

IS JESUS GOD & MAN?

An Explanation of the Divinity and Humanity
of Jesus for Christians and Muslims

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Engaging
with
Islam

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Is Jesus God & Man? - An explanation of the divinity and humanity of Jesus for Christians and Muslims

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Introduction

Who is Jesus? This is a question that Christians and Muslims often discuss and disagree about. For Christians, Jesus is both fully God and fully man in what is called the *incarnation*. The word incarnation is a Latin word that means, *in flesh*, and it refers to God coming to us, in flesh, as a man, to fulfill, perfect, and redeem our humanity, to bring glory to God and establish God's resurrection kingdom, and to save us. The doctrine of the incarnation states that Jesus has both a divine uncreated nature and a human created nature united in one person. For Muslims, Jesus is a great man, a prophet, the Messiah, but only a man. Therefore, we have two very different understandings of Jesus.

This booklet seeks to give a Christian defence for the belief that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. While it is possible to give a one sentence answer - *the creator God connects with his creation for a variety of reasons and the incarnation is the greatest of these* - the approach of this booklet will be to work through a series of concepts that provide the foundation for understanding how this belief makes logical sense and fits what the scriptures say. As we consider each of these foundations we will take steps towards the incarnation and address some assumptions and questions along the way.

If you are a Christian, and a Muslim asks you to explain how Jesus is God and man, you may like to read this booklet with them and discuss the ideas.

If you are a Muslim, I ask that you read this booklet and seek to understand what it is that Christians actually believe and why they believe it. It may be quite different to what you think or have been taught. You may even find we have some things in common.

Finally, when we consider the incarnation we are considering how and why the infinite and transcendent God interacts with his finite creation. This is an important subject and we must give it the proper respect and effort it is due. Ultimately we do not simply want answers but to grow in our love and knowledge of God, and to rejoice in what he has done for us.

Where do we start?

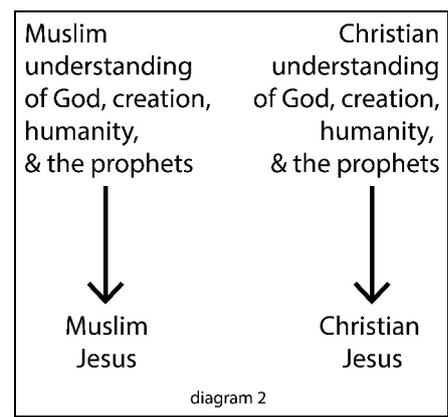
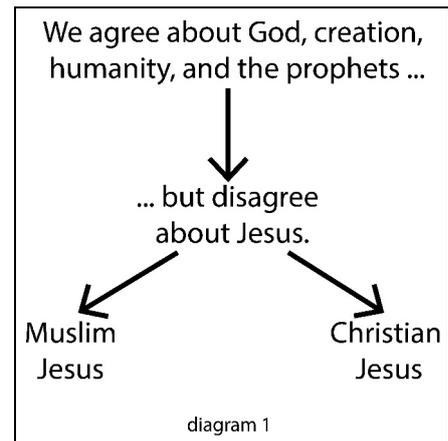
A common mistake Christians and Muslims make when talking about Jesus is that we *start* with Jesus. We assume that Christians and Muslims agree about God, creation, humanity, and the prophets before Jesus, and only differ when it comes to Jesus, and so we argue about him (diagram 1).

However, in practice, Christians and Muslims have a different understanding of these things, and it is because of these differences that we have a different understanding of Jesus. It is because of these differences that the incarnation seems reasonable to a Christian, but wrong and illogical to a Muslim (diagram 2).

This means if Christians and Muslims want to understand each other, and make progress in our discussions about Jesus, we first need to talk about our understanding of God, creation, humanity, and the prophets before Jesus. As we discuss these things, we will find what we have in common, and any significant differences we need to discuss. After this we can discuss Jesus. In this booklet we are going to do this by considering the following subjects:

- God and Creation
- God Accommodates Himself to Us
- God Comes to Dwell with His People
- Humanity Made in the Image of God
- The Prophets before Jesus

After considering these foundational subjects we will then turn to the testimony of the Gospel regarding Jesus. But before we do this I need to explain where Christians get their understanding of these things from. This is the subject of the next chapter entitled, *What is the Bible?*



What is the Bible?

What is the Bible? What is this book that Christians get their beliefs from, and in particular this belief about the incarnation?

The Bible is not one book but a collection of many books from different prophets, from different locations, in different languages, over about a 1500 year period. It contains the Law of Moses (Torah), the Psalms of David, the books of Solomon, the books of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Job, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and others. It has the Gospel of Jesus recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the writings of the apostles and prophets of Jesus.

THE BIBLE			
Law of Moses (Torah)	The Books of the Prophets	The Psalms	The Gospel
<----- c. 1500 years ----->			

Why do Christians have all these books in the Bible? The answer is simple: Christians accept all the prophets and make no distinction between them, therefore, they have all these books in the Bible so they can read them. What Christians believe about God comes from reading all these books of the prophets.

When God reveals himself to us it is not a matter of dumping data as fast as possible, rather, to reveal a person requires time, and because it requires time it is progressive. We see this in the Torah where God revealed more of himself to Moses than he did to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD [Yahweh] I did not make myself known to them." (Exodus 6:2-3)

Over a long period of time God has spoken through the prophets and progressively explained his name, his actions in history, provided us with concepts to understand him and ourselves, given us laws and ways to approach him, made promises for the future, promised to reveal more of himself to us,

and to bring our salvation. The Torah, Prophets, Psalms, and Gospel, are the word of God through which God has progressively revealed himself and unpacked his plans for us.

These books build on each other and are meant to be read together. Together they give us God's complete message. What Christians believe about God comes from reading all of the books of the prophets.

Islam is very different at this point because the Qur'an¹ only contains what Muhammad recited. Thus, what Muslims believe about God and the prophets comes from one man and not from reading all the books of the prophets. Muslims may say that Muhammad recited the word of God, but the point remains, Islam is still based on one man. Islam does not teach Muslims to read the books of the prophets but only listen to Muhammad.

THE QUR'AN
Muhammad
<----- 23 years ----->

This is an important fact we need to be clear about. The Christian understanding of Jesus does not come from *one* man but from the progressive revelation God has given through *all* the prophets. We will now consider our first subject: God and creation.

1. Islam is also based on the Hadith, but this too is based on one man, Muhammad.

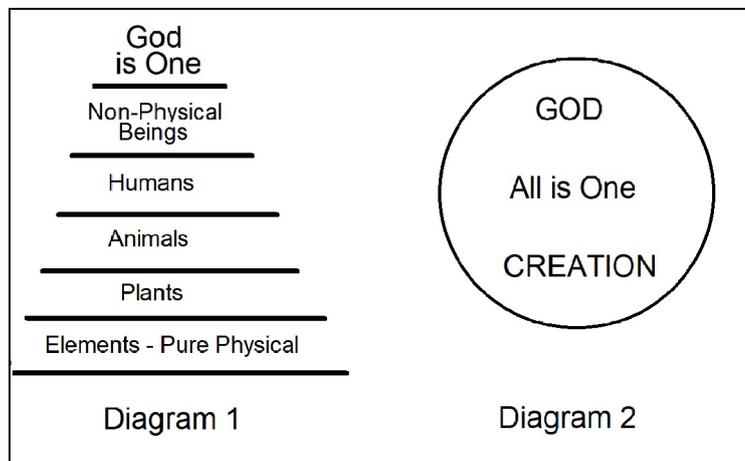
God and Creation

How does a transcendent God interact with creation? This is a question of cosmology. For many Christians and Muslims this may be a new subject to think about, but it is vital because we may have unhelpful assumptions in this area.

When Christians say Jesus is God they are claiming that God has connected personally with creation. The subject of how, or whether, God connects with creation is a subject that every religion or philosophy has to answer; and they answer it differently. Some say that since God is transcendent and separate from creation, unchanging, and perfect oneness, he therefore cannot connect with a changing diverse creation. In this case God needs a mediator to interact with creation so as to keep himself separate from it (diagram 1). The various Greek philosophies are in this category.² Other religions and philosophies go the other direction and say that God is creation, all is one; this is pantheism (diagram 2).

We need to think about this subject because what we assume here will affect our view of the incarnation. If we believe that God is transcendent and unchanging in such a way that he cannot connect with a changing diverse creation then the incarnation will be assumed

impossible. On the other hand, if we believe that God is creation then the incarnation is possible but not unique because everything is an incarnation. So what is it that Christians and Muslims believe?



Christians and Muslims believe in God and creation. We agree that God is transcendent, majestic, the creator, and separate from creation, that he is uncreated in nature and unchanging. We believe that creation is of a different nature to God; it is created, temporal, subject to change, and dependant. The question for both of us is how does God interacts with creation? Is it like diagram 1 or diagram 2, is it something different, what are our assumptions?

2. Search: The Chain/Ladder of Being and Classical Theism.

We must be clear about this if we want to understand each other when we talk about the incarnation. With this background in mind I now want to consider the Christian explanation of the incarnation and the common Muslim response.

Jesus is God

When Christians say that God came to us a man it is common for Muslims to think that Christians are saying that God changed; that God changed from being transcendent, uncreated, unchanging, and infinite, into a created, finite, changing, temporal being. The following quote shows this understanding.

[*At-Taftazani states:*] [Christians] claim that the divine being changed from His essence and manifested Himself in the body of Jesus. They therefore allowed change and dissociation from oneself in the essence of God. So the divine being in their view was subject to change.

(Muhammad Salih Farfur, *The Beneficial Message & The Definitive Proof in the Study of Theology*, (Trans: Wesam Charkawi) 2010, p. 95.)

And since God does not change, the incarnation is seen by Muslims as illogical, impossible, and a compromise of God's unchanging eternal nature.

However, Muslim leaders have misunderstood what Christians are saying. We are not saying that God changed from one nature to another, instead we are saying that Jesus has *two* natures: one divine and one human. He is fully God and fully man. The divine nature was not changed, but God *connected personally* with a human nature. In the person of Jesus there is a *union* of a divine and created nature.

Therefore, the question for Christians and Muslims is not: Can God change? The question is: Can God connect with creation the way Christians say? Can a transcendent, glorious, uncreated, infinite, and eternal God connect with a created, finite, and temporal creation? Is it reasonable to believe that a divine and created nature can be connected in the way Christians say they are in the person of Jesus? The answer to these questions is yes, because every time God interacts with creation, in any way, two natures connect, there is a union. Consider these examples:

The Act of Creating. The first place God interacts with creation is in creating it. Here we have the transcendent and uncreated God bringing creation into being from nothing by his word. That is, we have two different natures with a connection between them. If there is no connection then God is not responsible

for creation. Does this connection change or compromise God's nature? No. Does this connection make creation divine? No. Therefore, in the act of creating we see two natures connected and neither is compromised.

Sustaining Creation. Not only did God create all things but he also sustains the existence of all things. We continue to exist because God continues to sustain our existence, and will do so even into the resurrection which will be everlasting. Here we see God's divine nature permanently connected with a created nature. If there is no connection then God is not sustaining us. Does this connection change or compromise God's nature? No. Does this connection make creation divine? No. Therefore, in God's act of sustaining we see two natures permanently connected and neither is compromised.

Omnipresence or Immanence. God created all things, sustains all things, and is present throughout creation.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. (Psalm 139:7-8)

We created man, and We know what his soul whispers to him, for We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (Qur'an 50:16, Jones)

I [Allah] am near to answer the call of the caller when he calls Me. (Qur'an 2:186, Jones)

God is the all-present God. This again involves a divine and created nature being connected. If there is no connection then God is not present. Does this connection change or compromise God's nature? No. Does this connection make creation divine? No. Therefore, in God's act of being present we see two natures permanently connected and neither is compromised.

Scripture. God also reveals himself to creation through his word. This is what Christians and Muslims understand scripture to be - the word of God. This again involves a divine and created nature being connected. If there is no connection then there is no revelation of God to us. Does this connection change or compromise God's nature? No. Therefore, in God's act of revealing himself by his word we see two natures connected and neither is compromised.

The point of these examples is to show that *every time* God interacts with creation in *any way* a divine and created nature connect; there is a union of

two natures and neither nature is compromised. This connection is through the word of God.

If you are a Muslim, I want to ask you: Do you believe that God created all things? Do you believe God sustains the existence of all things? Do you believe God is present throughout creation? Do you believe God reveals himself to us through his word? If so, then you believe that a divine and created nature can be connected, and that when this happens neither nature is compromised or changed. In fact, if you say that God *cannot* connect with creation then you are denying that he is the creator, the sustainer, the all-present, and the revealer.

Yes, God is transcendent, glorious, and separate from creation, but this does not stop him from connecting with creation. Therefore, you cannot reject Jesus being God on the grounds that it is impossible for a divine and created nature to be in union. The incarnation is consistent with, and a beautiful new expression of, how God interacts with his creation.³

3. Early in the Church's history there were many discussions about the nature of Jesus and the incarnation. It may appear that these early Christians were arguing about *Jesus*, but much of their arguing was actually about *creation* and how a transcendent God interacts with it. People like the Docetists, Gnostics, and Arius had philosophical and cosmological views which saw God as so transcendent that he could not connect with physical creation *at all*. However, as we have seen, the Biblical view is that God can and does connect with his creation. It was these different understandings of God and creation that led to their different understandings of Jesus. This is why Christians and Muslims need to talk about God and creation first, and come to some agreement, before they talk about the possibility of God coming to us as a man.

God Accommodates Himself to Us

Several Muslims have said to me that Jesus cannot be God because God is all powerful, all knowing, all present, and eternal; God is limitless and infinite and therefore cannot be limited to a finite man. This argument sounds reasonable at first, but it fails to understand an important aspect of how God relates to us: There is a difference between God as he is in himself and God as he is *towards us*.

Yes, in himself God is all powerful, but he only expresses a limited amount of his power towards us. Consider creation. In creation we see a *true* display of God's *infinite* power but it is *limited* or *finite*. God could have made the universe double this size or half this size or not at all, and in all of these cases he is equally powerful in himself even though he has acted in a infinite way towards us.

We see this again when we consider other ways in which God relates to us. Yes, God is all knowing but he does not make all his knowledge known to us. He is eternal yet reveals himself to us in created 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 which limit himself to a particular course of faithful action. The point I am making here is that *every* time the infinite God interacts with finite creation in any way he limits himself, yet we still see who he truly is.

God *accommodates* himself to his creation so that his creation may truly 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. The God who is infinite expresses himself in a finite way in creation.

God's accommodation to us is an important foundation for understanding how Jesus is God because the infinite God has accommodated himself to us in Jesus. And if God does accommodate himself to his creation there is no logical reason for rejecting Jesus as God at this point.

God Comes to Dwell with His People

God's plan has always been to come and personally dwell with his people and for them to know him. This is another important foundation to understand the incarnation.

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 with Adam in the garden:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. (Genesis 3:8, 4:14)

God was personally present in the garden. Adam could walk and talk with God. And God chose for a time to be personally present with Abraham.

And the LORD appeared to him [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. (Genesis 18:1)

We see this again when God's personal presence dwelt with the nation of Israel.

Then have them [the Israelites] make a sanctuary for me [God], and I will dwell among them. (Exodus 25:8)

God was personally present with Israel in their sanctuary/temple, and coming to the temple was how the Israelites approached God to worship him. The temple was the place you could come into God's presence and worship.

Jesus spoke of himself as the true temple; the true place where God and humanity, the place of worship.

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple [in Jerusalem], and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. (John 2:19-21)

The teaching that God comes to dwell with his people is an idea throughout the Torah, Prophets, Psalms, and Gospel. Christians did not invent this idea; it is the message of all the prophets, and Jesus brings it to its perfection. God

coming to dwell with his people is another foundation for understanding how Jesus is God.

If you are a Muslim you need to decide whether or not God comes to dwell with his people? Can God's people enjoy God's presence? If God does dwell with his people there is no logical reason for rejecting Jesus as God at this point.

Humanity Made in the Image of God

In the last three chapters we considered our doctrine of *God*. We considered how God relates to creation, accommodates himself to us, and comes to dwell with his people. We saw that these are foundations for understanding the incarnation. If you are a Muslim I hope this has helped you to understand the Christian position better. What I want to do now is consider our doctrine of *humanity*, that is, what does it mean to be human?

The Torah, Prophets, Psalms, and Gospel, teach that God made us in his image:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

What does it mean to be human? It means to be made in the image and likeness of God. So what does it mean to be in the image and likeness of God? It means that humans represent God's rule in creation (Gen. 1:26), we are to display his character (Lev. 19:2) and bring him glory, and ultimately share in his glory (Gen. 2:9, 3:22, Ps. 8, 82). In our sinfulness we have failed to live as the image of God, but still, God has created a special connection between us and him.

This is an important foundation for understanding the incarnation. When God comes to us as a man he is not coming in some random unrelated form. Instead, he is using a human body that he himself created with the specific purpose of representing him, displaying his character and bringing him glory, and sharing in his glory. That is, God made humanity suitable for the incarnation. This is a key point: God made humanity suitable for the incarnation, and Jesus comes and fulfills and perfects our humanity.

However, in the Qur'an,⁴ humanity is not said to be created in the image and likeness of God, and there is no plan for humanity to bring glory to God or share in his glory.⁵ In practice, what Muslims believe about this varies greatly.

4. Qur'an 42:11

5. It could be argued that Muhammad shares in Allah's glory but this will not be pursued in this booklet.

Some may just follow the Qur'an, others may follow a hadith⁶ that speaks of Adam as the image of God, and still others may see that humanity does reflect God in some way. If you are a Muslim, what do you believe about humanity?

If you are a Muslim I hope you can appreciate how important the doctrine of the image of God is for understanding the incarnation. The Torah, Prophets, Psalms, and Gospel all teach that we are made in the image of God, and thus humanity is suitable for the incarnation.

6. 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.

The Prophets before Jesus

As we saw earlier, the Bible is not one book but a collection of many books from many prophets, and most of these prophets lived before Jesus. We will now briefly consider what these prophets said about God and the future of humanity. This is the next foundation for understanding the incarnation.

The prophets before Jesus are clear that humanity is made in the image of God to represent God, display his character, and bring him glory. This is our mission. The nation of Israel with her kings, prophets, and priests were to do the same. They were given the Torah, the law of Moses, for this purpose. However, the prophets record the failure of all of humanity to fulfil their mission. This failure is seen over a very long period of time, in different situations, with different forms of government, and with different types of leaders. God had offered blessing, life, and honour, but the sinful attitude and behaviour of humanity brought judgement, shame, and death. We are all sinners and God's name has been dishonoured because of us.

My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. (Ezekiel 36:22)

The prophets offer no expectation that given more time humanity will shake itself free from sin. We are bound in sin, unable to fulfil our mission, under the judgement of God, and needing to be saved. It is into this situation that God promises that *he* will come and bring salvation and fulfil our mission.

The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. (Isaiah 59:15-16 & 63:5)

God is going to do what we have failed to do. We see this again in Isaiah 40. Humans were meant to reveal God's glory but now God is going to come and do it himself.

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 40:3-5)

Therefore, the prophets before Jesus foretold that God is coming to do what humanity has failed to do. Humanity's mission was to bring glory to God, and God will now fulfil this mission for us. God will do it for us. But how will this happen? God tells us it is through the coming Messiah.

When the Messiah comes, God will perfect our humanity through him. Through his obedience, the Messiah will bring glory to God, the glory we failed to bring. He will fulfil humanity's mission and the mission of Israel.

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD - and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. (Isaiah 11:2-3)

He will establish God's everlasting kingdom.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

He will be the true and perfect priest for God's people.

The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (Psalm 110:4)

He will be the true and perfect prophet.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. (Isaiah 61:1)

He will perfect our worship (Psalm 22), bring salvation (Isaiah 53), and bring the everlasting resurrection kingdom of God, the new creation.

Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead

them. (Isaiah 11:5-6)

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead. (Isaiah 26:19)

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. (Isaiah 65:17)

The prophet Daniel calls the Messiah the *son of man*. In a world of sinful humanity in which no one is worthy to approach God's throne, the son of man is worthy, God will perfect our humanity. And this one is given all authority and worshipped by the nations and receives the kingdom of God on behalf of God's people.

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14)

Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him. (Daniel 7:27)

The prophet David calls the Messiah the *son of God*.

I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." (Psalm 2:7)

To conclude, according to the prophets before Jesus, God is coming to bring glory to himself and to bring us back to himself through the Messiah. The Messiah will be the perfectly obedient man who fulfils our mission and the mission of Israel. Through him, God will display his glory, bring our salvation from sin, and establish his resurrection kingdom. This is the message of the prophets before Jesus and is an important foundation for understanding the incarnation.

The Testimony of the Gospel

Now that we have considered the foundations of the incarnation it is time to listen to the testimony of the Gospel to Jesus. Who does the Gospel say Jesus is?

Jesus is the coming of God.

Jesus' parents were Mary and Joseph. An angel of God came to them and explained how Jesus would be conceived and who he was.

You [Mary] will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. ... "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:31-35)

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:23)

Through the angel, God announced that Jesus is the "Son of God," and "God with us." That is, Jesus is God coming to us, through the work of the Holy Spirit giving him a human body.

In the last chapter we read some of the prophecies about God coming. These prophecies also say that a messenger will announce the coming of God.

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. (Malachi 3:1)

These prophecies are quoted in all of the Gospel accounts⁷ to explain that John the Baptist is this messenger who announces the coming of God, who is Jesus. Consider the following:

7. Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:2-3, Luke 3:4-6, John 1:23.

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."

... [John said] "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Matthew 3:1-11)

Thus, the prophets before Jesus are quoted in the Gospel to show that Jesus is the coming of God.

The Signs of Jesus

What I will do now is show how the prophets before Jesus describe God, and then show how the Gospel describes Jesus in exactly the same way.

a. In the Law of Moses, the Torah, it says that God is the one who forgives sin.

The LORD replied [to Moses], "I have forgiven them, as you asked."
(Number 14:20)

But in the Gospel it is Jesus who forgives sin.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:5-7)

b. In the Psalms it says that God calms the storm,

Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters ... Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. (Psalm 107:23-30)

But in the Gospel it is Jesus who calms the storm.

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he

was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. (Mark 4:35-39)

c. In the book of the prophet Job God is the lord and judge of the spirits.

One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." (Job 1:6-7)

But in the Gospel it is Jesus who is the lord and judge of the spirits.

Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. (Mark 1:23-26)

If you know what the prophets teach about God, you will understand what Jesus was showing about himself.

Jesus and the Temple

In chapter 5 we saw that God's plan is to come and dwell with this people and that this happens through the temple. Jesus calls himself the true temple.

I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. (Matthew 12:6)

Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. (John 2:18-21)

When Jesus says he is the temple he is saying that his body is the place where God dwells.

Jesus and the Names of God

In the prophets before Jesus, God is called the First and the Last.

This is what the LORD says - Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. (Isaiah 44:6)

Jesus says that he is the First and the Last.

Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (Revelation 22:12-13)

Therefore, the Bible shows that Jesus is God. But at the same time it also shows he is fully man.

The Obedient Man

We see the full humanity of Jesus in that he was born, grew, learned, ate, prayed, slept, suffered, was tempted, died, and rose from the dead.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things. (Hebrews 2:14)

But Jesus is not just any man, he is the Messiah, who has come to bring glory to God, our salvation, and to establish God's resurrection kingdom, and he does this through his obedience. Jesus is fully human like us, but unlike us Jesus never sinned.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. (1 Peter 2:22)

Jesus, the Messiah, lived the perfect obedient human life, and through his obedience he fulfils God's plans for humanity.

Putting it All Together

If we put all of this together we see that God has come to us, as a man, to do what sinful humanity has failed to do. God fulfills, perfects, and redeems our humanity by living the sinless obedient human life for us. Through this he brings glory to himself, and conquers sin, the devil, and death, our real enemies. He establishes God's resurrection kingdom, and brings our salvation. This is what God has done for us in Jesus. This is good news. Much more could be said on this subject and there are many helpful books written on it.

Two Common Mistakes

There are two common mistakes that some Muslim leaders make. The first is to quote a Bible verse which shows Jesus is a man and then say this proves he is not God. This is a mistake, because Jesus is both God *and* man. We need to consider all of the verses and understand what God was doing through Jesus.

Secondly, some Muslim leaders say that all of the prophets were sinless and so Jesus' obedience is not unique. They may say that Muhammad was just as obedient as Jesus, that Muhammad and Jesus are the same. However, this is not the case. The Qur'an and Hadith are clear:

So know [Muhammad] that there is no god save Allah, and ask forgiveness for your sin and for believing men and believing women. (Qur'an 47:19)

Narrated Abu Musa: The Prophet used to invoke Allah with the following invocation: Oh my Lord! Forgive my sins and my ignorance and my exceeding the limits (boundaries) of righteousness in all my deeds and what you know better than I. O Allah! Forgive my mistakes, those I do intentionally or out of my ignorance or (without) or with seriousness, and I confess that all such mistakes are done by me. O Allah! Forgive my sins of the past and of the future which I did openly or secretly. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 8, bk. 75, no. 407)

The Qur'an does not teach that the prophets were sinless. It says they needed to be forgiven like us. Muhammad and Jesus are not the same. Muhammad does not fulfil God's plan for humanity, Jesus does.

FAQ

Question 1. Numbers 23:19 says “God is not a man”, therefore, the Bible says Jesus cannot be God.

Answer: You have only quoted a small part of the verse. The full verse says:

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? (Numbers 23:19)

When the whole verse is read it is not saying God cannot come to us as a man but that God is not a liar like men. As we have seen in Genesis 3:8, 18:1 God has come to us before, and in the prophets he promised to come again. Secondly, Christians agree that God is not a man. God is God; man is man. We are saying that Jesus is both God and man, not one or the other.

Question 2. Where did Jesus ever say I am God, worship me?

Answer: Why would Jesus say that to people who don't worship God? You do not seem to believe that sin has corrupted our worship. If you read the prophets before Jesus, you will see that God has already come and said, “I am God, worship me”, but it didn't work. People are sinful and we do not worship God, in fact, we are under God's judgement. Jesus came to do something different. He came to save us so that we can worship God. Jesus does say he is the divine son of God, equal to the Father, who *will* be worshipped (Matthew 26:63-64, John 5:16-23) but first he must complete his work of salvation and suffer before entering his glory. He gave proof of this by what he did and his resurrection.

Question 3. Christians say Jesus *died* for our sin. If Jesus is God how can God die? It is impossible for creation to kill its maker and sovereign ruler.

Answer: First, death is not non-existence. We are not saying that God ceased to exist. Second, as we saw in chapter 3, Jesus has two natures united in the one person. It is through his human nature that he experiences death.

Question 4. If Jesus is God how can he not know the hour of his coming (Matthew 24:36). Doesn't God know everything?

Answer: When God the Son comes to us through a man he willingly accepts

the limitations of being a man in the same way that God accepts the limitations of human words when he speaks to us.

Question 5. Jesus said the Father is greater than him (John 14:28), therefore, Jesus is not God.

Answer: When Jesus became man he put aside his glory to serve, suffer, and save us, and so the Father was greater than Jesus in this way and during this time. When Jesus returns to the Father he receives his glory again.

And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. (John 17:5)

Question 6. The Bible says you cannot see God (John 1:18, 1 Timothy 6:16), therefore, how can Jesus be God?

Answer: We cannot see the divine nature of God. God's nature is uncreated and outside of creation and our perception. But we do experience God because through his Spirit he can make himself personally present in various ways. Jesus has two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. We see the human nature of Jesus and encounter the person of God through it.

Question 7. Jesus prayed to his father and was obedient. God does not pray or obey anyone.

Answer: Jesus is God perfecting our humanity and doing what we have failed to do. He is God living the perfect human life for us. This is what the prophets said God would do.

For answers to other verses visit engagingwithislam.org/bible_verses.htm

To conclude, the Gospel proclaims that God has come to us, as a man, to do what sinful humanity has failed to do. We were made in the image of God, but fail to live that way. God fulfills, perfects, and redeems our humanity by living the sinless obedient human life for us in Jesus. Through Jesus, God brings his resurrection kingdom and our salvation.

God is Great!

When we say God is great what does this mean?

It means that God is the only creator and sustainer of life. He is the sovereign lord who rules over all things. He is infinite in power and glory. God is also great in wisdom, knowledge and beauty, kindness, mercy, and gentleness.

The disciples of Jesus, like many in our world, did not understand greatness. They thought that to be great meant that others must serve you. We read this in the Gospel.

A dispute arose among them [the disciples] as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the nations lord it over them [their people]; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves." (Luke 22:-24-26)

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. (Mark 10:43-44)

Jesus is saying that the truly great person is the one who is powerful and yet chooses to serve others.

We see this greatness in Jesus' life. One evening in Jerusalem he took off his coat and washed his disciples feet. They were shocked and tried to stop him but he said to them:

You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (John 13:13-15)

Jesus showed us what true greatness is: it is when the powerful choose to serve, and this is what God has done for us. God has given of himself to us. The incarnation does not take away from God's greatness, instead, it displays his greatness, and God did this for us because he loves us. Jesus shows us the great love of God.

The Incarnation and the Qur'an

Seeing God in Creation

In the Qur'an we see two aspects of God being present in creation. On the one hand it affirms that God is transcendent, majestic, and beyond our sight.

Vision perceives Him not, but He perceives [all] vision (Qur'an 6:103, Saheeh In)

Yet, on the other hand, it affirms that believers will see God on the Day of Resurrection, and that this will be a cause of great joy.

[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, looking at their Lord. (Qur'an 75:22-23, Saheeh In).

This is further explained in the Hadith.

Narrated Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri: During the lifetime of the Prophet some people said: "O Allah's Messenger! Shall we see our Lord on the Day of Resurrection?" The Prophet said, "Yes; do you have any difficulty in seeing the sun at midday when it is bright and there is no cloud in the sky?" They replied, "No." He said, "Do you have any difficulty in seeing the moon on a full moon night when it is bright and there is no cloud in the sky?" They replied, "No." The Prophet said, "(Similarly) you will have no difficulty in seeing Allah on the Day of Resurrection as you have no difficulty in seeing either of them." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 60, no. 105)

Thus, in the Qur'an there is an understanding that the uncreated, infinite, eternal God can be present in this temporal, finite creation and be seen. That is, the Qur'an has its own version of an incarnation.

Jesus in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an we see two distinct aspects of Jesus. On the one hand it regularly denies that he is God (Q. 5:73-75). Yet on the other hand it speaks of Jesus doing what only God can do. We see this in the Qur'an's account of Jesus creating birds from clay.

One of God's unique attributes is that he is the creator. This is his identity.

Being the creator is what defines him and makes him unique to everything else. Yet, in the Qur'an, we see that Jesus has this unique attribute of God and expresses it in exactly the same way as God.⁸ Consider what the Quran says about God creating Adam from clay and breathing 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." (Qur'an 38:71-75, Jones)

In exactly the same way the Qur'an says Jesus created life:

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. (Qur'an 3:49, Arberry)

These ... miraculous powers attributed to Jesus are extraordinary in that they suggest powers usually reserved for God. (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran*, U.S.A: Harper Collins, 2015, fn. 110, p. 334)

This story of Jesus creating birds comes from an early Christian fable⁹ about the childhood of Jesus. This original story demonstrated that Jesus was God by showing that he is the creator who gives life. What is surprising is that the Qur'an retells this story. That is, the Qur'an contains a story showing Jesus as the creator.

In the Qur'an the story now says 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 God shares this attribute with Jesus then Jesus shares in what is uniquely God's, and so shares in the identity of God. If we try to avoid this implication by saying that God can share this attribute with anyone, then God is no longer unique; God is not the one creator. Therefore, an element of incarnation theology still remains in the Qur'an.

If you are a Muslim, you may also find it helpful to see what the Qur'an says

8. Some people have said to me that Moses created when he threw his staff on the ground and it became a snake (Exodus 4), however, Moses ran from the snake in fear of what God had done. This is completely different to Jesus creating in precisely the same way as God did when he created Adam.

9. *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*

about God and compare this to what Jesus did and said about himself.

- Only God can forgive sin, Qur'an 3:135 > Jesus forgives sin, Mark 2:1-12.
- God is the truth, Qur'an 22:6, 31:30 > Jesus said he is the truth, John 14:6.
- God is the life, Qur'an 40:65 > Jesus said he is the life, John 14:6.
- God is the light of the world, Qur'an 24:35 > Jesus said he is the light of the world, John 8:12.
- God is the First and the Last, Qur'an 57:3 > Jesus said he is the First and Last, Revelation 1:18.
- God calms the storm, Qur'an 42:32-33 > Jesus calms the storm, Mark 4:35-39.

Conclusion

In this booklet we have taken steps towards understanding what Christians mean when they say Jesus is God, and examined some of our assumptions along the way. We have considered how God connects to creation, accommodates himself to us, and has always planned to come and dwell with us. We have seen that humanity is created in the image of God, and that through the prophets God has promised to come and perfect and save us. All of these doctrines are the foundations for the incarnation. They show that the incarnation is reasonable and consistent with the prophets before Jesus.

We then saw how the Gospel proclaims that God has come to us as a man to do what humanity has failed to do. God fulfills, perfects, and redeems our humanity by living the sinless obedient life. Through this he brings glory to himself, establishes God's resurrection kingdom, and brings our salvation. This is the revelation of God's greatness, his great love for us. This is what God has done for us through Jesus.

We have also seen that Islam too has its own understanding of God's incarnation and retains a story of Jesus' divinity in the Qur'an.

I have not tried to explain everything but hope this has helped you to understand the Christian position and answer some of your questions. My prayer is that this will help you understand the teaching of the prophets and the Gospel, and allow you to grow in your love and knowledge of God, and to rejoice in what God has done for us through Jesus.

Why not read some of the Bible yourself? Ask a Christian for a copy or search online. I recommend you start with a gospel called *Matthew*. It is available in various languages here. <https://biblehub.com/niv/matthew/1.htm>



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