

# السَّلَامُ عَلَى عَيْسَى نَبِيِّ اللَّهِ

PROPHET 'ĪSĀ [A.S]

نبي الله (ع) عيسى

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 5

## Lesson 1: 'Īsā in the Qur'an, Muḥammad in the Injīl

### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Know some of the arguments that Christian evangelists make by referring to the Holy Qur'an, and how to rebut these arguments
- Discuss the fact that the Bible prophesied the coming of Prophet Muḥammad
- Understand in depth the arguments against the Christian doctrine of Trinity
- Understand in depth the arguments against the Christian doctrine of Crucifixion and salvation

In past years, we have discussed the life of Prophet Jesus (as) and his mother Mary (as). We have also discussed some of the issues related to main Christian doctrines. In these lessons, we will discuss some of the arguments posed by Christian evangelists, before discussing the main Christian doctrines, and analysing them in more depth.

### CHRISTIAN ARGUMENTS REFERENCING THE QUR'AN

Christian evangelists sometimes refer to Qur'anic passages to try to prove some of their theological points. This lesson will explore these arguments and rebut them.

#### 1. God's Word Never Changes

Allegation: The Quran claims that no one can alter the word of God, so why do Muslims claim that the Bible has been altered? “[This is] the established way of Allah which has occurred before. And never will you find in the way of Allah any change.” (Quran 48:23)

Response: This particular verse has been intentionally quoted out of context, for known reasons. As soon as we read it in its context we can clearly see the meaning behind it. Allah is promising the “Allies of Allah” good news in this life and paradise in the Hereafter and his words or ‘Promises’ will never change. It doesn't mean that Allah is promising that no one will be able to change the words of the previous Holy Books (Taurāh, & Injīl).

The “words of Allah” as it is used in the Quran, does not refer to the previous holy books every time.

The expression the “words of Allah” has a number of meanings in the Qur’an, including:

- Promise
- Command
- Act of God, especially the act of Creation
- Signs of God

Below are some examples of different usages of this expression:

“When Abraham was tried by his Lord with words (commands) and he fulfilled them...” (2:124)

“Then Adam received from his Lord [some] words, and He accepted his repentance...” (2:37)

## 2. The Quran as a Guardian

Allegation: The Qur’an not only claims to confirm the previous scriptures but also claims the responsibility of being “a guardian” over them.

“And We have revealed to you the Book with the truth, verifying what is before it of the Book and a guardian over it” (5:48)

Muslim interpreters of the Qur’an say that “a guardian over it” means “The Qur’an is the protector of all the sacred books to preserve them from any kind of change”.

In the Qur’an there is no suggestion of alteration or corruption of the Biblical text by use of the word “taḥrīf”. The word “taḥrīf” is used to accuse the Jews (but not Christians) of concealing the truth, but it in no way implies that the text had been corrupted.

How can the Taurāh and the Injīl be distorted, and yet the Qur’an remains a guardian over them? If this is the case, then the Qur’an itself is also open to the accusation of corruption and can be charged with failing in its role as a guardian.

Response: The Qur’an states that it is a guardian over the previous scriptures, for the following reasons:

- The Qur’an has not been altered by humans, as God has promised to preserve his words for the future generations. In saying that, the previous holy books which were revealed to prophets Moses and Jesus (as) were lost or destroyed.

Then, people started re-writing them in their own styles, according to their understating and to suit their desires.

- God didn’t promise to preserve the previous holy books, even though that they are both his words “originally”, because they were meant to be temporary. They were sent for a particular era. God has only promised to guard his Final Testament for ever to make sure every one hears His words, so that no one will be excused on Judgment Day. The Qur’an is an everlasting miracle, not dependent on any period of time or the presence of any particular person.

## 3. Jesus is introduced as a ‘soul from God’

Allegation: The Qur’an describes Jesus as the soul of God’ in the following passage. Does this not indicate the divinity of Jesus?

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ ۚ إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ أَلْقَاهَا إِلَى مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِنْهُ ۗ فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۗ وَلَا تَقُولُوا ثَلَاثَةً ۗ انْتَهُوا خَيْرًا لَكُمْ ۚ إِنَّمَا اللَّهُ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ ۗ سُبْحَانَهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ وَلَدٌ ۗ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا { 171 }

“O people of the Scripture, Do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of Allah aught but the truth. The Messiah Isā (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah and His Word which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a spirit (Rūḥ) from Him; so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not: "Three (trinity)!" Cease! (it is) better for you. For Allah is (the only) One God, Glory be to Him (Far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is All-Sufficient as a Disposer of affairs.”

Response: the description of Jesus as a ‘soul from Him’ in the above āyah refers to the fact that Jesus (as) was created by God. God created the soul of Jesus (as) just liked he created the soul of any other living being. Therefore, it is correct and natural to refer to any living creature as a ‘soul from God’. Why is this specifically mentioned in the Qur’an in relation to Jesus (as) and not others? The reason is that Jesus (as) was born in a miraculous manner, and is a more obvious signs of God’s power of creation. This āyah has no reference to the

divinity of Jesus and this expression of 'soul from God' is not indicating divinity to Jesus in any way. The remaining parts of this passage, which clearly denounce Trinity and the claims of Christians make this obvious.

#### 4. Jesus is introduced as the 'Word of God'

Allegation: in the above passage (4:171), the Qur'an introduces Jesus as the Word of God- this is line with the Biblical teachings about Jesus being the Word of God (logos), and this is an indication of the divinity of Jesus, because the Word of God must exist with God always, and thus the Word of God (here claimed to be Jesus) must be co-eternal with God.

Response: the use of the expression 'His Word' in this āyah does not indicate the divinity of Jesus. As explained earlier, the expression 'word' when related to God can have a number of different meanings. The meaning indicated here is that Jesus was a creation of God, and the creations of God are said to be His 'words' in the Holy Qur'an. This is confirmed by another Qur'anic ayah in which God says:

“Verily, His Command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says to it, "Be!" and it is!” (36:82)

So the āyah quoted above is merely confirming the status of Jesus as a creature of God. The reason for the special mention for Jesus (as) again is that he was born miraculously, and because there were false claims about his being divine. Thus the Qur'an was to confirm Jesus as a creature of God through the use of this expression, while at the same time giving him the honour he deserves as a great Messenger of Allah.

## JESUS (AS) PROPHESED THE COMING OF MUHĀMMAD (SAW)

Now that we have refuted some of the common arguments Christian evangelists make by referring to the Qur'an, it is important to refer to the Bible in order to see how it confirms the Prophethood of Muḥammad (saw).

The Bible tells us that Jesus promised to send another prophet, “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another **Comforter**, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16).

That comforter has been described as the spirit of truth in the same book of John. “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the **Spirit of truth**, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from

me that he will receive what he will make known to you.” (John 16:12-14)

Notice the pronouns used in the verse (He/His). Ten masculine pronouns are used in one verse; no other verse in the Bible has so many masculine pronouns. This tells us that the 'Spirit of Truth' or the 'Comforter' is a human male, and not a ghost. This is certainly a unique verse for a unique personality, which is that of Muḥammad (saw).

The term used here is **Comforter**. This is an English translation of the Greek word “Periklyots” used in the ancient manuscripts. It is amazing that this word really means: “the praiseworthy”. As you know, this is the meaning of the name Aḥmad or Muḥammad. Similarly, **the Spirit of Truth**. Is referring to the characteristics of Prophet Muḥammad, who was known as the Trustworthy and Truthful even before his mission began.

The distortion that has occurred in the Bible has made this point difficult to prove. However, if we analyse further, we can see that it is pointing to no one else other than Muḥammad (saw). We can make the following points in relation to this:

- John uses the words 'prophet' and 'spirit' synonymously in the following passage, further supporting the claim that the 'spirit of truth' we saw in (John 16:12-14) is referring to a prophet: “Dear friends, do not believe every **spirit**, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are **from God**, because many false **prophets** have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1).

In another part, John declares that the spirit should be tested, if it declares Jesus as the “Messiah” or “Christ” then it is a spirit from God. The word “Messiah” literally means the one who is anointed, as this was the traditional one of indicating a holy position for someone in the past. The Greek equivalent for this term is “Christos”, and Christ is derived from this. The Arabic equivalent for all these terms is 'al-Masīḥ'. Now, Prophet Muḥammad clearly introduces Jesus as the Messiah through the Holy Qur'an, and therefore he passes the test and must be the Spirit of Truth who we are seeking:

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ {45}

“(Remember) when the angels said: "O Maryam (Mary)! Verily, Allah gives you the glad tidings of a Word from Him, his name will be al-Masīḥ (the Messiah), Jesus the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and in the

Hereafter, and will be one of those who are near to Allah."

Furthermore, Jesus made it a condition that he has to go, in order for that 'spirit of Truth' or comforter to come. Jesus has been quoted to have said the following: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, **the Helper** will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7).

According to the bible, the Holy Ghost was there all the time helping Jesus to establish his ministry, and assisting his disciples to preach and heal. Thus the above description cannot apply to the Holy Ghost, because it was already there with Jesus.

This leaves us with clear evidence that Jesus (as) was referring to Prophet Muḥammad and prophesying his advent as the last Messenger of God.

## Review Questions

Do some research into the Qur'anic use of the expression 'word of God'. How many different meanings for this can you find? What is the significance of each meaning? Which of these applies to the use of this term in relation to Jesus (as)?

## Lesson 2: Trinity

The doctrine of Trinity is the central doctrine in Christian theology. It is the belief in a Triune Godhead, that God is 'three in one'. The trinity consists of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It also includes the belief that God became incarnate in Jesus and that Jesus (the Son) is of the same substance as the Father.

### Historical development of the doctrine and how it was influenced by external sources

The doctrine of Trinity cannot be understood completely without an appreciation of the historical development of the doctrine of Trinity. Firstly, we must note it is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible itself. In the period immediately following the life of Jesus Christ on earth, there were many questions about his identity, his status and the claim of incarnation. The more the Church claimed that Jesus was God incarnate, the more need there was to explain the relationship of Jesus Christ to God. The roots of the doctrine of Trinity lie here.

It took until the middle of the fourth century for there to be any sort of consensus on this issue. Tertullian introduced the

terminology of Trinity in the last second or early third century, but it was after this that the Arian controversy came about, forcing the Church to formalise its belief about the significance of Jesus. Arius (c.250-c.336) was a priest in one of the major churches in Alexandria. He taught that the Father and the Son do not have the same essence, that the Son is a created being, and that there was a time when the Son did not exist. Thus Arius taught that Jesus was 'the first among creatures', but not divine in any meaningful way.

Athanasius (c. 297-c. 373) was another Alexandrian priest who strongly opposed Arius' teachings, and claimed Jesus to be divine. This controversy divided the Church, and it had to be settled. The Emperor Constantine the Great convened a council of bishops in order to come to an answer to settle this controversy, an answer which would then become official Church doctrine. The Council voted in favour of the view of Athanasius, and the doctrine that the Son and the Father were of the same substance became official Church teaching

It is important to note that most bishops were not in agreement with either Athanasius or Arius. However, Athanasius managed to exert his influence over many of the delegates, and so all but two signed his Creed. Arius, and two others, refused to do, and were later excommunicated.

## INTERNAL EVIDENCE FROM THE BIBLE ITSELF THAT CONTRADICTS THE DIVINITY OF JESUS

There are a number of Biblical passages that clearly contradict the doctrine of Trinity. Some of them are listed below:

- These passages indicate God cannot be seen or heard, so can Jesus (who was seen and heard) be God?

"And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen," (John 5:37).

"No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18)

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says: "And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation." (Colossians 1:15-21)

- Jesus is related to have prayed in the following passage, if he is God, then to whom does he pray?

"And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray." (Matthew 14:23)

- Here, Jesus is described clearly as a prophet, not as the son of God;

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." (Matthew 21:10-11)

"..... Then Jesus told them, "A prophet is honoured everywhere except in his own hometown..." (Matthew 13:57)

"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people." (Luke 24:19)

"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3)

- Here, he is described as someone needing God's approval and being dependent on God:

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him." (Acts 2:22)

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." (John 6:38)

- The following passages clearly indicate there is only One God, which is the main point we want to prove:

"You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides him there is no other." (Deuteronomy 4:35)

"I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you," (Isaiah 45:5)

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment of all, he quoted this verse:

"Hear, oh Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

We can see from the above passages that the Bible in many places indicates that God is one. However, Christians argue that God is one but in a plurality. They argue that the word "one" or in Hebrew (*Ehad*) is not one alone but one as a compound unity. And they will quote this passage: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) or (Ephesians 5:31). Yet in fact, the word "Ehad" in Hebrew could mean one as alone and one as a compound unity, depending on its context. For example: "one person who has no other, either son or brother" (Ecclesiastes 4:8)

Christians may also quote this passage in the first book of the bible, and say this shows that god is more than one. "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." (Genesis 1:26). However, that is the 'magnetic we', used to indicate status and respect, not an actual plurality.

If we look in the Bible, we can see other verses that clearly used the word one or 'Ehad' to indicate a singular one, not a compound unity. Some examples follow:

- "Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him." (Isaiah 51:2)
- "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me" (Deuteronomy 32:39)
- The first commandment that Moses taught the Israelites says: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3).

Christians may also refer to the following passage to try to prove the divinity of Jesus: "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30)

This may seem to indicate some sort of unity between God and Jesus, but when we look at the quote in context, we see that it is not claiming divinity for Jesus: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. **I and the Father are one.**”

The passage is indicating that the Father and Jesus are one in seeing that if the person accepts faith, they shall remain in faith. It is referring to a *unity of purpose*, not a unity of substance. It is this same unity of purpose which is referred to in the following passage: “...Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” (John 17:11)

Jesus here is using the same word “one” for himself and for his disciples. Does that mean that his disciples are one in substance with him and with God? Of course not! He means his disciples should unify in one and same purpose.

So we can see that there is very little evidence within the Bible for the belief in Trinity, and in fact there is plenty of evidence for a belief in a true Unity of God.

## TRINITY CONTRADICTS LOGIC

If we read the first passage of the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1), we see it contains a clear logical contradiction. How can the Word be ‘with God’ (i.e. separate to God) and yet be God at the same time? In fact, this particular quote, was plagiarised by the writer of “The Gospel According to John”, who borrowed it from a Greek philosopher named Philo.

If we read verse 14 from the same chapter it says: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14), we can clearly see that this verse implies that god has changed from the unlimited spiritual nature into humanly flesh nature. This fact of God changing his

nature is rejected by God, in his own words according to the Bible itself: “I am the LORD, and I do not change.” (Malachi 3:6). If God can change, it means he can be updated, or created into a different form or new shape that he wasn’t like before, which implies that he needs that form or space to exist, and God cannot be dependent on anything. This shows that God the Son is not co-equal to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, as he had to undergo change, and they (the Father and presumably the Holy Spirit) did not.

## GOD’S OMNIPOTENCE

Christians typically ask, If God is omnipotent, (All Powerful) shouldn't he be able to take on a human form and dwell among humans and behave like humans? If not, how can such a being be called all-powerful?

From a logical point of view, the question itself is illogical and an example of fallacy. It is similar to the question: "Can God create a rock so heavy that He can't lift it Himself". The problem is it contains a self-contradiction, mainly, that God is all-powerful and not-all-powerful at the same time. The question works grammatically but not intellectually.

When we say God is omnipotent, we mean He has power over all things which have an intellectual existence. However, possibilities like the above do not have a real intellectual existence, we cannot even imagine them! Therefore, they fall into the realm of non-existence and thus have nothing to do with God’s Omnipotence.

## A CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIANS

We found nowhere in the bible where Jesus says: “I am God” or where Jesus says: “Worship Me”. Can Christians present real evidence from their own book that Jesus is divine or should be worshipped?

The most a Christian may claim is by referring to the following passage: “For there are three that bear record

## Lesson 3: Crucifixion

in heaven, the Father, the Word [Jesus], and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” (I John 5: 7) KJV.

Note that this verse is only found in the King James Version. Almost all modern versions of the bibles do not include that particular verse anymore! It was removed and declared a fabrication. Even though this verse played such an important role in the faith and the prayers of Christians, it is no longer considered part of the Bible. Instead, the following versions of the verse are now found in different versions of the Bible:

- “For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.” (I John 5: 7) NIV.
- “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.” (I John 5: 7) ESV.

### CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we have analysed the doctrine of Trinity. We have come to a number of conclusions:

- ‘Trinity’ is not mentioned in the Bible itself. It developed over four centuries after the ascension of Jesus (as)
- Trinity is illogical
- There is no sound evidence for the doctrine of Trinity in the Bible
- There is plenty of evidence contradicting the doctrine of Trinity within the Bible

### Review Questions

Research some of the ‘models’ for visualising the Trinity presented by Christian theologians over time (e.g. the example of triangle having three sides but being one triangle). What is the problem with all of these models?

Another of the main Christian doctrines is that of Crucifixion and salvation. Christians believe that Jesus was captured by the Jews of his time, nailed to the cross and tortured, until he died. They believe he was resurrected three days later and came back to Earth as a final miracle.

The claimed event of crucifixion is central to Christian theology. They believe that all humans are born sinful, because of the ‘original sin’ of Adam. They believe the only way for our sins to be expiated is for god himself to suffer for them, and they see the crucifixion of Jesus as god suffering in for us to be freed from sin and achieve salvation. We read in Paul’s First letter to the Corinthians, “And if Christ is not risen from the dead, then our preaching is vain, and your faith is also in vain. More than that, and we are then found to be false witnesses of God ...” (1 Corinthians 15:14-15)

### THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION IS ILLOGICAL

The doctrine of salvation as presented in Christianity is illogical. It is against God’s justice that all humans should suffer and be born with an inclination towards sin, simply because one human, Adam, made a mistake. The justice of god rejects the idea that he can punish innocent people for the sins of the others, as we can see it clearly in the book of Ezekiel in the Old Testament. “The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.” (Ezekiel 18:20). We also see this reference to the justice of God in the following passage: “I the Lord search the heart, and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.” (Jeremiah 17:10).

The Holy Qur’an further confirms this idea:

“And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another” (35:18)

So we see that this doctrine goes against justice, and this ethical argument is supported by Biblical evidence.

### BIBLICAL PASSAGES CONTRADICTING THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

We also find numerous passages in the Bible that contradict that dogma of the inheritance of the Original Sin, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.

- Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist (Prophet Yaḥyā) as we are told in (Matthew 3:13-17). This would imply that that Jesus was regarded as a sinner, who has inherited the original sin. How can he then be the vehicle for salvation?
- The following passage indicates that God does not want sacrifice in exchange for atonement of sins. Yet Christians claim that the sacrifice of Jesus was necessary for the atonement of sin.  
“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.” (Hosea 6:6)
- If we read (Luke 23:26-34) we can clearly see that the person who was crucified could actually be Simon of Cyrene, and certainly not Jesus.

## CONTRADICTIONS WITHIN THE BIBLICAL NARRATIONS OF THE STORY

The story of crucifixion has many discrepancies and contradictions, if we compare the accounts across the Four Gospels.

- What day did Jesus die? That is a very simple question! We are told in both Mark and John. In Mark, we are told that it is the day after the Passover meal was eaten in Jerusalem. (Mark 14:12-16). And In John, we are told that it is the day before the Passover meal was eaten, on the day of preparation for the Passover. (John 19:14). And many more. Conclusion: these accounts are full of discrepancies and they are not reliable.
- What were Jesus’ last words? Mark and Matthew state they were: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” John states that they were: “It is finished”, while Luke states they were: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

There are many other contradictions within the Biblical narrations of this story, indicating that this story may not have a true origin.

## BIBLICAL VERSES THAT REJECT THE CRUCIFIXION

Here, we would like to explore one important point in greater detail: did the historical event claimed by Christians- that Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, was crucified by the soldiers of Pontius Pilate- really occur? The intention of this argument is not to prove that a crucifixion did not take place but rather that it was not Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. The early Christians had doubt about this. The Holy Qur’an rejects that Jesus was ever crucified and killed. This rejection is very much justified, because of the reasons below:

- We have no first-hand accounts of the event. The only sources we have are the accounts of Josephus, a Jewish historian, and Tacitus, a Roman historian, both of whom were not present at the time of the crucifixion.
- The Jewish Talmud tells us that Jesus was stoned to death. This contradicts the Biblical account (of course neither account is true)
- Early Christian sources: there are significant early sources that all suggests that were Christian groups that did not believe in the crucifixion and rejected that concept, or at least questions how the crucifixion took place:
  - **The Writings of the Early Church Fathers.** Such as have Ignasous , Polycarp, Justin, Uranaiuos, Tulian and Hepolaias. These fathers were attacking the groups who did believe in Crucifixion, indicating there were such groups. Perhaps most known among them was a group in Egypt called the Missillidions, who believed it was a person by the name of Simon of Cyrene who was in fact crucified.
  - **The New Testament Apocryphal Books.** Such as books of Jeeuo which go back to the third century in Egypt, says that Jesus was not crucified. The Apocrypha of Peter and the Acts of John are early books that were canonised but which state that Jesus was not crucified.
  - **The New Testament itself.** When Jesus was arrested and brought back to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, we are told in Matthew that Pilate really did not want to do anything to Jesus. He asked the crowd to choose between freeing Jesus or freeing another prisoner, and that he would allow this as a gesture of mercy: “so when the crowd gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you, **Jesus Barabbas** or Jesus, who is called the Messiah” (Matthew: 27:16, NIV). The people chose Barabbas and then Jesus was crucified. However in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible said that the two persons were “Jesus the Barabbas” and the other was “Jesus the Messiah” This is further clarified in the following passage: “At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was **Jesus Barabbas.**” (Matthew 27:16) NIV.

So who was set free? Jesus of Nazareth or another man named Jesus?

It seems that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was set free. This is because the name “Barabbas” literally means ‘son of the Father’. Of course, this would be referring to Jesus of Nazareth, and so if it is Barabbas who was set free, then it is Jesus of Nazareth who was set free, and another man, also named Jesus, who was instead crucified.

This may explain why the Coptic Christian Church canonized Pilate as a saint! Do you justify sainthood for the man who killed Jesus? Or for the man who saved him and set him free?

There is another issue to consider here. There is a variant in several Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew. The traditional text of Matthew 27:16-17 reads as follows in the New American Standard Bible (NASB): "At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when they the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" Several manuscripts, however, name the criminal "Jesus Barabbas" and have Pilate ask:

"Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah? "(v. 17). Many textual scholars believe the double name "Jesus Barabbas" was the original reading. They suggest that "Jesus" was omitted from several Greek manuscripts of Matthew out of reverence.

This shows us that the criminal being held along with Jesus of Nazareth was also named Jesus (Barabbas), and that he may have been the one actually crucified, but that this was later historically confused with Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah.

It also seems from some account that Jesus Barabbas was claiming to be the king of the Jews, and we see in many places in the Bible that the person who was crucified was in fact the person who was claiming to be the king of the Jews. Thus it is likely that the other Jesus (The Criminal), and not Jesus of Nazareth (Barabbas) or the Messiah, who was in fact crucified.

## THE JUSTICE AND MERCY OF GOD

Christian theologians object to the Islamic theological belief that we need both Faith and Good Works together to be saved. The Qur'an states:

" والذين آمنوا وعملوا الصالحات سندخلهم جنات تجري  
من تحتها الأنهار خالدين فيها أبدا "

"But those who believe and do righteous deeds - We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow..."

(4:57)

Protestant Christians believe in "justification by faith alone", while Catholics place a little more emphasis on actions. Yet all Christians would not claim that a person who believes in Jesus is free to commit sins and crimes and yet still expect to go to heaven. So at the end of the day, they also acknowledge that both faith and good works are needed.

The other objection they have is this: how can a sin committed against God be expiated by the repentance of a human? They claim that a sin against God can only be expiated by the action of God. The simple answer is that it

God's will that faith and certain acts of repentance cancel out certain sins committed against God. Just as Christians claim (without basis) that Jesus' death was willed by God to a vehicle for salvation, why can it not be God's will that certain good works atone for certain sins? Surely, this is more just than believing that the sacrifice and pain of one person wipes away the sins of other, independent people.

## Review Questions

Research the Qur'anic concept of justice and mercy of God. How can we reconcile these two concepts?