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• EAST AFRICA •

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM: The Essentials—PART 1

by

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This is an examination of Islam from a Christian perspective and a comparison of major Christian and Islamic doctrines. Part 1 includes examinations of Islam's basic authorities, beliefs, sects, and history and discusses the primary Muslim objections to what Jesus did and who Jesus is, namely, that he was crucified, resurrected, and is the divine Son of God.

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1. BASIC OVERVIEW OF ISLAM

I. Introduction

Islam means “submission to Allah” (Darussalam 2002b: 332; Dirks 2008: 178; Emerick 2004: 402). *Muslim* means “one who is submitted to God” (Braswell 2000: 3; Emerick 2004: 405). Islam divides the world into two areas: (1) *Dar al-Islam* (“house of Islam”), the world of peace, where Islam is practiced and the Qur’an is observed; and (2) *Dar al-Harb* (“house of war”), the world of warfare and ignorance, which is dominated by non-Muslims. “The mission of Islam is to bring this second world under Islam” (Braswell 2000: 3).

A. Size and growth

1. Christianity and Islam are the two largest religions in the world. As of 2015, counting all denominations, sects, and subgroups within each religion, Christianity numbered approximately 2.4 billion adherents (approximately 33% of the world’s population) and Islam numbered approximately 1.8 billion adherents (approximately 24.1% of the world’s population) (“List of religious populations” 2019: Adherent estimates as of 2012; “Islam” 2019: Demographics).

2. Islam is the fastest growing major religion in the world (Emerick 2004: 3; “Growth of religion” 2019). Over the past century Islam has grown at a rate almost 50% faster than the growth rate of Christianity (“Growth of religion” 2019: Historical growth [chart]); over the past 40 years, Islam has grown at a rate more than twice as fast as Christianity’s growth rate (“Major religious groups” 2019: Trends in adherence [chart]). Consequently, even given the rapid increase of the world’s population over the past century, Islam has almost doubled its share of the world’s population whereas Christianity’s share of the world’s population has remained the same (“Growth of religion” 2019: Historical growth [chart]).¹

B. Origin and demographics

1. Foundation and spread. Islam was founded by Muhammad (AD 570-632), a native of Mecca in modern Saudi Arabia. Muhammad and his followers conquered Arabia during Muhammad’s life. Following Muhammad’s death, Gregory Davis states, “Islam rapidly spread into the territories of Byzantium, Persia, and Western Europe in the decades after Muhammad’s death. . . . The Arab Muslim armies charged into the Holy Land, conquered what is now Iraq and Iran, then swept west across North Africa, into Spain, and finally into France. The Muslim offensive was finally halted in the West at the Battle of Poitiers/Tours, not far from Paris, in 732 AD. In the east, the jihad penetrated deep into Central Asia.” (Davis 2014: sec.2.4.i)

2. Demographics. Currently, approximately 57 countries have Muslim majorities (“Islam” 2019: Demographics). The majority of the world’s Muslims live in Asia and Africa, of whom 62% are living in Asia (Ibid.). The ten countries with the largest Muslim populations, which account for over one billion Muslims are in order: Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco (“Top Ten Countries” 2018: Chart). Africa is the only continent with a Muslim majority (Ibid.). Arabs make up only about 20% of the world’s Muslim population (“Islam” 2019: Demographics).

C. Islamic sects

Muslims generally present themselves as a united community (*Ummah*) in contrast to the many denominations of the Christian church. This stems from the fact that, as former Muslim Thabiti Anyabwile puts it, Islam is “primarily an identity”; thus, “Of *first* importance is to be Muslim; the second thing is to belong to a national or ethnic category” (Anyabwile 2011: 89). However, “while Muslims share a common Qur’an and Hadith, the Muslim world is complicated. . . . Realities range from secular and apathetic cultural Muslims in many countries to the devout Qur’anic Muslims.” (Garrison 2014: 232)

Additionally, Muhammad said, “The Jews split into seventy-one sects, or seventy-two sects, and the Christians similarly, and my Ummah will split into seventy-three sects” (at-Tirmidhi: 2640). Of the “seventy-

¹ Woodberry and Shubin present a more nuanced picture: “Islam’s growth rate of 2.15 percent annually does exceed Christianity’s rate of 1.45 percent. It is worth pointing out, however, that 96 percent of the growth of Islam is attributable to biological growth children born into Muslim families. Islam is flourishing in parts of the world where population growth is high. Christianity, increasingly decentralized, has its traditional base in parts of the world where population growth is quite slow or has come to a standstill. Thus, the overall trends do show Islam growing faster than Christianity.

Conversion growth is where you find quite a contrast. According to figures presented in the 2000 edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia, each year some 950,000 people convert to Islam from some other persuasion. Christianity, by contrast, sees some 2.7 million each year shift their affiliation to Christianity and presumably their allegiance to Christ from some other religion.” (Woodberry and Shubin 2001: “The fastest growing religion”)

three sects,” Muhammad also said, “Seventy-two of them will go to Hell and one of them will go to Paradise, and it is the majority group” (Abi Dawud: 4597). The *Dictionary of Islam* states that the actual number of Islamic sects have “far exceeded the Prophet’s predictions, for the sects of Islam even exceed in number and variety those of the Christian religion” (Hughes 1895: 567). The major ones include (see Braswell 2000: 59-70; Emerick 2004: 359-72; Nehls and Eric 2009: 66-80; Schirrmacher 2011: 51-59):

- *The Sunnis* (“*One of the Path*,” i.e., *those who follow the Sunnah*). Sunnis constitute at least 80% of all Muslims. The vast majority of teaching concerning “orthodox” Islam is Sunni.
- *The Shi’ah (Shiites)* (“*partisans*”). Shiites constitute about 10% of Muslims (Iran and Iraq are largely Shiite). The Shiites believe that the caliphs (Muslim leaders who succeeded Muhammad) should have been hereditary and should not have begun with Abu Bakr but with Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law, and Ali’s sons. The assassination of one of Ali’s sons led to permanent estrangement between Sunnis and Shiites. One sect within the Shiite movement is the Ismailis who are active in East Africa and whose spiritual leader is the Agha Khan.
- *The Wahhabi*. This sect is an ultraorthodox, literalist movement within Sunni Islam. It began in the 1700s in Saudi Arabia. Its founder wanted to revert Islam to its original form. It is very influential in Saudi Arabia and has influenced other ultraconservative Islamic movements around the world.
- *The Sufis*. Sufis are Muslim mystics. They form groups around a Shaikh, their spiritual leader. They renounce worldliness and seek an ecstatic experience of annihilation of the self in God. They use chanting, rhythmic dancing, and music to try to achieve direct contact with Allah.
- *The Ahmadiyya*. This group was founded in India in the late 1800s. Its founder claimed to be the Mahdi or Messiah. Although the rest of Islam denies the crucifixion of Jesus, the Ahmadiyya claim that Jesus was on the cross but was taken down and nursed back to health. The Ahmadiyya also advocate monogamy. They are very missionary-minded and are rejected by the rest of the Muslim world.
- *Folk Islam*. Folk Islam is not a separate sect but amounts to the joining of traditional religions with Islam. Thus, while the “five pillars” of Islam may be practiced (see below), belief in the spirit world, veneration of ancestors, the use of spells, charms, and amulets, and dependence on shamans and witch doctors are the most important practical expressions of religious life. One writer noted, “Whereas Formal Islam advocates a comprehensive, legalistic code of ritual and laws, Folk Islam’s domain is spirits, demons, blessing, cursing, healing and sorcery” (Love 1994: 87; see also Brown 2006a: 6-7). Various researchers have estimated that somewhere between 70-85% of all Muslims in the world are influenced by folk Islam (Brown 2006a: 6-7).

II. Basic Aspects of Islam

For a committed Muslim, “religion is not a matter of intellectual or theological convictions. It is not a set of beliefs. It is an *identity* drawn from his family, society, culture, and country.” (Houssney 2010: 82, *emph. added*; see also *ibid.* at 103-11; Brown 2008: 19 [“For many Muslims, being a Muslim is an inseparable part of their self-identity, their background, their family, their community, and their cultural heritage, regardless of what they actually believe about God”]). Islam’s goal of advancing *Dar al-Islam* (“House of Islam”) “is not done by teaching the pillars of Islam but by advancing *sharia*, the law of Islam” (Anyabwile 2011: 90).

A. *Sources of authority*

1. The Qur’an. The Qur’an is the holy book of Islam. It means “recitation” or “reading.” It is considered to be the very Word of Allah, eternally existing on a tablet in heaven (**Q. 85:21-22**).² It supposedly was recited, piece by piece, by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad over a period of 23 years (**Q. 17:106; 25:32**). The Qur’an is divided into 114 *surahs*. Muslim scholar Muhammad bin Abdullaah As-Suhaym notes that a *surah* “is a section of the glorious Qur’an that contains a group of Verses [*ayah*; plural = *ayat*] that may or may not be related in meanings. Some translators do translate it as a chapter which is quite inaccurate because a chapter is a combination of paragraphs in which related issues are discussed.” (As-Suhaym 2006: 132n.1) The *surahs* are *not*

² Typically, in my ECLEA teaching books I put citations to the Bible in **bold** and put lengthy quotes in *italics*. I will follow the same format with respect to citations of and quotations from the Qur’an. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the Qur’an will be from the English translation by Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Noble Qur’an*. Other versions that will be cited or quoted from (i.e., Sahih International [cited as Sahih], Pickthall, Shakir, Sarwar, al-Hilali and Khan [cited as Hilali-Khan], and Arberry) are found on the Muslim website *Quranic Arabic Corpus* (<http://corpus.quran.com/>); the translations by Muhammad Asad and M. A. S. Abdel Haleem will also be cited and quoted from. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the Bible will be from the New American Standard Bible.

“arranged chronologically or by subject matter” (Haleem 2005: xix; see Appendix A for the *chronological* order of the surahs). There is a marked difference in “tone” and subject matter between the earlier surahs from the period when Muhammad was weaker in Mecca and the later surahs when Muhammad was in a position of power in Medina (Haleem 2005: xvii-xviii; Michael and McAlister 2010: 17; Sell 1923: 187-95; Gilchrist 1995: ch.1.4). That difference includes the Qur’an’s (Muhammad’s) attitude toward Christianity (al-Fadi 2003: 2).

2. The Prophetic *Sunnah* (the life, sayings, and examples of Muhammad). Muhammad’s life example is called his *Sunnah* (i.e., path, way, manner of life). Suhaym says, “The *Sunnah* is the second source of the religion of Islam. It means all that is reported from the Prophet – with well-connected and authentic chain of transmitters – of his sayings, deeds, confirmations and qualities. . . . The pure *Sunnah* is the practical implementation of the rules, beliefs, acts of worship, kinds of relationships and manners that Islam enjoins. . . . The *Sunnah*, as it is regarded as the practical implementation of Islam, it also explains the Qur’an, makes comments on it, and explains verses that have general meanings. . . . The *Sunnah* may, in some cases, give independent explanations of some rules and legislations that are not in the Qur’an. One must have belief in the Qur’an and *Sunnah* that they are the basic sources of the religion of Islam that must be followed and turned to. The command of both must be obeyed, their prohibitions must be abstained from and their contents must be believed.” (As-Suhaym 2006: 163-65; see also Emerick 2004: 23)

The Qur’an frequently commands Muslims to “obey Allah and the Messenger” (Q. 3:32, 132; 4:13, 59, 69, 80; 5:92; 8:1, 20, 46; 9:71; 24:51, 52, 54, 56; 33:33; 47:33; 58:13; 64:12). Indeed, “Those who disobey Allah and His Messenger and transgress His limits will be admitted to a Fire, to abide therein: And they shall have a humiliating punishment” (Q. 4:14). In his farewell sermon preached shortly before his death, Muhammad said, “I leave behind me two things, the Qur’an and my example, the *Sunnah* and if you follow these you will never go astray” (Muhammad 2014: n.p.). Suhaym states, “One must have belief in the Qur’an and *Sunnah* that they are the basic sources of the religion of Islam that must be followed and turned to. The command of both must be obeyed, their prohibitions must be abstained from and their contents must be believed.” (As-Suhaym 2006: 165) Emerick similarly explains, “By stating that Muhammad is God’s last Messenger, we are pledging ourselves to practicing what he preached, doing what he did, and looking to him for our role model” (Emerick 2004: 130).

Whatever Muhammad said, did, or gave silent approval to is called a *hadith* (plural = *ahadith*) (Emerick 2004: 241-44). The *Sunnah* forms the basis of the *Hadith*. Since the *Sunnah* and *ahadith* are specific and practical, in many ways they may be more authoritative than the Qur’an although formally the Qur’an is the foremost authority. As one Muslim says, “If the *Qur’an* is a Muslim’s primary textbook for the examination of life, the *Ahadith* . . . represent the practical, supplemental reading, which may well help make the difference between passing and failing that all important examination” (Dirks 2008: 46). Each *hadith* consists of two parts: the “chain of transmitters” or source (*isnad*) and the content (*matn*). Muslim scholars have graded the statements of Muhammad into degrees of reliability and have selected six collections of Muhammad’s *ahadith* as authentic (those of al-Bukhari, Muslim, at-Tirmidhi, Abi Dawud, an-Nasa’i, and Ibn Majah).³ Each collection was compiled in the late ninth and early tenth centuries (i.e., 250-300 years after Muhammad’s death).

3. *Shari’ah* (Islamic Law). The *shari’ah* is a body of legal literature devised by Islamic scholars (the ‘*Ulema*). Georges Houssney states, “The Qur’an is not taught to be understood by the masses. It’s taught to be recited for gaining merit with God. The Sharia, not the Qur’an, is what dictates the daily life of a Muslim.” (Houssney 2010: 89) The purpose of *shari’ah* is “to provide a ruling on any issue that may confront the Muslim community” (Emerick 2004: 55). It is designed to regulate all aspects of a Muslim’s life. The *shari’ah* classifies every activity or thing as either *halal* (permitted) or *haram* (forbidden) (Ibid.: 264). The *shari’ah* is based on the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*. If those do not speak to an issue, the opinions of Muhammad’s immediate followers (known as the *sahaba*) are consulted; if none of the foregoing apply to an issue, the scholars may use their reasoning and analogy to provide an answer. Legal rulings are called *fatwas*. There are five schools of legal tradition founded by five Islamic scholars in the latter half of the 8th century and first half of the 9th century AD. Four of those are Sunni; one is Shiite. Muslim author ‘Abdus-Salam al-Basuni states the proper attitude Muslims are to have regarding *shari’ah*: “The position of the believing Muslim is ‘I have no opinion in what Allah and His Messenger (Blessings and peace be upon him) have legislated, I hear and obey’” (al-Basuni 2007: 16).

³ These and other collections of *ahadith* are available online at <http://sunnah.com/> and at <https://sunniconnect.com/m3/blog/downloads/ahadith/>. In this book I use “*hadith*” for an individual saying of Muhammad, “*ahadith*” for several such sayings, and “the *Hadith*” for the overall collection of Muhammad’s sayings. The numbers of the *ahadith* are the “reference” as given on the *sunnah.com* website.

B. Islam's "five pillars" (see As-Suhaym 2006: 167-75; bin Jamil Zino 2002: 282; Emerick 2004: 123-74; Nehls and Eric 2009a: 154-62)⁴

"The basics of Islam are all rigidly prescribed. . . . The call to prayer is the same every day, the ritual of ablutions is likewise always exactly the same every time a Muslim goes to mosque, and each . . . prayer ceremony is an exact repetition of the previous one. Every ritual of the Hajj Pilgrimage to Mecca is precisely defined and the observance of the Ramadan fast likewise never changes. The repetitive nature of the practices of Islam is derived directly from that first command, *Iqra!* ["read" or "recite," the first word of **Q. 96:1**, supposedly the first ayah given to Muhammad], and the true Muslim just repeats what has been revealed without ever having to think about it or being allowed to question it." (Gilchrist 1994: 91) Former Muslim Thabiti Anyabwile adds, "The forms are as integral to Islam as the theology. Islam is significantly constituted by outward form." (Anyabwile 2011: 90) Islam's "five pillars" are:

1. Shahadah. *Shahadah* is the declaration of faith of the Muslim. According to the prayers that Muslims are required to say, the shahadah is repeated a minimum of 17 times per day. It says, "There is no god except Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."

2. Salat. Islam distinguishes personal prayer and supplication (*du'a*) from salat. *Salat* is "the religious ritual that a Muslim must perform five times every day. . . . It consists of a physical routine of bowing and prostrating coupled with a litany of short recited passages and phrases." (Emerick 2004: 136) The participants must face toward Mecca. The timing and the number of repetitions of the prayers (including body movements) are also prescribed: early morning (two repetitions); midday (four repetitions); late afternoon (four repetitions); evening (three repetitions); night (four repetitions). Additionally, the face, hands, and feet must be washed and proper clothes must be worn in order for prayer to begin, and the salat must be said "in Arabic" (Ibid.: 138, 144).

3. Zakat. *Zakat* is a fixed portion of wealth that is required to be paid to benefit the poor in the Muslim community. It is required of Muslims who have assets of any kind equivalent to the value of three ounces of gold. The zakat is 2.5% of the Muslim's average annual wealth.

4. Saum. *Saum* is fasting during the month of Ramadan, which is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. From dawn until sunset Muslims are to avoid food, drink, and sexual intercourse. However, they may freely partake of all of those things between sunset and dawn. The sick, travelers, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and women who have just delivered a baby are exempted from the requirement of saum.

5. Hajj. Every adult, sane, Muslim who is able to do so is required to make a pilgrimage (*hajj*) to the House of Allah—the sacred mosque of Mecca—once in his or her lifetime. The hajj is required to take place from the eighth to the tenth day of the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. All male pilgrims are required to wear two specific white garments, and all pilgrims (male and female) are not allowed to have sexual intercourse, shave or cut their nails, use colognes or scented oils, hunt or kill any living thing, or fight, argue, or bother anyone during the hajj.

C. Islam's six articles of belief (iman) (see al-Athari 2005: 68-127; As-Suhaym 2006: 177-99; bin Baz 2002: 247-65; Houssney 2010: 59-63)

1. Belief in Allah. Belief in Allah includes: He is the creator, possessor, and controller of all matters; He is the only true deity and that all other deities besides Him are false. Belief also includes belief in His names and attributes. Above all, belief in Allah means belief in His oneness, that He has no partner in His lordship; He alone has the right to be worshipped. This doctrine of the oneness of Allah (which is a solitary oneness that excludes the concept of the trinity) is the Islamic doctrine of *tauhid*.

2. Belief in the angels. According to Islam, angels were created out of light and cannot be seen (although Allah sometimes shows some of them to his prophets and messengers). They have different functions: Jibreel (Gabriel) supposedly transmitted the Qur'an to Muhammad; other angels are the keepers of Hell and Paradise, and others perform other functions. Each human being is assigned two angels, one to write down the good deeds, one to write down the bad deeds. Angels are large in size and have wings. Additionally, attached to each person at birth is a *qarina*, the person's demonic equal, whose purpose is to haunt and distract the person

⁴ Anyabwile notes that the Five Pillars "emerged as a consensus regarding the *religious* duties of the faith. Early on in the history of Islam some Muslim clerics and scholars argued *jihad* should be the fifth pillar because *jihad*, or striving in the cause of Allah, runs throughout the entire practice of the faith" (Anyabwile 2011: 89n.7). The Five Pillars described here are according to Sunni Islam. Georges Houssney states, "The Shiite Five Pillars are quite different, made up of abstract concepts rather than deeds" (Houssney 2010: 51n.1). Since Sunnis constitute at least 80% of Muslims, this book deals primarily with Sunni Islam. See also the article entitled "True Islam from a Christian perspective" found at <http://www.true-islam.info>, which compares Islam's "five pillars" to similar statements found in the Bible.

from the straight path. Also, spirits created from fire are known as *jinn* (most but not all of whom are evil). The ultimate evil being is *Shaytan* (Satan).

3. **Belief in Allah’s books.** Islam recognizes four major holy books: the *Tawrat* (Torah) given to Moses; the *Zabur* (Psalms) given to David; the *Injil* (Gospel) given to Jesus; and the *Qur’an* (Recitation) given to Muhammad. Muslims contend that the Qur’an is uncreated and eternal. Because the Qur’an contradicts the Bible at many points, Muslims contend that all of the past books no longer exist or were corrupted by the rabbis and priests assigned the task of protecting them; however, they maintain that Allah has guaranteed to protect the Qur’an from corruption, so it has remained free from all defects.

4. **Belief in the Messengers (prophets).** Islam contends that Allah sent prophets and messengers (who are considered superior to prophets) to all the nations to warn people of idolatry, disobedience to Allah, and *shirk* (the cardinal sin of attributing partners to Allah), and to call people to submit to Allah in the true religion of Islam. Some Islamic scholars say that 124,000 messengers have been sent. The Qur’an names 25 messengers. The major ones are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Muhammad is considered the greatest of all the messengers. He is the last and is considered “*the Seal of the Prophets*” (Q. 33:40).

5. **Belief in the Last Day (i.e., of judgment).** Islam contends that there will be a last day of resurrection and judgment. Islam teaches that people’s deeds will be weighed in scales. A bridge (*sirat*) no thicker than a razor leading to paradise will be set up over the pit of hell. Everyone will have to cross that bridge. Those not destined for paradise will fall into hell. There are seven levels of both heaven and hell. If people in hell affirmed the oneness of Allah (*tauhid*) they can get out of hell after a fixed term. Those who committed *shirk* (attributing partners to Allah) will be in hell forever.

6. **Belief in predestination (pre-decree; divine destiny).** Islam teaches that everything that happens in the universe, both good and bad, faith and unbelief, happens by the will and decree of Allah, and Allah does whatever he wills. What he decrees emanates from his knowledge, power, and will. It is unchangeable. He knows everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen for all eternity, and he wrote down the decrees concerning creation in a book in which nothing is neglected. Allah guides whomever he wills by his mercy, and he leads astray whomever he wills by his wisdom. Allah’s will and decrees are not to be questioned. “*Your Lord creates whatsoever He wills and chooses, no choice have they (in any matter). Glorified be Allah, and exalted above all that they associate as partners (with Him).*” (Q. 28:68, Hilali-Khan)

D. Calendar, festivals, holy days, and holy places

1. **The Islamic calendar (“Islamic calendar” 2020).** Islam follows a lunar calendar of twelve months, not the solar calendar. Consequently, the Islamic year is approximately 354 days long instead of 365 days. As a result, the months fall back about 11 days each solar year, returning to their starting points after about 33 lunar years. The first year of the Islamic calendar is set by the flight of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina on 17 July 622 (this is called the *hegira*). Thus, 622 is 1 AH (After Hegira) according to Muslim reckoning. 1441 AH runs from approximately 1 September 2019 to 20 August 2020. These are the names of the Islamic months:

Month	Number of days
Muharram	30
Safar	29
Rabi I	30
Rabi II	29
Jumada I	30
Jumada II	29
Rajab	30
Sha’ban	29
Ramadan	30
Shawwal	29
Dhu’l-Qa’dah	30
Dhu’l-Hijjah	29 or 30* (*leap year)

2. **Islamic holy days and festivals.** The Qur’an says, “*The number of months in the sight of Allah is twelve (in a year)-so ordained by Him the day He created the heavens and the earth; of them four are sacred*”

(**Q. 9:36**). Those four sacred months are Muharram, Rajab, Dhu'l-Qa'dah, and Dhu'l-Hijjah. The following are common Muslim festivals (Braswell 2000: 40-41; Emerick 2004: 262-63; Nehls and Eric 2009: 231-34):

- *New year's day (first of Muharram)*. A day that commemorates the hegira.
- *Ashura (tenth of Muharram)*. A day of voluntary fasting to commemorate the day on which it is said God created Adam and Eve. This day is particularly special to Shiites, since it was on this day that Ali's son Hussain was killed.
- *Maulid un Nabi (twelfth of Rabi I)*. The birthday of Muhammad. On Lamu island off the coast of Kenya this is a major event, with Qur'an recitation competitions that last for a week.
- *Ramadan*. During the month of Ramadan Muslims are to fast from food, drink, and sexual intercourse between dawn and sunset. It is believed that fasting during Ramadan is thirty times better than at any other time and that those who fast with pure motives may obtain remission of their sins.
- *Lailatu'l-Qadr ("Night of Power [or Glory], twenty-seventh of Ramadan)*. This day commemorates when the angel Gabriel supposedly brought the first verses of the Qur'an to Muhammad. The Qur'an says, "The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission, on every errand: Peace! . . . This until the rise of morn!" (**Q. 97:3-5**).⁵ Some Muslims pray during the entire night.
- *Eidu'l-Fitr ("The Minor Feast" or "Festival of the fast Breaking," first of Shawwal)*. This, the most popular holiday in Islam, celebrates the breaking of the fast of Ramadan. It is a time of parties, visiting family and friends, exchanging presents, and special sweets are prepared.
- *Eidu'l-Adha ("The Great Festival" or "Festival of the Sacrifice," tenth of Dhu'l-Hijjah)*. This celebrates the completion of the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca, which is one of the "five pillars of Islam" [see above]). It is celebrated around the world, even by Muslims who have not participated in the Hajj. It is a festive time of visitation, feasting, exchange of gifts, and buying new clothes. It is also a day of sacrifice based on **Q. 22:34-37; Q. 37:100-110**. "Eid-ul-Adha commemorates Prophet Abraham's unselfish act of sacrificing his own son Ishmael to the One God, Allah. . . . But miraculously enough, when Abraham was about to sacrifice Ishmael, Allah spared the boy's life and replaced him with a lamb.⁶ And this is what Abraham ultimately sacrificed. To commemorate this outstanding act of sacrifice (qurbani) by Prophet Abraham, people sacrifice a lamb, goat, ram or any other animal on Eid-ul-Adha." ("Eid-ul-Adha-History" 1988-2012: n.p.)

3. Islamic holy places (see Emerick 2004: 161-74, 298-99; "Holiest sites in Sunni Islam" 2019; Nehls and Eric 2009a: 241-42; "Qibla" 2019). According to the Hadith, Muhammad said, "Do not prepare yourself for a journey except to three Mosques, i.e. Al-Masjid-Al-Haram, the Mosque of Aqsa (Jerusalem) and my Mosque" (al-Bukhari: 1197). He also said, "One prayer in my Mosque is better than one thousand prayers in any other mosque excepting Al-Masjid-Al-Haram" (Ibid.: 1190).

- *The Kab'ah in Mecca*. Islam's holiest city is Mecca, where Muhammad is from. However, the holiest site in Mecca is the *Kab'ah* ("Cube"). The *Kab'ah* is a brick building approximately 14x18 meters in size, and 12 meters high. It is holy because Muslims believe it was originally constructed as a shrine by Abraham and Ishmael (**Q. 2:127**). The *Kab'ah* is covered with black draping and contains a black stone fitted into the east corner, allegedly given by the angel Gabriel to Ishmael. It is toward the *Kab'ah* that Muslims are required to pray five times per day. The original *Kab'ah* was a site for idol worship and was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Muhammad played a role in rebuilding and cleansing it of idols. The *Kab'ah* is surrounded by Masjid al-Haram ("The Sacred Mosque").
- *Al-Masjid an-Nabawi ("The Mosque of the Prophet") in Medina*. This is Islam's second holiest site. Muhammad was involved in constructing it. The most important feature of the site is the green dome over the center of the mosque, where Muhammad's tomb is located.

⁵ "The Spirit" is generally understood by Muslims to refer to the angel Gabriel, not the Holy Spirit (see Ali 2006: Q. 97:4 n.6219; Haleem 2005: Q. 97:3n.a; Dirks 2008: 197). This is an inference that is not explicitly stated in the Qur'an.

⁶ This is contrary to the account in **Gen 22:1-19** where God told Abraham to sacrifice (and then spared) *Isaac*, not Ishmael. **Q. 37:100-110** does not specifically name which son Abraham was told to sacrifice. Muslim historian Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (839-923) points out, "The earliest sages of our Prophet's nation disagree about which of Abraham's two sons it was that he was commanded to sacrifice. Some say it was Isaac, while others say it was Ishmael. Both views are supported by statements related on the authority of the Messenger of God." (al-Tabari 1987a: 82) He then spends 14 pages citing and quoting early Islamic authorities on both sides of the issue. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* reflects this confusion in its comment on **Q. 37:107**: "Then We ransomed him the one whom he had been commanded to sacrifice namely Ishmael or Isaac—two different opinions—with a mighty sacrifice a mighty ram from Paradise."

- *Al-Aqsa Mosque* (“*The Farthest Mosque*”) in *Jerusalem*. This mosque stands over the site where Muhammad allegedly was taken one night by the angel Gabriel on a horselike creature called the *Buraq*. From there he ascended to heaven before being returned to Mecca (see **Q. 17:1, 60; 53:1-18**). Jerusalem was also the direction toward which Muslims originally were required to pray until Muhammad received a new “revelation” to change the direction toward the Kab’ah in Mecca (**Q. 2:142-144**). This mosque is located on temple mount in Jerusalem and is notable for its large gold dome.

III. Muhammad and the History of Islam

A. *Muhammad* (see Emerick 2004: 291-312; “Muhammad” 2019; Nehls and Eric 2009a: 3-66)

Muhammad’s life can be divided into three distinct parts: (1) His youth and married life up to his “calling” to be a prophet of Allah (AD 570-609); (2) his prophethood during his time in Mecca (AD 610-622); and (3) his life in Medina until his death (AD 622-632).

1. Life prior to his calling (AD 570-609). Muhammad was born in AD 570 in Mecca to Abdullah and Amina, of the clan of Hashim of the tribe of Quraish. His father died before he was born, and his mother died when he was six. He was then raised first by his grandfather, Abdu’l Muttalib, and then by his uncle, Abu Talib. Muhammad was from a merchant family and as a young man traveled widely accompanying trading caravans. When he was 25 he married Khadijah who was his employer and was 15 years older than he was. By all accounts it was a happy marriage, producing 2 boys and 4 girls. Khadijah died after 25 years of marriage.

2. His “calling” and prophethood during his time in Mecca (AD 610-622). Muhammad was in the habit of periodically retreating to a cave. When he was 40 years old he claimed to be visited by the angel Gabriel in the cave, who began reciting for him the Qur’an; he did not know what was happening and became very frightened, but his wife convinced him that this was from Allah (al-Bukhari: 6982; Muslim: 160a). Three years after this event Muhammad started preaching these revelations publicly, proclaiming that “God is One” (i.e., “*tauhid*”), that complete “surrender” (i.e., “*islam*”) to Him is the only way acceptable to God, and that he himself was a prophet and messenger of God. Muhammad’s claims resulted in some converts but also caused controversy among the polytheists and the different tribes. In about 620 his wife and uncle died. In 622 Muhammad was invited by Muslim believers in Medina (then known as Yathrib) to settle there and become their leader. He encouraged his followers in Mecca to emigrate to Yathrib and, under cover of night, Muhammad and his close companion Abu Bakr left Mecca for Yathrib (the *hejira*).

3. His life in Medina until his death (AD 622-632). In his last 10 years, Muhammad’s life was transformed: he went from a devoted believer in his calling who had submitted to rejection and ridicule to a warrior, conqueror, and unquestioned leader of both a religion and a state; he exchanged his monogamy for an extensive harem of wives and concubines. After fighting a number of battles against the Meccans, Muhammad’s ranks were swelled with new converts. In 630 he led an army of 10,000 into Mecca which surrendered without a fight. In June 632 Muhammad died after a short illness, which some say was the result of poison. “At the time of his death, Muhammad had emerged as a religious and political leader without equal in the Arabian peninsula. He had founded a community, in fact a nation, based on a monotheistic and prophetic religion.” (Braswell 2000: 15)

B. *History of Islam* (see Braswell 2000: 47-58; Davis 2014; Emerick 2004: 313-36, 373-91; Nehs and Eric 2009a: 50-60)

1. 632-750: the four “rightly guided caliphs” and the Umayyad dynasty. Muhammad did not name his successor. His closest friend, Abu Bakr, was chosen to succeed him. Following him, Umar (634-644), Uthman (644-656), and Ali (656-661) were selected as caliphs. They are known as the “rightly guided” caliphs based on their following the sunnah and their style of governance. Umar, Uthman, and Ali were all assassinated by other Muslims. Following Ali’s assassination, a dynasty called the Umayyads ruled the Muslim world from Damascus, Syria. During this period Muslim armies conquered the entire Middle East, the Byzantine and Persian empires, North Africa, Spain, reached India and China, and invaded France, where they were stopped by Charles Martel at the battle of Tours on 732.

2. 750-1258: the Abbasid dynasty. A group known as the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads and ruled the Islamic world from Baghdad, Iraq. The Abbasid dynasty is considered the “golden age” of Islamic civilization and corresponded to the so-called “dark ages” of the Christian West. Abbasid rule was destroyed when the Mongols swept into Muslim lands from central Asia. Eventually, the Mongols themselves converted to Islam. It was during the period of the Abbasids that Roman Catholic powers from Europe attempted to restore access to the Holy Land that had once been Christian but had been conquered by the Muslims. A series of

crusades lasting from 1095-1291 resulted in temporary Christian footholds in the holy land but those ultimately fell. The crusades resulted in a lasting enmity of Muslims against Christians that exists to this day.

3. 1258-1945: rival Islamic states, the Ottoman empire, and colonialization. After the defeat of the Abbasid dynasty, the Islamic world consisted of several large Muslim empires which competed among themselves. These included the Persian Empire, various Turkish states, the Mamlukes of Egypt and Syria, the Mughals of India, and other states throughout Africa and Asia. The Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) in 1453 and by 1517 captured Cairo, Egypt and ended the Mamluke dynasty. The Ottoman Empire lasted until 1922. During this period of time the Roman Catholics succeeded in pushing the Muslims out of Spain in 1492. European colonial powers were successful politically, but not religiously, in taking over much of the Muslim world and creating nation-states and boundary lines. Western cultural influences were felt particularly in Turkey and Iran beginning after World War I. World War II marked the culmination of this period.

4. 1945-the present: the contemporary situation. After World War II the Western powers fairly rapidly granted autonomy to their former colonies. When Great Britain granted independence to India in 1947, Pakistan was partitioned off as an independent nation for Muslims from the regions where there was a Muslim majority. Other overtly Muslim states have been established since the end of World War II, including Sudan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Somalia. The breakup of the USSR led to the independence of Muslim-dominated countries in central Asia. Islamic movements in many other nations are striving to Islamize their nations. The northern 15 provinces of Nigeria have declared shari'ah law to be the legal code of that territory. The formation of the modern nation of Israel in 1948 began a change in the Middle East that has had significant repercussions. It sparked Muslim unity which led to four wars between Israel and her Muslim neighbors and is an ongoing source of Muslim outrage. The vast oil wealth of Middle Eastern nations has resulted in a great expansion of Muslim missionaries and influence around the world. The other aspect of the modern rise of Islam is the rise of extremist Islamists who focus on *jihad* ("struggle").

2. JESUS AND MUHAMMAD

I. Introduction

Jesus and Muhammad are at the center of Christianity and Islam, respectively. As noted above, Muhammad lived approximately 600 years after Jesus. Since Islam contends that it is the final manifestation of God's (Allah's) revelation to the world and contends that Jesus was part of Allah's progressive revelation, it is not surprising that the Qur'an and the Hadith refer to Jesus. Muslims who are writing for Christian-influenced Westerners often make a point of saying things like "Jesus holds a particularly high place in Islam, and he is honored in many verses in the Qur'an" (Emerick 2004: 222). Muhammad even said, "I am most akin to Jesus Christ among the whole of mankind, and all the Prophets are of different mothers but belong to one religion and no Prophet was raised between me and Jesus" (Muslim: 2365b; see also 2365a, c; al-Bukhari: 3442, 3443).

II. The Islamic View of Jesus

Although Jesus is said to be honored in Islam, the Jesus that Islam honors is not the same as the Jesus depicted in the Bible and who is worshipped by Christians. Michael and McAlister point out, "The Qur'an's Isa [i.e., Jesus] is not a historical figure. His identity and role as a prophet are based solely on alleged revelations to Muhammad over 600 years after the Jesus of history lived and died." (Michael and McAlister 2010: 79)⁷

A. Jesus or Isa

In the Qur'an, the name of Jesus is "Isa," although most English translations render his name "Jesus." "Jesus' mother tongue was Aramaic. In his own lifetime he was called *Yeshua* in Aramaic, and *Iesous* in Greek. . . . *Yeshua* is itself a form of Hebrew *Yehoshua*, which means 'the LORD saves.' . . . Yeshua of Nazareth was never called *Isa*, the name the Qur'an gives to Him. It is worth noting that Arabic-speaking Christians refer to Jesus as *Yasou* (from *Yeshua*), and never as *Isa*." (Michael and McAlister 2010: 79) The name *Isa* "obtained most probably from the Nestorian *Isho*. There are no other records anywhere in Christian history to possibly suggest the strange name for Jesus in the Qur'an. As Arabic is a Semitic language closely allied to Hebrew one

⁷ Christine Schirrmacher makes the important observation that "when Muslim partners in Muslim-Christian dialogue emphasize that they 'accept' biblical persons such as Abraham or Jesus Christ, indeed even venerate them, then that means that only the Koranic perspective on Abraham or Jesus has validity, while Abraham and Jesus, in the way they are portrayed in the Old and New Testaments, find no acceptance at all" (Schirrmacher 2011: 26).

would have expected his name to have been the same Yasu' as the Christians used." (Gilchrist 1994: 8)

B. The family and birth of Jesus

Islamic apologist Ahmed Deedat recounts the Islamic account of Jesus' lineage: "The story is that the maternal grandmother of Jesus, Hannah, had hitherto been barren. She poured out her heart to God: If only God will grant her a child, she would surely dedicate such a child for the service of God in the temple. God granted her prayer and Mary [often called Maryam] was born." (Deedat 2002: 9) In Islam's account, Imram [Hebrew = Amram] was Maryam's father (Q. 3:35-36; 66:12).⁸ Maryam then was entrusted to Zechariah, the father of Yahya (John the Baptist) for her upbringing (Q. 3:36-37, 39-41; 19:7). Although the Bible says that Mary was betrothed and then married to Joseph (Matt 1:18-24), "there is no Joseph in the Islamic version of Jesus' life" (Emerick 2004: 223). Both the Bible (Matt 1:18-25) and the Qur'an (Q. 19:20-22) accept that Mary was a virgin when she supernaturally conceived, but according to the Qur'an Mary gave birth alone in a remote place under a date palm tree, not in Bethlehem with her husband Joseph in the fulfillment of prophecy (Q. 19:22-26; compare Matt 2:1-6; Luke 2:1-7).

Deedat confuses the birth of Mary with the biblical story of Hannah's imploring the Lord for a son and then giving birth to Samuel (1 Sam 1:1-28). According to Num 26:59, Amram's [Imram's] wife was Jochebed, not Hannah. Jochebed "bore to Amram Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam" (see also Exod 6:20; 15:20). Indeed, Q. 20:30 quotes Moses as calling "Aaron, my brother." Q. 19:28 even calls Maryam the "sister of Aaron." Gilchrist points out, "Elsewhere in the Qur'an the word *ukhtun* (a sister) is always applied to an immediate sister (as in Sura al-Nisa 4:12, 23, 176) and the use of the word in Mary's case can only mean a 'blood-sister of Aaron'." (Gilchrist 2010: 5; see also "Quran Dictionary" 2009-2017: Q. 19:28, *yāukh'ta*) All of this indicates that Muhammad (the Qur'an) confused Mary of the NT with Miriam of the OT, who had lived 1000 years earlier.⁹

C. According to Islam, Jesus was not crucified or resurrected

The most important differences between the Islamic Jesus and the biblical, historical Jesus go to the heart of *who Jesus is* and *what Jesus did*. The crucifixion is central because it is necessary both for Christ's substitutionary atonement for people's sins and for the resurrection. Yusuf Ali recognizes this: "The Orthodox-Christian Churches make it a cardinal point of their doctrine that his life was taken on the Cross, that he died and was buried, that on the third day he rose in the body with his wounds intact, and walked about and conversed, and ate with his disciples, and was afterwards taken up bodily to heaven. This is necessary for the theological doctrine of blood sacrifice and vicarious atonement for sins, which is rejected by Islam." (Ali 2006: Q. 4:157n.663) Islam denies all those cardinal points.

By denying the crucifixion and "the theological doctrine of blood sacrifice and vicarious atonement for sins," Muslims unwittingly contradict five important aspects of Islam and the Qur'an:

⁸ Imram simply is the Arabicized spelling of the Hebrew Amram ("Amram" 2019: In the Qur'an).

⁹ Ali tries to deal with the obvious problem that Mary lived more than 1000 years after her supposed father Imram and brothers Moses and Aaron by stating, "Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first in the line of Israelite priesthood. Mary and her cousin Elisabeth (mother of Yahya) came of a priestly family, and were therefore 'sisters of Aaron' or daughters of Imran (who was Aaron's father)." (Ali 2006: Q. 19:28n.2481) However, "The problem is that Mary was never descended from Aaron at all! Aaron was a Levitical priest, descended with his brother Moses from Levi, one of the sons of Jacob. On the other hand Mary was descended from Judah, one of Jacob's other sons, through the line of David (Luke 1:32). She was not even of the same tribe as Aaron." (Gilchrist 2010: 5, see Matt 1:2; Luke 3:33; Heb 7:14 which indicate that Mary was of the tribe of Judah; see also Katz, "Is Mary" n.d.; Gilchrist 2015: 56-57). Halali and Khan try to explain the problem away by saying, "This Harun (Aaron) is not the brother of Musa (Moses), but he was another pious man at the time of Maryam (Mary)" (Hilali and Khan 1998: 405 n.1; see also Haleem 2005: Q. 19:28n.b).

Muhammad's own explanation when he was confronted about this was, "The (people of the old age) used to give names (to their persons) after the names of Apostles and pious persons who had gone before them" (Muslim: 2135). Muhammad's attempted explanation of the problem is manifestly false based on the Qur'an alone, since "the Qur'an calls Mary the 'sister of Aaron' not according to any 'old age' practice but because, according to the Qur'an, Mary was the daughter of Imram by birth, a birth described in real terms in the Qur'an. Consequently, as far as the Qur'an is concerned, Mary was called the 'sister of Aaron' and 'daughter of Imram' because she was the direct offspring of Aaron's parents." (Sundiata 2006: 130; see also Spencer 2009: 138) Gilchrist adds, "Muhammad's response is not convincing. No one else in the Qur'an is described as the sister of an ancestor." (Gilchrist 2015: 57) Further, "it is also most unlikely that Aaron would be called the brother (*akha*) of Moses in the Qur'an, as often as he is, in the direct sense if Mary was only called his sister (*ukhta*) in a figurative sense" (Gilchrist 2010: 5; and, as noted in the main text, the word used means "immediate blood sister," not "ancestor"; at pages 3-7 Gilchrist discusses other Islamic errors concerning Jesus' genealogy).

- First, the denial of substitutionary atonement effectively denies the very heart of the 2000 years of Judaism and Christianity which preceded Muhammad. It therefore contradicts the claim that Islam is simply the evolutionary culmination of Judaism and Christianity. The reason is that “the fundamental idea of sacrifice in the Old Testament is that of substitution, which again seems to imply everything else—atonement and redemption, vicarious punishment and forgiveness” (Edersheim 1881: 81). The substitution of an innocent life for that of the guilty party, which is the heart of substitutionary atonement, pre-eminently is seen in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.
- Second, the denial of substitutionary atonement contradicts many passages which state that the Qur’an confirms the previous revelation of the Bible (see **Q. 2:41, 89, 97; 3:3; 4:47; 5:15, 48; 6:90, 92; 10:37; 12:111; 35:31; 46:9, 12, 30**). Islam’s rejection of the crucifixion of Jesus does not address any of the OT prophecies that pointed to and were fulfilled in the crucifixion;¹⁰ nor does it address any of the NT and historical evidence for the crucifixion and resurrection.
- Third, in **Q. 11:70, 74-76** angels appeared to Abraham, told him they had been sent to destroy Sodom (where Lot lived), and then Abraham “*began to argue with Us concerning the people of Lot*” (Sahih). This is the Qur’an’s version of the account in **Gen 18:16-33** where Abraham argued that God should not “*sweep away the righteous with the wicked,*” and God agreed that he would spare the entire city if there were only ten righteous people in it. While the Qur’an does not detail Abraham’s argument, Muslim commentators and historians accept that Abraham argued that the entire city should be spared if there were even a few righteous people in it. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* states, “When Jibril and the other angels who were with him came to Ibrahim, they said, (Verily, we are going to destroy the people of this town.) Ibrahim said to them, ‘Will you destroy a town that has three hundred believers in it’ They said, ‘No.’ He then said, ‘Will you destroy a town that has two hundred believers in it’ They said, ‘No.’ He said, ‘Will you destroy a town that has forty believers in it’ They said, ‘No.’ He then said, ‘Thirty’ They still replied, ‘No.’ This continued until he said, ‘Five’ They said, ‘No.’ Then he said, ‘What do you think if there is one Muslim man in the town, would you destroy it’ They said, ‘No.’” (Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, n.d.: Q. 11:74, comment). This is the principle of substitutionary atonement, i.e., people are not doomed to suffer their fate solely on the basis of their own sins and behavior, but the righteousness of *someone else* can save the sinner.
- Fourth, **Q. 37:102-107** explicitly confirms the account of **Gen 22:1-14** in which God told Abraham to sacrifice his son but substituted a ram as the substitutionary sacrifice at the last moment.¹¹ **Q. 37:107** (Hilali-

¹⁰ Prophecy	OT Source	NT Fulfillment
1. Betrayed by a friend	Ps 41:9; 55:12-14	Matt 10:4; 26:47-50; 13:21-27; Luke 22:19-23
2. Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	Zech 11:12	Matt 26:15; 27:3
3. Money thrown in God’s house	Zech 11:13	Matt 27:5
4. Money given for potter’s field	Zech 11:13	Matt 27:6-10
5. Forsaken by his disciples	Zech 13:7	Matt 26:31, 69-74; Mark 14:27, 50
6. Silent before accusers	Isa 53:7	Matt 27:12; Acts 8:32-35
7. Beaten and spat upon	Isa 50:6; 53:5	Matt 26:67; 27:26; Mark 10:33-34
8. Mocked	Ps 22:7-8	Matt 27:31; Luke 22:63-65
9. Hands and feet pierced	Ps 22:16; Zech 12:10	Luke 23:33; John 20:25-27
10. Suffers for the sins of others	Isa 53:5-6, 8, 10-12	Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:3
11. Dies with transgressors	Isa 53:12	Matt 27:38; Mark 15:27-28; Luke 22:37
12. Intercedes for persecutors	Isa 53:12	Luke 23:34
13. Lots cast for his clothes	Ps 22:18	John 19:23-24
14. Friends stand far away	Ps 38:11	Matt 27:55-56; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49
15. People wag their heads	Ps 22:7	Matt 27:39
16. People stare at Him	Ps 22:17	Luke 23:35
17. He suffers thirst	Ps 22:15; 69:21	John 19:28
18. Given gall and vinegar to drink	Ps 69:21	John 19:28-29; Matt 27:34
19. Cries out when forsaken by God	Ps 22:1	Matt 27:46
20. Commits His spirit to God	Ps 31:5	Luke 23:46
21. His bones are not broken	Ps 34:20	John 19:33
22. His side is pierced	Zech 12:10	John 19:34-37
23. Heart broken	Ps 22:14; 69:20	John 19:34
24. Darkness over the land	Amos 8:9	Matt 27:45
25. Buried in a rich man’s tomb	Isa 53:9	Matt 27:57-60

¹¹ Although most Muslims believe that the son involved was Ishmael, the Qur’an does not specify whether the son was Ishamel or Isaac.

Khan) states, “*We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.*” That is *the actualization of the principle of substitutionary atonement*. Muslim commentators refer to the biblical account and the substitution of the ram (see Ali 2006: Q. 37:107n.4108; A’la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 37:107n.66; Jalal 2017: Q. 37:107, comment). More than that, every year Muslims commemorate this event by sacrificing animals at their great festival *Eidu’l-Adha* (“Festival of the Sacrifice”). Mawdudi states that “Allah made it a tradition till the Day of Resurrection that all the believers should offer animal sacrifice on the same date in the entire world so as to keep fresh the memory of the great and unique event signifying faithfulness and devotion” (A’la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 37:107n.66; see also Asad 1980: Q. 37:107n.43).

- Fifth, Muslims have a ritual called *aqiqah* that is not mandatory but is “highly encouraged” (“Aqiqah” 2013: “What is the purpose of Aqiqah?”; see also Malik: book 26, no. 7). *Aqiqah* is the sacrifice of an animal on behalf of a newborn baby, typically seven days after the birth. *Aqiqah* has a substitutionary and redemptive purpose. Famous Muslim theologian, commentator, and jurist Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim (1292-1350) admitted the substitutionary and redemptive purpose of *aqiqah*. He stated that among the benefits of *aqiqah* are: “1) It is a sacrifice by means of which the child is brought close to Allah soon after he comes into this world. 2) It is a ransom for the newborn so that he or she can intercede for his parents. 3) It is a sacrifice by which the newborn is ransomed just as Allah ransomed Isma’eel with the ram.” (“Sunnah of the Prophet” 2019: Benefits of Aqiqah?) In sum, the Qur’an and Islam actually accept the principle of substitutionary atonement while at the same time formally denying it.

Islam’s denial of the crucifixion is based on only one passage in the Qur’an, written more than 600 years after the life of Jesus, **Q. 4:157-58**: “*They said (in boast), ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah’;— but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not. Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.*”¹² Although the Qur’an denies that Jesus was crucified, Dirks points out that “the *Qur’an* does not say that there was no crucifixion. Rather, the *Qur’an* states that it was not Jesus Christ who was crucified, even though it was made to appear that he was. In short, the chasm, which separates Islam and Christianity in regard to the crucifixion, is not whether or not there was a crucifixion at the time and place the *New Testament* maintains, but only whether the person so crucified was Jesus.” (Dirks 2008: 78)

Given the admission that there was a crucifixion at the time and place the NT says there was, Muslims are unsure what happened on the day Christ (supposedly) was crucified. “Sunni tradition indicates several different views have gained acceptance. There has never been only one view.” (Larson 2008: 7) The majority view is that someone else was substituted for Jesus and was crucified in his place. The famous commentary on the Qur’an *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* maintains, “The one slain and crucified, who was an associate of theirs [the Jews], was given the resemblance, of Jesus. In other words, God cast his [Jesus’] likeness to him and so they thought it was him [Jesus].” (Jalal 2017: Q. 4:157, comment) Emerick says, “Who was crucified on that fateful day? If anyone was executed, it may have been the man who betrayed Jesus [i.e., Judas Iscariot]. If he looked sort of like Jesus, in the confusion the Caucasian Romans may have grabbed him and killed him, thinking all Semites looked alike.” (Emerick 2004: 224) Mufti Muhammad Madani says that “Allah changed the looks of the guard [of the house where Jesus was imprisoned]. . . . As a result of this, the guard was led to be executed.” (Madani 2005: 1:388) Dirks maintains that the “Barabbas” who was released by Pontius Pilate (**Matt 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:17-25; John 18:39-40**) was really Jesus Christ and the “Jesus” who was crucified was a “paramilitary insurrectionist known as Jesus, the Galilean, who claimed to be the King of the Jews” (Dirks 2008: 93-108, 111). However, Dirks also floats suggestions that the person crucified might have been “Judas Iscariot; Simon of Cyrene; simulacrum [i.e., one bearing a superficial likeness to someone else] of Jesus Christ; [or] unidentified others” (Ibid.: 111; see also Ayoub 1980: 94-103 for various “substitution” theories).

Yusuf Ali in his commentary on **Q. 4:158** says, “Another [view] holds that he did die (5:117) but not when he was supposed to be crucified, and that his being ‘raised up’ unto Allah means that instead of being disgraced as a malefactor, as the Jews intended, he was on the contrary honoured by Allah as His Messenger: (see 4:159)” (Ali 2006: Q. 4:158n.664). Fazlul Karim, after citing **Q. 4:157** and **3:55**, states, “These verses do not deny Jesus being nailed on the Cross, but they negative his having expired on the Cross. There was no eye witness of his death but it was only a supposition that he died as a result of nailing.” (Karim 1939: 4:79n.1) Adil Salahi, editor of the “Islam in Perspective” column for the Saudi Arabian newspaper *Arab News*, adds, “A

¹² Kevin Greeson points out that **Q. 4:157** “does not say that Isa did not die. It only says that the Jews did not kill Him. The *Injil* agrees! The Jews did not crucify Jesus. They did not have the authority to crucify Him. They were under Roman occupation and Roman authority. . . . They had to turn Jesus over to the Romans and hope that the Romans would crucify Jesus for them. And the Romans, not the Jews, did crucify Him.” (Greeson 2007: 141; see also Reynolds 2018: 181)

number of scholars, some of them prominent indeed, have expressed this view and argued that this expression [*mutawaffika*] which occurs in three different verses in the Quran [Q. 3:55; 5:117; 19:33], means actually that Jesus Christ died a natural death” (Salahi 1992: 9; see also Mohammad 2003: 3-82 for the evidence from Islamic sources why the Ahmadiyya Islamic sect concludes that Jesus died a natural death).

Despite the prevailing view that Jesus was not crucified or did not die on the cross, some Muslims agree that Jesus *did* die on the cross. Tabari (1987b: 120-25), Ayoub (1980: 91-121), Cumming (2001: 1-14), Larson (2008: 5-7), and Shamoun (“Al-Tabari” n.d.) discuss the many Islamic views throughout history of what happened when Christ was (supposedly) crucified, including the view that Jesus died on the cross. Professor Ayoub even states that the Qur’an “does not deny the death of Christ. . . . The death of Jesus is asserted several times and in various contexts.” (Ayoub 1980: 106, citing Q. 3:55; 5:117; 19:33) For example, Q. 3:55 states, “Behold! Allah said: “*O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme*”]; The word which is translated “will take you” (*mutawaffika*) is an active participle of the word *tawaffā*. It typically means “to pass away, to cause to die, to take in death” (“Quran Dictionary” 2009-2017: Q. 3:55, *mutawaffika*; Shamoun, “Al-Tabari” [Appendix: The Meaning of Tawaffa in the Quran] n.d.). Gabriel Said Reynolds points out, “The Arabic term (*tawaffā*) behind the translation [of Q. 3:55] is regularly used in the Qur’an to refer to the manner by which God separates soul from body at death, that is, His taking one’s life (note, for example, the prayer in 7:26: ‘Lord! Pour patience upon us, and grant us to die [*tawaffanā*] as Muslims.’)” (Reynolds 2018: 124). Indeed, Asad’s translation of Q. 3:55 reads, “Lo! God said: “*O Jesus! Verily, I shall cause thee to die, and shall exalt thee unto Me, and cleanse thee of [the presence of] those who are bent on denying the truth.*”

Similarly, Q. 5:117 states, “*I [referring to Jesus] was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them; when Thou didst take me up Thou wast the Watcher over them, and Thou art a witness to all things.*” The word translated “take me up” (*tawaffaytanī*) is a verb form of that same word, *tawaffā* and specifically means “to pass away, to cause to die, to take in death” (“Quran Dictionary” 2009-2017: Q. 5:117, *tawaffaytanī*; Shamoun, “Al-Tabari” [Appendix: The Meaning of Tawaffa in the Quran] n.d.). Shakir thus translates Q. 5:117 as “*I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst cause me to die, Thou wert the watcher over them.*” Asad similarly translates that ayah as “*I bore witness to what they did as long as I dwelt in their midst; but since Thou hast caused me to die, Thou alone hast been their keeper.*” Asad points out that Allah’s question to Jesus in Q. 5:116 (“*O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?*”) must have taken place “after Jesus’ death”: this is fully evident from Jesus’ subsequent reference, in the past tense, to his own death (‘since Thou hast caused me to die’) in verse 117” (Asad 1980: Q. 5:116n.139; see also Reynolds 2018: 181).

Finally, Q. 19:33 has the infant Jesus saying, “*So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!*” That is identical to what is said of the prophet Yahya (John the Baptist) in Q. 19:15, “*So Peace on him the day he was born, the day that he dies, and the day that he will be raised up to life (again)!*” Muslims acknowledge that Yahya died “an unjust death at the hands of a tyrant” (Ali 2006: Q. 19:15n. 2469; see also A’la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 19:15n.12). Since the same things are said about Yahya and Jesus in the same order and Yahya admittedly was put to death, the text suggests that Jesus likewise was put to death. Indeed, the statement at the end of Q. 19:33 “*that I shall be raised up to life (again)*” makes no sense unless he first had died. *Tafsir Ibn Abbas* interprets this text as follows, “(Peace on me the day I was born) safety to me from Satan’s touch when I was born, (and the day I die) and safety to me from the compression of the grave when I die, (and the day I shall be raised alive) *when I am resurrected alive from the grave!*” (Ibn Abbas 2016: Q. 19:33, comment, emph. added; see also Madani 2005: 3:379) Ibn Abbas’s and Madani’s interpretations of Q. 19:33 as referring to the *resurrection* of Jesus (not just his being assumed alive into heaven) are consistent with the biblical accounts of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. Nevertheless, most Muslims believe that Jesus was taken to heaven without having died; and all Muslims (including the minority who believe Jesus died) deny the bodily resurrection of Christ as described in the Bible.

D. According to Islam, Jesus is a prophet but not the divine Son of God

The basic position of Islam regarding Jesus is that Jesus was a prophet of Allah, but he is not the divine Son of God (Dirks 2008: 35). Islam is adamant that Jesus, like all the prophets (including Muhammad), was a created being, a merely mortal human. Q. 5:75 says, “*Christ the son of Mary was no more than a messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food.*” The Qur’an also says, “*O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers.*

Say not ‘Trinity’: desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.” (Q. 4:171; see also Q. 2:116; 5:17, 72-73, 116-17; 6:101; 9:30; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4-5; 19:35, 88-92; 21:26; 23:91; 39:4; 43:81-82; 72:3; 112:3). Regarding Q. 4:171, Muhammad Asad states, “In the verse under discussion, which stresses the purely human nature of Jesus and refutes the belief in his divinity, the Qur’an points out that Jesus, like all other human beings, was ‘a soul created by Him’” (Asad 1980: Q. 4:171n.181; see also Ali 2006: Q. 4:171n.675-676; A’la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 4:171n.212-218).

Muslim apologists also cite statements in the Bible where Jesus calls people to worship God (**Matt 4:10; 19:16-17; 23:8-9; Mark 12:28-34; John 17:3; 20:17**), calls God “Father” (a term not used of Jesus) (**Matt 5:48; 6:1; 7:21; 11:25; 26:39**), prays to the Father (**Matt 14:23**), says that only the Father knows the day and the hour of the Second Coming (**Matt 24:36**), calls himself a “prophet” (**Luke 4:24**), and was considered to be a prophet (**Matt 21:45-46**) (see Al-Hilali 1998: 904-09; Ali 2006: Q. 5:72n.782). They thereby conclude that “Jesus was subservient to Allah and that he had no share in Divinity” (Al-Hilali 1998: 909; see also Ali 2006: Q. 5:117n.831; A’la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 43:64n.57).

Christians do not deny the biblical *facts* stated by Muslim apologists regarding Jesus’ humanity; indeed, Christians positively *affirm* that Christ was fully a man, but neither the Bible *nor Jesus himself* ever said that Jesus was *only* a man. Muslim quotations from the Bible are *very selective*. They omit a vast amount of biblical data that led Christians to conclude early-on that Jesus was more than *just* a mortal man but was God come to earth *as a man*. The combination of divine and human natures in the person of Christ is called the “hypostatic union.” In the hypostatic union “the two natures are unchanged by the union. The argument: If divine attributes are conferred to man, man ceases to be man. Therefore the divine and human natures are not mixed to form a third nature that is neither one nor the other. The humanity in Christ is not deified, nor is the deity of Christ humanized.” (Bozack 1993: 75) The Muslim position is based on a fundamental misunderstanding: “Ever since the Qur’an misled Muslims into assuming that Christians are promoting mere human beings (like Mary) to the position of deity, their efforts have been directed at showing that it is impossible for man to become God! Christians also believe that it is impossible for man to become God. However, Christians believe that God became man. . . . Muslims seem unable to see that Christianity is not exalting a man and equating him with God, but worshipping a God who became man.” (Sundiata 2006: 199)¹³ Christians therefore deny the Islamic *conclusions* that Christ was *only* a man and “had no share in Divinity.”

This denial of Christ’s divinity represents a fundamental divide between Christianity and Islam since it goes to the heart of who Jesus is: either he is fully God and fully man (the Christian view) or is he merely a man (the Muslim view). This issue is central to Christianity because Christ’s deity (as well as his humanity) is essential to Christ’s ability to fulfill his primary mission according to Christianity, namely, his substitutionary atonement for mankind’s sins. It is also central to Islam because Islam (wrongly) considers the Christian view as amounting to Islam’s unforgivable sin, namely, *shirk*, i.e., worshiping or attributing godhood to anything or anyone other than Allah. This divide between Christianity and Islam ultimately is irresolvable since the two have radically different conceptions of what the “oneness” of God means.

Even though Islam denies the deity of Christ, various aspects of Qur’anic teaching show the Christian concept of the incarnation of Christ to be at least plausible:

- First, in the Qur’an, spirits or angels can take the form of human beings: “*We sent to her [Mary] Our Ruh [angel Jibrael (Gabriel)], and he appeared before her in the form of a man in all respects*” (Q. 19:17, Hilali-Khan). Since spirits or angels can take the form of human beings, then God, who can do anything, certainly also could take the form of a human being.

¹³ According to the Bible, Jesus is *eternal*. McDowell and Larson point out, “Nowhere in Scripture does it say that God ‘created’ Jesus” (McDowell and Larson 1983: 93). Indeed, Christ who “*existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men*” (**Phil 2:6-7**; see also **2 Cor 8:9**). In other words, although he was God, Christ voluntarily left heaven, became a man, and submitted himself to the Father—all for our sake. Thus, whenever Jesus indicates his subordination to the Father in such statements as “*the Father is greater than I*” (**John 14:28**), we must remember this context of his voluntarily emptying himself and leaving the riches of heaven for us. As A. W. Pink reminds us, “The contrast which the Savior drew between the Father and Himself [in **John 14:28**] was not concerning nature, but official character and position. Christ was not speaking of Himself in His essential Being. The One who thought it not robbery to be ‘equal with God’ had taken the servant form, and not only so, had been made in the likeness of men. In both these senses, namely, in His official status (as Mediator) and in His assumption of human nature, He was inferior to the Father. . . . In view of this, Christ was now contrasting His situation with that of the Father in the heavenly Sanctuary. . . . It was Christ owning His place as Servant, and magnifying the One who had sent Him.” (Pink n.d.: 2:408)

- Second, **Q. 39:4** says, “*Had Allah wished to take to Himself a son, He could have chosen whom He pleased out of those whom He doth create.*” This affirms that Allah could have a son if he chose to. The issues thereby become whether he has a son or not and, if so, what is the nature of his son.
- Third, the incarnation of Christ and the Qur’an itself are clearly analogous: “As the eternal ‘logos’ [Word] took on human flesh in the person of the God-man, so the eternal word of God (Qur’an) ‘descended’ [see **Q. 2:97; 17:105; 24:34; 26:192-93**] on Muhammad in the form of a book” (Larson 2008: 12n.35).
- Fourth, **Q. 20:9-14; 27:7-9** relate the story of Moses and the fire, “*But when he came to the fire, a voice was heard: ‘O Moses! . . . Verily, I am Allah’*” (**Q. 20:11, 14**). Ali comments that “it was not an ordinary fire. It was a Burning Bush; a Sign of the Glory of Allah.” (Ali 2006: Q. 20:10n.2541) Daniel Shayesteh observes, “The Almighty God became a fire (a substance) and it did not seem blasphemous to the Qur’an. . . . Does the kind of substance God chooses to dwell in make a difference for the Qur’an? If it does not, then why does it blame Christians for claiming that God became a man?” (Shayesteh 2004: 140)

Since the Qur’an accepts *in principle* the concept of incarnation in these other contexts, a primary impediment to Muslims accepting the incarnation of Christ is undermined. As Sundiata states, “It is only when it can be shown that God *cannot* become man that the Christian claim that Jesus was God among us can be implausible” (Sundiata 2006: 218). Understanding this can help to break the barrier that separates Muslims from the gospel.

III. Responses to the Islamic View of Jesus: Introduction

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ form the very heart of Christianity. Their central importance is repeatedly emphasized throughout the NT (e.g., **Matt 20:28; John 10:17-18; Rom 5:8-11; 1 Cor 15:1-4; Gal 3:13; Eph 2:14-16; Phil 2:5-11; Col 2:13-14; 1 Tim 2:5-6; Heb 2:14-15; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 John 4:10; Rev 5:1-6**). Jesus predicted both his crucifixion and bodily resurrection (**Matt 16:21; 17:22-23; Mark 8:31-32; 9:31; 10:32-34; Luke 9:22; 18:31-33; John 2:18-22**). Jesus claimed to be God come to earth as a man. Jesus’ critics asked him for a sign, and he said he would give them one—his resurrection. Jesus was saying that he would prove that he is who he claimed to be by doing something (bodily rising from the dead) that is impossible for anyone who is merely a human being (even a prophet or messenger). It is the test by which we could know that he was telling the truth (**Matt 12:38-40; 16:1-4; John 2:18-21**; see also **Mark 14:58; Luke 11:29-30; Rom 1:4**).¹⁴ Such a historical test of truth is unique to Christianity. “If Jesus *did not* rise from the dead, he was a false prophet and a charlatan whom no rational person should follow. Conversely, if he *did* rise from the dead, this event confirmed his radical claim.” (Habermas and Licona 2004: 27)

In the Bible, the bodily resurrection of Christ is intimately linked to the crucifixion (see, e.g., **Matt 17:22-23; Mark 10:32-34; John 2:18-22; Rom 4:24-25; 5:8-11; 1 Cor 15:1-4; Phil 2:5-11; Heb 10:9-13**). Since the very purpose of Christ’s coming into the world was to bear the punishment for mankind’s sins by sacrificing himself on the cross, the resurrection (and subsequent ascension): (1) demonstrates that God accepted Christ’s sacrifice; and (2) validates who Christ was and everything Christ said. The issues of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ are historical ones: either he was crucified and then bodily rose from the grave or he did not. On these crucial points either the Bible’s affirmation that those events took place is correct or the Qur’an’s denial is correct. Both cannot be true. Because these are historical issues, “Whether or not a particular event happened two thousand years ago is not made certain by faith but by historical research, to the extent that certainty can be attained at all about questions of this kind” (Pannenberg 1968: 98).

Because this issue goes to the heart of who Jesus is, and because the stakes are so high (if Jesus is who he said he is, then being rightly united with him is a matter of eternal life or death), all people—Christians,

¹⁴ **Q. 46:35** talks about “*messengers of inflexible purpose*” (or, as Hilali-Khan translates it, “*strong will*”). Of all the Prophets and Messengers, only five are considered to be “messengers of strong will”: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (Hilali and Khan 1998: 686 n.2; Haleem 2005: Q. 46:35n.a). Muslim apologist Dr. Abdullah Hadi Al-Kahtani says, “Muslims believe that a prophet of God will never lie, since all the prophets of God are infallible” (Al-Kahtani 1996: 16). Muslims do not appear to consider the fact that—since Jesus was a “messenger of inflexible purpose” who predicted both his death and resurrection and even said that his resurrection would be a sign—by claiming he was neither killed nor resurrected, essentially they are saying that Jesus was a liar. Further, by not believing Jesus they are disobeying the command of **Q. 4:150-52** which says, “*Those who deny Allah and His messengers, and (those who) wish to separate Allah from His messengers, saying: ‘We believe in some but reject others’: And (those who) wish to take a course midway, -They are in truth (equally) unbelievers; and we have prepared for unbelievers a humiliating punishment. To those who believe in Allah and His messengers and make no distinction between any of the messengers, we shall soon give their (due) rewards: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.*” According to **Q. 4:150-52**, to reject what Jesus said would make one equal with the unbelievers who face a “*humiliating punishment.*” Consequently, since Jesus specifically talked about and even predicted his crucifixion and resurrection, it is important to consider the evidence.

Muslims, nonbelievers of any kind—need to investigate the evidence and determine for themselves whether the Bible’s account or the Qur’an’s account is true. The Qur’an itself seems to commend this. In **Q. 2:111** Muhammad is told to say specifically to Christians and Jews, “*Produce your proof if ye are truthful.*” On several other occasions the Qur’an calls on people to use their minds and consider the evidence (**Q. 6:151; 7:169; 8:22; 10:16; 16:12, 67; 21:10; 23:80; 26:28; 30:28; 36:62**). So let us turn to the evidence.

IV. Responses to the Islamic View of Jesus: The Crucifixion

Multiple lines of evidence establish that Jesus did, in fact, die by crucifixion. Those lines of evidence include the following:

A. Multiple witnesses

The crucifixion of Jesus was not a secret or private event. Instead, it was a public event involving Roman government officials, Jewish leaders (the Sanhedrin), and common people, both friends and foes of Jesus. Ryan Turner summarizes, “Though the disciples forsook Jesus, some of them were still witnesses from a distance (Mark 14:54). Also, there was an anonymous disciple [probably John] whom Jesus, while on the cross, commanded to take care of Mary (John 19:26-27). The Gospel of Luke reports that while Jesus was carrying the cross, ‘. . . there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him’ [Luke 23:27]. In addition to these people already mentioned the Gospels are scattered with references to Jewish leaders (Mt. 27:41; Mk. 15:31), Roman centurion (Mt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39; Lk. 23:47) and soldiers (Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:35; and John 19:18, 23) who all witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion. For Muslims to argue that the crucifixion is not historical simply does not square with the historical data because there were multitudes of witnesses to the fact that the Romans crucified Jesus.” (Turner 2014: Eyewitness Sources)

Additionally, as Jesus was being led out to be crucified, “*They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross*” (**Mark 15:21**). Timothy Keller points out, “There is no reason for the author to include such names unless the readers know or could have access to them. Mark is saying, ‘Alexander and Rufus vouch for the truth of what I am telling you, if you want to ask them.’” (Keller 2008: 101) **Luke 23:49** adds that Jesus’ “*acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things,*” and Jesus’ own mother, his mother’s sister, and other women he knew were eyewitnesses to the crucifixion (**John 19:25-27**). A mother knows her own son. Mary, Jesus’ disciples (including John, who specifically said, “*He who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe,*” **John 19:35**). Jesus’ relatives, his friends, and his acquaintances knew who Jesus was and thus knew it was Jesus who was crucified, not someone else. To claim that someone else was on the cross, or that Jesus did not die on the cross, is contrary to reason.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the book of Acts, the epistles of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 2 Peter (implicitly), 1 John, and Revelation all record the death of Jesus; when the manner of that death is mentioned, they state it was by crucifixion. Those books were written by at least seven different authors and were all written within 20 to a maximum of 65 years after Jesus’ death. That means the crucifixion was written about while many of the witnesses still were alive. Keller points out, “The New Testament documents could not say Jesus was crucified when thousands of people were still alive who knew whether he was or not” (Keller 2008: 102).

In complete contrast to this, the Qur’an contains only a single assertion denying the crucifixion made over 600 years after the event. Consequently, for purposes of historical evidence, analysis, and reliability, *with respect to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus*, the Bible is in a different category from the Qur’an. As Eddy and Boyd state, in terms of historical value “the Qur’an dates from the seventh century, far too late to be taken seriously as a reliable *independent* source of information about Jesus” (Eddy and Boyd 2007: 172).

B. The earliness of Christian creeds

As mentioned above, the books of the Bible were written early, beginning less than 20 years after the death of Jesus. However, the writers of the NT incorporated into their writings early Christian creeds *which are much older than the books in which they appear* (see Habermas 1984: 119; Cullmann 1949: 10, 22-23). “Such early traditions appear frequently in the New Testament and actually consist of oral teachings and proclamations which were repeated by word of mouth until recorded in the book itself. Therefore these creeds actually predate the New Testament writings in which they occur. . . . The two most common elements in these creeds concerned the death and resurrection of Jesus and his resulting deity.” (Habermas 1984: 33, 120) These early creeds include **1 Cor 15:3-7** and **Phil 2:6-11** (Cullmann 1949: 22-23). Both of these creedal formulas refer to Christ’s

death. **1 Cor 15:3-4** reports that “*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried.*” The creed recorded in Philippians specifies the manner of his death: “*even death on a cross*” (**Phil 2:8**).

Gary Habermas points out, “That this confession [**1 Cor 15:3-7**] is an early Christian, pre-Pauline creed is recognized by virtually all critical scholars across a very wide theological spectrum. There are several indications which reveal this conclusion. First, Paul’s words ‘delivered’ and ‘received’ are technical terms for passing on tradition. As such, we have Paul’s statement that this material was not his own, but received from another source. Second, a number of words in this creed are non-Pauline, again indicating another origin of this material. . . . Third, it is likely that the creed is organized in a stylized, parallel form, thereby providing a further indication of the oral and confessional nature of this material. Fourth, there are indications that there may have been a Semitic original, such as the use of the Aramaic ‘Cephas’ for Peter (v. 5), hence, pointing to an earlier source before Paul’s Greek translation.” (Habermas 1984: 124-25, citations omitted; see also Jeremias 1966: 101-03) Additionally, “According to most scholars, Paul received this creed from the apostles, which makes it even earlier, and a creed has to be repeated before it becomes stylized. So now we’re right on top of the Crucifixion, and note, it’s the eyewitnesses who transmitted this information; it’s not hearsay testimony.” (Habermas 1987: 43; see also Habermas 1984: 125 and the citations therein; Wright 2003: 319)

C. Medical evidence of death

A detailed article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* analyzes from a medical perspective the events that led up to Jesus’ crucifixion (i.e., his sweating great drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, his being beaten by the Jews and then scourged by the Romans, his inability to carry his own cross), the nature of the crucifixion itself, and his being pierced by the Roman’s spear with blood and water coming out of him, as described in the different biblical accounts. The authors conclude, “The actual cause of Jesus’ death, like that of other crucified victims, may have been multifactorial and related primarily to hypovolemic shock, exhaustion asphyxia, and perhaps acute heart failure. . . . However, the important feature may not be *how* he died but *whether* he died. Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.” (Edwards, et al. 1986: 1463)

The Roman soldier who pierced Jesus’ side with his spear was making sure that Jesus was, in fact, dead (**John 19:31-34**). Had that soldier not been absolutely certain that Jesus was dead, either the soldiers would have broken Jesus’ legs as they did to the other two men who were crucified with Jesus or they would have done something else to ensure his death. If Jesus was not truly dead, but the Roman centurion reported to Pilate that he was dead, he would have been in violation of his orders and would have been lying to his commander and therefore probably would have paid for that with his own life. Consequently, it is incredible to contend that Jesus did not die on the cross.

D. Jesus’ burial in a tomb

Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect (governor) of Judea, had ordered Jesus to be crucified (**Matt 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:24-25; John 19:16**). After the crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, requested Jesus’ body in order to bury it; Pilate released the body to be buried but only after first confirming from the centurion who had been present at the crucifixion that Jesus was, in fact, dead (**Matt 27:57-58; Mark 15:42-45; Luke 23:50-52; John 19:38**).¹⁵ The early creed, which pre-dates Paul and goes back essentially to the time of the crucifixion itself, includes the statement “*that He was buried*” (**1 Cor 15:4**). N. T. Wright points out, “The mention of Jesus’ burial [**1 Cor 15:4a**] can only have attained such a significant place in a brief and summary traditional narrative if it was regarded as important in itself. [It served] to certify that Jesus was really and truly dead.” (Wright 2003: 321) A “*large stone*” was rolled to close the entrance, the tomb was sealed, and a guard was placed at the tomb to make sure that no one could steal the body (**Matt 27:60-66; Mark 15:46; 16:3-4; Luke 23:53; John 19:41-42**). The official government seal, and the Roman security guard made it impossible for anyone to break into or out of that tomb (Ibid.: 53-61).¹⁶

¹⁵ “Even the most skeptical scholars acknowledge that Joseph was probably the genuine, historical individual who buried Jesus, since it is unlikely that early Christian believers would invent an individual, give him a name and nearby town of origin, and place that fictional character on the historical council of the Sanhedrin, whose members were well known” (Craig 1981: 53).

¹⁶ Josh McDowell points out, “This seal on Jesus’ tomb was a public testimony that Jesus’ body was actually there. In addition, because the seal was Roman, it verified the fact that His body was protected from vandals by nothing less than the

E. Reaction of the disciples

The immediate post-crucifixion events are *only* consistent with Jesus' actually dying by crucifixion. For example, **John 20:19** reports that the disciples were in a room in which "*the doors were shut . . . for fear of the Jews.*" That is only explicable if their leader had, in fact, been executed at the insistence of the Jewish leaders and the disciples were now afraid that the Jewish leaders would come after them. On the Sunday immediately after the crucifixion, **Mark 16:10** adds that Jesus' disciples were "*mourning and weeping.*" **Luke 24** reports that two other disciples, one named Cleopas, were walking on the road to Emmaus. **Luke 24:17** states that they were "*looking sad.*" The two disciples told the reason in **Luke 24:20-21** when they spoke of "*how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him [Jesus] to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel*" Again, the sadness and dashed hopes of those disciples only makes sense in light of Jesus crucifixion. The fact that one of the disciples on the road to Emmaus was named is further evidence that the account is authentic and reliable, since Cleopas could have been questioned about the events of that day.

F. The prevalence of self-damaging material

Christianity was born in a first-century Jewish context, yet all four Gospels and many other NT writings are centered on the fact that Jesus was crucified by the Romans. If the story of Jesus' life was simply made up long after the fact by his followers, the account of Jesus' crucifixion never would have been included. "It is hard to imagine a more effective way to convince people in a first-century Jewish context that someone is *not* the Messiah than by telling them that the would-be savior was executed by Israel's military oppressors! To go further and tell them that this would-be savior died a cursed death on a tree would make the sales pitch all the worse (cf. Deut. 21:22-23). . . . Thus, the fact that the Synoptic tradition not only continues to mention the crucifixion but also makes it the centerpiece of its message must be taken as evidence that the earliest Christians, including the authors of the Synoptic Gospels, remained willing to acknowledge, remember, and boldly proclaim the single most embarrassing historical fact associated with their fledgling movement. This is the very sort of self-damaging material historians typically look for in assessing the veracity of ancient works." (Eddy and Boyd 2007: 411)

G. Confirmation by hostile and non-Christian sources

Multiple, ancient, non-Christian sources attest to the validity of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Archaeologist Titus Kennedy recounts that Celsus was a "2nd-century AD Roman who criticized Christianity" who "affirmed that Jesus was nailed to a cross. Around the same time, Justin, a pagan turned Christian, wrote to Emperor Antoninus Pius in defense of Christianity, mentioning the crucifixion of Jesus and how the events in the Gospels can be confirmed by checking the Roman records such as the Acts of Pilate." (Kennedy 2020: 196). The crucifixion was even portrayed in pictorial form. "The earliest known pictorial representation of the crucifixion of Jesus comes from Rome, found scratched into the plaster of a wall of the Paedagogium on the Palatine Hill. Known as the Alexamenos Graffito, the drawing shows Jesus on the cross with the head of a donkey, while a man standing on the ground looks up to the crucifixion victim with a raised arm. Below, an accompanying Greek inscription reads 'Alexamenos worships (his) god.'" (Kennedy 2020: 196-97) Other Roman and Jewish admissions that Jesus Christ was, in fact, crucified are the following:

1. Babylonian Talmud. The *Babylonian Talmud* is a central text of Rabbinic Judaism. Tractate Sanhedrin, folio 43a states, "On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!" (Bab. Talmud: Sanhedrin 43a) One manuscript specifies that Yeshu refers to Jesus Christ by adding "the Nasarean" after his name (Bab. Talmud: Sanhedrin 43a, n.34). Most scholars conclude that this passage of the *Talmud* came from the earliest period of compilation, AD 70-200 (Habermas 1984: 97-98). This is significant in that the *Babylonian Talmud* is an "official" work of Jewish rabbis that admits responsibility for having Jesus executed and that he died.

2. Toledot Yeshu. The *Toledot Yeshu* is a "derogatory version of the life of Jesus, growing out of the response of the Jewish community to Christianity" (*Toledot Yeshu* n.d.: Introduction). Although it was not compiled until the fifth or sixth century, *Toledot Yeshu* again confirms Jesus' execution: "Yeshu was put to death on the sixth hour on the eve of the Passover and of the Sabbath" (Ibid.: text).

3. Josephus. Josephus was born in AD 37. He became a Jewish priest and later fought against the Romans during the war of AD 66-70. After the Jews were defeated, he joined the Romans as court historian for Emperor Vespasian. In his book *Antiquities of the Jews*, written in AD 93, Josephus wrote what is called the *Testimonium Flavianum*: “About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, *if indeed one ought to call him a man*. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. *He was the Messiah*. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. *On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him*. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.” (Josephus 93:18.63-64, italics added) Many people believe that a later Christian editor added the italicized portions. The vast majority of scholars agree that Josephus wrote at least the non-italicized portions of the *Testimonium* (see Habermas and Licona 2004: 266-70n.42).

4. Tacitus. Tacitus, who lived from approximately AD 55-120, is known as the “greatest historian” of ancient Rome (Habermas 1984: 87). His *Annals*, written about AD 115, confirm Jesus’ death. In referring to the great fire of Rome under Emperor Nero, Tacitus states, “Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus.” (Tacitus c.115: 15.44)

5. Lucian of Samosata. Lucian of Samosata was a Greek anti-Christian satirist. In approximately AD 165-75 he wrote *The Passing of Peregrinus*. In it, he talked of the Christians who worship “the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world” (Lucian of Samosata c.165-75: 11).

6. Mara Bar-Serapion. Mara Bar-Serapion was a Stoic philosopher from Syria. He wrote between approximately AD 73-200. He wrote a letter to his son to motivate him to emulate wise teachers of the past. In that letter he said, “For what benefit did the Athenians obtain by putting Socrates to death, seeing that they received as retribution for it famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, seeing that in one hour the whole of their country was covered with sand? Or the Jews *by the murder* of their Wise King, seeing that from that very time their kingdom was driven away *from them*? For with justice did God grant a recompense to the wisdom of *all* three of them. For the Athenians died by famine; and the people of Samos were covered by the sea without remedy; and the Jews, brought to desolation and expelled from their kingdom, are driven away into Every land.” (Mara Bar-Serapion n.d.: n.p., emph. in orig.)

The above works establish that no one in the ancient world doubted that Jesus had died by crucifixion; it had, in fact, become common knowledge. The Qur’an’s statement that Jesus was not killed by crucifixion is not based on any historical or factual reason but is a bare assertion made for theological, not historical, reasons.

H. *The failure of alternative explanations*

No plausible alternative explanation has ever been advanced to explain away the crucifixion. The Qur’an’s simple denial that Jesus died or was crucified is based on no historical or factual basis whatsoever and fails for the above reasons. The same applies to the idea that someone else was “substituted” for Jesus or that he did not die on the cross but revived in the tomb.

1. The “substitution” theory. The substitution theory fails for other reasons, as even some knowledgeable Muslims admit. Emerick’s suggestion that the Romans grabbed the wrong man, “thinking all Semites looked alike” (Emerick 2004: 224) is foolish because all Semites do not look alike *to other Semites*, which in this case included Jesus’ mother, his disciples, friends, acquaintances, and his enemies (who wanted to make sure that it was Jesus who was killed, not some “look alike”).

Muslims generally have not considered other implications of the idea that Allah substituted someone else for Jesus on the cross: (1) Allah thereby would have victimized an innocent man; (2) Allah thereby would have deceived not just Jesus’ enemies but also would have deceived Jesus’ mother, relatives, friends, and disciples; (3) Allah thereby would have demonstrated that he is inherently untrustworthy because this deception was completely unnecessary. Former Muslim Daniel Shayesteh asks the obvious questions, “What was the purpose of making a Jesus look alike die and taking the unique Jesus to heaven? Wouldn’t it have been better for God not to deceive people but rather kill off His enemies and take Jesus to heaven before the eyes of the people?” (Shayesteh 2004: 183) Further, as Abbas Sundiata points out, “If Allah could deceive people into thinking that an event they had witnessed was an illusion, how then can Muslims tell that Islam [itself] is not a gigantic cruel hoax? . . . Is it not remarkable that the only way the Qur’an was able to deny the historical fact that Jesus was crucified was to make Allah the deceiver of humanity?” (Sundiata 2006: 248, 249)

Finally, because the historical evidence for the *resurrection* is so great (see below, section **V. Responses to the Islamic View of Jesus: The Resurrection**) the idea that “someone else was substituted for Jesus” necessitates the conclusion that the “*Jesus look-alike*” was resurrected from the grave! In other words, Allah’s deception leads to the same result—someone was crucified and then was resurrected—except that the person involved was Allah’s imposter, not the real Jesus. More than that, *after his resurrection* the imposter implausibly would have continued the charade by convincing everyone he was the “real” Jesus by knowing his disciples personally (**John 20:11—21:24**), explaining how the entire OT was all about the real Jesus (**Luke 24:13-49**), commissioning his disciples to go to the entire world and spread the gospel of the real Jesus (**Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18**), and then ascending to heaven (**Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11**)! The “substitution theory” therefore is nonsensical and is completely incoherent.

2. The “swoon” theory. Perhaps the most important alternative explanation to the crucifixion that at least tried to deal with some of the facts was the so-called “swoon theory,” which contends that Jesus did not die on the cross but was taken down from the cross unconscious (i.e., he “swooned”) and then revived in the tomb.

The swoon theory is contrary to the uniform testimony of the very earliest witnesses—either the friends or foes of Christianity (Moule and Cupitt 1972: 508; Maier 1973: 112). Additionally, the swoon theory is contrary to the physical evidence. First, “crucifixion is essentially death by asphyxiation, as the intercostals and pectoral muscles around the lungs halt normal breathing while the body hangs in the ‘down’ position. Therefore, faking death on the cross still would not permit one to breathe; one cannot fake the inability to breathe for any length of time.” (Habermas 1984: 57) Second, the swoon theory also ignores the spear thrust into Jesus’ side. “Medical doctors who have studied this issue usually agree that this is a very accurate medical description. The water probably proceeded from the pericardium, the sac that surrounds the heart, while the blood came from the right side of the heart. Even if Jesus was alive before he was stabbed, the lance would almost certainly have killed him. Therefore, this chest wounds also disproves the swoon theory.” (Ibid.: 58) Third, the swoon theory does not take into consideration that Jesus’ body would not have been prepared for burial had even one spark of life remained in him. Fourth, if he somehow survived the crucifixion, how could he move the heavy stone blocking the entrance to the tomb? In his extremely weakened physical condition, could he move an object which even a healthy man would have a great problem with (according to tradition)? This would be even more difficult when it is remembered that the stone would have to be rolled uphill out of its gully.” (Habermas 1984: 56-57)

Finally, the swoon theory largely was dealt its death-blow by David Strauss (an opponent of orthodox Christianity) in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Strauss pointed out, “It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still, at last, yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which he had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.” (Strauss 1865: 412)

I. Conclusion

The fact that Jesus died by crucifixion is an event “so strongly attested historically” that it is “granted by nearly every scholar who studies the subject, even the rather skeptical ones” (Habermas and Licona 2004: 44; see *ibid.*: 48-49). Even Muslim Alhaj A. D. Ajijola, a member of Nigeria’s Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, refers to “the historical fact that Jesus, son of Mary, had been put on the cross” (Ajijola 1972: 72). He also admits that “Christians and Jews, despite their discords, are at one that Jesus died on the Cross. The chronicles of the Roman Empire are in accord with this fact.” (Ibid.: 39) Nevertheless, Ajijola’s adherence to Islamic doctrine causes him to disregard what he admits to be historical facts and proclaim, “Six hundred years after Jesus, a man from the Arabian desert made his appearance and proclaimed contrary to the entire world: ‘They slew him not nor crucified him.’ [Q. 4:157] This claim is a standing miracle of Muhammad the unlettered Prophet of the Arabian Peninsula (the choicest blessings of God be upon him).” (Ibid.: 39-40)

The above data and conclusions have important implications regarding the basic trustworthiness of the Qur’an. As Eddy and Boyd point out, “If there is any fact of Jesus’ life that has been established by a broad consensus, it is the fact of Jesus’ crucifixion. For the Qur’an to get it wrong at this most fundamental point raises serious questions about the historical reliability of *any* claim it makes about Jesus.” (Eddy and Boyd 2007: 172)

V. Responses to the Islamic View of Jesus: The Resurrection

Historical data similar to those that establish that Jesus died by crucifixion also establish that he bodily rose from the dead. Islam teaches that Jesus was bodily translated to heaven, similar to Enoch and Elijah and also similar to Jesus' ascension forty days after his resurrection as described in the Bible (**Q. 4:157-58**; see also **Q. 3:55**; compare **Gen 5:24**; **2 Kgs 2:1-11**; **Acts 1:9-11**). However, resurrection is different from being translated to heaven: "A resurrection is the physical and bodily raising up of the dead man in the tomb to new life" (Craig 1981: 133; see also Wright 2003: 109 ["Resurrection is what did *not* happen to Enoch or Elijah"]). Jesus predicted his resurrection and gave it as the test by which we could know he was telling the truth (**Matt 12:38-40**; **16:1-4**; **John 2:18-21**; see also **Mark 14:58**; **Luke 11:29-30**; **Rom 1:4**). Whether he resurrected is a factual, historical question: either he did or he did not. The following historical data demonstrate that Jesus was, in fact, bodily resurrected from the grave:

A. The tomb was empty

The tomb in which Jesus had been buried was owned by Joseph of Arimathea (**Matt 27:57-60**; **Mark 15:45-46**; **Luke 23:50-53**; **John 19:38-42**); thus it was a known tomb. Further, the women who went to the tomb on the Sunday after the burial had seen where Jesus was buried, so they knew the location of the tomb (**Matt 27:61**; **Mark 15:47**; **Luke 13:55**; **John 20:1**).

1. The significance of the women. On the Sunday immediately following the burial, Mary Magdalene and other women went to the tomb, found that the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty, and encountered the risen Christ (**Matt 28:1-7**; **Mark 16:1-9**; **Luke 24:1-8**; **John 20:1**). They then reported to the disciples that the tomb was empty and that Jesus had risen from the grave and was alive (**Matt 28:8**; **Mark 16:10-11**; **Luke 24:9-12**; **John 20: 2-18**). These passages are significant in that the initial appearances of Jesus following his resurrection and the initial reports of the resurrection were made to and were given by women. This fact shows that the biblical accounts were not made up but are reliable. The reason is that in ancient Judaism women were considered to be unreliable witnesses; they either were not competent to act as witnesses in court or there were significant limitations on the testimony they could give ("Witness" 2008: n.p.; Meacham 2009: Other Laws). Paul Maier explains that since the testimony of women was considered to be unreliable, "if the resurrection accounts had been manufactured . . . women would *never* have been included in the story, at least, not as first witnesses" (Maier 1973: 98).

2. The significance of the Jews. The Jewish leaders never denied that the tomb was empty. Instead, when the Roman guard reported to the chief priests what had happened, the Jewish leaders bribed the guard and invented the story that Jesus' "*disciples came by night and stole Him away*" (**Matt 28:11-15**). "Well into the second century A.D. and long after Matthew recorded its first instance, the Jerusalem authorities continued to admit an empty tomb by ascribing it to the disciples' stealing the body. For, in his *Dialogue with Trypho* [ch. 108], Justin Martyr, who came from neighboring Samaria, reported c. 150 A.D. that the Jewish authorities even sent specially commissioned men across the Mediterranean to counter Christian claims with this explanation of the resurrection." (Ibid.: 116-17)

Additionally, Edward Bode points out that the claim that someone stole the body had to have developed early, because after a long time "too many things could have happened to explain [the tomb's] being empty. . . . Moreover, the polemic [the argument of the Jewish leaders] did not contest the existence of the empty tomb; rather it admitted the fact of the empty tomb by trying to explain the emptiness through some manner other than Jesus' resurrection." (Bode 1970: 163; see also Wright 2003: 638) As William Lane Craig states, "The early Jewish propaganda against which Matthew writes thus itself presupposes and bears witness to the fact that Jesus' tomb was empty. The evidence is all the more powerful because it comes from the enemies of the Christian 'heresy' themselves." (Craig 1981: 83-84)

3. The lack of veneration of the grave. "One of the most striking factors to be considered is that we have no record in the early decades of Christianity of any tomb being venerated as the place where Jesus had been laid to rest. . . . This is indeed striking, because within contemporary Judaism, as in other religions, the desire to honour the memory of the revered dead by constructing appropriate tombs and (by implication) by veneration of the site is well attested. . . . Why would the first Christians not act out this pious instinct and tradition? The only obvious answer, in the light of the evidence thus far reviewed, is that they did not believe any tomb contained his body. They could not venerate his remains because they did not think there were any remains to be venerated." (Dunn 2003: 837-38; see also Craig 1981: 63) The lack of veneration of Jesus' tomb contrasts with the veneration of the tombs and bones of the early Christian martyrs (see *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* c.160: 18). It also contrasts with the tomb of Muhammad in Medina which to this day remains a site of pilgrimage for Muslims.

B. *The early Christians began proclaiming Jesus' resurrection even in Jerusalem*

The fact that Jesus' tomb was empty and the credibility of the Christian belief in the resurrection are confirmed by the fact that the early Christians did not wait decades to proclaim Jesus' resurrection (so that the witnesses would be dead) but did so from the beginning.¹⁷ They also did not go to some remote province to proclaim Jesus' resurrection (where no one could contradict them), but began their proclamation in Jerusalem, the city where Jesus had been killed and buried and where their primary opponents, the Jewish leaders and the Romans, were most prominent (**Acts 2-7**).

Edward Bode notes, "Given the Jewish notion of the resurrection of the body and the knowledge of the location of the tomb, it would have been impossible to preach a risen Jesus in Jerusalem if this tomb had still contained the body. With the Jewish mentality of resurrection and the availability of the tomb, someone sooner or later was bound to look for himself to see if the tomb was empty." (Bode 1970: 174; see also Craig 1981: 82-83) "The empty tomb could not prove the resurrection of Jesus or create faith in it. *But the contrary is not true.* If the Jewish authorities had been able to produce the body of Jesus, they would have been able finally and decisively to *disprove* the resurrection of Jesus, as the disciples believed it and were proclaiming it" (Neill 1964: 288, *emph. in orig.*). The Jewish leaders had the means, the motive, and the opportunity to crush the incipient Christian movement, and they easily could have and would have done so had they simply gone to the tomb, removed Jesus' dead body, and paraded it for all to see; but they did not because they could not.

The same is true with respect to the Roman authorities who, above all else, wanted to keep peace and avoid conflict among the people they governed. "If the [Jewish or Roman] authorities could have produced Jesus' corpse, they would have exploded the Resurrection faith for good; the fact that it was not exploded indicates that they did not produce the corpse, and their failure to produce it . . . shows that they could not produce it." (Packer 1987: 149) The failure of early Christianity's enemies to produce Jesus' dead body is eloquent testimony that the grave was empty—and the only plausible explanation that fits all the facts is that the grave was empty because Jesus had risen from the grave exactly as he had predicted and as the disciples were proclaiming.¹⁸

C. *Multiple witnesses*

Earlier, we considered the early Christian creeds, including **1 Cor 15:3-7**. That creed is particularly important since it goes back to the early AD 30s, essentially to the time of the crucifixion/resurrection itself, and was based on eyewitness testimony (Habermas 1987: 43; see also Habermas 1984: 125 and the citations therein). Verses 4-7 of that creed state: "*4 And that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*" A. M. Hunter points out that **1 Cor 15:3-7** "is traditional testimony to the fact of the resurrection taking us back to within half a dozen years of the crucifixion, and it has rightly been called 'the oldest document of the Christian church which we possess.' Moreover, it is 'tradition' whose *truth was open to testing*. When Paul wrote, Peter and James were still living and most of the 'five hundred brethren' yet survived and could be questioned." (Hunter 1976: 100, *emph. in orig.*) Habermas summarizes the importance of this early creed: "No longer can it be charged that there is no demonstrably early, eyewitness testimony for the resurrection or for the other most important tenets of Christianity, for this creed provides just such evidential data concerning the facts of the gospel, which are the very center of the Christian faith. It links the events themselves with those who actually participated in time and space. . . . The fact that it was the original eyewitnesses who reported these events indicates that legends from a later period cannot explain this initial testimony." (Habermas 1984: 126-27)

With respect to the 500 witnesses, C. H. Dodd observes, "There can hardly be any purpose in mentioning the fact that most of the 500 are still alive, unless Paul is saying, in effect, 'the witnesses are there to be questioned'" (Dodd 1968: 128). It is important to remember that "Paul's letter was to a church, and therefore

¹⁷ The fact that Jesus' disciples began proclaiming his *resurrection* is itself evidence for his *crucifixion*. To proclaim that someone has risen from the dead is nonsensical unless that person first is *dead*.

¹⁸ "The seedbed for the first budding and growth of the church was in the city of Jerusalem itself, where, of all places, it would have been ridiculous to preach a risen Christ unless both the apostles and their hearers knew that Joseph's sepulcher was empty. Some months later, the authorities were so desperate to stop the movement that they even resorted to persecution. A far more effective tool would have been at least an elaborate counter-rumor that there was a body in Joseph's grave, but this was never attempted because by then there were apparently too many Jerusalemites who had seen for themselves that the sepulcher was empty at the time." (Maier 1973: 120)

it was a public document, written to be read aloud. Paul was inviting anyone who doubted that Jesus had appeared to people after his death to go and talk to the eyewitnesses if they wished. It was a bold challenge and one that could easily be taken up, since during the *pax Romana* travel around the Mediterranean was safe and easy. Paul could not have made such a challenge if those eyewitnesses didn't exist." (Keller 2008: 204)

D. The early Christians' lives were changed by what they saw

As mentioned earlier, the disciples also did not believe the reports of the women that Jesus had risen from the tomb. Then Jesus appeared to the disciples in order to assure them that he was not just a vision, or hallucination, or spirit, or ghost; he asked them to touch his body, and he also ate with them (**Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-29; 21:9-14**).

These personal appearances of Jesus in his resurrection body transformed the disciples. Habermas and Licona discuss this: "After Jesus' death, the lives of the disciples were transformed to the point that they endured persecution and even martyrdom. . . . Compare this courage to their character at Jesus' arrest and execution. They denied and abandoned him, then they hid in fear. Afterward, they willingly endangered themselves by publicly proclaiming the risen Christ. These facts are validated by multiple accounts, both from early sources in the New Testament as well as outside of it." (Habermas and Licona 2004: 56) Clement of Rome, who is reputed to have seen the apostles (Irenaeus c.185: 3.3.3; Tertullian c.200: 32), wrote even at the end of the first century that their boldness in preaching was because they had "been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Clement c.95: ch. 42). If the original disciples had not seen the risen Lord, they would not have been transformed from cowards to bold witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, despite persecution and death (which most of them suffered). But for that, Christianity would not exist.

The NT frequently discusses the persecution faced by the early disciples who had seen the risen Jesus and the boldness with which they nevertheless proclaimed that Jesus had risen and was Lord (e.g., **Acts 4:1-31; 5:17-42; 6:7-7:60; 8:1-3; 9:1-31; 12:1-5; 14:1-28; 16:16-40; 18:12-16; 20:17-24; 21:10-13, 27-26:29; 28:16-31; 2 Cor 11:23-33**). Polycarp, who himself was martyred in about AD 160 (*Martyrdom* c.160: 9), in his *Epistle to the Philippians* (c.110) confirms not only the suffering and deaths of Paul and the other apostles but also the source of their steadfastness—the resurrection of Christ: "For they loved not this present world, but Him who died for us, and for our sakes was raised again by God from the dead" (Polycarp c.110: 9). The only plausible explanation for this amazing change in the character and lives of the disciples that is also consistent with the rest of the known evidence (e.g., Jesus' death, his burial, the empty tomb) is Jesus' bodily resurrection. Origen made this point in AD 248: "But a clear and unmistakable proof of the fact [of Christ's resurrection] I hold to be the undertaking of His disciples, who devoted themselves to the teaching of a doctrine which was attended with danger to human life,—a doctrine which they would not have taught with such courage had they invented the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; and who also, at the same time, not only prepared others to despise death, but were themselves the first to manifest their disregard for its terrors." (Origen 248: 2:56) The bold proclamation of Jesus' resurrection in the face of persecution and death thus disproves the swoon theory, the stolen body theory, or other "naturalistic" attempts to explain away the resurrection, because no one will willingly suffer and die for what he knows to be a lie.¹⁹

It is true, of course, that many people have willingly died for causes they sincerely believed in even if those causes proved to be untrue or evil. However, Michael Licona points out that, with respect to the early Christians who faced persecution and martyrdom for their faith, "There is an important difference between the martyred apostle and those who die for their beliefs today. Modern martyrs act solely out of their trust in beliefs passed along to them by others. The apostles died for holding to their own testimony that they had *personally* seen the risen Jesus. Contemporary martyrs die for what they *believe* to be true. The disciples of Jesus died for what they *knew* to be either true or false." (Licona 2010: 370)

E. The sudden conversion of Paul, an enemy of Christ

The apostle Paul, first known as Saul of Tarsus, was a well-educated Pharisee (**Acts 22:3; 26:4-5; Phil 3:4-5**). So fanatical was he for the monotheistic Jewish faith in which he was raised and instructed that he became a zealous persecutor of Christians (**Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-11; Phil 3:6**). However, even

¹⁹ Charles Colson has stated, "But what about the disciples? Twelve powerless men, peasants really, were facing not just embarrassment or political disgrace, but beatings, stonings, execution. Every single one of the disciples insisted, to their dying breaths, that they had physically seen Jesus bodily raised from the dead. Don't you think that one of those apostles would have cracked before being beheaded or stoned? That one of them would have made a deal with the authorities? None did. You see, men will give their lives for something they believe to be true—they will never give their lives for something they know to be false." (Colson 2002: n.p.)

while he was in the middle of persecuting Christians, Paul was dramatically converted to Christ (**Acts 9:1-22**). What accounts for such a dramatic conversion—one that transformed Paul from being a persecutor to being persecuted? Paul himself describes the reason for this change as his encounter with the resurrected Christ. He adds to the early creed in **1 Corinthians 15**, “*and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also*” (**1 Cor 15:8**; see also **Acts 22:1-16; 26:1-23; 1 Cor 15:9-10; Gal 1:11-24; Phil 3:6-10**). Paul’s account is credible because he himself was willing continually to suffer and ultimately die for his belief in the risen Christ. Further, the early church leaders who assessed him accounted him as authoritative as the other apostles (see **2 Pet 3:16**; Polycarp, c.110: 3:2; 9:1; Ignatius, c.110a: 12:2; c.110b: 4:3)

While many people have converted from one set of beliefs to another, Licona reminds us that “People usually convert to a particular religion because they have heard the message of that religion from a secondary source and believed the message. Paul’s conversion was based on what they perceived to be a personal appearance of the risen Jesus. Today we might believe that Jesus rose from the dead based on secondary evidence, trusting Paul and the disciples who saw the risen Jesus. But for Paul, his experience came from primary evidence [the direct, personal appearance of Jesus himself].” (Licona 2010: 440)

F. The sudden conversion of James, a skeptic of Christ

The Bible records that Jesus had a number of brothers, one of whom was James (**Matt 13:55-56; Mark 6:3**; see also **Matt 12:46-47; Mark 3:31-32; Luke 8:19-20; John 2:12; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor 9:5; Gal 1:19**). During Jesus’ life, James and the other brothers did not believe that Jesus was who he claimed to be and apparently thought that he had lost his senses (**Mark 3:21, 31; John 7:1-5**). When he was on the cross, Jesus’ committing his mother into the care of his disciple John instead of to his own brother confirms that James was not a believer (**John 19:25-27**).

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, as Paul recites in the ancient creed, “*then He appeared to James*” (**1 Cor 15:7**). The appearance of the risen Christ to James evidently was early, because James is among those waiting in the upper room in Jerusalem for the empowering by the Holy Spirit which occurred on the day of Pentecost; that would place the appearance to James within 50 days of the resurrection (**Acts 1:14**). James then became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (**Acts 15:13-21; Gal 1:19**). He wrote one of the epistles that make up the NT. His conversion was so profound that he, like the other early disciples, died a martyr’s death, which is attested by both non-Christian and Christian sources (Josephus 93: 20.9.1; Eusebius 325: 2.23).

As with Paul, the question must be asked: What best accounts for such a profound conversion and change of life of James, this former skeptic? The simplest, most plausible explanation that fits all the existing facts and that was maintained *from the beginning* (**1 Cor 15:7**) is the appearance to James of the resurrected Christ. As Wright puts it, “It is difficult to account for his centrality and unrivalled leadership unless he was himself known to have seen the risen Jesus” (Wright 2003: 325).

G. The formation and existence of the Christian church

While Jesus was on earth, his disciples had no understanding of a dying and rising messiah; yet “even the most skeptical scholars admit that at least the *belief* that Jesus rose from the dead lay at the very heart of the earliest Christian faith” (Craig 1981: 127). Where did that belief come from? Such a belief did not come from paganism. In connection with his exhaustive survey of pagan beliefs concerning resurrection and life after death, N. T. Wright summarizes, “Christianity was born into a world where its central claim was known to be false. Many believed that the dead were non-existent; outside Judaism, nobody believed in resurrection.” (Wright 2003: 35; for Wright’s survey of the data see *ibid.*: 32-84)²⁰ Concerning this important issue, Craig observes, “If

²⁰ Some pagan cults, of course, had stories of dying and rising gods and goddesses such as Adonis, Attis, Demeter, Dionysus, Persephone, Isis and Osiris, Tammuz, and Balder, the son of the Norse god Odin. Such myths do not account for the historical *evidence* of Jesus crucifixion and resurrection. Further, C. S. Lewis notes the logical fallacy of citing such myths as a reason to discount the historical fact of Christ’s resurrection: “The agnostic argument from similarities between Christianity and paganism works only if you know the answer. If you start by knowing on other grounds that Christianity is false, then the pagan stories may be another nail in the coffin: just as if you started by knowing that there were no such things as crocodiles then the various stories about dragons might help to confirm your disbelief. But if the truth of Christianity is the very question which you are discussing, then the argument from anthropology is surely a *petitio* [i.e., *petitio principii*—the logical fallacy of “begging the question” in which what is to be proved is implicitly taken for granted].” (Lewis 1970: 132)

Such pagan myths manifestly were not the *source* of the Christians’ belief in Jesus’ resurrection, because the early Christians were all Jews, steeped in Judaism, not pagans. Wright states, “Did any worshipper in these cults, from Egypt to Norway, at any time in antiquity, think that actual human beings, having died, actually came back to life? Of course not.

one denies that Jesus really did rise from the dead, then he must explain the disciples' belief that He did rise either in terms of Jewish influences or in terms of Christian influences" (Craig 1981: 129). Obviously, the belief in a crucified and resurrected messiah could not have come from Christian influences, because Christianity did not yet exist. This idea also could not have come from Judaism although many Jews believed in a resurrection: "The Jewish conception of resurrection differed in two important, fundamental respects from Jesus' resurrection. In Jewish thought the resurrection *always* (1) occurred after the end of the world, not within history, and (2) concerned all the people, not just an isolated individual. In contradistinction to this, Jesus' resurrection was both within history and of one person." (Ibid.) Consequently, Professor C. F. D. Moule concludes, "I don't for a moment think anything in the OT could have *generated* it [the belief of a resurrected messiah]. . . . I have been able to discover none [either OT passages or extra-biblical Jewish beliefs] which suggests the entry upon *eternal* life by an *individual*, *before* the wind-up of history: and it's *this* that one has to account for." (Moule 1972: 508, *emph. in orig.*)

Nevertheless, "*something* must have taken place on Easter morning to have ignited that spiritual explosion called Christianity" (Maier 1973: 105, *emph. in orig.*). What was that "something"? The only plausible explanation for the *origin* of Christianity—which necessitated a profound theological change from previous Jewish belief—is that Jesus had, in fact, resurrected from the dead. No other explanation fits all the facts. In connection with this, Timothy Keller makes the important observation that "a massive shift in thinking at the worldview level" (which belief in the bodily resurrection most certainly was) "ordinarily takes years of discussion and argument in which thinkers and writers debate . . . until one side wins. That is how culture and worldviews change. However, the Christian view of resurrection, absolutely unprecedented in history, sprang up full-blown immediately after the death of Jesus. There was no process or development. His followers said that their beliefs did not come from debating and discussing. They were just telling others what they had seen themselves. No one has come up with any plausible alternative to this claim." (Keller 2008: 209) Not only does the origin of Christianity involve a massive shift at the worldview level, but the resurrection became the *focus* of the new worldview. That fact also requires a historical explanation. Again, the only plausible explanation is that Jesus did, in fact, bodily rise from the dead.

This sudden and dramatic change in belief is confirmed by certain unique aspects of Christian belief and practice, all of which began early-on:

1. Sunday worship. "One of the Jewish beliefs held with most tenacity is observance of the Sabbath, and yet Christian Jews transferred their worship from Saturday to Sunday [**Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2**], which they termed 'the Lord's Day' [**Rev 1:10; Didache** c.70-110: 14.1]. Only some drastic consideration would have introduced this change: their weekly celebration of the Resurrection." (Maier 1973: 122) James D. G. Dunn adds, "Not least of relevance is the tradition that Jesus first appeared '*on the first day of the week*' (Sunday) following his crucifixion and burial. . . . Nor should we forget the striking but often neglected fact that from as early as we can trace, Sunday had become a day of special significance for Christians, 'the Lord's day', precisely because it was the day on which they celebrated the resurrection of the Lord." (Dunn 2003: 860) Indeed, early church fathers Ignatius and Justin Martyr specifically refer to the resurrection as the rationale for the new day of worship (Ignatius c.110d: 9.1; Justin Martyr c.155: 67).

2. Baptism. While baptism had been practiced in ancient Judaism for proselytes to Judaism and as a sign of repentance and purification ("Baptism" 1906; see **Matt 3:1-6; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; John 1:25-27**), its meaning in Christianity was changed to directly relate to the death and resurrection of Jesus (**Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:12**). The church could have kept the old Jewish notions of baptism, but it did not. And this change in meaning

These multifarious and sophisticated cults enacted the god's death and resurrection as a *metaphor*, whose concrete referent was the cycle of seed-time and harvest, of human reproduction and fertility. . . . The Jewish world into which Christianity was born was influenced in many ways by the wider greco-roman world. . . . But, remarkably enough, there is no sign of dying and rising gods and goddesses within the Jewish world. . . . When the Christians spoke of the resurrection of Jesus they did not suppose it was something that happened every year, with the sowing of seed and the harvesting of crops. They could use the image of sowing and harvesting to talk about it; they could celebrate Jesus' death by breaking bread; but to confuse this with the world of the dying and rising gods would be a serious mistake." (Wright 2003: 80-81, *emph. in orig.*; see also McDowell and Wilson 1993: 167-88) C. S. Lewis adds, "The Pagan stories are all about someone dying and rising, either every year, or else nobody knows where and nobody knows when. The Christian story is about a historical personage, whose execution can be dated pretty accurately, under a named Roman magistrate, and with whom the society that He founded is in a continuous relation down to the present day." (Lewis 1980: 83) Even deceased Roman emperors who were proclaimed to be gods, or legends that human beings such as Romulus became divine, could not have been the source of belief in Jesus' resurrection, because those proclamations and legends "did not require resurrection; it regularly happened without it. It involved the soul, not the body." (Wright 2003: 83)

occurred very early in church history.

3. Communion (the Lord's Supper). **1 Cor 11:23-26** sets forth another of the ancient creeds that go back to the very beginning of Christianity in the early to mid-30s, in this case back to Jesus himself (Jeremias 1966: 101, 104-05; Habermas 1984: 121). The celebration of the Lord's Supper specifically commemorates Jesus' death on the cross and is based on what Jesus said at the Last Supper he shared with his disciples. As we have seen, however, it is the resurrection that validates the efficacy of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Hence, **1 Cor 11:26** ends the formula by saying "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*" That is a recognition that Jesus is alive and will return.

Any theory of what happened that first Easter morning *other than the bodily resurrection of Christ* "does not even solve the problem which is here under consideration: the origin, that is, of the Christian Church by faith in the miraculous resurrection of the Messiah" (Strauss 1865: 412).

H. *The failure of alternative explanations*

A number of theories that have been proposed to try to explain away the resurrection (the swoon theory; the body was stolen; the contention that Jesus didn't die so he couldn't have been resurrected; the resurrection is a myth like the dying and rising gods and goddesses of certain pagan cults) have been discussed above. Some other contentions are now mentioned.

1. The resurrection is just a legend that developed later. This is "the only satisfactory explanation" Islamic scholar and Qur'anic translator Muhammad Asad can come up with to explain the statement in **Q. 4:157** regarding the crucifixion that "*killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them.*" Asad states, "The story of the crucifixion as such has been succinctly explained in the Qur'anic phrase *wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*, which I render as 'but it only appeared to them as if it had been so' - implying that in the course of time, long after the time of Jesus, a legend had somehow grown up (possibly under the then-powerful influence of Mithraistic beliefs) to the effect that he had died on the cross in order to atone for the 'original sin' with which mankind is allegedly burdened; and this legend became so firmly established among the latter-day followers of Jesus that even his enemies, the Jews, began to believe it - albeit in a derogatory sense (for crucifixion was, in those times, a heinous form of death-penalty reserved for the lowest of criminals). This, to my mind, is the only satisfactory explanation of the phrase *wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*, the more so as the expression *shubbiha li* is idiomatically synonymous with *khuyyila li*, '[a thing] became a fancied image to me', i.e., 'in my mind' - in other words, '[it] seemed to me.'" (Asad 1980: Q. 4:157n.171) Asad's "legend" theory is specifically directed at the issue of the crucifixion but of necessity would equally apply to the resurrection since the two are related.

Approximately 200 years ago Julius Müller made the important point that it takes considerable time for written legends to develop about historical people and events, particularly when primary sources and eyewitnesses exist. Müller wrote: "Most decidedly must a considerable interval of time be required for such a complete transformation of a whole history by popular tradition, when the series of legends are formed in the same territory where the heroes actually lived and wrought. Here one cannot imagine how such a series of legends could arise in an historical age, obtain universal respect, and supplant the historical recollection of the true character and connexion of their heroes' lives in the minds of the community, if eyewitnesses were still at hand, who could be questioned respecting the truth of the recorded marvels. Hence, legendary fiction, as it likes not the clear present time, but prefers the mysterious gloom of grey antiquity, is wont to seek a remoteness of age, along with that of space, and to remove its boldest and more rare and wonderful creations into a very remote and unknown land." (Müller 1844: 26, quoted in Craig 1981: 101)

With respect to the claims in the NT that Jesus was resurrected, the situation is clear and consistent. "All four gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke/Acts, John) were written during the first century. Each gospel attests to the resurrection of Jesus, and Acts is the sequel to the third gospel, Luke. This means that four accounts were written within seventy years of Jesus at the latest, reporting the disciples' claims that Jesus rose from the dead." (Habermas and Licona 2004: 53) Additionally, we have the letters of Paul to the Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, and 1 Peter, all of which specifically mention the resurrection. Those letters are significant in that both Paul and Peter were martyred in the mid-60s AD, which means that their letters were written only 20-30 years after the resurrection itself. They also were eyewitnesses of Christ's post-resurrection appearances. Further, as has been discussed above, some of Paul's letters contain ancient creeds that pre-date Paul's writings and go back essentially to the resurrection itself.

The significance of these multiple early accounts is that there simply was no time for "legends" of the resurrection to have developed. Greco-Roman scholar A. N. Sherwin-White states, "Herodotus enables us to test the tempo of myth-making, and the tests suggest that even two generations are too short a span to allow the

mythical tendency to prevail over the hard historic core of the oral tradition” (Sherwin-White 1992: 189-90). Craig concludes, “Müller challenged scholars of his day to find even one historical example where in thirty years a great series of legends, the most prominent elements of which are fictitious, have accumulated around an important historical individual and become firmly fixed in general belief. His challenge has never been met. The time span necessary for significant accrual of legend concerning the events of the gospels would place us in the second century A.D., just the time in fact when the legendary apocryphal gospels were born.” (Craig 1981: 101-02)

2. Psychological explanations. It is not plausible to contend that the disciples proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus as a psychological reaction to his death. The idea that Peter, James, and the others “experienced fantasies brought on by grief . . . is [not] based on any evidence whatsoever” (Wright 2003: 20). The same thing applies to the idea that Paul began spreading stories of the resurrection because he was consumed by guilt over his persecution of Christians. Not only is there no evidence whatsoever for that, but the fact is that Paul was zealously continuing to persecute Christians up until the very moment of his encounter with the risen Christ.

Further, none of the disciples were psychologically primed to believe in Jesus’ resurrection, because none of them were expecting or looking forward to it. Indeed, “‘resurrection’ was not something *anyone* expected to happen to a single individual while the world went on as normal. Certainly—a point often ignored by critics—the disciples were not expecting any such thing to happen to Jesus.” (Wright 2003: 689, *emph. added*) In the first century there were other messianic movements whose leaders had been executed by the authorities. “In not one single case do we hear the slightest mention of the disappointed followers claiming that their hero had been raised from the dead. They knew better. ‘Resurrection’ was not a private event. . . . A Jewish revolutionary whose leader had been executed by the authorities, and who managed to escape arrest himself, had two options: give up the revolution, or find another leader. We have evidence of people doing both. Claiming that the original leader was alive again was simply not an option. Unless, of course, he was.” (Wright 1993: 63)

3. Jesus’ resurrection was only “spiritual.” In the first century, Jewish burials typically took place in two stages: first, the body was laid on a slab, wrapped in cloth with spices in a cave-like tomb with a movable stone door (like Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb in which Jesus was laid); second, a year or more later, after the flesh had decomposed, relatives or friends would return, collect the bones, and place them in an ossuary (bone box). “If the disciples had believed that what they called the ‘resurrection’ was just a ‘spiritual’ event, leaving the body in the tomb, someone sooner or later would have had to go back to collect Jesus’ bones and store them properly. . . . But of course, if anyone had at any stage gone back to tidy up Jesus’ bones and put them in an ossuary, that would indeed have destroyed Christianity before it had even properly begun.” (Wright 1998: 52)

Jesus himself specifically countered the idea that he was merely a spirit by having the disciples touch him and eat with him (**Matt 28:9; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:15-17, 24-29; 21:9-14**). Indeed, everyone who heard the proclamation of the resurrection knew that what was being proclaimed was the *bodily* resurrection (that is, after all, what a “resurrection” is). Had that not been the case, the Jewish leaders never would have concocted the story that the body had been stolen but themselves would have gone to the tomb and produced the body.

4. The disciples were hallucinating or had visions. “There would have to have been collective hallucinations for different groups of up to five hundred in size, all of them seeing the same thing—a virtual impossibility in the case of a phenomenon that is usually extremely individualistic. Many different people will *not* see the same thing at different places in any general hallucination, mirage, daydream, or mass hysteria. Such visions, moreover, are generated only when the recipients are in an agitated state of expectancy and in hopes of seeing their wishes fulfilled, a mood diametrically opposite from that of the disciples, who were hopelessly saturated in sorrow and despair. In fact, news of the resurrection nearly had to be forced on them in the face of their obvious disbelief.” (Craig 1981: 113) As George Eldon Ladd succinctly summarizes, “*Faith did not create the appearances; the appearances created faith*” (Ladd 1975: 138, *emph. in orig.*).

People in both the ancient and modern world have had visions of recently deceased loved ones. However, as N. T. Wright points out, such visions “are a thoroughly *insufficient* condition for the early Christian belief. The more ‘normal’ these ‘visions’ were, the less chance there is that anyone, no matter how cognitively dissonant they may have been feeling, would have said what nobody had ever said about such a dead person before, that they had been *raised from the dead*. Indeed, such visions meant precisely, as people in the ancient and modern worlds have discovered, that the person was dead, not that they were alive.” (Wright 2003: 690-91, *emph. in orig.*)

Finally, “the sightings of the risen Jesus had a temporal end; when he, Paul, saw Jesus, that was the last in the sequence [**1 Cor 15:8**].” (Wright 2003: 318) William Lane Craig points out that, contrary to actual

sightings of the physically risen Christ when ended not long after the resurrection, “hallucinations might have continued for decades, centuries. Had they just been visions or dreams or hallucinations, they would have continued.” (Craig 1981: 113) The idea that the disciples had hallucinations or visions or some kind of “religious experience” instead of actually seeing the resurrected Jesus therefore contradicts the facts and the actual eyewitness accounts of what happened.

5. The body was taken or moved. As previously discussed, the earliest response to the proclamation that Jesus had resurrected was the claim by the Jewish leaders that the disciples had stolen the body. Maier notes, “The stolen body theory founders on two insurmountable obstacles: the problem of motive and the problem of execution. To plan a tricky grave robbery of a closely guarded tomb would have required an incredibly strong incentive by a daring and extremely skillful group of men. But who had this incentive? Who had the motive and then the courage necessary to bring it off? Certainly not the dispirited disciples, huddling and hiding in their despair over Jesus’ evident failure and in fear of the Temple authorities—hardly a pack of calculating schemers enthusiastically planning to dupe their countrymen.” (Maier 1973: 109) Maier goes on to point out how far-fetched the idea of the disciples’ ability to steal the body is, “The grave area was crawling with guards specifically instructed to forestall any such attempt. . . . Guards in ancient times always slept in shifts, so it would have been virtually impossible for a raiding party to have stepped over all their sleeping faces, as is sometimes claimed. The commotion caused by breaking the seal, rolling the stone open, entering the tomb, and lifting out the body was bound to awaken the guards even if they had all been sleeping.” (Ibid.: 110-11)

Additionally, James Dunn observes that lack of veneration of Jesus’ tomb not only is evidence for the resurrection but also is evidence against the idea that the disciples had stolen the body: “For if the disciples had indeed removed the body, it is inconceivable that they would not have laid it reverently to rest in some other fitting location. In which case, it is almost as inconceivable that a surreptitious practice of veneration would not have been maintained by those in the know and that some hint of it would not have reached a wider circle of disciples.” (Dunn 2003: 838) The idea that someone else removed the body faces not only “the problem of motive and the problem of execution,” but is also contrary to the Roman seal of the tomb and the guard. And it does not account for the well-documented resurrection appearances of Jesus. As with the other theories, there is no historical evidence that anyone moved Jesus’ body. Hence, as with the other alleged alternative explanations, the idea that something happened to Jesus’ body *other than his bodily resurrection* does not fit the existing historical facts.

I. Conclusion

That Jesus was crucified and bodily resurrected can be reliably determined by historical investigation in the same manner as other historical events. To assert an alternative explanation is not to establish that explanation. As we have seen, the alleged alternative explanations of the crucifixion and resurrection either are based on no evidence at all, do not account for all of the historical data, or contradict the historical data. The reason why the alternative explanations have been advanced does not flow from the evidence itself but is premised on philosophical or theological reasons apart from the evidence. The reason for that is because the evidence itself has implications that the holder of an alternative explanation does not want to accept, i.e., that Jesus really is the Son of God. However, to maintain any intellectual or theological credibility at all, it is not enough to simply dismiss the resurrection of Jesus by asserting “it didn’t (or couldn’t) happen.” Even the Qur’an says that one must consider the evidence and use one’s reason. In short, one must face and answer several historical questions: “Why did Christianity emerge so rapidly, with such power? No other band of messianic followers in that era concluded their leader was raised from the dead—why did this group do so? No group of Jews ever worshipped a human being as God. What led them to do it? Jews did not believe in divine men or individual resurrections. What changed their worldview virtually overnight? How do you account for the hundreds of eyewitnesses to the resurrection who lived on for decades and publicly maintained their testimony, eventually giving their lives for their belief?” (Keller 2008: 210)

VI. Responses to the Islamic View of Jesus: Jesus is the “Son of God”

When Muslims hear the term “Son of God,” some may think of Allah’s having sexual relations with Mary, which they (and Christians) rightly view as untrue and even blasphemous. In several places, the Bible calls Jesus the “*only begotten*” Son of the Father (see **John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9**). The Qur’an says, “*It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah that He should beget [or ‘take to Himself’] a son*” (**Q. 19:35**; see also **Q. 2:116; 10:68; 18:4; 19:88, 92; 23:91; 39:4**) **Q. 112:3** adds, “*He begetteth not, nor is He begotten.*” Yusuf Ali articulates the Muslim objection: “Begetting a son is a physical act depending on the needs of men’s animal nature. Allah Most High is independent of all needs, and it is derogatory to Him to attribute such an act

to Him. It is merely a relic of pagan and anthropomorphic materialist superstitions.” (Ali 2006: Q. 19:35n.2487; see also *ibid.*: Q.72:3n.; Deedat 2002: 29) This idea is confirmed by the Qur’an which states, “*How could He have a son when He has no consort*” (Q. 6:101; see also Q. 72:3).²¹ When the Bible describes Jesus as the “Son of God,” it *never* means or implies the physical process of conceiving and giving birth any more than Egyptians who call themselves “sons of the Nile” mean that the Nile got married and had children (Michael and McAlister 2010: 145). Rather, “the expression ‘Son of God’ is a metaphorical or analogical term” to describe Jesus’ relationship with God the Father (*Ibid.*; see also Feinberg 2001: 492 [“Scripture speaks of Christ as the Son, but everyone grants that he must be Son in some metaphorical sense”]; Lewis 1967a: 137).

Additionally, John Gilchrist observes that the Islamic objection to Jesus as the “Son of God” is not even directed at the orthodox Christian understanding of that term: “The book nowhere shows any comprehension of the fundamental Christian belief in Jesus, that he is a divine figure, uncreated at any point in time, who has been one with the Father from all eternity, who took on human form and *became* the man Jesus. The Qur’an vents all its denunciations at the Arian alternative [referring to the heretic Arius (AD 256-336)], namely that the Son was brought into existence at some point in time. Arius taught that ‘there was a time when the Son of God did not exist’ and that only thereafter did God *take to himself* a Son whom he *created* as an independent divine figure. It is this principle that the Qur’an consistently (and without exception) assails.” (Gilchrist 2015: 101)²²

This Islamic objection also rests on a misunderstanding of the word translated “*only begotten*.” All of the biblical passages that talk about Christ as the “*only begotten*” Son (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) are referring to his *eternal* nature, not to when he became incarnate as a man. The Greek word is *monogenēs*. While some (particularly older) translations of the Bible render it as “*only begotten*,” the actual meaning of the word is “the only one of its kind or class, *unique (in kind)*” (Danker 2000: *monogenēs*, 658, *emph. in orig.*). Confirmation that this is the correct meaning of *monogenēs* is seen in Heb 11:17 where Isaac is called

²¹ Reynolds observes, “The way in which the Qur’an argues in simplistic, literal terms (God has no spouse; he thus does not have sex and could not have a child; cf 72:3) suggests either a misunderstanding of the Biblical metaphor of God’s children or (more likely) a straw-man argument.” (Reynolds 2018: 237)

Some knowledgeable Muslim scholars admit that the use of “begotten” in translation of some verses of the Qur’an is incorrect. For example, Muslim Tiger Chan discusses translations of the Qur’an which mistranslate *ittakhadha* as “begotten” rather than “taken” (e.g., Yusuf Ali’s translation of Q. 2:116 [“*They say: ‘Allah hath begotten a son’*”] and Q. 19:88 [“*They say: ‘(Allah) Most Gracious has begotten a son!’*”]). Chan states that there is no linguistic basis for *ittakhadha* meaning “to beget” and concludes, “The bottom line is, the Qur’an does not teach that Christians believe that Jesus is literal biological Son of God.” (Chan 2003: n.p.; see also “Quran Dictionary” 2009-2017: Q. 19:88, *ittakhadha*) However, even the correct translation of “taken” does not resolve the issue because, as Chan explains, “If we read what Christian theology books say, it says that Christians never believe that God begot a literal biological son. . . . The doctrine of Trinity has it that the 3 Persons of the Godhead are God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The 3 Persons of the Godhead are co-equal in essence and attributes. God the Father ‘takes’ Jesus as ‘the Son’, that’s why Jesus is called the Son, God the Father is called the Father. This is a divine relationship calling (that ‘taking’) the 3 Persons as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the Qur’anic sense, the term ‘*ittakhaza*’ [Q. 19:88, “*And they say: The Beneficent Allah has taken (to Himself) a son*” (Shakir)] is pointing out that there is no such thing as God taking anything as having the status of sonship. The verse Qur’an 19:88 negates such a doctrine as in the doctrine of Trinity. It rejects just any form of sonship. The Qur’an doesn’t say that Christians believe Jesus is the literal biological son of God, it rejects just any inkling to relating sonship to God.” (Chan 2003: n.p.) Even here, Chan and the Qur’an are wrong: orthodox Christianity *never* has held that the Father “took” Christ as the Son, but Christ always and eternally *is* the Son, the second person of the Trinity.

²² Abd al-Fadi adds, “Possibly the word ‘Son’ disturbs some people, because they immediately imagine, through its relationship with the word ‘Father’, that the Father preceded the Son in time, so there must be a difference in time and of status between them” (al-Fadi 2003: 20). Such ideas are incorrect. According to the Bible, “God, from eternity, has had the title Father, so this necessitates the existence of the Son from eternity also. . . . No one becomes a father until the moment when the son comes into being. The time difference, in this case, is imaginary and a delusion in regard to God and his Son Jesus Christ. . . . We use the terms son of truth or son of light to indicate the resemblance between them and truth or light. In this way, Jesus has been called the Son of God, because of the complete resemblance between Father and Son in the person of the one God. Jesus has been called thus because he is the only complete and eternal revelation of the person of God to mankind, or, as we read in Hebrews 1:1-2, In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” (*Ibid.*: 21) McDowell and Larson similarly comment, “Some people, using the fact that Jesus is a son, might say, ‘Did you ever hear of a son who did not have a beginning?’ By this they mean to contrast the ‘created’ son with the uncreated father. Of course, the question may be turned around, ‘Did you ever hear of a father who didn’t have a beginning?’ . . . An obvious implication . . . is that if the Father is eternal, then so is the Son.” (McDowell and Larson 1983: 75) Indeed, the term “father” is “a relative term that makes no sense except in relation to the person whose father he is. Thus in some way the identity of being Father depends on the Son, and vice versa.” (Pannenberg 1991: 57)

Abraham's *monogenēs*. Isaac was not, of course, Abraham's "only begotten" son, since Abraham also had fathered Ishmael. John Feinberg explains, "The point is that Isaac was Abraham's unique son. . . . Though Abraham had another son, Isaac was unique in that he, and he alone, was the child of promise." (Feinberg 2001: 491) When used of Christ, *monogenēs* is "descriptive of the kind of Sonship Christ possesses and not of the process of establishing such a relationship" (Zodhiates 1992: *monogenēs*, 996).

There are three other biblical passages that refer to Jesus as "begotten": **Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5**.²³ Each one of them quotes **Ps 2:7** ("*You are my Son; today I have begotten you*") and applies that to Jesus. Jochen Katz states that, in their respective contexts, "All of these passages speak about the **resurrection and exaltation** of Christ. It refers to his taking office as king and priest. This took place about 33 years **after** the birth of Jesus. Clearly, in Biblical usage, the term 'begotten' when used for Jesus in those passages is **not** at all connected with anything sexual but has a metaphorical meaning. The expression 'the begotten son' of God is never mentioned in respect to his miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit or his birth by the Virgin Mary. . . . What then is the Biblical meaning? I think Romans 1:4 says it most clearly that Jesus 'was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.' The resurrection was the time of public declaration of what he has been all along. . . . Psalm 2 is an inauguration psalm for the Israelite kings -- the public declaration of kingship. And most of the Kings became kings as grown men. **None** became king at his conception. And this meaning carries over into the New Testament use for Jesus just as well, that the resurrection is the public announcement by God about the true identity and authority of Jesus, Messiah, true king of Israel, representative of God among mankind." (Katz, "You are" n.d.: n.p., bold emph. in orig.; see also Guthrie 2007: 927-28)²⁴

The term "Son of God" goes to the heart of who Jesus is. "Muslims understand well what it means for Jesus to be declared the Son of God: He is God incarnate" (Carlton 2011: 13). The following biblical facts—drawn primarily from Jesus' own words and deeds—demonstrate how Jesus redefined the title to reveal that he was and is the *unique*, divine Son of God (for a summary of the biblical evidence for Christ's deity see Brown 2002: 20-27):

A. Jesus was fully God: miraculous conception and miraculous signs

Unlike any other human being who has ever lived, Jesus was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (**Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38**). Muslims admit that. Muslims also admit the fact that Jesus had supernatural powers and performed multiple miracles. However, there is much additional evidence to demonstrate that Jesus was more than just a man or even a prophet but was the divine "Son of God."

B. Jesus equated Himself with God and identified Himself as God

Ajjjola correctly states, "God is comprehended from His attributes. If it is proved and granted that Jesus is Master of Divine attributes, one is justified in taking him for God." (Ajjjola 1972: 20) Jesus is, indeed, "Master of Divine attributes," as the following words and deeds of Jesus demonstrate:

1. He claimed to be pre-existent (i.e., to have existed before He became a man) (**John 8:58; 17:5, 24**). He is in fact pre-existent (**John 1:1-2, 14-15, 30; 8:58; 1 Cor 8:6; Phil 2:6-7; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:2; 1 John**

²³ In Luke's account of Jesus' baptism, **Luke 3:22** concludes with the voice from heaven saying, "*You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.*" A variant reading of that verse in some ancient manuscripts concludes with "*today I have begotten you.*" Muslim Jerald Dirks claims that this variant reading proves that "this was a 'created sonship', which began only secondary to Allah granting a special relationship with Him to Jesus, at the time of the baptism" (Dirks 2008: 69). That is not true. Leaving aside the fact that the oldest and the vast majority of the manuscripts use the "well-pleased" language, the fact is that Luke applies "sonship" language at different points of Jesus' life, including his conception and birth (**Luke 1:30-35**), baptism (**Luke 3:21-22**), and resurrection (**Luke 24:6-7**). If we were to assume that the "begotten" language of **Luke 3:22** is the correct reading, "the act of begetting in this specific context doesn't refer to the time when Christ became God's Son. Rather, this is Luke's way of highlighting the moment that God chose for Jesus to begin his Messianic office in the power of the Holy Spirit." (Shamoun, "Jesus Christ" n.d.: n.p.) Further, such a reading does "absolutely nothing to refute the plain and emphatic testimony of the author of Luke-Acts that Christ is fully God – and is therefore eternal – who came down from heaven to become a man from the blessed virgin Mary" (Ibid.).

²⁴ The Nicene Creed (AD 325) includes the statement, "I believe in . . . one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." In the creed, the word "begotten" clearly is being used in a special way, contrary to the normal usage of the word, specifically to *refute* the idea that Christ was created or made in time. This was not done arbitrarily, but "there was [sic.] justifiable grounds for fencing their term *begotten* with the qualifier 'not made'"—specifically, that while the NT does use "begotten" language about Christ it also ascribes deity to him, and "the church was against setting one part of Scripture against another" (Sproul 1992: 88). That is the proper way to approach Scripture.

2:13-14).

2. He claimed to come from the Father in heaven (John 3:13; 5:23-24; 6:29, 32-39, 41-42, 46, 50-51, 57-58, 62; 7:33; 8:23, 42; 11:41-42; 16:5, 27-28; 17:3, 5, 8, 18, 23, 25). He in fact did so (John 3:31; 13:3; 29-30; 1 Cor 15:47; 1 John 4:9-10, 14).

3. He claimed to be the only one who knows the Father and can reveal the Father (Matt 11:27; John 6:46; 17:25). That is true (John 1:18; Heb 1:1-2; 1 John 5:20).

4. He claimed to do nothing on his own but only what the Father showed him (John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). He in fact lived a perfectly holy life and is the perfect manifestation of the Father (Matt 1:22-23; 27:3-4; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; 23:22, 40-41, 47; John 5:30; 7:18; 8:29, 46; 14:6-11; 17:6; Acts 3:14; 4:27, 30; 13:28, 35; 2 Cor 4:4; 5:21; Col 1:15, 19; 2:9; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3, 9; 3:2; 4:15; 7:26-28; 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22; 1 John 2:29; 3:5; Rev 3:7; 5:1-8).

5. The Bible says that God sends the prophets (2 Chron 36:15; Jer 26:5; Luke 11:49-51). To show that He is God come to earth, Jesus said that He was the one who was sending the prophets (Matt 23:34-35).

6. He claimed to send and baptize with the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 15:26; 16:7; 20:22). He in fact does so (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:8; 2:1-21).

7. He knows and can foretell the future (Matt 10:17-23; 12:40, 27-28; 16:21; 17: 9, 22-27; 20:17-19; 21:1-7; 23:34-36; 24:1-31; 26:1-2, 13, 20-25, 31-34, 69-75; Mark 8:31; 9:1, 9, 30-31; 10:32-34; 11:1-7; 13:1-27; 14: 9, 12-21, 27-30, 66-72; 16:6-7; Luke 8: 49-56; 9:22, 43-44; 17:22-36; 18:31-33; 19: 29-35, 41-44; 21:7-28; 22: 7-13, 20-23, 31-34, 54-62; 24:6-8; John 2:18-22; 4:21; 6:70-71; 11:23, 43-44; 12:27-33; 13:18-28, 36-38; 16:4, 16-20, 32; 18:4, 25-27; 21: 4-6, 18-19; Acts 1:5, 8).

8. He said and demonstrated that he was the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). The Pharisees claimed that Jesus' disciples were guilty of breaking the Sabbath because they picked heads of grain on the Sabbath. Jesus answered that "the disciples are innocent *because* [He] as the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Carson 1982: 67). By saying that, Jesus was asserting his "superiority over the Sabbath and, hence, of the authority to abrogate or transform the Sabbath law" (Moo 1984: 17). This amounts to a claim to being equal to God because the Sabbath was part of the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue), which was the law of God given by God Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 20:1-17). In other words, only God could promulgate God's Law, and therefore only God is superior to God's Law and has the authority to change or break His Law.

9. He claimed the authority to forgive people of their sins (Matt 9:2-8, 12-13; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:17-26, 31-32; 7:47-50; 9:56; 19:10; John 5:33-34; 8:1-11; 10:7-9; 12:47). He, in fact, is the savior who alone can save people from their sins (Matt 1:21; Luke 2:11; John 1:29; 3:17; 4:42; Acts 3:26; 4:12; 5:31; 13:23, 38-39; 15:11; 16:31; Rom 3:24-26; 4:25; 5:1, 6-11, 15-21; 8:2; 10:9; 1 Cor 1:30; 6:11; 15:17; 2 Cor 5:18-21; Gal 1:3-4; Eph 2:13-16; 4:32; 5:2, 25-26; Phil 3:20; Col 1:12-14; 3:13; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9-10; 1 Tim 1:15; 2 Tim 2:10; 3:15; Titus 1:4; 2:13-14; Heb 2:17; 5:9; 7:25; 13:20; 1 Pet 1:18-19; 3:18; 2 Pet 1:11; 1 John 3:5; 4:9-10, 14; Rev 5:9; 14:4).

C. S. Lewis noted the significance of Jesus' claim to forgive sins—any sins: "We can all understand how a man forgives offenses against himself. You tread on my toe and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money? . . . Yet this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offences. This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words would imply what I can only regard as silliness and conceit unrivalled by any other character in history." (Lewis 1996: 55)

10. He claimed to have the power to give people eternal life (John 3:16; 4:14; 5:25-29, 40; 6:27, 32-40, 44, 47-58, 68; 10:10, 27-28; 11:25-26; 14:6, 19; 17:1-3; Rev 1:18). He in fact does so (Rom 6:23; 2 Tim 1:10; 1 John 5:11-13, 20; 21:27).

11. He claimed to be the author of life itself (John 11:25). He in fact is (John 1:4; 5:26; Rev 1:18).

12. He claimed to have all authority (Matt 11:27; 19:28; 26:64; 28:18; Mark 14:62; Luke 10:22; 22:29-30, 69; John 17:2; 18:36-37). He in fact has all authority and rules as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Luke 1:32-33; 2:11; 19:37-38; 23:42; John 3:31; 13:3; Acts 2:30-36; 5:31; 10:36; Rom 9:5; 14:9; 1 Cor 15:23-28; Eph 1:20-22; Phil 2:9-11; Col 2:10, 15; 1 Tim 6:15-16; 2 Tim 4:8; Heb 2:7-8; 10:12-13; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 1:5; 5:12; 11:15; 12:10; 14:14; 17:14; 19:11-16; 20:4-6).

13. He says He will judge the world (Matt 7:21-23; 13:41; 16:27; 25:31-46; John 5:22, 27-29; Rev 2:23; 22:12). He in fact will do so (Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom 2:16; 14:10; 1 Cor 4:4-5;

2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1, 8; 1 Pet 4:5).

14. Jesus equated and identified himself with God in general (**Mark 9:37; Luke 22:69-70; John 5:17-23; 8:12-58; 10:30, 34-38; 12:44-49; 14:1, 6-11; 15:23; 17:21-23**). D. A. Carson summarizes some of the evidence from the Gospel of John: “Jesus insists that to believe in him is to believe in the one who sent him (12.44), to look at him is to look at the one who sent him (12.45; 14.9), to hate him is to hate the Father (15.23). He says that all must honour the Son even as they honour the Father (5.23), that he and his Father are one (10.30). We not only learn that the Son cannot do anything except what the father shows him, but that the Son does *whatever* the Father does (5.19). . . . Jesus’ words are God’s words (3.34); that is the reason why the one who receives *Jesus’* witness confirms that *God* is true [3:33]. . . . In precisely the same way, the faith that leads to life hears *Jesus’* words and believes the *one who sent him* (5.24; 14.24). Only Jesus has seen the Father (6.46); but to know Jesus is to know the Father (8.19).” (Carson 1994: 147, 156)

C. S. Lewis summarizes the significance of the above claims by Jesus: “Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time. Now let us get this clear. Among Pantheists, like the Indians, anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world Who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips. . . . I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great moral teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” (Lewis 1996: 55-56)

C. Jesus claimed to have a unique relationship with God the Father, calling Him “My Father”

In **Matt 7:21; 10:32-33; 11:27; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 19; 20:23; 25:34; 26:39, 42, 53; Luke 2:49; 10:22; 22:29; 24:49; John 2:16; 5:17, 43; 6:32, 40; 8:19, 38, 49, 54; 10:18, 25, 29, 37; 14:2, 7, 20, 21, 23; 15:1, 8, 10, 15, 23, 24; 20:17; Rev 2:27; 3:5, 21** Jesus indicated his special relationship with God the Father by calling him “My Father.” Hilali cites Jesus’ use of the term “Father” as indicating that Jesus was not God (Al-Hilali 1998: 905). Again, Hilali does not appear to understand the significance of Jesus’ use of that term. Jesus did not refer to God as “our Father,” which He taught His disciples to say when praying to God (**Matt 6:9**; see also **Luke 11:2; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1:3**). Rather, Jesus addressed the Father directly, using the Aramaic word “Abba,” a term of intimate, personal affection (**Mark 14:62**). Although there are very rare instances of other Jews *describing* God as Abba, “we have no evidence that others before Jesus *addressed* God as Abba” (Bauckham 1978: 249, *emph. added*).

It was Jesus’ calling God “*my Father*” that caused the Jews to try to kill him for blasphemy. They recognized (as Hilali apparently does not) that when Jesus called God “*my Father*” he “*was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God*” (**John 5:18**; see also **John 8:38-59; 10:22-33**). Similarly, Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one*” (**John 10:30**).

The intimate union between Christ and the Father was made clear on another occasion. In **John 14:6-14** the following interchange took place between Jesus and his disciples Thomas and Philip: ⁶ *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”* ⁷ *If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.”* ⁸ *Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”* ⁹ *Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”* ¹⁰ *Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.* ¹¹ *Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.* ¹² *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.* ¹³ *Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* ¹⁴ *If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.*

Carson observes that Jesus’ is describing the complete unity between himself and the Father; indeed, “it

is precisely this degree of unity that ensures Jesus reveals God to us” (Carson 1991: 494). There are important implications of this unity between Jesus and the Father:

- First, “Not all roads lead to possession of eternal life. Jesus is the God-appointed way.” (Ngewa 2006: 1283)
- Second, “A consequence of Jesus and the Father being one is that whatever is asked of the Father is also asked of Jesus. The Father ultimately owns all things. Jesus, as Son, submits to him, but at the same time, he and the Father act as one. Anything asked from or given by the Father is also asked from or given by Jesus. Jesus thus becomes both the one to be asked for blessing (*ask me*) and the go-between who makes it easier to have requests granted (*in my name*) ([**John** 14:13b-14a).” (Ngewa 2006: 1284)
- Third, while distinctions exist between the Father and the Son (they are separate persons yet are one), what Jesus says here negates the idea that he is *merely* a prophet or Messenger. “This ‘envoy’ [Messenger] model is suddenly outstripped when we are told that *everything* Jesus does is what the Father gives him to do, and that he does *everything* the Father does: now we are dealing in unique ‘sonship’ language. No mere envoy [Messenger] would refer to the one who sent him as his Father, claim that whoever has seen him has seen the Father, and affirm mutual indwelling between himself and the one who sent him.” (Carson 1991: 494-95; see also **John** 5:19-23)

D. Jesus’ use of the term “Son of Man” is a reference to His divinity

Jesus is called the “*Son of Man*” approximately 80 times in the Gospels; it is his most frequent description of Himself. Hilali acknowledges that Jesus “used to call himself the ‘Son of Man’ (Mark 2:10)” (Al-Hilali 1998: 905). However, Hilali evidently does not understand the meaning of that term. The “*Son of Man*” is both human and divine, just as Jesus is both human and divine. The phrase “*Son of Man*” alludes to **Dan 7:13-14** (“*I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.¹⁴ And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.*”). In **Rev 1:13-14** John received a revelation from Jesus, who is described as “*one like a son of man . . . [whose] head and His hair were white like wool, like snow.*” Those images are taken from Daniel’s vision in **Dan 7:9, 13**. However, in Daniel’s vision (**Dan 7:9**) it was “*the Ancient of Days*” whose “*vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool.*” Given this context, “John sees ‘one like a son of man’ who is distinguished from and identified with the Ancient of Days—a mysterious combination but consistent with the fact that he lays claim to the title ‘the first and the last’ ([Rev] 1:17), by which God proclaimed his divine eternity (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). The Son of Man is God, infinite in wisdom and holiness.” (Johnson 2001: 59)

Thus, whenever Jesus used the term “*Son of Man*” he was making an assertion that he was, in fact, God come to earth *as a man*. In **John 3:13** he explicitly said, “*No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.*” Similarly, in **John 6:62** Jesus said, “*What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?*” Carson comments that “Jesus the Son of Man (the title especially connected with his function as the revealer from heaven) first *descended* [**John 6:38**], and so in ascending is merely returning *to where he was before* (cf. 17:5). This not only affirms Jesus’ pre-existence, but places him in a class quite different from antecedent Jewish religious heroes.” (Carson 1991: 301)²⁵

²⁵ Carson’s point about the term “Son of Man” being especially connected with Jesus’ function as a revealer from heaven is important. “According to Daniel 7:9-22 the Son of man was a heavenly figure who would participate in the judgment on the last day; however, Jesus pours new content into the title by claiming that the Son of man must also suffer. Thus, Jesus links together the Son of man and the Suffering Servant (Isa. 52:13-53:12 [see **Matt 17:12; 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27; John 3:14**]).” (Schreiner 1989: 818) “The death and the exaltation of the Servant of the Lord are the way in which God reveals his glory and demonstrates his deity to the world. . . . The Servant, in both his humiliation and his exaltation, is therefore not merely a human figure distinguished from God, but, in both his humiliation and his exaltation, belongs to the identity of the unique God” (Bauckham 1999: 49, 51). Thus, the term “Son of Man” reveals (along with many of Jesus’ other statements and actions) the true nature of who God is. As Richard Bauckham puts it, “Jesus reveals the divine identity—who God truly is—in humiliation as well as exaltation, and in the connexion of the two. God’s own identity is revealed in Jesus, his life and his cross, just as truly as in his exaltation, in a way that is fully continuous and consistent with the Old Testament and Jewish understanding of God, but is also novel and surprising.” (Ibid.: viii) The nature of who God is and what he is like is a major point of contention between Christianity and Islam. In brief, Islam’s Allah is, one might say, a “one dimensional” god, i.e., a god only of transcendent power; the idea of his also being a personal god of love, suffering, and humiliation is foreign and, indeed, abhorrent to Muslims. However, the God of the Bible, particularly as definitively revealed by Jesus, is far more complex than Islam’s Allah.

We see Jesus claiming to be deity in his other references to the “*Son of Man*.” For example, Jesus’ claim that “*the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*” (**Matt 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24**) is a claim to be God *come to earth as a man*, because only God has the authority to forgive sins; yet here Jesus is claiming to forgive sins on his own authority (see the quote from C. S. Lewis [1996: 55] above). In **Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5** Jesus said, “*The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath*.” As was discussed above, by saying that, Jesus was claiming to be God Himself. In **Luke 9:58** Jesus said, “*The Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them*” (see also **Luke 19:9-10**). The granting of salvation to anyone is something that only God can do. In **Matt 13:41-42** Jesus said, “*The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*.” This refers to the final judgment. Similarly, in **Matt 16:27** Jesus says that “*the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds*.” J. Knox Chamblin points out that “as in Daniel 7:13-14, the Son of man is revealed as divine (the angels are *his*, not just the Father’s, v. 27)” (Chamblin 1989: 743). Sending the angels and rendering eternal judgment are the acts of God. That is the same context in which Jesus calls himself the “*Son of Man*” in **Matt 24:30-31; 24:42-44; 25:31-46; Mark 8:38; 13:26; Luke 9:22-26; 12:8-9; John 9:35-39**. Jesus’ statements concerning forgiveness of sins, granting salvation, and judgment reveal a fundamental difference between himself and Muhammad: Muhammad could only declare what Allah could do in forgiving, saving, and judging people; Jesus said that he himself would do all those things.

In **Matt 24:42-44** the “*Son of Man*” is specifically equated with the “*Lord*.” In **Matt 25:31-46** the “*Son of Man*” is equated with the “*King*” who “*will sit on His glorious throne*” and judge all the people of the earth, sending some to hell and others to eternal life. That, of course, can only refer to God. Thus, again, when Jesus calls himself the “*Son of Man*” he is equating himself with God Almighty. In **Matt 19:27-28** Jesus says that, “*in the regeneration [or, renewal of all things] when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (see also **Luke 22:29-30**). The “*throne*” can only be the throne of God. In **John 6:27** Jesus says that people should work for “*the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you*.” Again, eternal life is something that only God can give, and here Jesus is saying that he will give it (see also **John 6:40, 53-54**).

E. Jesus used the term “*Son of Man*” in the same context with the term “*Son of God*” to show that the two terms are equivalent

In **Matt 16:13-17** Jesus equated being the “*Son of Man*” with being the “*Son of God*.” He asked his disciples, “*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*” (**Matt 16:13**) In **Matt 16:14** they replied, “*Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets*.” Jesus rejected the answer that he was *merely* a prophet, because he then asked, “*But who do you say that I am?*” (**Matt 16:15**) In **Matt 16:16** Peter answered, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” and Jesus responded, “*Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven*” (**Matt 16:17**). Thus, although Jesus indeed was a prophet, he was not *merely* a prophet. Likewise, although Jesus indeed was a man, he was not *merely* a man.

In **John 1:49** Nathanael said, “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel*.” Jesus did not deny this but in **John 1:50-51** explained, “*You will see greater things than these. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man*.” While the terms “*Son of God*” and “*King of Israel*” had messianic meanings, Jesus’ answer expands the meaning Nathanael probably intended for “*Son of God*.” Jesus does this by alluding to the vision of Jacob in **Gen 28:12**. The reference to “*the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending*” conveys the image of “uninterrupted communion between Jesus and the Father” (Köstenberger 2007: 430). Jesus is saying that *he* “is the locus of God’s self-revelation on earth. In this regard, this final verse reiterates the affirmation of the prologue [**John 1:1-18**]: Jesus is the full revelation of the glory and presence of God.” (Burge 1989: 849)

In **John 5:19-29**, Jesus repeatedly calls himself the “*Son*,” the “*Son of God*,” and the “*Son of Man*.” Jesus’ references to the “*Son of God*” and the “*Son of Man*” are in the same context of his executing judgment on the day of resurrection and judgment. The two terms therefore are equivalent. Indeed, Jesus’ statements from **5:21-29** concerning judgment, particularly his statement in **John 5:22** that “*not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son*,” are remarkable assertions of Christ’s divine authority, since both the Qur’an and the Hebrew Scriptures (the OT) affirm that judgment is the exclusive prerogative of God.

At his trial before the high priest in **Matt 26:63-65** (**Mark 14:61-63; Luke 22:66-71**), the following interchange took place: “*The high priest said to Him, ‘I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.’*”⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, “*You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you,*

hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ‘He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy.’” Craig Blomberg discusses why Jesus’ claim to be the “Son of Man” in this context is so significant: “This ‘Son of Man’ saying, rather than the claim that he was some kind of messiah, is what would have led the high priest to tear his garments and proclaim that Jesus had blasphemed (26:65). Alleging messiahship was no capital offense; otherwise, the Jews could never have received a messiah! But claiming to be the exalted, heavenly Son of Man, one who was Lord and next to the Father himself in heaven, transgressed the boundaries of what most of the Jewish leaders deemed permissible for mere mortals.” (Blomberg 2007: 93)

F. Jesus calls himself the “Son of God” and accepts to be called the “Son of God” by others

Hilali states that “Jesus never called himself *Son of God* as far as I know . . . although he heard himself being called by that name he did not object . . . and did not consider the title exclusively for him” (Al-Hilali 1998: 905, citing **Matt 5:9, 45** where the term “Son [or child] of God” is applied to “every God-fearing righteous person”). Hilali is incorrect. While the phrase can have a broader meaning, its use concerning Jesus clearly meant that Jesus was God come to earth as a man (i.e., he was the “Son of God” in a special sense, with a *unique* relationship with God the Father).

First, Jesus *did* call himself the “Son” to describe his *unique* relationship with God the Father. In **Matt 11:27 (Luke 10:22)** Jesus said, “*All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*” What Jesus is saying is that he is the *only one* who truly knows God, and *the only way to know God* is through him! Note that it is the *Son’s* will which must be exercised if anyone is to know the Father. That is a stunning claim which must be taken seriously, especially by those who call Jesus a great prophet. By making this statement in **Matt 11:27** about his unique relationship with the Father, Jesus is claiming divinity for Himself and is placing Himself in a class far above Muhammad or anyone else. In telling his disciples to make disciples of all the nations, Jesus told them to baptize believers “*in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*” (**Matt 28:19**). Again, he is calling himself the “Son” in a unique relationship with the Father.

In **John 3:16-18** Jesus called himself the “*only begotten Son,*” the “Son,” and “*the only begotten Son of God.*”²⁶ In connection with the works he did, Jesus called himself the “*Son of God*” in **John 5:25; 10:36; 11:4**. The context was his doing what only God has the power to do (raise the dead).

In the parable of the vineyard (**Matt 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19**), Jesus contrasted himself with all the prophets who had been sent before, predicted his own death, indicated that he was the only way of salvation, said that the kingdom was not limited to the Jews, and refers to himself as the “Son” in a way that negates the Islamic claim that Muhammad is the last of the prophets. In the parable, God the Father sent prophets to Israel who had mistreated them; so at last he decided to send his own Son (Jesus). N. T. Wright correctly concludes, that “once the father has sent the son to the vineyard, he can send nobody else. To reject the son is to reject the last chance.” (Wright 1996: 362, 365)

Second, *God Himself* on more than one occasion called Jesus “His Son” in circumstances that can only be referring to Jesus’ divine Sonship. At Jesus’ baptism “*a voice out of heaven said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased’*” (**Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22**). Again, when Jesus was transfigured before three of His disciples, “*a voice out of the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!’*” (**Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35**).

Third, the *angel Gabriel* called Jesus the “*Son of God.*” When announcing to Mary that Jesus was to be born, Gabriel stated, “*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High*” (**Luke 1:32**). When Mary then asked “*How can this be, since I am a virgin?*” (**Luke 1:34**), Gabriel replied, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God*” (**Luke 1:35**). In that context, Gabriel’s reference to “*the Son of God*” can only be referring to Jesus’ divine Sonship.

G. Jesus’ opponents recognized that he was claiming to be God and sought to kill Him for blasphemy because of his claim to be God’s unique Son

In **Matt 9:2-3; 26:63-66; Mark 2:6-7; 14:61-64; Luke 5:20-21; 22:66-71; John 5:17-18; 8:53, 59;**

²⁶ Since ancient texts did not use quotation marks or similar markers, there is dispute as to whether or not **John 3:16-21** are Jesus’ words (i.e., the end of his answer to Nicodemus that began in **v. 10**) or are a comment by the writer of the Gospel of John (see Carson 1991: 203-04; Burge 1989: 851).

10:30-33, 39; 19:7 Jesus' opponents recognized that Jesus was claiming to be God's unique Son and sought to kill him because of that claim. The law of Moses prescribed the death penalty for blasphemy (**Lev 24:14, 16, 23**; see **John 19:7**). **John 5:18** says that the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus "because He not only was breaking the Sabbath [by healing a man on the Sabbath], but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." Yusuf Ali admits that "Jesus was charged by the Jews with blasphemy as claiming to be God or the son of God" (Ali 2006: Q. 3:55n.395). Bernard Ramm points out, "At this point, from the human perspective, there is only one thing for Jesus to do. He ought to deny the charge and give some reason why he healed the man on a Sabbath day. This he does not do. He says that the Jews were right. He is equal with God. In the verses that follow Jesus specifies the kind of things only God can do but yet that he can do. Hence he is equal with the Father." (Ramm 1985: 43)

H. People worshipped or prayed to Jesus as God, and Jesus accepted that worship

The Bible makes it absolutely clear that only God is to be worshipped (**Exod 20:3-5; 34:14; Deut 4:19; 5:7-9; 8:19; 1 Kgs 9:6-7; Isa 42:8**). Jesus himself specifically said that only God is to be worshipped (**Matt 4:10; Luke 4:8**). The worship of mere mortals or even angels is idolatrous and sinful (**Exod 20:1-5; Deut 5:6-9; Rom 1:18-23**). Jesus knew that.

Nevertheless, in **Matt 2:11; 14:33; 28:9, 16-17; Luke 24:51-52; John 1:1-14; 5:22-23; 9:35-38; 20:28; 28:9; Acts 2:36; 7:59-60; 20:28; Rom 9:3-5; Phil 2:5-11; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:5-10; 2 Pet 1:1; 1 John 2:23; Rev 5:1-14** people worshipped or prayed to Jesus as they would to God Himself. *Jesus accepted their worship*. The response of Jesus in accepting worship would be blasphemy and idolatry for anyone, even a prophet, if he were only a man. The fact that Jesus did not object, but accepted people's worshipping him, showed that he knew he was God who had come to earth as a man—because only by being God come to earth as a man could Jesus legitimately accept being worshipped. In fact, the worship of Jesus is known to have been present long before the NT was even written. This is known, among other reasons, because the universal worship of Jesus is stated in **Phil 2:9-11**, which is an early Christian creed that long pre-dated Paul's writing of the book of Philippians (see discussion of early Christian creeds in the section **2.IV.B. The earliness of Christian creeds**, above). **Phil 2:9-11** alludes to **Isa 45:22-23** which pertains to the worship of Yahweh; this, again, shows that Jesus is equated with God.

There is an important implication of the fact that Jesus accepted worship of himself. Muslim scholar Shaikh Abdul-Aziz bin Abdullah bin Baz states that "belief in Allah signifies that Allah is the true God Who Alone deserves to be worshipped, as He is the Creator and the Sustainer of all human beings" (bin Baz 2002: 250; see, e.g., **Q. 2:21-22; 11:1-2; 16:36; 21:25; 51:56-58**). Since Jesus accepted worship of himself and Muslims and the Qur'an acknowledge that Jesus was pure and sinless, that necessarily means that Jesus' accepting worship of himself *was not a sin*. That could only be true if he was, in fact, God come to earth.

I. Jesus is specifically called "God" or "Lord" on multiple occasions throughout the NT

On more than one occasion the NT applies to Jesus the name "Lord" or "God":

- **Matt 7:22-23:** *Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord . . ." Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."*
- **Luke 1:42-43:** *And she [Elizabeth] cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you [Mary] among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me that the mother of my Lord would come to me?"*
- **John 1:1, 14:** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the father, full of grace and truth.*
- **John 20:28:** *After being told to reach with his finger to feel the holes in Jesus' hands and side, Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for blasphemy but accepted those titles of deity.*
- **Acts 7:59-60:** *They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.*
- **Acts 10:36:** *The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all).*
- **Acts 16:31, 34:** *They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." . . . And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.*

- **Acts 20:28:** *Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*
- **1 Cor 2:7-8:** *But we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
- **1 Cor 11:26:** *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.*
- **Rom 9:5:** *Whose [referring to the Israelites] are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.*
- **Phil 2:5-7:** *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed [literally, “being,” hupárchōn] in the form [morphē] of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form [morphē] of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.*
- **Col 2:9:** *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.*
- **Titus 2:13:** *Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. In addition to being called “God,” it is significant that Jesus is also called “Savior,” because in the OT God specifically said, “I, even I, am the Lord, and there is no savior besides Me” (Isa 43:11).*
- **2 Pet 1:1:** *Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and savior, Jesus Christ.*
- **1 John 5:20:** *And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.*

J. The same names, titles, and other attributes that are applied to God in the OT or NT are applied to Jesus in the NT

Sometimes a passage which applied to God is alluded to or directly quoted as applying to Jesus (in the following table, ^{x, y, z} indicate direct quotes):

Name/Title/Attribute	Applied to God	Applied to Jesus
I AM	Exod 3:13-14	John 8:24, 28, 58; 18:5-6
Lord	Isa 40:3 ^x ; 45:23-24 ^y ; Joel 2:32 ^z	Mark 1:2-4 ^x ; Phil 2:10-11 ^y ; Acts 2:36; Rom 10:13 ^z
God	Ps 45:6-7 ^x	Heb 1:8-9 ^x ; John 1:1, 14, 18; 20:28; 2 Pet 1:1
First and Last	Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12	Rev 1:17; 2:8; 22:13
Alpha and Omega	Rev 1:8 ^x ; 21:5-6 ^x	Rev 22:13 ^x
Exalted above the heavens	Ps 57:5, 11; 108:5	Heb 7:26
Savior	Isa 43:3, 11; 1 Tim 4:10	Matt 1:21; Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Titus 2:13
Redeemer	Ps 130:7-8	1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7; Titus 2:13-14
Judge	Gen 18:25; Ps 50:4-6; 96:13	John 5:22; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1
King	Ps 95:3	Rev 17:14; 19:16
King of Israel	Isa 43:15; 44:6; Zeph 3:15	John 1:49; 12:13
Holy	1 Sam 2:2; John 17:11	Acts 3:14; Heb 7:26
Good ²⁷	Ps 34:8	John 10:11
Light	Ps 27:1; Isa 60:20; Mic 7:8	John 1:4-5, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5
Rock	Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22:32; Ps 89:26	1 Cor 10:4; 1 Pet 2:4-8
Husband	Isa 54:5; Hos 2:16	Mark 2:18-19; 2 Cor 11:2; Rev 21:2
Shepherd	Ps 23:1; 80:1; Isa 40:11	John 10:11, 16; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4
Creator	Gen 1:1; Ps 102:25-27 ^x ; Isa 40:28	John 1:3, 10; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2, 10-12 ^x
Sustainer	Job 34:14-14; Ps 3:5; 2 Pet 3:7	Col 1:17; Heb 1:3
Giver of life	Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6; Ps 36:9	John 5:22; 10:28; 11:25
Source of “living water”	Jer 2:13	John 4:10, 14; 7:37-38
Forgiver of sin	Exod 34:7; Isa 55:7; Dan 9:9	Matt 1:21; Mark 2:5; Acts 26:18; Col 2:13

²⁷ God’s attribute of “goodness” indicates what Jesus was getting at when he asked the rich young man, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19). He was not denying that he was God, as Hilali (1998: 906-07) claims. Rather, he was affirming his divinity by asking a rhetorical question. In effect, he was saying to the man, “Do you really know to whom you are speaking?” As Victor Babajide Cole puts it, “Jesus was not denying that he was ‘good’. Rather, he was pressing the man to see the logical implication of addressing him as ‘good’, namely that he is God!” (Cole 2006: 1189)

Sovereign over all Omniscient Searches hearts & minds	Neh 9:6; Isa 44:24-27; 45:22-23^x Job 21:22; Ps 33:13-15 1 Chron 28:9; Ps 7:9; 139:1-4, 23; Jer 17:10	Matt 28:18; Eph 1:20-22; Phil 2:9-11^x; 3:21 John 16:30; 21:17 Mark 2:8; John 2:24-25; Rev 2:23
Rewards according to people's deeds	Ps 62:12^x; Jer 17:10; 32:19	Matt 16:27^x; Rev 2:23

K. Prophecies and statements that pertain to God or the Lord in the OT are quoted and applied to Jesus in the NT

- *I have set the LORD continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (Ps 16:8; applied to Jesus in Acts 2:25)*
- *Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. (Ps 45:6; applied to Jesus in Heb 1:8)*
- *Of old You founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. (Ps 102:25-26; applied to Jesus in Heb 1:10-12)*
- *The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. (Ps 118:22; applied to Jesus in Acts 4:11)*
- **Isa 6:1-13:** In **Isa 6:5** Isaiah says, “*Woe is me, for I am ruined. . . . For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*” In **Isa 6:8-13** “*the voice of the Lord*” then commissions Isaiah to go and prophesy to the people of Israel. **John 12:40** quotes **Isa 6:10**. **John 12:41** then applies all of **Isaiah 6** to Jesus by saying, “*These things Isaiah said because he saw His [Jesus’] glory, and he spoke of Him.*”
- *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Isa 7:14; applied to Jesus in Matt 1:22-23, which specifies that “Immanuel” means “God with us”)*
- *It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread. Then He shall become a sanctuary; but to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Isa 8:13-14; applied to Jesus in Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:8)*
- *A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.” (Isa 40:3; applied to Jesus in Matt 3:3; John 1:23)*
- *My house will be called a house of prayer. (Isa 56:7; applied by Jesus to Himself in Matt 21:13)*
- *But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. (Mic 5:2; applied to Jesus in Matt 2:6. The language of the second sentence of Mic 5:2 is OT language that typically describes the eternal God in such passages as Ps 74:12; 90:2; 93:2; Isa 43:13; 63:16)*
- *I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. (Zech 12:10; applied to Jesus in John 19:37; Rev 1:7)*

L. Conclusion

Muslim apologists often contend that the worship of Jesus as the Son of God as part of the Godhead was a later development “under the misleading influence of Greek philosophy” (A’la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 4:171n.212; see also *ibid.*: n.216; Ali 2006: Q.4:171n.676 [“Alexandrian and Gnostic mysticism”]; Dirks 2008: 68-69). To the contrary, all of the above data demonstrate that “the highest possible Christology, the inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity, was central to the faith of the early church even before any of the New Testament writings were written, since it occurs in all of them. Although there was development in understanding this inclusion of Jesus in the identity of God, the decisive step of so including him was made at the beginning of Christology. . . . The New Testament writers did not see their Jewish monotheistic heritage as in any way an obstacle to the inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity; they used its resources extensively in order precisely to include Jesus in the divine identity; and they saw in this inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity the fulfilment of the eschatological expectation of Jewish monotheism that the one God will be universally acknowledged as such in his universal rule over all things.” (Bauckham 1999: 27)²⁸ The basis for this conclusion primarily was what

²⁸ John Gilchrist points out, “No historical records of any description challenging the Jesus of the canonical gospels exist

Jesus himself said and what Jesus himself did.

Inasmuch as Muslims view Jesus as a sinless prophet who cannot lie, Jesus' words and deeds confront them (and everyone) with the same issue that confronted the first century Jews: Who is Jesus? Based upon the evidence, multitudes of first century Jews accepted that Jesus was who he claimed to be, the Son of God, i.e., God come to earth, and their lives were changed. Jesus' claims are so profound that everyone needs to look at the evidence and make a choice, because if Jesus' claims are true, then to reject Jesus *as Lord* is to reject God and thereby to miss life itself, but to have Jesus as Lord is to have God the Father as well and thereby to have eternal life (**John 8:19; 1 John 2:23; 4:15; 2 John 9**).

VII. Implications of the Fact that Jesus Christ is Fully God and Fully Man

A. God can be truly and personally known in Christ

“Jesus became human so that human beings could have some understanding of the infinite God. A second reason God chose to become a man was to bridge the gulf between God and humankind. If Jesus had been ‘only’ a man or created being, then the hugeness of the gulf between God and humanity—the infinite and the finite, the Creator and the created, the Holy and the unholy—would have remained. For us to be able to know God, God had to step down to us. No created being could have bridged the gigantic gap between God and human beings any more than a piece of clay could aspire to understand and reach the level of the sculptor. Out of love, God took that step down to us. He wanted to open a way that all might come to know Him.” (McDowell and Larson 1983: 19) The fact that God became a man and lived among us in the person of Jesus Christ means we can know him *personally* and *truly*. This makes Christianity unique among all the religions of the world.

B. Christ shows us what God's true nature is and thereby also is our true example of how to live

Because Jesus is God, it is appropriate and necessary to believe in him and worship him. However, because he is man, he is a true example of how we should live our lives here on earth: “*By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked*” (**1 John 2:5-6**). Peter says that patiently enduring unjust suffering for doing what is right “*finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.*” (**1 Pet 2:20-21**) It is here that Christ's divinity and humanity converge in a profound way. **Phil 2:5-11** describes how Christ was God (**2:5-6**) but emptied Himself to become a man, even a slave (**2:7**), who was obedient to the point of death on a cross (**2:8**); therefore, God highly exalted him such that everyone will worship him as Lord of all (**2:9-11**). “The exaltation of Christ to participation in the unique divine sovereignty shows Him to be included in the unique divine identity. But since the exalted Christ is first the humiliated Christ, since indeed it is *because* of his self-abnegation that he is exalted, his humiliation belongs to the identity of God as truly as his exaltation does. The identity of God—who God is—is revealed as much in self-abasement and service as it is in exaltation and rule. The God who is high can also be low, because God is God not in seeking his own advantage but in self-giving. His self-giving in abasement and service ensures that his sovereignty over things is also a form of his self-giving. Only the Servant can be the Lord. Only the Servant

from any period during the 1st century” (Gilchrist 2015: 23). Oskar Skarsaune points out that, far from stemming from Greek or Gnostic thought, “The available evidence shows, on the contrary, that most Hellenists [i.e., Greeks or people who had adopted Greek philosophy and ideas] reacted with disgust and contempt at the very idea of a divine incarnation, and with charges of blasphemy when they heard that the incarnate Son of God had suffered the uttermost shame of crucifixion. . . . And that means that the Christian doctrine of the incarnation can hardly be a product of a milieu—the Hellenistic—that regarded this doctrine as a philosophical and theological monstrosity. Nor can it be the brilliant idea of someone trying to speak the way Hellenists liked.” (Skarsaune 2002: 323-25) In the early fourth century, Arius did begin promulgating an essentially Gnostic view of Christ, describing “the Son as a second, or inferior God, standing midway between the First Cause and creatures” (“Arianism” 2012: Doctrine). That controversy resulted in the Nicene and Constantinople creeds of 325 and 381 which recognized that Christ is fully God and fully man. Richard Bauckham concludes that the idea that the Christian doctrine of Christ stems from Greek philosophy or Gnostic mysticism is “virtually the opposite of the truth. . . . In the context of the Arian controversies, Nicene theology was essentially an attempt to resist the implications of Greek philosophical understandings of divinity and to re-appropriate in a new conceptual context the New Testament's inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity.” (Bauckham 1999: 78; see also Skarsaune 2002: 325, 333 [“Now if we could ask the church fathers themselves what they thought was the background of the Christology of the (Nicene) creed, they would no doubt have answered, this creed is biblical through and through, not only in substance, but also in wording. And by ‘biblical’ they would have meant that every word and clause in the creed can be substantiated from the Old Testament, not only the New. . . . It goes without saying that a Christology like this could only arise in a Jewish setting among disciples steeped in the Old Testament and Jewish categories of thought.”]).

who is also the Lord receives the recognition of his lordship—the acknowledgement of his unique deity—from the whole creation.” (Bauckham 1999: 61)

God’s identification with us in Christ then leads us to identify with others, since we have received the mind of Christ (**1 Cor 2:16**) and the Spirit of Christ (**Rom 8:1-17**). We treat others with love and forgiveness because that is the way Christ has treated us (**Eph 4:32; 1 John 4:7-21**). Our lives and actions become more and more like Christ’s as we are conformed to his image (**Rom 8:29; 12:1-2**). The Christian God is unlike any other god and Christianity is unlike any other religion in the world—and it is only Christ who reveals this.

C. Redemption from our sin is only possible because Christ is both fully God and fully man

All people intuitively know that we have a problem: we are separated from God because we are sinful and God is holy and perfect. The Bible correctly sees that mankind has a fatal flaw, an inner corruption known as indwelling sin (e.g., **Gen 6:5; Ps 51:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:9-18, 23; 7:14-24; Gal 3:21-22**). Because all people have a fundamental problem of a sinful nature, cannot change that, and therefore cannot save themselves, the Bible reveals that God chose to do for mankind what mankind could not do for itself. That is why God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. By taking on a human body “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (**Rom 8:3**) and coming into the world, Christ lived the life we should have lived. He was “*tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (**Heb 4:15**; see also **2 Cor 5:21; Heb 2:18**). That qualified Him to be our representative with the Father, to die the death we should have died, and pay the penalty for our sins that we should have paid (**Rom 8:3-4**). As **1 Tim 2:5** says, “*There is one God, and one mediator also between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.*” A mediator is someone who brings together two parties who are opposed to each other. A mediator therefore has to identify with each of the parties. Because he is God, Christ identifies with God the Father. Because he is man, Christ identifies with us. Because he did not sin, he did not have to atone for his own sin. Instead, Christ could take our sin onto himself, pay the price for our sin that we should have paid, and also impute to us his righteousness so that we can stand before God (**Isa 53:5-6, 10-11; Rom 10:4; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 2:17-18; 1 Pet 2:4; 3:18**). He alone can thereby reconcile us to God (**Col 1:19-20**).

No one else who has ever lived—neither Muhammad, nor Buddha, nor anyone else—ever claimed to redeem people from their sins. And no one else who has ever lived was *qualified* to redeem people from their sins even if he wanted to do so, because: (1) no one else who has ever lived was both God and man like Christ is; and (2) everyone else who has ever lived has had his or her own sinful nature and actual sins to deal with (**Acts 4:12; Rom 3:9-18**). Consequently, Christianity alone recognizes that salvation is not, *and cannot be*, based on what we do, but is, *and can only be*, based solely on what Christ has done for us. Salvation cannot be earned by us but is a gift given to us by the grace of God through Christ (**Rom 5:18-21; 6:23; Eph 1:7; 2:4-5, 8-9**). Only in Christ can we have confidence to approach God, because Christ is our advocate who intercedes for us with the Father (**Rom 8:34; Heb 4:16; 7:25; 1 John 2:1**). Therefore, “He, as no other human being in history, is to be listened to, revered, and even worshipped. . . . To treat Jesus as a mere man (or even a god [in the polytheistic sense]) under such circumstances would be blasphemy. To fail to adjust one’s life to His teaching would be to miss life itself.” (McDowell and Larson 1983: 14-15)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The full bibliographic references to the citations in the text are set forth in the bibliography of *Christianity and Islam: The Essentials* which is on the ECLEA website at <http://www.eclea.net/courses.html#islam>.

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