

THE TITLES OF JESUS IN THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE

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TITLES OF JESUS IN THE QUR'AN

Jesus is defined in the Qur'an as a messenger and a prophet no different nor superior to all the other messengers who went before him. The Qur'an expressly denies the Christian beliefs about Jesus that make him pre-eminent among men and it is known in the Christian world primarily for its denials that Jesus is the Son of God and that he was crucified.

Nevertheless, while the denials in the book are very emphatic, the positive teaching about the person and life of Jesus is considerable, even though it's vague and indeed strangely mysterious. For much of the teaching in the Qur'an about Jesus really appears to be far more Christian than Muslim in content and emphasis. Many of the admissions it makes about the features of his life, far from supporting the bare denials of the Qur'an about his deity and the Christian belief that he is the Son of God, tend rather to strongly uphold these Christian beliefs. (Many of these features have already been thoroughly examined in "***The Uniqueness of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible***" in this series. In this booklet the emphasis has been placed solely on some of the titles which the Qur'an gives to Jesus).

Whereas the Qur'an concedes unique features in the life of Jesus that are not in any way adequately explained in the book, they clearly imply that he is the Son of God and that he came to earth to die for the sins of men. The book also awards certain eminent titles to Jesus alone which are also not explained and which in no small measure also strengthen Christian belief about Jesus.

No sincere Muslim can study the teaching of the Qur'an about Jesus without honestly feeling that there is more to this man than meets the eye and that the assertion that he was no different to other messengers is not supported by the evidence the Qur'an concedes to the Bible.

Among the many titles Jesus is given in the Qur'an only three will be treated in this booklet. The reason for this is twofold. In the first place, the three titles referred to are applied to Jesus alone. Secondly, all three of these titles appear in one short passage where the Qur'an bluntly denies that Jesus is deity and that he is the Son of God. This makes it possible to study the meaning of these titles right in the very context of the basic teaching of the Qur'an that Jesus was only a messenger like those who went before him. The passage is:

"O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and his messengers and say not "Three" - Cease! It is better for you! - Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from his transcendent majesty that He should have a son". Surah 4:171

As strongly as anywhere else in the Qur'an the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God is here denied. But in this same passage Jesus is given three titles which are majestic, exalted and splendid and are of supreme importance because they are applied to Jesus alone. Let us consider them in the order in which they appear.

1. THE MESSIAH (*Al-Masih*)

Jesus alone is called the Messiah in the Qur'an¹. Eleven times he is given this title and occasionally he is referred to solely by this title without being referred to by name. No explanation of the title is given in the Qur'an. What is of interest, however, is that Jesus is chiefly called the Messiah in passages that are alleged to have been revealed to Muhammad at Medina after the Hijra.

The title Messiah is extremely relevant to both the Christian and Jewish religions. The Jews, in their holy scriptures, have an abundance of prophecies of one glorious

Saviour to come who is called the Messiah (Daniel 9:25), the anointed one, and they have long awaited his coming. At the time of Jesus this Messianic expectancy reached its peak but after the destruction of Jerusalem, forty years after the ascension of Jesus, this hope waned among the Jews.

To the Christians, Jesus is the promised Messiah. He said so in no uncertain terms. (John 4:25-26) The Jews in his time could not perceive that Jesus was the Messiah because they had expected a military leader who would drive out all foreign powers from the land of the Jews and set up a kingdom in Israel which would possess world-wide authority. But the Messiah came "not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

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In Hebrew the word Messiah means "the Anointed One". It can, in a lesser sense, refer to any priest or anointed leader, and occasionally the expression is used in this context in the Jewish Scriptures. But it became in time a title for the one who was to come, the final herald of God's salvation, the Redeemer of the world.

Significantly the title only appears in the Qur'an *after* Muhammad has made some contact with the Jews and Christians of Arabia. Clearly Qur'anic use of the title is linked to Jewish and Christian beliefs about the Messiah. Therefore, we must go into Jewish expectations and Christian beliefs about the Messiah to find out what the title means.

At this stage, however, we first ask whether this title elevates the bearer in any way superior to other great prophets of God. In Surah 4:171 it is said that the Messiah is "*only* a messenger" but to both the Jews and the Christians the Messiah is a man who is *the greatest* among men, one possessed of regality, majesty, excellence and splendour for above that of all other men.

**In Hebrew the word
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He is unique in his glory and there is no one to compare with him.

By offering no explanation of this title, the Qur'an at the same time accepts longstanding beliefs of the Jews and Christians about the Messiah. To both he is far more than just a messenger. The title in Jewish and Christian scriptural usage clearly implies greatness of such a degree that all the true messengers of God will ultimately bow to him in homage and obeisance. By admitting the Christian contention that Jesus is the Messiah, the Qur'an is in fact implying that he is the ultimate man of glory in human history and that he is the one who is the final expression of the revelation of God to men.

Nevertheless we cannot even stop here for we find in the Bible that, to both Jews and Christians, the title Messiah is in fact synonymous with the title Son of God. In these circumstances it is rather amazing to find that the Qur'an calls Jesus the Messiah and denies that he is the Son of God in the same breath. Let us examine some of the texts in the Bible that show that the expressions Messiah and Son of God are synonymous. (The word "Christ" means "Messiah" and as we have been consistently referring to the "Messiah" and have been quoting from a Muslim translation of the Qur'an which uses the word Messiah rather than

Christ which is used by other Muslim translators, we shall continue to do so).

- ❖ Jewish believers in Jesus called him both the Messiah and the Son of God. Simon Peter was the first to do so:

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God". Matthew 16:16

- ❖ Martha also used the two titles simultaneously in her expression of belief in Jesus:

"I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world". John 11:27

- ❖ The High Priest of the Jews used the titles simultaneously with one another asking Jesus if he was the Messiah:

"I adjure you, by the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God". Matthew 26:63

- ❖ The early Christians used the titles synonymously with one another as well in various contexts:

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God". Mark 1:1

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name". John 20:31

Even the demons did so when they spoke to Jesus:

"And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!"

But he rebuked them, and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah". Luke 4:41

From these many texts we can see that the Messiah is no less than the Son of God himself. This is no ordinary title – it is a title of the highest eminence and only the Son of God could exclusively claim the title of Messiah for himself according to the expectations of the Jews and the teachings of the prophets who preceded him.

By admitting that Jesus is the Messiah and by confirming his own emphatic declaration to this effect (John 4:25-26), the Qur'an has given Jesus a title which implies nothing less than that he is indeed the Son of God.

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2. THE WORD OF GOD (*Kalimatullah*)

Jesus is also called "His word" in Surah 4:171, meaning the Word of God. In Surah 3:45 we also read that the angels said to Mary "Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary". More than once in the Qur'an, therefore, Jesus is called God's Word. He is also called the Word of God in the Bible:

*"He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God".
Revelation 19:13*

Once again, therefore, Jesus is given a title in the Qur'an which the Bible gives him as well. Like the title Messiah this is a very distinctive and exalted title. Whether we take it in its actual Biblical form, "The Word of God", or in its actual Qur'anic forms, "a Word from God" and "God's Word", two things are strikingly and abundantly clear. Jesus *himself*, in his actual person, is the Word; and the source, origin and the fountainhead of the Word is God.

As with the title Messiah, the Qur'an gives no explanation of the title. Nevertheless, in seeking to reconcile it with the Qur'anic assertion that Jesus was only a messenger, Muslim commentators generally have claimed that Jesus is called the Word of God solely in

accordance with the teaching in the Qur'an that he was created in the womb of a virgin-woman by the Word of God:

*She said: "My Lord!! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: So it will be. Allah createth what He will, if He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only; Be! and it is."
Surah 3:47*

By the single word of God "Be", it is alleged that Jesus was created; and from this verse Muslim commentators have concluded that this is why Jesus is called the Word of God. It is a convenient but inadequate conclusion. According to that verse, this is how anything is created by God. But Jesus alone receives the title Word of God and its unique character must compel us to reject this theory as over-simplistic. Secondly it is exposed further as being an insufficient answer to the question of its meaning by a simple statement just twelve verses later in the same Surah:

**Jesus himself,
in his actual person,
is the Word; and
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of the Word is God**



insufficient answer to the question of its meaning by a simple statement just twelve verses later in the same Surah:

"Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam, He created him from dust, then He said unto him, Be! and he is".
Surah 3:59

Once again it is said of Jesus that he was created by God purely through the expression "Be" but this time it is said that "the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam", implying that *both* were made by the single word of God "Be" in the same way. If Jesus is called the Word of God purely as a result of the manner of his conception, then Adam too must be the Word of God, for according to the Qur'an they were both created in the same manner. Now a real difficulty arises because Adam is not called the Word of God in the Qur'an. Nor are the angels, nor is any other creature so called in the Qur'an. Jesus alone is called the Word of God.

The very exceptional nature of this title, by which Jesus is distinguished from all other men and all creatures, demands that there is some other meaning and significance behind it. The very fact that the title is given to Jesus alone in *both* the Qur'an and the Bible clearly shows that there is something about the *person* of

Jesus that makes him the Word of God in a way in which no other man or creature can compare. Jesus *himself* is called the Word of God and the title relates to his person and not to any feature or circumstance of his life.

As mentioned earlier, one of the distinctive features of this title is the emphasis of deity as the source of the person who bears it. The Word is from *God*. And the title *Word* implies that he is the communication and revelation, in his own person, of God to men. The Word of God is one who indeed is actively the real manifestation of God to men. To know him is to know God. He does not merely bring the religion and words of God to men, he himself is the word and revelation of God, Jesus himself made this clear when he said:

"He who has seen me has seen the Father".
John 14:9

Let us now turn to the plain teaching of the Bible about Jesus as the Word of God. The prologue to the Gospel of John gives us a clear explanation of the title:

*In the beginning was the Word.
 And the Word was with God.*

**To know him is
 to know God**



And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. John 1:1-3

To emphasize strongly that Jesus himself is the Word of God and not that God's word is somehow related to him as is suggested by the major Muslim commentators, let us briefly paraphrase those two verses:

In the beginning *before* God ever began to *create*, the Word *already* existed. Far from being part of the created order, the Word was in the realm of *God* and indeed the very nature of the Word was that of *God*. When God first began to fashion the *created* order, the Word already existed in the *divine* order. He himself was *not* created but all *other* things were created by God *through* him as agent, indeed as the very Word of God. Because he alone is the Word of God, and is therefore the sole means of communication between God and his creatures, nothing was created without being created by and *through* him. (John 1:1-2)

The clear teaching of the Bible is that Jesus existed as the Word of God before God ever created anything and that he is therefore deity. But then the Word of God became the man Jesus, the son of Mary.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Jesus is the Word of God not because of any intervention by God at his conception nor by any other circumstances. He always was, from all eternity, the Word of God before he took on human flesh and became the man Jesus, the son of Mary.

Every prophet of God has been a messenger but only Jesus is the Word of God. The distinction comes out in this contrast: whereas every prophet only delivered the words of God when proclaiming God's message, Jesus *at all times* spoke the words of God. In private conversation with their friends, for example, the prophets spoke their own words and we accordingly distinguish between the prophet's own words in normal conversation and the words of God which the prophets spoke at various intervals whenever commanded by God to do so. But Jesus is *the* Word of God and *every* word he spoke – whether in teaching or in private conversation – was God's word. There was no distinction between the words of Jesus and the words of God. This is abundantly clear from the teaching of Jesus himself:

"I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what

*to say and how to say it.
And I know his commands
lead to eternal life; so I say
whatever the Father
commands me to say".*

John 12:49-50

*"The words I speak are not my
own, but the Father who lives in
me does his work through me."*

John 14:10

The words which Jesus spoke were not the words of a man but of God. Yet because Jesus himself is the Word of God, he could quite justifiably call them his own words. This is something no other prophet could do. No one else could say that his *own* words were the words of *God*. See how Jesus speaks of his words as his own and yet also as the words of God:

*"He who does not love me
does not keep my words,
and the word which you hear
is not mine but the Father's
who sent me".* *John 14:24*

Again, whereas Jesus often proclaimed that nothing he said was on his own authority (as we have seen) but that every word he spoke was God's, yet because he is the Word of God he could quite rightly claim them as his own:

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, he
who hears my word and
believes him who sent me, has*

*eternal life; he does not come
into judgment, but has passed
from death to life".* *John 5:24*

*"If you continue in my word,
you are truly my disciples, and
you will know the truth, and the
truth will make you free".*

John 8:31

*"I know that you have but little
power, and yet you have kept
my word and have not denied
my name".* *Revelation 3:8*

Nevertheless not only does Jesus on every occasion speak of God's words as his own because he is the Word of God, but he himself is the final, ultimate and complete revelation of God to men:

*"He is the image of the invisible
God, the first-born of all
creation for in him all things
were created, in heaven and on
earth, visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions
or principalities or authorities -
all things were created through
him and for him. He is before all
things and in him all things
hold together. He is the head of
the body, the church; he is the
beginning, the first-born from
the dead, that in everything he
might be pre-eminent. For in
him all the fullness of God was
pleased to dwell".*
Colossians 1:15-19



So we see that far from being only a messenger of God, that is, one who receives an independent message from God, Jesus *himself* is the message of God and there is accordingly *no* independence between God and his Word. This is why Jesus alone is the unique Word of God. He is not a created messenger, he is the eternal Word of God. Other men are made from the dust – this man is from God. Other men return to the dust - this man returned to God.

At this stage we are constrained to say that we Christians do not really see where we are exaggerating in our religion as the Qur'an suggests in the passage under review (Surah 4:171). Because we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we are supposedly exaggerating in our belief in him and yet, in that very same passage, the Qur'an calls Jesus the Messiah which implies fundamentally that he is the Son of God. But now we come across the title **Word of God** which, to all intents and purposes, is really more emphatic and suggestive of deity than the title Son of God.

The latter title at least implies some limitation and submission on the part of its bearer - a son is

subject to his father - but the title **Word of God** implies no such limitation. By itself it clearly implies that its bearer is the express image

of the invisible God and only the latter, title Son of God implies some submission on his part to the Father. *The Qur'an denounces Christians for believing that Jesus is the Son of God and yet, in the very same breath, gives him the title Word of God which is as indicative of deity on the title Son of God.* There is really no meaningful difference between the titles. Quite where we are exaggerating in our religion is not at all clear to us! So we see that the first two titles in Surah 4:171 that we have considered, i.e. Messiah and Word of God far from supporting the suggestion that Jesus is "only a messenger", in fact heavily reinforce the Christian belief Jesus is the Word and Son of God incarnate. But let us press on that now to the third title in Surah 4:171.

**Other men are
made from dust –
this man
is from God**




3. A SPIRIT FROM GOD (Ruhullah)

This third title is very little different from the second one for once again the title belongs to Jesus alone and God again is the source of the Spirit as he was the source of the Word. (It is sometimes said of Adam that God breathed something of his spirit into him but this must be carefully distinguished from the title Spirit of God which is given to Jesus alone.) Jesus is *his* Word and *his* Spirit. This title is also not explained in the Qur'an but frankly supports the Christian belief that Jesus was not a creature made out of dust but an eternal spirit who took on human form.

In this case, however, we do find some evidence in the Qur'an that helps us to identify the meaning of this title. Elsewhere in the Qur'an we read of the "Holy Spirit" (*Ruhul-Quds* – cf. Surahs 2:87, 2:253, 16:103) and it is presumed that the Holy Spirit is the angel Gabriel. Even though opinions differ, it is generally agreed that the Holy Spirit is greater than man and comes from heaven and is purely a spirit.

Jesus, however, is now called "a Spirit from him" (*ruhun-minhu*) from which he has received the title in Islamic traditions "Spirit of God" (*Ruhullah*). The expression in Surah 4:171, *ruhun-minhu* ("a spirit

from him") is used in exactly the same form in Surah 58:22 where it is said that God strengthens true believers with "a spirit from him". Very significantly Yusuf Ali, commenting on this latter verse in his translation of the Qur'an states that here the "phrase used is stronger" than that for the Holy Spirit (*Ruhul Quds*). He implies that the Spirit from God is greater than the Holy Spirit and says that it is "the divine spirit, which we can no more define adequately than we can define in human language the nature and attributes of God" (Note 5365).

This is a remarkable comment which is clearly a veiled implication that the *ruhun-minhu* is the very Spirit of the living God, uncreated and eternal in essence. Yusuf Ali says it is "the divine spirit" and that it is as incomprehensible as God himself. This language is unambiguous – the Spirit from God is clearly believed by him to be from the realm of deity and not from the created order. He is, according to this interpretation, practically synonymous with the Holy Spirit in the Christian Bible.

Now this is the very title that the Qur'an gives to *Jesus* in Surah 4:171. The exact same words are used – *he* is the *ruhun-minhu*, "a Spirit from God". If we merely

apply Yusuf Ali's interpretation of the expression in Surah 58:22 to the very same expression given as a title to Jesus in Surah 4:171, we can only conclude that *Jesus* is the "divine spirit, which we can no more define adequately than we can define in human language the nature and attributes of God". He is, therefore, God in essence and nature. Because of the simultaneous denial in 4:171 that Jesus is the Son of God, Yusuf Ali is constrained to deny that the title *ruhun-minhu* when applied to Jesus implies deity, but he is hardly consistent in his exposition of the Qur'an when he teaches in another place that *ruhun-minhu* is indeed a *divine* spirit possessing the nature and attributes of God and is as incomprehensible as God as well.

For our part we believe that, as with the titles Messiah and Word of God, this title Spirit of God also strongly supports the Christian belief that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and that, not in any metaphorical sense, but in an eternal one which is based on the fact that he is very deity himself. The only way Yusuf Ali could avoid this admission when commenting on Surah 4:171 was to frankly contradict what he said in his commentary on Surah 58:22.

Nevertheless all three of these titles not only support but plainly imply that the one they refer to is the Son of God. In the Bible this is clearly the case and in the Qur'an the lack of an explanation for each title, together with the fact that the titles are much the same as those in the Bible, and further together with the underlying implication of each title by itself, leaves us with no other alternative but to conclude that Jesus is indeed the exalted figure that the Bible reveals him to be.

We have concluded our study of the most significant titles of Jesus in the Qur'an. Let us now turn to the Bible and let us briefly examine the two most significant titles of Jesus in this book – Son of Man and Son of God. We are selecting these titles, not simply because the Bible gives them to Jesus, but because these are the two titles which Jesus used of himself more often than any other in describing himself and his mission and ministry on earth.

TITLES OF JESUS IN THE BIBLE

The Bible gives Jesus many magnificent titles. He is given the titles Savior of the World, King of Kings, Redeemer, The Lord our Righteousness, the Sun of Righteousness, among many others which, when combined with one another, leave the unmistakable impression that he is indeed the Lord of Glory.

We will now consider, however, the two titles Jesus used of himself more than any other, the Son of Man and the Son of God. Indeed from these two titles, we can gain a sufficient impression of the whole person and work of Jesus Christ.

4. THE SON OF MAN

In the Bible the title Son of Man is undoubtedly one of the most important titles of Jesus for he used this title of himself more than any other during his ministry. It is in fact the first title we find him using of himself. He addressed his new disciple Nathaniel in these words:

*"Truly, truly, I say to you,
you will see heaven opened,
and the angels of God
ascending and descending upon
the Son of Man". John 1:51*

Not only is this the first title of Jesus in the Gospels, it is also the last title he used for himself during his earthly life. When he was arraigned before the Jewish High Priest on the last night he was alive, he said to him:

"Hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven".

Matthew 26:64

Quite obviously this title was a very important and distinctive one to Jesus. But what does it mean? Is it simply a way of expressing the humanity of Jesus? That Jesus was a man is disputed by neither Christian nor Muslim in this world. But the title Son of Man cannot just be an expression of humanity. The definite form of the title, *the Son of Man*, refers to more than this and clearly implies that it is a unique man who bears this title and that in some exceptional way he is the figurehead of the human race.

Secondly one might be tempted to say that if Jesus so often called himself the Son of Man, was he not perhaps contrasting himself with the beliefs of some who followed him who held that he was the Son of God? Was not this his way of emphasizing his humanity over and against the assertions of others that he was the Son of God?

On the contrary, no fair exposition of the Bible can allow this interpretation at all. Firstly Jesus never used the title Son of Man in a context where it is contrasted with the title Son of God. Secondly it is only in the four Gospels in the Christian Bible that these two titles Son of Man and Son of God are found, and as the writers quoted Jesus as using both titles for himself, we cannot imagine that they would have done this if the title Son of Man was in any way contrary to the title Son of God.

We discover the meaning and import of the title Son of Man from a prophetic passage in the Book of Daniel where the prophet describes a vision he saw many centuries before Jesus was born. He was given a vision of heaven where God is and saw all the nations of earth gathered before him. Then in the night he saw this great event happen:

"Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was

presented before him. And to him was give dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed".
Daniel 7:13-14

The Son of Man is an apocalyptic figure who is able to come right into the presence of God and it is to him that God gives authority over all the powers of the universe that every creature in heaven and on earth should serve him. Quite obviously the Son of Man is a glorious person, the epitome² of human perfection and honour. And it is in this context that we find Jesus calling himself the Son of Man.

Elsewhere in the Bible we find the expression Son of Man used in a lesser sense (Psalm 8:4, Job 25:6, Ezekiel 11:15) where it does not refer to Jesus but is used in a general sense denoting humanity. Nevertheless whenever Jesus used it of himself, he used it as a *title* which belonged to him *alone*

**Quite obviously
the Son of Man is
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honour**



In an exclusive sense he is the ultimate Son of Man, the one who was beheld by Daniel in all his glory in the vision he was allowed to receive, one who is unique and pre-eminent among men. The Son of Man, through something he had done and achieved as a man, was entitled to enter the presence of God and become the heir to the kingdom God has prepared for all those who truly love him.

What the Son of Man had done was to die for the sins of the world. By reconciling men to God, he was entitled to receive the kingdom which he had now made accessible to all who know God through him. By conquering sin he had become the sovereign over those he set free from its power.

For this reason we invariably find Jesus using the title Son of Man in respect of his crucifixion and the glory he was to receive subsequent to it. He often told the Jews that it was the destiny of the Son of Man to be "lifted up", an expression which implied firstly that he was to be lifted up on a cross as an object of scorn before all men as he took their sins on himself and, secondly, that he was thereafter to be lifted up by God to glory in heaven to reign with him in wondrous majesty over all the sons of men. (See John 3:14-15, 8:28, 12:32-34.)

To his closer circle of disciples Jesus made this even clearer. On the last night before he was to be crucified, when he knew that Judas was about to betray him into the hands of the Jews, he said:

"The Son of Man goes as it is written of him". Matthew 26:24

As many of the prophets of old had foretold (e.g. Psalm 22, Psalm 69, Isaiah 53), the Son of Man was to die for the sins of men to make atonement³ for them. Only two days earlier Jesus had said to his disciples:

"You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified". Matthew 26:2

On numerous other occasions Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man in the context of a lowly man on earth serving his fellow men finally laying down his life for them - much the same as the concept of the son of man in a general sense where the expression is used, not only to imply humanity, but to imply lowly humanity and human weakness. The Lord of all glory had voluntarily taken on the form of a servant and had in deep humility

**The Lord of all glory
had voluntarily
taken on the form
of a servant**




elected not only to serve God in form of a creature but even to serve his fellow-men:

"The Son of Man came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". Matthew 20:28

But far from the pending crucifixion being a final humiliation, Jesus spoke of it as a means of being glorified. More than once he spoke of his hour of destiny on the cross on the hour of glory for him. Shortly before his crucifixion he said to his disciples:

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit". John 12:23-24

Again, as he began his last discourse to his disciples, after Judas departed, he said:

"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and in him God is glorified. If God is glorified in him, he will glorify him in himself, and will glorify him at once". John 13:31-32

Far from the crucifixion being a disgrace for Jesus or even a triumph for his enemies, it was merely a means to that ultimate glory which the Son of Man was to receive in heaven according to the vision which Daniel saw many

centuries earlier. He went to the cross to redeem sinners then and now so that he could ultimately lead them in triumph into the kingdom which God was to give him. Three days after he had died on the cross, God raised him from the dead and forty days later God lifted him up and raised him to glory in the heavens until he should return to receive his own and lead and rule over them in the kingdom of heaven for evermore.

Accordingly we often find Jesus speaking of himself as the Son of Man in the context of glory as well as in the context of crucifixion. We only have to refer to the two texts quoted of the beginning of this section to see how emphatically Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man in the context of heavenly honour and majesty.

In the first quote he said to Nathaniel "You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" and to the High Priest he said "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven". One day all men will see the Son of Man coming from heaven with the glory he has already obtained in the kingdom of God. Other quotes in the same context are these:

"When the Son of Man comes In his glory, and all the angels

with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne". Matthew 25:31

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". Matthew 24:30

In all these quotes we find a deeply significant trend. The Son of Man is the central figure in the kingdom of heaven. He is unique among men – not just one who has found his way into heaven, but the one who is the focal point of glory before the eyes of all men and all angels of the highest place that heaven affords, at the right hand of the throne of God.

After Jesus had ascended to heaven, we have a wonderful example of a vision granted to one of the early Christians, Stephen, who was about to die for his Master and so became the first Christian martyr. As Daniel had seen a vision of the ultimate honour of the Son of Man in heaven, so Stephen also received a similar vision as he was about to die, and said:

"Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God". Acts 7:56

So we see the pattern of the life of the Son of Man:

- from apparent disrepute at the hands of sinful men as he died for them on the cross
- to transparent honour and glory at the hand of God when he raised him from the dead to sit at his right hand,
- there to receive the kingdom he had rightly earned for all who are saved by faith in him.

So we see what a glorious personality the Son of Man is. Far from being a simple expression of humanity, the Son of Man is a title given only to the ultimate Redeemer of the earth and all who follow him. But if the Son of Man has gone to sit at the right hand of the throne of God, we are constrained to ask: Does not this lead us to consider that the title "Son of Man", far from contrasting with the title "Son of God", rather corresponds, is wedded to it? While the title implies humanity, do not the circumstances that Jesus spoke of, which are found to accompany the ministry and work of the Son of Man, imply that he is also in very truth the Son of God? Indeed, the Son of Man must possess both divinity and humanity.

Let us press on to see how the Jews themselves got this very impression; and then let us conclude with a very brief examination of this title Son of God which Jesus also gave himself.

5. THE SON OF GOD

At the time of Jesus the Jewish people failed generally to believe in him and to follow him, but despite this they did not fail to grasp his claims about himself. When Jesus stood before the Council on the last night before he died, he said "From now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69), to which the Jews promptly replied "Are you the Son of God, then?" (v. 70) Although he had called himself the Son of Man, what he had said about the Son of Man seemed to imply that he was also the Son of God. Jesus answered "You say that I am", meaning, "Indeed what you have said is true – I am the Son of God – and *you* have borne witness to the fact".

Likewise we find a similar answer from Jesus when the High Priest said to him, "I charge you, by the living God, tell us whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63). Jesus answered "I am - and you have said so" (Mark 14:62, Matthew 26:64). To this answer the High Priest exclaimed "He has uttered blasphemy" (Matthew 26:65).

Jesus had been arrested by the Jews on the order of the High Priest because he had learnt that Jesus claimed to be the Son of

God. At his trial no evidence could be brought which could be made to stick against Jesus, so the High Priest stood up and asked him the one question that was on his heart. "Are you the Son of God?" The question was as unambiguous and as plain as it could be – and Jesus was put on oath before God to give him the true answer. Jesus replied in equally obvious language: "I am".

Not only did he confirm without reserve that he was the Son of God but he did so in the full knowledge of the consequences – that he would immediately be sentenced to death for blasphemy by the unbelieving Jews.

This was the climax of the growing hostility of the Jews to Jesus because of his repeated assertions that he was the Son of God. When they were angry with him for healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus answered:

"My Father is working still, and I am working". *John 5:17*

As a result of this claim they sought all the more to kill him because he made himself the Son of God by calling God his Father and by unreservedly equating his work with the Father's work.

On another occasion Jesus again incurred the wrath of the Jews for saying "Before Abraham was I am" (John 8:58). They did not accept his claim to pre-exist Abraham but were struck by the present tense "I am", which implied that he had an eternal spirit. To them this was the equivalent of God's statement to Moses "I am the God of Abraham" (Exodus 3:6). So they took up stones to stone him for blasphemy.

A third time Jesus said to them "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) – an emphatic statement that God was his Father and that he existed in absolute unity with him – and was therefore the Son of God. Again the Jews took up stones to stone him for blasphemy.

Now their own scriptures confirmed that the expression "Sons of the Most High" was used metaphorically of all true believers (Psalm 82:6). Why then were they accusing him of blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God in an absolute sense? (He at no time took exception to their conclusion – he reacted solely against their charge that he was *falsely* claiming to be the Son of God). His own words were:

"Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world "You are blaspheming" because I said

"I am the Son of God?".

John 10:36

For two reasons the Jews could not validly accuse him of blasphemy. *Firstly*, they could not genuinely object to terminology like "I am the Son of God" because their own scriptures used such language. But *secondly*, although their own Scriptures used such terminology only in a metaphorical sense, while Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God in an absolute sense, they still could not sincerely charge him with falsehood because the good works he did from the Father showed that his claims for himself were equally good and that this proved that he was indeed the Son of God.

All this had come to the ears of the High Priest and to avoid any further dispute, he put Jesus on oath to say whether he was indeed the Son of God to which Jesus replied "I am". The Jews then promptly went to the Roman governor, Pilate, seeking the execution of Jesus – for only one reason: *Jesus* claimed to be the *Son of God*. The Jews said to Pilate:

"We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God".
John 19:7

Once they thought they had succeeded in their designs, when Jesus hung on the cross, they exclaimed:

*"He trusts in God, let God deliver him now, if he desires him, for he said 'I am the Son of God'".
Matthew 27:43*

It is of great importance to observe the thrust of the accusation of the Jews against him – "he has made *himself* the Son of God"; "he said 'I am the Son of God'". While many men since that day have accused the Christian church of making Jesus the Son of God, the Jews heard it from his own lips – and they accused *him* of making *himself* the Son of God. Jesus made no attempt to deny this charge. So we see that Jesus himself is the source of Christian belief that he is indeed the Son of God.

Just as the expression "son of man" is found elsewhere in the Bible in a general sense, so is the expression "sons of God", but just as Jesus took the title Son of Man for himself in an exclusive and glorious sense as a majestic title, so he claimed to be the Son of God in the same exclusive sense.

No one can honestly doubt that Jesus himself claimed to be the Son of God. Only one question

remains, however, – was he indeed speaking the truth when he made this claim for himself or was he uttering blasphemy as the High Priest alleged?

In three definite ways God bore witness to the truth of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. When he promised the Jews centuries earlier that the Messiah was to come from David's line, God said of him:

*"I will be his father and he shall be my son".
2Samuel 7:14*

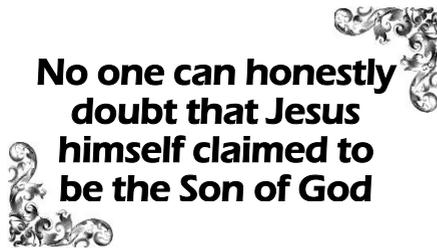
God made it clear that the Messiah was to be his *own* Son and this prompted Jesus to say to the Jews at the end of his ministry among them:

*"What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?"
Matthew 22:42*

When the Jews replied that he was to be the Son of David, Jesus pointed to a Psalm where David called him his Lord. How then could he be *his* son, Jesus asked? The Messiah was to be the offspring of David but had not God said that he would be *his own* Son? *Secondly*, God spoke from heaven of Jesus at his baptism, and later again, at his transfiguration and said:

*"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased".
Matthew 3:17*

No one can honestly doubt that Jesus himself claimed to be the Son of God



Thirdly, Jesus was raised from the dead three days after his crucifixion according to his own predictions to this effect (Matthew 16:21, etc.). In this way God bore witness to the fact that everything Jesus said about himself was true – including his oft-repeated claim to be the Son of God. His resurrection proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was indeed the Son of God (Romans 1:4) and that God was truly his Father.

It was the express united will of both the Father and the Son that Jesus should die as a man on a cross to redeem mankind to God. Perhaps the Father was never less obviously revealed in the Son than during those hours when Jesus hung, on the cross, forsaken of his Father, as he took the sins of men on himself. But never was the absolute and awesome love of the Father and the Son more revealed

to hell-deserving sinners than during those moments when Jesus endured what is rightfully due to all other men for their sins.

You must answer this question as well – what do *you* think of the Messiah? Whose Son is he? Will you agree with God and testify that Jesus, the Messiah, is indeed *his* Son? Will you not commit yourself to Jesus as your Lord and Saviour and receive the salvation he obtained for you by dying on the cross for your sins? Will you not believe in him fully and recognise that eternal life is found in him alone? Will you not receive forgiveness of sins in his name?

**You must answer
this question as well:
What do you think
of the Messiah?**

¹ For more detail about Jesus, the Messiah, request our booklet ***AL-MASIHU-ISA: THE GLORY OF JESUS THE MESSIAH***

² Epitome = a person that possesses to a high degree the features of a whole class

³ Atonement = reconciliation by way of a sacrifice

Now it is your turn:

1. What were some of the opinions in Jesus time about who he really was?
2. How was the title 'Messiah' used in the Jewish Scriptures?
3. Give the English meaning of these three Arabic titles: Al-Masih, Kalimatullah, Ruhullah.
4. What is your view about the statement "Jesus existed as the Word of God even before the world was created?"
5. What was Jesus reaction when the demons cried out 'You are the Son of God'?
6. Explain the significance of the title 'Word of God'.
7. List the three generally agreed aspects of the Holy Spirit.
8. Give at least five reasons from Daniel 7:13-14 why the Son of Man mentioned there cannot be an ordinary human being.
9. Why did the High Priest charge Jesus under oath to clearly state if he is the Son of God?
10. Why is it unfair to blame Christians today that they are making Jesus to be the Son of God?

Send in your answers to us and receive **a free copy** of another booklet of your choice from our **CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM SERIES**



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