, large and black; his eyelashes, long and thick; his nose, high tipped with narrow nostrils. At the time of his death, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) had exactly seventeen white hairs shared between his temples and the front of his thick beard. He had hair on his forearms and shins. A line of fine hair also ran from his chest to his navel.

The Prophet (p.b.u.h) would walk briskly with a forward leaning gait, moving with strength of purpose and lifting each foot clearly off the ground. His pace was such that fit men would tire trying to keep up. When he turned, he would turn his whole body, giving full attention to the one addressing him and showing complete concern to what was being said. When he pointed, he would use an open hand so as not to offend. Likewise, when he criticised a person’s behaviour, rather name the individual, he would simply say “Why do people do so and so?” He would laugh only to the extent that the gap between his front teeth would become visible. He would

become angry only to the extent that his face would turn red and the vein between his fine, bow shaped eyebrows would bulge. (Taken from 'Muhammad the Messenger of Allah' - Abdurrahman Al-Sheha).

Conclusion

I conclude the life of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) with the words of the following persons: Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869), French historian, poet and statesman, wrote about Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h): "If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astonishing results are the three criteria of a human genius, who could dare compare any great man in history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples, dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that he moved the alters of gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and the souls. On the basis of a book, every letter which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blends together peoples of every tongue and race. He has left the indelible characteristic of this Muslim nationality. The hatred of

false gods and the passion for the one and immaterial God. This avenging patriotism against the profanation of heaven formed the virtue of the followers of Muhammad; the conquest of one third of the earth to the dogma was his miracle; Or rather it was not the miracle of man but that of reason. The idea of the unity of God, proclaimed amidst the exhaustion of the fabulous theogonies, was in itself such a miracle that upon its utterance from his lips it destroyed all the ancient temples of idols and set on fire one third of the world. His life, his meditations, his heroic reveling against the superstitions of his country, and his boldness in defying the furies of idolatry, his firmness in enduring them for fifteen years in Mecca, his acceptance of the role of public scorn and almost of being a victim of his fellow countrymen: all these and finally, his flight, his incessant preaching, his wars against odds, his faith in his success and his superhuman security in misfortune, his forbearance in victory, his ambition, which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire; his endless prayers, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death; all these attest not to an imposter but to a firm conviction which gave him the power to restore a dogma. This dogma was twofold the unity of God and the immateriality of God: the former telling what God is, the latter telling

what God is not: the one overthrowing false gods with the sword, the other starting an idea with words. Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational beliefs... the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?" (*Historie de al Turquie*).

The famous playwright and critic, George Bernard Shaw said:

"I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to possess that assimilating capability to the changing phases of existence which make itself appeal to every age- I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today. Medieval ecclesiastics, either through ignorance or bigotry, painted Muhammadanism in the darkest colours. They were, in fact, trained to hate both the man and his religion. To them, Muhammad was an anti-christ. I have studied him, the wonderful man, and in my opinion, far from being an anti-christ, he must be called the Saviour of Humanity." (*Encyclopaedia of Seerah* by Afzalur Rahman).

In his book, 'The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History,' author Michael H. Hart said about Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), "My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels. Of humble origins, Muhammad founded and promulgated one of the world's great religions, and became an immensely effective political leader. Thirteen centuries after his death, his influence is still powerful and persuasive."

Conclusion

God's guidance has always been revealed to humankind through specially chosen individuals to be His messengers or Prophets. These Prophets were instructed by God to convey His words and will to their respective communities throughout human history. In the beginning Prophet Adam who is considered by Muslims to be the first Prophet, and culminating with the advent of Prophet Muhammad as the 'seal of the Prophets.'

Prophets are individuals who manifested model characteristics of righteousness and moral conduct as an example to their people. They also warned their people of the dire consequences of rejecting God's message. Humanity could not have survived without Prophets; there is no way to know the truth and falsehood except through the teachings of the messengers sent by God who wants to help individuals to live virtuous lives and guide them on how to do so.

All Prophets, from Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them), received the same message of monotheism, the Quran says. "God has

ordained for you the same religion which he enjoined on Noah, and which we have revealed to you, (O Muhammad), and which we enjoined upon Abraham and Moses, and Jesus, so that you should remain steadfast in religion and not become divided in it...” (Quran 42:13).

The Prophets are role models in their words and deeds; without the spirit of these messengers, our body and our spirit will be dead.

Peace be with you,
Sabir Nakhuda

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About the Author



Sabir Nakhuda, Barbadian Muslim author, researcher and social commentator was born in Ghala, Gujarat, India in December 1947. He spent his early childhood in the village of Tadkeshwar before migrating to Barbados at the age of 10 years. His early education was at the Wesley Hall Junior School, the Modern High School and the Seventh-Day Adventists School in Barbados. His tertiary education was at George Brown College in Canada.

Mr. Nakhuda has for many years been actively involved in various social, cultural and religious activities on the island. He has spoken

extensively to a variety of audiences and has done several media interviews on issues of his faith, culture and Indian background.

He is the author of 'Bengal to Barbados', his first published work. This book was the result of several years of research into the history of East Indians in Barbados and provides valuable and useful information on the East Indian community of the island.

Mr. Nakhuda's second published work 'Muslims of CARICOM' brings to light the history and depth of the contribution Muslims have made to the development of Islamic and the wider communities in Caribbean Community (CARICOM) 15 member states. His meticulous research chronicles the presence of Islam and Muslims over several centuries in the Caribbean region and exposes, perhaps for the first time, persons who have contributed to the existence of successful Muslim communities in each of the countries presented.

Mr. Nakhuda's training and work in sales, public relations, counseling and teaching has put

him in touch with a wide cross section of the Barbadian society in the East Indian, Muslim and wider community. Additionally, Mr. Nakhuda has traveled extensively visiting several countries and continents.

The Foreword to his book “Bengal to Barbados” is written by the former Prime Minister of Barbados, Mr. Freundel Stuart, and this book had the distinction of being placed in the time-capsule alongside other items of interest for Barbadians, on the occasion of Barbados’ 50th Anniversary of Independence in 2016.