

# **CRUCIAL CHOICES: CROSS AND HIJRAH COMPARED**

**By  
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NOTE: All Qur'an quotations from Abdullah Yussuf Ali, New Revised Edition, Amana Corporation, 1989

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**W**hat would have happened if ...

- ❖ **Nelson Mandela would have insisted to spend the rest of his life in prison?**
- ❖ **Napoleon had not succeeded to flee from banishment on Elba and not have recruited a new army?**
- ❖ **President Jomo Kenyatta had not sought to reconcile with the British colonial residents after independence?**

Theirs were crucial choices that impacted the course of history. This is even more relevant for Jesus as well as Muhammad in their choices.

It is not often realised how many similarities there are between the ministries of Jesus and Muhammad up to the point of Muhammad's departure from Mecca for the city of Medina (then known as Yathrib). The Islamic calendar traditionally dates from this exodus which is described in Islamic history as the hijrah (the "emigration"). In the biographies of the founders of the two greatest religions in the world we find them both pursuing a religious purpose and vocation that was to provoke intense opposition from their respective countrymen to the point where plans were laid to put them both to death. Each one was to learn of the plot against him and a moment of crisis, of crucial decision-making, was to face him.

In this booklet we shall briefly analyse the similarities between the events in the lives of these two men that led to the point of crisis, examine the actual decisions taken by them, and the vastly different courses their lives and ministries were to take as a result.

## 1. THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND MECCA

During the lifetime of Jesus the city of Jerusalem was the centre of Judaism, the religion of the people of Israel, the Jews, to whom Jesus himself belonged. He had been born of David's line (Luke 1:32) which made him a descendant from Judah (Hebrews 7:14), one of the twelve sons of the prophet Jacob [*Yakoub*].

Nearly six centuries later Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca, the leading city of the Arab tribes throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the custodian of its most important shrine and relics. The Quraysh tribe controlled the city and its religious ceremonies and Muhammad was duly born into this tribe in 570 AD<sup>1</sup>. Both Jesus and Muhammad, therefore, were members of the very nations that ruled their major cities respectively and were brought up in the environment of their forefathers and their religious

customs. Just as Jerusalem was the centre of Judaism at the time of Jesus, so Mecca was the focal point of Arab paganism during the lifetime of Muhammad.

Each city, furthermore, had its own special place of worship, a shrine that was the focal-point of all the religious ceremonies practised by the Jews and Arabs respectively. In Jerusalem the great temple of the Jews stood at the time of Jesus. It had originally been built by Solomon nearly a thousand years earlier, had been rebuilt during the reign of Zerubbabel after the exile<sup>2</sup> to Babylon a few centuries later, and by the time Jesus began his ministry it had gone through a radical phase of reconstruction that had already taken forty-six years (John 2:20) and became known as "Herod's Temple" when it was finally completed.

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The temple in Jerusalem

This temple had a number of courtyards and porticoes but its chief building was a cube-like structure in the middle of the Jewish courtyard known as the "Holy Place" which contained the Holy of Holies, an inner sanctuary where the presence of God was known to be and into which only the High Priest could go on the Day of Atonement to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel.

Wherever the Jews were in the known world of the time, whether in Africa, Asia Minor, Greece or Rome, they would turn towards the Temple in Jerusalem to pray, signifying their rejection of the pagan rites and customs of the Gentile nations and their identification with the God of Israel. This practice had been enjoined by Solomon (Suleiman) himself when he completed the first temple in Jerusalem. He prayed to God at the dedication of the temple in these words:

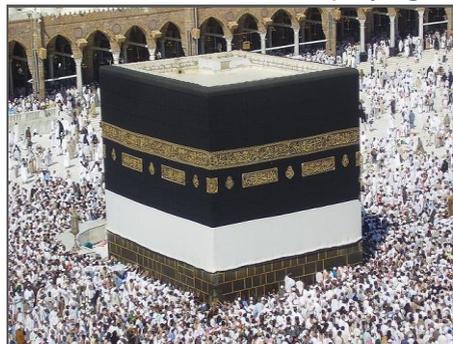
*"May you hear the humble and earnest requests from me and your people Israel when we pray toward this place. Yes, hear us from heaven where you live, and when you hear, forgive."*  
1 Kings 8:30

In Mecca the pagan Arabs had a similar shrine which today likewise has porticoes and an inner

courtyard. Like the Holy Place in Jerusalem it too contained a cube-like structure known as the "Ka'aba" (the word in Arabic in fact signifies a cube) and to this day it is known in Islam as the holiest shrine in all the world.

As the Temple in Jerusalem is known among Muslims as *bait-ul-muqaddas* (the "Holy House"), so the Ka'aba has been called *bait-ullah* (the "House of Allah"). Although Muhammad never believed that Allah himself manifested his presence in the shrine, it has nonetheless become the point of identification with Allah on earth for all Muslims and, like the Jews of old, they too all turn towards their holy house when offering their prayers to God. Every mosque in the world should face Mecca so that all Muslims will be facing the Ka'aba when they pray.

The similarity between the shrines goes still further. Not only did the Jews face Jerusalem when praying



The Ka'aba

at various Jewish festivals held every year. Many made the journey to the city for the *Passover Feast*, the *Festival of Booths*, and other festivals. On the *Day of Pentecost* that followed the ascension of Jesus to heaven we read that the Jews were astounded to hear the disciples of Jesus preaching fluently in their own languages and in their exclamation of amazement we obtain some idea of the distant lands from which they had come. Thousands were gathered together and as this multitude of worshippers stood bewildered at the manner in which the apostles addressed them they said:

*"Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia<sup>3</sup>, Judea and Cappadocia<sup>4</sup>, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them telling in our own tongues (languages) the mighty works of God".*  
Acts 2:7-11

In a similar way Arabs came from all over Arabia in the holy months to worship at the Ka'aba during the time of Muhammad. The *Festival of Ukadh* was their major fair but many others were held every year to which Arabs from the *Najran* province, the Hijaz mountain areas north of Mecca, the state of Yemen to the south, and various other cities and provinces flocked.

Both the Temple and the Ka'aba were thus the focal-points of Judaism and Arab paganism respectively to which the Jews and Arabs turned in prayer and flocked in pilgrimage to perform their devotions. Into these two similar environments Jesus and Muhammad were born, and within the precincts of their holy cities Jerusalem and Mecca they preached in the name of God to their country-men, both making special use of the annual festivals to deliver their messages to the representatives of their nations gathered together.

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## 2. THE OPPOSITION TO JESUS AND MUHAMMAD

Jesus and Muhammad both rose from among their own people and came into prominence as they began to preach in their holy cities. It took only a short while, however, before each was strongly opposed and persecuted by the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Mecca respectively. They both acknowledged the sanctity of the holy shrines in their cities but stood firmly against the practices and ceremonies being conducted around them. Jesus recognised that the Temple was the sacred house of the God of Israel and constantly referred to it as "my Father's house" (Luke 2:49, John 2:16). So likewise Muhammad acknowledged that Allah was the *Lord of the Ka'aba*<sup>5</sup> and the Qur'an teaches that it was originally built by Abraham through a direct command of Allah in these words:

*We covenanted with Abraham and Ismail, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer).*

*Surah 2:125*

Jesus stood against the Temple worship, not because he did not accept that it was the true Holy Place of God on earth, but because the religion of the Jews, in

particular the rites being practised around the Temple, had become a gross perversion of what God had intended it to be. The Jewish leaders had forsaken the commandments of God for the sake of their own tradition (Matthew 15:6).

Shortly after his baptism, and at the very beginning of his public ministry, Jesus entered the Temple and made a public remonstrance<sup>6</sup> against the religious orders of the day. The incident is recorded as follows:

*It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace." John 2:13-16*

This act immediately set the Jews of Jerusalem against him and when he repeated it during the last week of his ministry, the chief priests and scribes and principal men of the Jews took counsel against him to put him to death (Luke 19:47). Jesus, on this latter occasion, condemned the whole Jewish system around God's House in these words:

*It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers'.*

*Luke 19:46*

Muhammad stood against the rites around the Ka'aba because the shrine was polluted with idols. It is said there were more than three hundred in and around the shrine. At the age of thirty-five, some five years before the commencement of his public preaching, he was selected to replace the black stone in the Ka'aba as it was being rebuilt. He willingly consented and throughout his life regarded the Ka'aba as a sacred shrine built originally for the honour of Allah alone.

His early teachings, however, struck right at the root of the pagan idolatry surrounding the building. He constantly declared that God was One, that he had no partners, and that any association of any creature with him was an

unforgivable sin (Surah 4:116). He thus condemned out of hand the whole of the Ka'aba worship as idolatrous and whereas, like Jesus at the Temple, he did not disdain to worship at the Ka'aba, he nevertheless opposed the idol-worship associated with the shrine.

In both cases the cities rose in defiance of these men who promised nothing less than the supreme punishment to their most distinguished inhabitants. Jesus plainly said to the Jewish leaders, "How are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" (Matthew 23:33). And Muhammad likewise warned the Arabs against the Day of Judgment when they would be dragged through the Fire, being commanded, "Taste ye the touch of Hell!" (Surah 54:48). Each came to a point of crisis and decision. When Muhammad made a covenant with certain men from *Yathrib* (Medina), it was discovered by the Quraysh and they finally determined to put him to death. A three-year trade ban on the sub-tribe of Banu Hashim to which Muhammad belonged had failed to undo his influence and the Meccan Arabs decided on the ultimate method of silencing him. Muhammad's life was no longer safe in Mecca – the point of decision had come. The Qur'an itself mentions the plot laid by the unbelieving Arabs to kill Muhammad:

*Remember how the Unbelievers plotted against thee, to keep thee in bonds, or slay thee, or get thee out (of thy home).*

*They plot and plan, and God (Allah) too plans, but the best of planners is God (Allah).*

*Surah 8:30*

Muhammad had to take a quick decision in this moment of crisis. He had to act one way or the other in the face of the ever more extreme threat from the idolatrous Arabs of Mecca. Jesus reached a similar point where he too had to make a sudden decision in the

face of a growing scheme to destroy him. When he raised Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests among the Jews at Jerusalem, concerned at his growing influence, finally turned their desire to do away with him into a deliberate plot to kill him:

*So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death.* *John 11:53*

Like Muhammad he was faced with a moment of destiny. Should he remain in Jerusalem and endanger his life, or should he move away from the city?

### **3. THE WAYS OF ESCAPE BEFORE JESUS AND MUHAMMAD**

Just as opposition against Muhammad was coming to a head in Mecca, and not long after he had been rejected by the people at *at-Ta'if* to the south-east of the city, a welcome opportunity to escape the pending dangers and find an alternative haven came his way. The two major tribes in Yathrib, the *Aus* and the *Khazraj*, had for a long time fought with one another and, in an attempt to resolve their differences, they sought an independent leader. Men from both tribes made a pact with Muhammad during one of the fairs at Mecca and a year later a group of seventy returned and,

at the *Second Pledge of Aqabah*, committed themselves to Muhammad, pledging to defend him even at the cost of their lives.

Not long afterward Muhammad left Mecca for Yathrib with a few score followers, later known as the *muhajirun* (the "emigrants"), and was duly met by each of the *ansar* (the "helpers") who had covenanted with him at Aqabah. Muhammad made the city his home and headquarters, renamed it *al-Madinah* ("the city"), and set about establishing himself among the people to the north of Mecca who had offered him a suitable

haven of refuge and a way of escape from the growing dangers he had faced. The great *Hijrah*, the Emigration, was complete.

The parallels between the crises that both Jesus and Muhammad met continue at this point as well. As soon as Jesus knew that the chief priests were planning to put him to death, he no longer went about openly among the Jews until the Feast of the Passover when he returned again to Jerusalem (John 11:54: 12:1). He came into the city seated on a donkey, fully aware of the schemes being laid against him. He had been rejected and despised by the priestly hierarchy in Jerusalem and knew that he faced all sorts of dangers from the Jews in the city. Suddenly a way of escape opened to him, uncannily similar to the one presented to Muhammad. Shortly after he had entered the city a delegation of Greeks came to Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, and they said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (John 12:21). Philip and Andrew duly went and told Jesus.

Jesus must have felt the same sense of potential relief that Muhammad was later to feel in similar circumstances. He could go away from the Jews and make his home among the Greeks – a possibility considered sometime earlier by the Jews themselves in Jerusalem (John 7:35). At his

moment of destiny and crisis Jesus too discovered an inviting prospect of escape. Thus far the analogy between him and Muhammad goes, but no further.

When he heard that the Greeks wanted to see him he replied 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 earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit".*

*John 12:23-24*

He had come into the world with an express purpose and he knew that his hour of destiny had arrived. The hour had come for him to fulfil his glorious mission and as he considered the request of the Greeks, he told a brief parable to illustrate his reason for rejecting the opportunity to escape. If a grain of wheat is left by itself on a shelf it will retain its own identity but will serve no purpose. If it is buried in the ground, it will lose its identity, but the plant that will grow from it will bear many new grains of wheat.

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Jesus came into the world to save it. He came to give his life as a supreme sacrifice that would give life and a new hope to the world (John 6:51). His purpose was to make the kingdom of heaven available to sinful, dying men. To achieve this he knew that he himself must die and be buried and that it would only be through this atoning work that the kingdom of heaven could truly be established on earth and many men become its heirs through faith in him.

The seed had to lose its identity and first be buried before it could bear much fruit. Jesus first had to suffer and die for the sins of men before his salvation could become available to Jews *and* Greeks and all the other nations of the world. He considered the way of escape offered to him but rejected it in these words:

*"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour".*                      *John 12:27*

Should he appeal to his Father to save him from his moment of destiny by finding a refuge among the Greeks? No - he rejected the idea. He had come for this hour. He solemnly turned down the opportunity to escape that Muhammad gratefully accepted.

He set his face towards the cross that he knew was facing him and the work of salvation that he was to accomplish on it. Instead of appealing for help he boldly declared, "Father, glorify your name", and a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and I will glorify it again" (John 12:28).

The similarities between the course of events in the lives of Jesus and Muhammad come to an end at this point and from here on all is in contrast. Muhammad took a pledge from the Ansar to defend and save his life, even to the point of sacrificing their own lives. Jesus renewed his own pledge to lay down his life so that all his followers might find life instead. These contrary decisions in the moment of crisis and destiny were to lead these two men on totally different paths thereafter and their missions were to have sharply contrasting consequences.



## **He set his face towards the cross**



#### 4. MUHAMMAD AND THE UMMAH AT MEDINA

For many years scholars tended to distinguish between Muhammad as a lonely preacher in Mecca and Muhammad as the head of a community of believers at Medina – dedicated to defeating their opponents in Arabia through *jihad*, religious warfare. It has often been suggested that Muhammad's personality and objectives changed at Medina and that the militant figurehead of a large body of believers in this city compared sharply with the passive preacher at Mecca who patiently endured all the insults heaped on him and the persecutions levelled against his followers.

In more recent years, however, scholars have concluded that there was really no change in the man at all and that the rule he established in Medina and the means he adopted to enforce and spread its influence had been forming in his mind long before he left Mecca. It seems much more plausible that the prophet of the Arabs at Mecca was seeking favourable circumstances quite intentionally to employ his ultimate objectives. This would mean that the Hijrah was not simply an escape from Mecca but a deliberate stepping-stone towards creating circumstances Muhammad perceived necessary to bring

about the religious order he believed he was called to establish.

A brief study of the teaching of the Qur'an at this point tends to confirm this latter view. The book plainly teaches that it was God's express will to create a well-balanced and stable *ummah*, a "community" of believers, as a witness to the nations (Surah 2:143). Furthermore, whereas *jihad* only became a tenet and regular feature of Islam at Medina in contrast with the situation at Mecca where no Muslim was taught to retaliate against the enemies of Islam, the Qur'an nevertheless places the Hijrah and jihad side by side, indicating that one of the purposes of the escape from Mecca was to establish a better base from which the struggle of jihad against the unbelievers could be launched.

Not long after the Hijrah a party of Muslims made an attack on a small Meccan caravan at *Nakhlah* near Mecca in which one of the pagan Arabs was killed and two were captured. The Muslims at Medina were surprised at this new venture and were also quite disturbed to find themselves on the offensive against the Meccans. Although they had been the victims of prolonged persecution during Muhammad's preaching years at Mecca, it was not the

policy of the Quraysh to put them to death. Now, very shortly after the Hijrah, one of their opponents had been slain by fellow-Muslims and the fledgling<sup>7</sup> community at Medina questioned the wisdom of provoking possible large-scale retaliation from Mecca and the whole prospect of fighting in the way of religion. The following verse in the Qur'an, however, soon came to Muhammad to reassure them:

*Fighting is prescribed for you.*

*Surah 2:216*

The very next verse justified retaliation against the Meccans for denying the Muslims access to the Ka'aba and for the constant oppression heaped upon them and the following verse reads:

*Those who believed and those who suffered exile and fought (and strove and struggled) in the path of Allah, - they have the hope of the mercy of Allah; and Allah is Oft-forgiving,*

*Most Merciful. Surah 2:218*

In the original Arabic the words translated "and those who suffered exile and fought in the path of God" read as follows: *wallathiina haajaruu wa jaahaduu fii sabiilillah*. It is very significant to see the concept of exile, *hijrah*, directly linked with that of fighting, namely *jihad*. Those who have been "exiled" (*haajaruu*) are also those who have "fought"

(*jaahaduu*) in the way of Allah. The Hijrah was thus merely a stepping-stone towards jihad. It was not only an opportunity to escape for Muhammad but also a means to deal more effectively with those who opposed him. It was the pathway to jihad. Muhammad left Mecca only to take steps immediately to interrupt its trade and ultimately to conquer and subdue it. He escaped from the city that had rejected him only to confront it from Medina.

The growing Muslim *ummah* at Medina at last found itself able to deal forcefully with those who opposed it. Even though there were hostile elements in the city, both Jewish and Arab, Muhammad gradually asserted his authority. He exiled two of the Jewish tribes and dispatched the third after his final confrontation with the Meccans at Medina, and although he never fully subdued the Arabs in the city who were opposed to him he did eventually annul their influence completely. Even during the period when they sought to undermine his influence they did outwardly swear allegiance to him. The three confrontations with the Meccans

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before Muhammad was finally able to conquer Mecca with a superior force in 630 AD all helped the ummah to establish itself. Though outnumbered at *Badr* in 625 AD the Muslims inflicted a serious defeat on the Meccans, killing a number of their leaders including Abu Jahl who had been one of Muhammad's chief opponents.

The Muslims suffered a reverse at the *Battle of Uhud* which followed but their security within Medina was unchallenged and when a major effort by the Meccans to drive them out a year later also failed, the ever-growing Muslim community was able to take the offensive and conquer the Meccans.

Many Muslim writers have sought to justify jihad in Islam by suggesting that this applies purely to self-defense and they argue accordingly that all Muhammad's wars including those of his successors (in particular the battles fought during Umar's caliphate<sup>8</sup> which spread the rule of Islam to Egypt, Syria, Iraq and parts of Iran) were purely defensive. We are not concerned to debate this subject here and only wish to note that it is at least admitted that the sword may be unsheathed for the protection of Muslim communities and the faith of Islam.

Muhammad himself saw nothing wrong with the destruction of his

enemies by force of arms and the Qur'an itself calls for the demise of his uncle and radical opponent Abu Lahab (Surah 111:1). Muslims themselves were told that every Muslim who died while fighting for Islam was a *shahid*, a martyr (the word principally means a "witness"), and the Qur'an duly guarantees Paradise<sup>9</sup> to them. A typical passage setting out the benefits of dying while fighting for the faith is this one:

*Those who leave their homes in the cause of God, and are then slain or die, – on them will God bestow verily a goodly*

*Provision: Truly God is He Who bestows the best Provision.*

*Verily he will admit them to a place with which they shall be well-pleased: for God is All-Knowing, Most Forbearing.*

*Surah 22:58-59*

Significantly the first verse speaks once again of the *haajaruu*, those who go into exile, and who are then killed (*qutiluu*) in the way of Allah. The Hijrah thus led directly to the establishment of the initial *ummah* of believers, a kind of "kingdom of God on earth". The body of believers was thus an earthly community that was entitled and exhorted to defend its identity against all who would oppose it or stand in its way. It was thus clearly Muhammad's

objective to establish a theocratic Muslim state and community, and to protect and maintain its identity by fighting those who resisted it.

The later passages of the Qur'an give Muslims the right to take up arms against anyone who threatens the Muslim ummah and to slay them wherever they be found (Surah 2:190-191). The book even contains an open license to make war on all who do not acknowledge Islam, including Christians, until they "feel themselves subdued" (Surah 9:29).

It is thus quite apparent what the natural consequence and, indeed, express objective of the Hijrah was. Although the concept of jihad, fighting in the way of God against unbelievers, was a novel one in Arabian society, the principle of faith versus unbelief as a justifiable cause for physical warfare became one of the tenets of Islam. Nonetheless, despite its

religious character, the employment of force of arms for the subjugation of opponents, whether in self-defense or otherwise, is historically nothing more than the customary method of establishing an earthly rule. It has been resorted to throughout the ages.

It was this very means which Muhammad adopted to protect the *ummah* of Islam against its opponents and, when he was strong enough, to subdue them. Its express purpose was to safeguard and expand the visible identity of the people of Islam as a distinct community on earth. The Hijrah led perforce to the concept of what can best be described, in Christian terms, as a visible kingdom of God on earth. Its very character necessitated the use of forceful means to protect its identity whenever this appeared to be threatened.

## **5. THE DIFFERENT PATH CHOSEN BY JESUS CHRIST**

Jesus Christ could have chosen a similar path to that chosen by Muhammad. Not only were the Greeks prepared to welcome him but the Jews in Galilee also were only too willing to make him their king (John 6:15). The opportunity to gather a band of loyal followers around him and stage a revolt was presented to him on numerous

occasions. Nevertheless, when the chance to escape from the designs of the hostile Jews suddenly came to him as he entered Jerusalem for the last time, he resisted it and set himself positively on the road to his moment of destiny – the cross.

There were many people in Israel in those days who attempted to

overthrow the Roman rule and establish themselves as the leaders of the Jewish race. The notorious Barabbas was just such a man, one who had been "thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder" (Luke 23:19). Gamaliel, the great Jewish teacher of the law in Jerusalem, spoke of other such men who had arisen at various times in the nation's history and had endeavoured to overthrow the existing rule by forceful means:

*"For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered".*  
Acts 5:36-37

So likewise Bar Kochba gathered a number of men around him in 130 AD and attempted to drive out the Romans as well. In each case the usual means was resorted to – the followers were armed with weaponry and sent forth to fight in the name of God against unbelievers.

Jesus was different. The Jews tried more than once to persuade him to aspire to become the ruler of the nation and enable it to resist the unbelieving Gentiles by force of arms, but he resisted the temptation every time it came his way.

At last the moment of crisis arrived, the hour of destiny. Jesus sat together with his disciples on the Thursday night after his entry to Jerusalem the previous Sunday when the Greeks had sought to see him. He knew that the Jewish soldiers would come to arrest him that night and would look for him in the Garden of Gethsemane where he usually met with his disciples (John 18:2). Even now escape would have been easy enough for him but instead he went straight to the very place where he knew they would come for him, knowing everything that was to befall him (John 18:4). "I have come to this hour" he had boldly declared (John 12:27) and when he saw the crowd coming towards him with lanterns, torches and weapons he said:

*"The hour has come;  
the Son of man is betrayed  
into the hands of sinners".*  
Mark 14:41



**Jesus was  
different**



At this very moment his disciples saw what was about to happen and they cried out, "Lord, should we strike? We brought the swords!" (Luke 22:49). Simon Peter immediately drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest. At the hour of crisis the followers of Jesus were possessed with the spirit of jihad. The sword was promptly unsheathed by Peter in the defence of his master in fulfilment of his pledge that he was willing to die for Jesus (Matthew 26:35).

Jesus, however, had rejected the whole idea of a hijrah or jihad. If Peter had laid down his life for Jesus it would have been a courageous act of martyrdom. But Jesus had come to lay down *his* life for Peter and for all his followers instead. He had come to bring new life to them and sought to open the door so that they could be transformed into true men of God and inherit eternal life. He said to Peter:

*"Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions (=thousands) of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"*  
Matthew 26:52-54

To the astonishment of his disciples he promptly healed the ear of his captor! (Luke 22:51) This was the opposite of the spirit of jihad, it was the spirit of sacrificial love and grace. He did not seek to destroy his enemies by means of jihad so that he might live, he was willing to be destroyed so that even his enemies might live and be reconciled to God (Romans 5:10).

In one breath he commanded his followers once for all to sheathe the sword. He had not come to set up an earthly ummah which was to be defended by force of arms, he had come to prepare his followers to become citizens of the kingdom of God, a heavenly ummah.

When Jesus was brought before Pilate the next day the Jews laid the false charge against him that he had been attempting to set himself up as a king in opposition to Caesar. Pilate duly asked him if he was the King of the Jews and why he had been handed over by his own nation. Jesus answered him:

*"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place".*  
John 18:36

"My servants would fight", he said. In other words, if he had come to set up an earthly ummah, just as

Muhammad's servants duly did to protect him and his community of followers, he would have acted as can be expected in this world. But his kingdom, as he said, was *not of this world*. He had come to make the kingdom of heaven accessible to all on earth and to prove the love of God by paving the way for them to become citizens of heaven. He was not interested in a hijrah to preserve his life on earth, nor in a jihad to protect an earthly community. He sought to establish a heavenly kingdom and the only way to achieve this was entirely different to the path of jihad.

The kingdom that was not of this world that Jesus came to establish was a heavenly one, a kingdom of love, grace, holiness and peace. He did not seek to subdue his enemies, he came into the world because he was endowed with

heavenly love for them. He sought to save them and, to achieve this, he was willing to lay down his own life for them. He came to establish a spiritual people constituting one body over all the earth, not to be gathered into an earthly community to be protected against all other tribes and nations, but to be united in one spirit, secure and prepared for a kingdom ready to be revealed at the last time. He therefore chose the only possible path that could bring his mission to fulfilment.



**The Kingdom  
that Jesus came  
to establish was a  
heavenly one, a  
kingdom of love,  
grace, holiness  
and peace**



## **6. THE CROSS - THE CHOICE OF THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD**

On the night that Jesus was arrested the hatred of those who sought to destroy him was finally given an opportunity to express itself. The Jewish leaders, who were his sworn enemies, immediately took steps to have him put to death and within less than twenty-four hours he was nailed to the cross. His disciples were shattered. They "had long hoped that he was the one to

redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21) and, in this moment of apparent defeat, it appeared that all was suddenly lost. His enemies were jubilant. At last they had him in their power and were determined to see him put to death before their very own eyes.

As Jesus hung on the cross he seemed to be a failure. All his labours appeared to have been in vain. While the hijrah had taken

Muhammad from the depths of disconsolation to the prime of success, the cross took Jesus to an early grave. It was all so sudden and unexpected. It had seemed that the chief priests could do nothing to withstand him. Suddenly they had laid hold of him and had arranged a swift execution. What went through the mind of Jesus at this point? Did he regret not taking the many opportunities he had enjoyed to escape from the Jews? Did he look back on the occasion a few days earlier when the Greeks had desired to talk with him and wish he had listened to them? Did he despair in the sudden horror of all that had befallen him? Did he curse his enemies in his heart for achieving what they had so long sought? Not one of these thoughts entered his mind. Shortly after he was put to the cross. Yet he prayed in these words:

*"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".*

*Luke 23:34*

The crucifixion did not catch Jesus by surprise at all. He had often predicted that he would be crucified (Matthew 17:23, 20:19) and as the time approached he spoke of it as his "hour" (John 12:27). On the night of his arrest he plainly told his disciples that he was about to be betrayed (John 13:19), and in everything he said during his arrest, trial and

crucifixion we find him reacting without surprise to the events that were rapidly unfolding against him.

He spoke of this hour as the moment which he had anticipated and as the one in which he was to be "glorified" (John 12:23; 13:31). He looked toward it as the climax of the glorious work he had been sent to fulfil. He did not view it as a sudden disaster that he should have anticipated and fled from in 'hijrah fashion', he saw it as his moment of glory, as the occasion he had long awaited when the fulness of his love was finally to be revealed. The moment had come for him to achieve what he had long been constrained to accomplish (Luke 12:50).

He did not cry out from the cross in despair, nor did he curse those who had condemned him. He prayed that they might be forgiven. He was willing to suffer in their place and be consumed that they might be forgiven. *He died so that his enemies might live.* He revealed the perfection of his Father's love for those who hated him by enduring on the cross the penalty that was due to them for their sins. In his crucifixion he gave the ultimate proof of God's love for wayward sinners. Jesus Christ chose the opposite path to that chosen by Muhammad. The cross was the antithesis<sup>10</sup> of the Hijrah and its

objectives were the opposite of those sought in the escape from Mecca. Muhammad fled his enemies only to engage in battle with them and slaughter them so that he and his companions might live. Jesus made no attempt to escape from his enemies that fateful night but gave himself up for them and died that they might live.

When God called on Abraham to sacrifice, he tested him to see whether he loved him so much that he would give his very own son for him. When this same God, the eternal Father, willingly gave his own Son for the human race and took the initiative in securing the forgiveness even of his enemies, he manifested to the full his love for mankind. Muhammad willingly destroyed those whom he considered to be the enemies of God, but in Jesus Christ God willingly forgave those whom he knew to be his own enemies so that they might live instead.

*God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love –*

**The cross was  
the antithesis  
of the Hijrah**



*not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.  
1John 4:9-10*

From an earthly point of view it may yet appear that Muhammad's decision to flee his enemies was a wiser one than the decision of Jesus to passively give himself up to them. After all, Muhammad's decision was the turning-point in his mission. Twelve years of frustration in Mecca were soon to be forgotten as the Islamic ummah was established at Medina and as Muhammad grew in power and authority. Successes became increasingly regular and in the end he was able to return to Mecca with an overwhelming force and conquer his enemies. At the time of his death he had subdued virtually the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. Did he not die in peace, beholding the triumphs of his mission?

After only three years ministry Jesus was suddenly apprehended and put to an untimely death in what was generally considered to be a shameful and disgraceful manner. His small band of disciples deserted him and his enemies gloated over him in triumph. Did not his life, in contrast with Muhammad's, end in miserable defeat and apparent disaster?



As he hung on the cross, two thieves who were crucified with him began to mock him with the Jewish leaders for claiming to be the Messiah (Matthew 27:44). After a while one of them again reviled him, calling on him to come down from the cross and save them if he really was the Messiah. It was to be the last temptation from Satan to Jesus to express himself as a worldly Messiah and make a public display of his real authority and conquer all his enemies. At this late hour, however, the other thief finally repented and had a change of heart. He said to his fellow criminal:

*"Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong".* Luke 23:40-41

But what good would such repentance do at this moment for a hardened criminal who had done no good in his life at all and was now only a short while from death? With his hands and feet nailed to the cross, what could this enemy of God do to redeem himself, one who not an hour earlier had heaped abuse on the Anointed one of God? In his moment of helplessness and

complete demoralisation he said to Jesus:

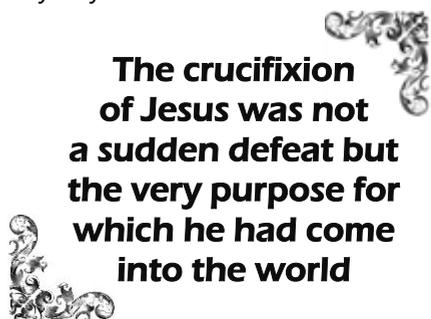
*"Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power".*  
Luke 23:42

He finally perceived that the crucifixion of Jesus was not a sudden defeat but the very purpose for which he had come into the world and in penitence asked only to be remembered, even as the most undeserving of sinners and least of men, the last man who might hope to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus immediately replied:

*"Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise".*  
Luke 23:43

A faint hope that he might yet obtain access to the kingdom of God as the last man in was transformed in a moment into a full assurance that he would be the first man to die after Jesus Christ in true faith and walk with him that very day into Paradise!

**The crucifixion of Jesus was not a sudden defeat but the very purpose for which he had come into the world**



The Hijrah opened the way for Muslims on earth to obtain temporary security in the ummah of Islam. The cross opened the way for all true followers of Jesus to obtain eternal life in the kingdom of God. Apparent defeat was

about to be transformed into glorious victory. At first glance the Hijrah might appear to have been a wiser choice than the cross. When viewed in perspective, however, the opposite turns out to be the case.

## **7. THE END RESULT: THE GLORIOUS KINGDOM OF GOD**

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ stands with his resurrection from the dead and ascension to heaven forty days later. The only historical record of the life of Jesus is found in the Bible and it testifies to both the crucifixion *and* resurrection as facts of history.

Who really succeeded in his mission – Muhammad who lies dead and buried in Medina, or Jesus who reigns alive in heaven above? The Hijrah led Muhammad to Medina, the seat of his earthly ummah, but the cross led Jesus to resurrection and glory in the kingdom of heaven, the realm of eternal life. Muhammad duly went the way of all flesh as his earthly body returned to dust in a city made of dust. Jesus returned to heaven and to "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).

What striking parallels and contrasts there are between the events that led to the Hijrah, which Muhammad chose, and the cross, to which Jesus submitted himself.

Ultimately, however, it is the contrasts and their consequences that fix themselves before our eyes. Jesus could have chosen to escape and find refuge among the Greeks, but what good would that have done? The seed would have remained alone. It had to die if it was to bear much fruit and so Jesus willingly gave himself up to die on the cross. But he rose again from the dead and his atoning work guarantees life beyond the grave to all who believe in him.

How gloriously this wondrous statement sets forth the success that he wrought through his crucifixion and resurrection to life three days later:

**Who really  
succeeded in his  
mission - Muhammad  
who lies dead and  
buried in Medina, or  
Jesus who reigns alive  
in heaven above?**



*"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live".  
John 11:25*

One fact cannot seriously be ignored - death brings disaster on all men. "They all lived happily ever after" is the myth of the average fairy story. The true human destiny is quite another thing. All men, no matter what their achievements, waste away and come to nothing. For many the demise of the body is a painful, humiliating experience. No real success can be achieved in a world where all come to nothing eventually. Death is the dreadful consequence of sin and it holds all men in its vice-like grip.

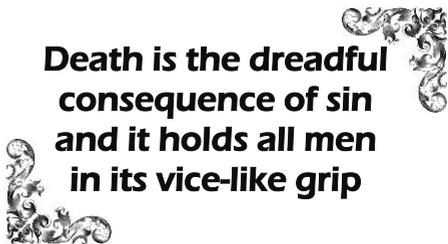
Jesus Christ obtained the greatest victory this world has ever seen when he conquered death and rose from the grave. This is the one supreme success story of history. No other remotely compares with it. While men continue to die all over the world, one man – just one man – sits alive in the heavens above and has done so for nearly two thousand years. While billions lie in the dust, one man alone enjoys the power of eternal life having not only conquered death but having also risen above the perishable world below, where all is bound to decay, into the realms of heaven where all is imperishable and unfading.

Both Jesus and Muhammad planned to return to the places where they had been so ruthlessly opposed. Muhammad returned to Mecca some years after the Hijrah in triumph over his foes who were this time bound to acknowledge his claims. Death, however, was not far away and within two years it took him permanently into the earth where he remains to this day.

Jesus, however, visited death first, burst out within three days from the grave, and ascended to heaven. From there he will return in triumph to reign over his foes, when every knee will bow to him and every tongue will be constrained to confess "that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). Similarities there are indeed between Jesus and Muhammad, but the contrasts are far more striking.

Muhammad established the ummah of Islam at Medina which asserted itself after the conquest of Mecca. Jesus has also chosen a people for himself, but his community is yet to be revealed in

**Death is the dreadful  
consequence of sin  
and it holds all men  
in its vice-like grip**



its glory. At the cross he wrought salvation – on his return he will raise to glory all true believers who are presently interred<sup>11</sup>, "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:13-14).

He will come not only in triumph over his foes but also in eternal glory with those who are his own.

He will come not only in triumph over his foes but also in eternal glory with those who are his own. Then the true success of his mission will be revealed. As he himself came back to life, so he will raise from the dead all who love him and follow him as their only Lord and Saviour.

Only one man could conquer death and there was only one means to achieve it. Jesus Christ was the man and his crucifixion and immediate resurrection the means. "Cometh the hour, cometh the man" – of no man could these words be more truly said than of the Saviour of the world who, when the hour came, did not shirk its terrors but graciously endured them all so that those who believe in him might share his total victory and look forward, as all true Christians do, to the Day of their Redemption when he will return and raise them from the dead to eternal life.

**Similarities there are indeed between Jesus and Muhammad, but the contrasts are far more striking**




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1 AD = *Anno Domini* which means 'In the year of the Lord'

2 Exile = captivity (of the Jewish people in Babylonia)

3 Today's Iraq

4 Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia and Pamphylia were provinces in today's Turkey

5 Other places in the Qur'an that speak about this are Surah 106:3; 27:91

6 Remonstrations = objection, disapproval

7 Fledgling = like a young bird that has just grown the feathers needed to fly

8 Caliphate = rule of the successors (caliphs) of Muhammad the Bible.

9 Note that the concept of Paradise in the Qur'an is very different from the Bible

10 Antithesis = the exact opposite

11 Interred = laid to rest

## **Some similarities and contrasts between Muhammad and Jesus:**

<b>MUHAMMAD</b>	<b>JESUS</b>
Was born and raised in a city: Mecca	Born in a small village: Bethlehem
Reinstated the Ka'aba	Confirmed the temple as God's house
Cleansed the Ka'aba	Cleansed the temple courts
Was threatened by the Meccans to be killed	Was threatened by his own people to be killed
Accepted the invitation to emigrate to Medina (Yathrib)	Rejected the idea to find refuge among the Greeks
Fought many battles to save his life from his enemies	Willingly laid down his life for others like a grain of wheat buried in soil
Prescribed for his followers to fight for their cause	Explained to his followers (and others) that his Kingdom is not of this world
Cursed his opponents like his uncle Abu Lahab (Surah 111)	Forgave his enemies even while hanging on the cross
Died alone and was buried in Medina	Was raised to life and promised eternal life with him in heaven
Returned to Mecca in triumph years after the Hijrah	Will return in triumph from heaven for all to see



## Now it is your turn:



1. What symbolized Jerusalem as the center of the Jewish faith?
2. What makes the Ka'aba in Mecca of utmost significance to Muslims?
3. How did Jesus refer to the Temple and in similar ways Muhammad to the holy shrine in Mecca?
4. Who offered Jesus, and who offered Muhammad a way of escape out of a dangerous destiny?
5. How did Jesus respond? Please quote what he said.
6. How did Muhammad respond and in what ways did it decide his future course?
7. What was the purpose of the ummah which Muhammad established?
8. How did Jesus oppose the 'spirit of jihad' in his followers?
9. What makes Jesus' reply to Pilate "My Kingdom is not of this world" so significant?
10. What promise did Jesus give to the criminal who attested to Jesus innocence while hanging on the cross?

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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