

# Engaging with Islam

## IS JESUS GOD? - SESSION 10

### PART 1: Preparation

God the Son has come to us by taking to himself a human body. This is called the *incarnation*. Jesus is fully God and fully man. The Qur'an explicitly teaches Muslims to reject this idea; it says Jesus was only a man. Therefore, this topic may come up when talking with a Muslim. The incarnation is a beautiful subject and it is important that Christians learn deeply about Jesus and are able to talk about him.

#### God and Logic - Talking about the Divinity of Jesus

A common mistake Christians make when talking to Muslims about the divinity of Jesus is to start with Jesus. We *assume* that Christians and Muslims agree about God, creation, and humanity, and only differ when it comes to Jesus, and so we argue about him (diagram 1).

However, Christians and Muslims actually have a completely different understanding of God, creation, and humanity; and it is these differences that lead to our different understandings of Jesus, and why the incarnation is illogical to a Muslim (diagram 2).

If we want to explain the divinity of Jesus to a Muslim we need to start by talking about the nature of God, creation, and humanity, then we can move to the person of Jesus. We need to take steps towards the incarnation and lay a foundation for it. If we don't we will have no common foundation for understanding it.

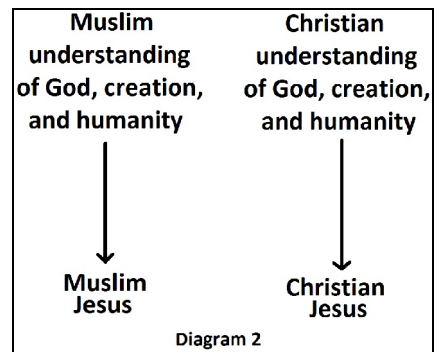
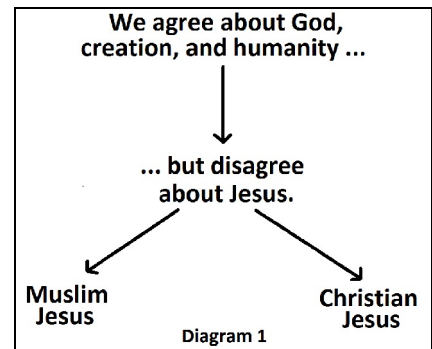
What follows is a summary of the booklet on this subject. It is recommended that you read the booklet, *Is Jesus God?*

[http://engagingwithislam.org/leaflets/Is\\_Jesus\\_God.pdf](http://engagingwithislam.org/leaflets/Is_Jesus_God.pdf)

#### Step 1: God and Creation

One reason that Muslims give for rejecting the incarnation is that they say it implies God changed. God changed his *nature* from being uncreated to being created, and since God cannot change the incarnation is impossible.

However this misunderstands the incarnation. Christians are not saying that God changed his uncreated nature. We are saying that Jesus had two natures: a divine uncreated nature and a created human nature, and that these two natures were united in the person of the divine Son. Therefore, the divine uncreated Son did not change but added to himself a created human nature. The real question that Muslims and Christians need to discuss is can God connect himself to a created nature?



The answer to this is yes because *every time* God interacts with creation a divine and created nature are united in some way. Every time God interacts with creation two natures are connected. Consider the following: When God made creation or sustains it there is some type of union between a divine and created nature. If there is no connection or union then God is not doing it! That is, the doctrine of creation teaches that God can connect with creation, that an uncreated nature and a created nature can connect. Thus the incarnation is a new and beautiful expression of how God interacts with creation.

### Step 2: God as he is in himself and God as he is towards us.

A Muslim may say that God is all powerful, all knowing, all present, and eternal; he is limitless and therefore cannot be limited to a man. But this does not understand an important aspect of how God relates to us. There is a difference between God as he is in his transcendence, or in himself, and God as he is towards us. Yes, he is all powerful but he does not *express* all his power towards us. He is all knowing but does not make all his knowledge known to us. He is all present yet access to his personal presence is expressed in a local way by dwelling with his people. He is eternal yet reveals himself to us in time. He is the just judge yet we do not see all his justice expressed in the world now but wait for Judgement Day. He is free to act as he wants yet makes covenants to limit himself to a particular course of faithful action. That is, *every time* God interacts with creation he limits himself.

God expresses himself in a true but limited way to his creation. He *accommodates* himself to his creation so that his creation may know him. This does not at all take away from God's majesty or limit who he is in himself; it just acknowledges the way God expresses himself to us. God's accommodation to us is an important foundation for understanding how Jesus is God: God has accommodated himself to us in the man Jesus. This is an important step to discuss with Muslims.

### Step 3: God dwells with his people.

God's plan has always been to personally dwell with his people and for them to know him. Jesus is the fulfilment of this plan.

While God's nature transcends the created order, this transcendence does not mean he is isolated and unknowable to his creation. God created us to dwell and fellowship with him, and he has always created a means of communicating his *person* and *presence* to us. We see this in Eden (Gen. 3:8), the temple (Ex. 25:8), and the word of God. In all of these, God's person and presence are communicated by his Spirit. This is another foundation for how we understand the incarnation: God communicates his personal presence to us through the man Jesus. You need to ask Muslims if God can reveal his presence to us?

### Step 4: The Image of God

The doctrine of the image of God teaches that God has made a connection between humanity and himself: Humans represent God's rule in creation (Gen. 1:26), are to display his character (Lev. 19:2), and are to share in his glory (Gen. 2:9, 3:22, Ps. 8, 82). This is another important foundation for understanding the incarnation, because when God comes to us as a man he is using a human body that he himself created with the purpose of representing him, displaying his character, and sharing in his glory.

However, in the Qur'an, and popular Islamic belief<sup>1</sup>, there is no image of God; no connection between God and humanity, and no plan for humanity to share in God's glory<sup>2</sup>. This means Christians and Muslims have a completely different understanding of what it means to be human.

#### Steps 1-4: Summary

If we want to help Muslims understand how Jesus is fully God and fully man we first need to agree about what it means to be God and what it means to be man. If we cannot agree about these we are unlikely to agree about Jesus. Once we have come to some sort of agreement on these subjects we can then approach the New Testament and discuss Jesus.

#### Step 5: The Humanity and Divinity of Jesus

The Gospels demonstrate the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus. We see his full humanity in that he was born, grew, learned, ate, prayed, suffered, was tempted (yet do not sin), died, and rose from the dead.

We see the full divinity of Jesus in that he is:

- Preexistent, John 1:1.
- The Creator John 1:1-3.
- The fulfilment of the coming of God in Isaiah 40:2-3, Malachi 3:1 > Mark 1:1-3.
- He does what only God can do in the way God does it.
  - Forgave people their sin, Mark 2:5-7.
  - His presence led to a conviction of sin, Luke 5:8.
  - He calmed the storm, Psalm 107:23-30 > Mark 4:35.
  - Walked on water, Job 9:8 > Mark 6:45ff.
  - Commanded spirits, 1 Kings 22 > Mark 5:7-8.
  - Chooses who is saved, Matthew 11:27.
- He is the husband to God's people, Isaiah 54:5, Jeremiah 3:14; Ezekiel 16:32, Hosea 1-2 (2:19-20) > Mark 2:19, John 3:29.
- And finally Jesus says it: Matthew 26:63-66, Mark 12:35ff, John 5:16-23, 8:58, 10:29-39, 14:8-9, Isaiah 44:6 > Revelation 1:17, 22:13.

Show these verses to your Muslim friend.

Q1. What would you say to a Muslim who said: Numbers 23:19 says "God is not a man ..." Therefore the Bible says Jesus cannot be God.

#### Step 6: Jesus in the Qur'an

You may not want to take this step, but it is an option, and good to know. The Qur'an is not consistent in its portrayal of Jesus. On many occasions it states that Jesus is not God, yet it has him

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<sup>1</sup>There is a Sunni hadith (*Sahih Muslim*: bk. 40, no. 6809) about Adam being made in Allah's image 30 meters tall, but this hadith seems to have little theological impact for popular Islam.

<sup>2</sup>It could be argued that Muhammad shares in Allah's glory but this will not be pursued at the moment.

do things that uniquely define God. For example God is the only creator. This is a unique God defining attribute. Yet in the Qur'an we see that Jesus has this attribute and expresses it in exactly the same way as God: God creates Adam from clay and breathes into him the breath of life.

When your Lord said to the angels, "I shall create mankind from clay. When I have formed him and breathed some of my Spirit into him ... I created (him) with my own hands." (Q. 38:71-75, Jones)

And in exactly the same way Jesus creates:

I (Jesus) have come to you with a sign from your Lord. I will create for you out of clay the likeness of a bird; then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird, by the permission of God. (Q. 3:49, Arberry)

This story of Jesus creating birds comes from an early Christian fable about the childhood of Jesus. Muhammad has changed the original story by adding that Jesus only did this by God's permission; however, this does not remove Jesus' divinity from the story, because creating is a unique attribute that defines God. If Jesus is not God, and God could give this permission to anyone, then God is not unique and Islam becomes pantheism. Jesus creating in exactly the same way as God is a possible talking point with Muslims.

Conclusion

The Qur'an teaches Muslims to reject our biggest and most beautiful doctrines. Learning how to explain and defend these doctrines requires time and effort, but it is worth it because it makes us learn our own faith better. If a Muslim asks you to explain the incarnation I recommend you start by reading together the booklet, *Is Jesus God?* [http://engagingwithislam.org/leaflets/Is\\_Jesus\\_God.pdf](http://engagingwithislam.org/leaflets/Is_Jesus_God.pdf)



**PART 2: Video Presentation** (15 minutes) <https://youtu.be/z8b6UpxbXSU>

Who is Jesus?

The Incarnation and Logic

- Image
- God dwells with his people.
- God is free and able to do as he wills.

The Popular Understanding of God in Islam



BIBLE				QUR'AN
Old Testament		New Testament		Muhammad
Torah	Prophets	Psalms	Gospel	
<----- c. 1500 years ----->				23 years
Humanity is created in the image of God.				No
The Fatherhood & Son of God				No
God dwells with his people.				No
Humanity is corrupted by sin.				No
Priesthood & Sacrifice of Atonement for Sin				No
Covenants of Noah, Abraham, Moses, & David				No
One Story of Redemption				No

## The Academic Understanding of God in Islam.

- Image, *Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 8, bk 74, no. 246.
- Muhammad shares in the attributes of God (Q. 9:128).
- God in Creation: Moses (Q. 4:164, 20:9-ff, 27:7-10, 28:28ff), Judgement Day (Q. 75:22-23).
- The Spirit of God appeared as a man, and agent of God (Q. 19:17).

Muslims believe the Qur'an is God's eternal, uncreated, divine Word and that it is part of creation.

### Did God change?

- The image of God means God can display himself through a man therefore no change.
- God dwelling with his people is God's plan therefore no change.
- Jesus has two natures: one divine and one created. The divine did not change but connected with a human nature to express his person to us.
- It is God accommodating himself to us.

### How can God die?

Where did Jesus say I am God worship me? (Exodus 3:14, Daniel 7:13-14, Psalm 82, 110)

“God is not a man” Numbers 23:19

## PART 3: Discussion

Q2. Do you have any comments about the video?

If a Muslim asks you to explain how Jesus is God read the booklet, *Is Jesus God*, with them. [http://engagingwithislam.org/leaflets/Is\\_Jesus\\_God.pdf](http://engagingwithislam.org/leaflets/Is_Jesus_God.pdf)



## Answers

Q1. Read the whole verse. It is talking about how God is not a man because he does not lie. It is not referring to the possibility of God coming to us as a man.

## PART 4: Activities

Have you done the following? Circle an answer.

- Smile at a Muslim. Greet the Muslims you know. Yes/No.

- Pray privately, and publicly at church, for the Islamic world and the Muslims you know, and for Christians who are suffering under Islam. Yes/No.
- Ask a Muslim if they know what books are in the Bible. Yes/No.
- Ask a Muslim if they believe in the Day of Judgement. If they do ask if they have done enough good deeds. Yes/No.
- Invite a Muslim to read Matthew and then meet with them and talk about it using the Matthew outline presented in session 7. Yes/No.
- Have you done your group activities? Yes/No.