

# THE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS

## Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Similarities and Contrasts

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### ***Introduction***

Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) is a central and pivotal figure in the shared history and heritage of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the Judaic tradition, he is the recipient of the original covenant between the Hebrew people and God. In the Christian tradition, he is a famed patriarch and the recipient of a formative and original covenant with God, which was later refined as the mosaic covenant, whereas the second covenant is seen as being ushered in with Jesus Christ. In the Islamic tradition, he is a heralded example of unwavering faith and of steadfast monotheism, a prophet and messenger of God, and the recipient of one of the original books of revelation bestowed upon mankind by God. Across all three religious traditions. Abraham is specifically noted to be the friend of the one God.

Thus, it is that within the Jewish scriptures of the Nevi'im and the Ketuvim and within the Christian scriptures of the Old Testament, that we find the following words:

*But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the off-spring of Abraham, my friend ... (Isaiah 41: 8)*

*Did you not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham? (II Chronicles 20:7)*

Further, within the Christian scriptures of the New Testament epistles, it is stated:

*Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says: "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness", and he was called the friend of God. (James 2:23*

Likewise, within the Islamic scriptures of the Qur'an, God says in the closest English meaning:

*Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to God, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in faith? For God did take Abraham for a friend. (Qur'an 4: 125)*

## **FINDING COMMON GROUND**

Against this backdrop of essential commonality, there is little wonder that Islam, Judaism and Christianity are often classified together as the three Abrahamic faiths. While a classification system based upon a shared and common heritage from Abraham may appear to be overly particularistic to some, no matter what classification system is used, Judaism, Christianity and Islam consistently group together. For example, the academic discipline of comparative religion offers a variety of ways to classify the various and sundry religions of the world: monotheistic vs. polytheistic, prophetic vs. Wisdom tradition, middle Eastern vs. Eastern. Within the same context, the three major prophetic religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Likewise the three primary Middle Eastern religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

It is no accident that these three religions consistently group together across a variety of conceptual schemata. While each of the three religions has dogma and doctrine unique to itself, each of them has a core that is essentially similar to the

core of the other two. Each of the three religions claims the same historical legacy within the prophetic tradition, although each may interpret specific historical and prophetic events differently. Each of the three religions shares a common core of religious and ethical teaching although differing in places with regard to specific doctrine and dogma. In fact, using the analogy of a tree, each of the three religions claims to be the one, true, vertical extension of a trunk of primary and divine revelation, with the other two religions being seen as lateral branches that have deviated from the true verticality of the original trunk.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share a common trunk of divine revelation and in their original forms, can be considered to be not just one religious tradition, but one religion. This very point finds repeated and unambiguous expression in the Qur'an, where God said that the religion established for Prophet Muhammad and the followers of Islam is the same religion that God established for prophet Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

The same religion has he established for you as that which he enjoined on – Noah – that which we have sent by inspiration to thee – and that which we enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus namely, that ye should remain steadfast in religion and make no divisions therein ... (Qur'an 42: 13a)

*Say: "God speaketh the truth: follow the religion of Abraham the sane in faith: he was not of the pagans. (Qur'an 3:95)*

*And who turns away from the religion of Abraham but such as debase their souls with folly? His we chose and rendered pure in this world: and he will be in the hereafter in the ranks of the righteous. Behold! His lord said to him: "Bow (they will to me)" he said: "I bow (my will) to the lord and cherished of the universe. And this was the legacy that*

*Abraham left to his sons, and so did Jacob: "Oh my sons God hath chosen the faith for you; then die not except in the state of submission (to God)". Were ye witnesses when death appeared before Jacob? Behold, he said to his sons: "what will ye worship after me?" They said: We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers – of Abraham, Ismail, and Isaac – the one (true) God: to him we bow (in Islam)". (Qur'an 2: 130 – 133)*

*And strive in His cause as ye ought to strive, (with sincerity and under discipline). He has chosen you and has imposed on difficulties on you in religion: it is the cult of your father, Abraham. It is he who has named you Muslims, both before and in this (revelation)... (Qur'an 22: 78a)*

The Qur'an further documents that the divine revelation sent to Prophet Muhammad was a continuation of the inspiration sent previously to Prophets Noah, Abraham, lot, Ismail, Isaac, Job, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elijah (Elias), Elisha, Jonah, Zechariah (Zakariya), John the Baptist, and Jesus. In other words, it was the culmination of the prophetic tradition encoded, however erroneously at times, within the Bible.

*We have sent thee inspiration, as we sent it to Noah and the messengers after him: we sent inspiration to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon and to David we gave the Psalms. (Qur'an 4: 163)*

*Say: "We believe in God and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, and in (the books) given to Moses, Jesus and the prophets, from their lord: we*

*make no distinction between one and another among them, and to God do we how our will (in Islam)." (Qur'an 3: 84).*

*We gave Moses the book and followed him up with a succession of messengers; we gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear (signs) and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. (Qur'an 2: 87a)*

*And we gave him (Abraham) Isaac and Jacob: all (three) we guide and before him we guided Noah, and among his progeny David, Solomon, job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron: thus do we reward those who do good. And Zakariya and Job and Jesus and Elias: all in the ranks of the righteous and Ismail and Elisha, and Jonah, and lot: and to all we gave favor above the nations: (to them) and to their fathers and progeny and brethren: we chose them, and we guided them to a straight way. (Qur'an 6: 84 – 87).*

*We did messengers before thee and appointed for them wives and children: and it was never the part of a messenger to bring a sign except as God permitted (or commanded). For each period is a book (revealed). Good doth blot out or confirm what he pleaseth: with him is the mother of the book. (Qur'an 13: 38 – 39).*

"For each period is a book (revealed)." Here we begin to encounter the Islamic concept of progressive revelation, of a gradual unfolding of the one true religion through the medium of successive revelations a topic that will be addressed more fully in the following chapter. However, for the moment it suffices to note that the three Abrahamic faiths were in their pristine origins, one religion. Being originally one religion, the three Abrahamic faiths worship the same God, although the three religions may differ in how they conceptualize that one God.

God made this very point in the Qur'an when he said that the Muslims and the people of the book (*Ahl Al-kitab*; i.e. Jews and Christians) have the same deity: "Our God and your God is one; and it is to him we bow (in Islam)".

*And dispute ye not with the people of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury); but say, "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)". (Qur'an 29: 46)*

God also says in the Qur'an that there were many other prophets before Prophet Muhammad. Some of these prophets are directly mentioned in the Qur'an and others of these prophets are not.

*We did aforetime send messengers before thee: of them there are some whose story we have related to thee, (Qur'an 40: 78a)*  
*Of some messengers we have already told thee the story; of others we have not – and to Moses God spoke directly – messengers who gave good new as well as warning, that mankind, after (The coming) of the messengers, should have no plea against God; for God is exalted in power, wise, (Qur'an 4: 164).*

With regard to those prophets of whom Muslims are aware, i.e. those who are directly mentioned in the Qur'an, God directs Muslims not to make hierarchical distinctions among his prophets, but to accept and honor them all.

*Say ye: "We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac Jacob and the tribes and that given to Moses"*

*and Jesus and that given to (all) prophets from their lord; we make no difference between one and another of them; and we bow to God (in Islam). (Qur'an 2: 136).*

*The messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his lord, as do the men of faith. Each one (of them) believeth in God, his angels, his books and his messengers. "We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of his messengers." And they say: "We hear and we obey: (We seek) thy forgiveness our lord, and to thee is the end of all journeys". (Qur'an 2: 285)*

*Say: "we believe in God, and in what has been revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and in (the books) given to Moses, Jesus and the prophets from their lord; we make no distinction between one and another among them, and to God do we bow our will (in Islam)". (Qur'an 3: 84)*

*To those who believe in God and his messengers and make no distinction between any of the messengers. We shall soon give their (Due) rewards: for God is oft-forgiving, most merciful (Qur'an 4: 152)*

## **CONFRONTING MISCONCEPTIONS**

### **Introduction**

Before continuing our journey into the commonalities and contrasts to be found among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it may be helpful to provide a few different conceptual frameworks for understanding the inter-relationships among these three religions. In what follows, three specific issues are addressed: (1) the contrast between the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic perspectives on the origins of

the three Abrahamic faiths; (2) some highly misleading comparisons that are often made when contrasting Judaism, Christianity and Islam; and (3) the derivation and meaning of the Arabic word "Allah" as well as its relationship to the Hebrew text of the *Old Testament* and to the English word "God".

### **Origins of the Abrahamic faiths**

Most readers whose religious heritage is from the Judaeo-Christian tradition have probably been taught that Judaism was the first monotheistic religion, that Christianity was a derivation from Judaism, and that Islam was a derivation from both Judaism and Christianity. In fact, these teachings are not facts derived from religious history, but are Judaeo-Christian interpretations of religious history. The Islamic interpretation of the same historical facts that underlie the Judeo-Christian interpretation is that Islam began with Prophet Adam, deviations occurred in the true revelation of Islam. Despite additional prophets being sent to call the people back to Islam, some of these religious deviations became codified. Such codifications were the origins of Judaism and Christianity, with Judaism being codified primarily under the influence of Ezra and the men of the Great Assembly circa 400 BCE and with Christianity, at least how it has evolved into modern times, being codified primarily under the teaching of Paul (Saul of Tarsus).

### **Misleading Comparisons**

As a second conceptual issue, consider Prophet Jesus and the Bible on the one hand and Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an on the other hand. Most non-Muslims immediately assume that Christianity and Islam can be compared by contrasting the role of Prophet Jesus in Christianity with the role of Prophet

Muhammad in Islam. In years past, this highly misleading comparison gave rise to the terms "Muhammadans," "Muhammadanism," and "Muhammadism," terms that are deeply offensive to Muslims, as they might imply that Prophet Muhammad is somehow an object of worship for Muslims. An equally inappropriate comparison is to contrast the role of the Bible in Christianity with the role of the Qur'an in Islam. Much better, although by no means perfect, comparisons have been offered by my former professor of comparative religion. Wilfred Cantwell Smith.

Smith has argued cogently that the most frequent error in contrasting Islam and Christianity is to hypothesize a comparison between the roles of Jesus Christ in Christianity and of Prophet Muhammad in Islam. Smith has argue that it is more realistic and more profitable to contrast prophet Muhammad's role in Islam with the role of Paul (Saul of Tarsus) in Christianity. Both have been referred to as apostle (messengers, envoys delegates, or ambassadors), who preached a message whose followers believe was of divine origin. Paul's messenger and the message of Pauline Christianity was very person of Jesus Christ, whom Christians frequently call the "word of God" and whom Christians typically believe to be the revelation from God "And the word became flesh and lived among us..." (John 1:14a). in contrast, Muslims believe that prophet Muhammad preached the message of the Qur'an i.e. the literal words of God. Thus the role of prophet Muhammad in Islam can be compared with the role of Paul in Christianity and the role and status of the Qur'an in Islam can be contrasted with the position of Jesus Christ in Pauline Christianity.

Extending Smith's argument further, the Bible, i.e. contemporary Christianity's record about the revelation which is Jesus, should not be compared to the Qur'an, i.e. Islamic actual and verbatim revelation from God, but perhaps to the *Ahadith*, i.e. the reported narratives regarding from Prophet Muhammad said

and did which contain information regarding history and context regarding the divine revelation to Prophet Muhammad. As such, Smith argued that within Islam, there is no Qur'an field of study comparable to Christianity's academic and theological interest in Biblical criticism including text criticism and literary form criticism. The comparison to Biblical criticism within Christianity would be *Ahadith* criticism within Islam a field of study that is still somewhat in its early stages compared to the text critical and literary form critical studies that have been undertaken on the bible given this presentation, perhaps the Christians reader can understand that asking a Muslim; "for historical criticism of the Qur'an" is comparable to asking a devout Christian "for a psychoanalysis of Jesus."

Smith's construct has much to commend it but tends to shortchange the type of rational scrutiny by which Muslims have studied and analyzed the Qur'an. Such analytical methods have included the study of the circumstance of discrete revelations, the issue of later revelations modifying or abrogating earlier revelations, and the relationship between sound and content. The real contrast is that the Qur'an has stood the test of historical and rational analysis in a way that the Bible has not.

### **On the word "*Allah*"**

The Arabic word "Allah" often sounds quite strange and foreign to non-Muslim ears. Frequently, non-Muslims erroneously conclude that there is some mutually exclusive contrast that is to be made between Allah and God, as though Allah can be understood as some cult deity such as Baal or Osiris. In fact, the English word "God" is merely a translation of the Arabic word "Allah".

The Arabic word "Allah" is a contraction of the Arabic "*Al-Ilah*", which means "the God" and, at least by implication, "the One God". Furthermore, Arabic and Hebrew are sister languages among the Semitic language group, and the Arabic "*Al-Ilah*" is linguistically comparable to the Hebrew "*Elohim*" and "*El-Elohim*", which are the Hebrew words that are typically translated as "God" in most English versions of the Old Testament. This can be dramatically illustrated by comparing the Arabic spelling of "*Al-Ilah*" with the Hebrew spelling of "*El-Elohim*".

Neither Arabic nor Hebrew has letter for vowels, with both languages having alphabets consisting only of consonants. Both languages rely on supplemental vowel marking to aid in pronunciation, but such aides are typically found only in highly formal writing. As such using English letters instead of Arabic and Hebrew letters and omitting the supplemental vowel markings. *Al-Ilah* becomes *Al-Ilh* and *El-Elohim* becomes *El-Elhm*. If one then removes the plural of respect, which is found only in the Hebrew word, the Arabic remains *Al-Ilh*, while the Hebrew becomes *El-Elh*. Finally, it should be noted that first and third letters of the Arabic word are transliterations of the Arabic letter "*Alif*" and that the first and third letters of the Hebrew word are transliterations of the Hebrew letter "*Alif*". If each *Alif* in each alphabet is transliterated with the English letter "A", the two words become identical, i.e. "*Al-Alh*" for the Arabic "*Al-Ilah*" and "*Al-Alh*" for the Hebrew "*El-Elohim*".

Given the above understanding, the English word "God" will typically be used throughout this book, rather than the Arabic word "Allah". However, before becoming just too obsessed with whether one uses the Arabic word "Allah" or the English word "God", one does well to heed the words of God as recorded in the Qur'an. Perhaps, members of all three Abrahamic faiths can find some insight in

these sacred words and thereby find within themselves some measure of greater tolerance for the linguistic practices used by members of the other two Abrahamic faiths when referring to the deity.

*Say: "Call upon Allah (i.e. the One God) or call upon Al-Rahman (i.e. The Most Gracious or The Entirely Merciful): By whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is well): for to Him belong the most beautiful names".*  
(Qur'an 17:110a)

### **On Islam as an Arab Religion**

As an additional misconception, consider the oft-stated proposition that Islam is an Arab religion. In point of facts, many Arabs are not Muslims. Iraq houses a Christian population of around one million Arabs, about 05% of the Arabs in Jordan are Christian, and much higher percentages of Christians are to be found among the Arabs of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Furthermore, the vast majority of Muslims are not Arabs. There are over 160 million Muslims in Indonesia, over 100 million in Bangladesh, over 100 million in Nigeria, over 100 million in India, over 90 million in China, over 60 million in Turkey; and several million in Germany, France, and Great Britain.

With regard to Islam in America, it is currently estimated that there are over seven million Muslims in the United States, making it America's second largest religion. Of those over seven million Muslims, it appears that just over 50% are native-born Americans whose parents belong or had once belonged to some other religious tradition. In fact, American conversions to Islam range as high as 25,000 converts each year. During the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of

mosques in America has more than tripled, climbing from just over 600 to around 2,000. Currently, more Islamic books are being published in English than in Arabic.

### **Culture vs. Islam**

It is said that many people erroneously assume that some of the worst cultural practices of so-called Muslim countries of the third world are manifestations of Islam. Here I am referring to such abominations as so-called "honor killings", the subjugation of women, female genital mutilation, the killing of civilian non-combatants, etc. these practices are more representative of Islam than is the widespread practice in certain areas of so-called Catholic South America of families selling their teenaged daughters into white slavery a valid representation of Roman Catholicism. With all religions, it is crucial to distinguish the religion from the cultural milieu in which it may be found.

### **ONWARD AND UPWARD**

Having addressed the foregoing it is time to turn to some of the specific and detailed commonalities and contrasts that exist among Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Without in anyway downplaying or minimizing the differences that do exist within these three religious traditions, *Insha'Allah* (the one God willing), the reader will come to appreciate that the commonalities that bind us together are much greater than the differences that keep us apart. In particular, the following chapter highlights some important aspects of religious history and of spiritual and ethical instruction that are shared by the three Abrahamic faiths.

# THE QUR'AN, AHADITH AND JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES: FINDING COMMON GROUND

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the many and striking similarities that exist between Judaeo-Christian scripture on the one hand and the Qur'an and *Ahadith* (singular = hadith) on the other hand. For Muslims, the Qur'an represents the divine revelation given to Prophet Muhammad between approximately 610 and 632 CE. Muslims believe that the Qur'an contains the actual and verbatim words of God as relayed to Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. As such, the Qur'an is the highest religious authority in Islam. In contrast, the *Ahadith* consist of the narratives of what Prophet Muhammad said and did. Within Islam, the authentic *Ahadith* are second in religious authority only to the Qur'an. I emphasize the word "authentic", because it is a matter of historical record that some *Ahadith* were fabricated and others have a weak and questionable provenance. However, there is a corpus of *Ahadith* that is generally accepted as being authentic, and it is this corpus of *Ahadith* that will be used throughout the remainder of this book whenever *Ahadith* are presented.

In an effort to provide some conceptual structure to understanding the commonalities between the Islamic and Judaeo-Christian scriptures, the field of inquiry has been somewhat arbitrarily divided into four areas of concern (1) religious history and the prophetic tradition (2) divine revelation in religious history (3) Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary and (4) religious and ethical teachings. The fourth area has been further segmented according to various biblical passages that find parallel expression in either the Qur'an or the *Ahadith*.

## RELIGIOUS HISTORY AND THE PROPHETIC TRADITION

### The Prophetic Tradition

As a starting point in exploring the similarities between the Judeo-Christian scriptures and the religious texts of Islam, we can begin by examining the shared prophetic tradition of the three Abrahamic faiths, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. However, before beginning this endeavor it is worthwhile to degree momentarily in order to consider the meaning of the word "prophet".

The English word "prophet" and the related words "prophecy" and "prophesize" are derived from the Greek "prophets". In turn the Greek "prophets" is a translation of the Hebrew (and Arabic) word "*nabi*," which is derived from the Akkadian language. The Akkadian word "*nabi*" means "to call," "to announce," or "to speak for." Thus a religious prophet is one who announces or proclaims a divine messenger or revelation. A prophet is simply someone who speaks for God. As originally intended, prophet had nothing to do with predicting or seeing into the future.

The prophetic tradition within Judaism and Christianity is firmly encapsulated in what Christianity refers to as the Old Testament. Moving from Genesis to Malachi, Judaism and Christianity trace their prophetic tradition from the creation of Adam, through the pre-Israelite patriarchs (Noah, Enoch, Abraham and Isaac), and on through the various Israelite prophets and notables e.g. Jacob, Moses, Joseph, Samuel, David, Solomon Elijah. Elisha, Jonah, etc.). Within Christianity, the prophetic tradition even encroaches slightly into the New Testament gospels, with the inclusion of stories about Zechariah and his son John the Baptist, who is known as Prophet Yahya within the Islamic tradition.

It may come as a surprise to many non-Muslims to learn that everyone of these aforementioned prophets is mentioned repeatedly in the Qur'an. Utilizing a standard English translation of the meaning of the Qur'an, one finds Moses being named over 170 times, Abraham over 70 times, Noah over 40 times, Jesus and Joseph (the son of Jacob) over 30 times, Adam, Jacob, and Solomon almost 20 times, Isaac and David over 15 times, and John the Baptist about five times. Within the Qur'an, one also finds references to Job (or Prophet Ayyub), Jonah (or Prophet Yunus), Elijah (or Prophet Elias), and Elisha. Clearly, this is a shared prophetic tradition among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

When one moves beyond mere names and begins to compare the stories of the prophets mentioned in both the Bible and the Qur'an, one typically finds that the two sources parallel each other, although occasionally disagreeing about some specific details of the story. This is the case with each of the following stories.

### **The Creation**

Both the Qur'an and the Bible maintain that God created the cosmos in six days (Qur'an 7:54 vs. Genesis 1:1 2:4)

### **Prophet Adam**

Both Islamic and Judaeo-Christian scripture state that: (1) God created the first human, Adam, from clay or mud: (2) Adam later "fell" by eating from the forbidden tree: and (3) Adam was then expelled from paradise (Qur'an 2:30 – 39: 7:19 - 24: 15:28 – 29: 32: 7 – 9; 38:71–72 and 55: 14 vs. Genesis 2:4 3 : 24)

## **Cain and Abel**

Both the Bible and the Qur'an relate the story of Adam's first two sons, Cain (Qabil) and Abel (Habil). Both accounts state that they quarreled because God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain. As a result, both sets of scripture maintain that Cain killed Abel. (Qur'an 5:27 – 31 vs. genesis 4:1 – 16)

## **Prophet Noah and the flood**

Both the Qur'an and the Bible related the following data regarding Prophet Noah (1) God directed Prophet Noah and his followers to build an ark (2) once completed the ark was boarded by Prophet Noah and his followers as well as by representatives from the animal kingdom (3) thereafter, a flood destroyed mankind but the inhabitants of the ark were saved (4) Noah lived 950 years (Qur'an 11: 25 - 34, 36 – 48: 23: 23 – 30 26: 105 – 122: 29: 14 – 15: 37: 75 – 82; 54: 9 – 25; and 71: 1 – 28 vs. genesis 6: 9:9 29)

## **The Sacrifice of Prophet Abraham**

Both the Qur'an and the Bible relate that Prophet Abraham was tried by God being asked to sacrifice his son. As Prophet Abraham was complying with this test, God ransomed Abraham's son with a ram, which was sacrificed in place of Abraham's son. (Qur'an 37:99 – 112 vs. genesis 22:1 – 19)

## **Prophet Lot and the Destruction of Sodom**

Both the Qur'an and the Bible state the following details regarding Prophet Lot. (1) Prophet Lot eventually left Prophet Abraham and moved to a city (Sodom). (2) Angels of God came to Sodom and stayed in Prophet Lot's home, where they

were threatened by the inhabitants of Sodom. (3) Prophet Lot tried to appease these men of Sodom by offering his daughters as brides if these men would leave his guests alone. (4) Prophet Lot's offer was rejected. (5) The angels then blinded the inhabitants of Sodom and destroyed Sodom and all its inhabitants, with the exception of Prophet Lot and his followers. (6) Even Prophet Lot's wife was killed. (Qur'an 7:80)

### **Prophet Joseph**

Both the Qur'an and the Bible relate the following narrative events concerning Prophet Joseph. (1) Prophet Joseph, the son of Prophet Jacob, had a dream or vision in which 11 stars (his brothers), the sun (his father), and the moon (his mother) prostrated to him. (2) This dream or vision earned Prophet Joseph the enmity of his brothers. (3) His brothers subsequently faked Prophet Joseph's death. (4) Instead of dying, Prophet Joseph was first placed into a well or pit and then was later sold into slavery in Egypt. (5) In Egypt, he was sexually confronted by his owner's wife. (6) Prophet Joseph was then placed in prison, where he interpreted the dreams of two former servants of the Egyptian monarch. (7) Later, Prophet Joseph correctly interpreted the monarch's dreams of seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine and was made the vizier of ancient Egypt. (8) Subsequently, Prophet Joseph's brother came to Egypt to buy grain during the time of famine, and the family was eventually reunited in Egypt. (Qur'an 12:4 – 10) vs. Genesis 37: 3 – 37.

## **Prophets Moses and Aaron**

Both the Qur'an and the Bible detail the following events concerning Prophet Moses and his brother, Prophet Aaron. (1) Moses was cast out on the water as an infant by his mother but he was then rescued and taken in by a member of the Egyptian royal family. (2) As an adult, Moses killed an Egyptian who was oppressing an Israelite. (3) Moses then escaped to Midian (Madyan), where he helped the Sheykh of Midian's daughters water their flock at a well. (4) Having been summoned to be a Prophet of God on a mountain in Midian, Prophet Moses later returned to Egypt where he and Prophet Aaron confronted the pharaoh with mighty signs (e.g. a staff being turned into a serpent and Prophet Moses hand turning a leprous white in colour) and demanded that the Israelites be set free. (5) Pharaoh initially refused this request but finally granted it after Egypt was afflicted with a series of plagues, including death, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood (Qur'an) or water turned to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, diseased livestock, boils, thunder and hail, locusts, darkness, and death (Bible). (6) Pharaoh released the Israelites into the custody of Prophets Moses and Aaron before changing his mind and pursuing them to the sea. (7) The sea parted, allowing the Israelites to pass by but then closed on the pursuing Egyptians and drowned them. (8) The Israelites subsequently wandered in the wilderness, where God provided for their sustenance with manna and quail. Nonetheless, the Israelites complained about not having a variety of vegetable and fruits to eat. (9) Early in the Israelite sojourn in the wilderness, the Israelites sent spies into Palestine to survey their potential opposition. Upon returning, all of the spies, excepting only two (identified as Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 13:1-14:10), maintained that the opposition was too strong for the Israelites to proceed into Palestine. As punishment for their lack of faith,

God made the Israelites wander in the wilderness for 40 years. (10) In the wilderness, Prophet Moses relieved the thirst of the Israelites by striking a rock with his staff, causing water to come gushing forth by God's leave. (11) Also in the wilderness, Prophet Moses was called up to a mountain where God gave him the tablets of the law. (12) In the meantime, the Israelites abandoned the worship of God and forced (Qur'an) or seduced (Bible) Prophet Aaron into helping to construct a golden calf as an idol. (Qur'an 2:51–61; 5:20–26; 7:104-156; 10:75-92; 11:96-97; 17:101-103; 19:51-53; 20:9-73, 77-98; 23:45-48; 26:10-66; 28:7-39; 43:46-56; 51:38-40; and 79:15-24 vs. Exodus 2:1-4:17; 5:1-14:31; 16:4-35; 17:1-7; 31:18-32:35; Numbers 11:1-9, 31-32; 13:1-14:10, 26-34; 20:1-11; and Deuteronomy 9:8-29).

### **Prophet Samuel and king Saul**

Both the Bible and the Qur'an relate the following details concerning prophet Samuel and King Saul (Talut) (1) the Israelites demanded that one of their prophets (identified as Samuel in the Bible) appoint for them a king. (2) The prophet anointed Saul as king of Israel, but the Israelites then questioned the prophet's choice of Saul as their king. (3) Saul subsequently led the Israelites out into battle against Goliath (Jalut) and his army (the Philistines according to the Bible). Qur'an 2:246 – 250 vs. I Samuel 8:4 – 10:8; 17:1 – 11).

### **Prophet David**

Both the Qur'an and the Bible stated when King Saul's army was confronted by Goliath and the Philistines, Prophet David marched forth and killed Goliath (Qur'an 2:251 vs. I Samuel 17:1- 54).

## **Prophet Jonah**

Both the Qur'an and the Bible relate the following events concerning the life of Prophet Jonah. (1) Prophet Jonah tried to escape and flee on a ship (2) while he was onboard lots were cast, and he was thrown overboard. (3) Once in the sea, he was swallowed by a big fish. (4) Inside the big fish, Prophet Jonah prayed to God for forgiveness. (5) His prayer was answered, and he was cast forth on a shore. (6) Thereafter, a plant grew over Prophet Jonah, and he preached the message of God, converting over 100,000 with his preaching. (Qur'an 37: 123 – 132 vs. Jonah 1:1 – 4:6 )

## **Prophets Zechariah and John the Baptist**

Both the Qur'an and the Bible provide the same following details regarding the miraculous birth of Prophet John the Baptist. (1) Prophet Zechariah was a caregiver to the Virgin Mary. (2) Prophet Zechariah, as an aged and childless man who was married to a barren woman, prayed that he might yet father a child. (3) His prayer was answered, and his wife conceived Prophet John the Baptist. (4) As a sign, Prophet Zechariah was made mute for three nights (Qur'an) or throughout the conception, gestation and first eight days of life of Prophet John the Baptist (Bible). (Qur'an 3:37 – 41; 19:2 – 15; 21: 89 – 90 vs. Luke 1: 5 – 80).

## **Differences in the Prophetic Tradition**

Having summarized some of the commonalities to be found in the shared prophetic tradition of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it must also be acknowledged that one often finds that the respective stories of the prophets from the Bible and the Qur'an tend to complement each other without overlapping.

Thus, the Qur'an gives considerable details about Abraham's early life, presumably in Ur. While such information is not to be found in the bible, it does not contradict Biblical accounts. In contrast, the Bible gives information about Abraham's life in Palestine that is not to be found in the Qur'an but that does not contradict the Qur'an. Further, the Qur'an presents a much fuller story regarding the visit of the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) to Prophet Solomon than is to be found in the Bible. In contrast, the bible gives much more information than the Qur'an when it comes to the stories regarding Prophet Solomon's building programs and judicial wisdom. However, once again, these specific differences in emphasis are not contradistinctions.

Furthermore, it should be noted that many of the Qur'anic stories of the prophet that are not found in the bible are found in parallel or variants versions in the Jewish Talmud or in various Jewish Targum and Midrashim. Such is the case with all of the following Qur'anic stories. (1) Prophet Adam, having previously been taught the names of all things by God, named the various entities of creation after the angels were unable to do so (Qur'an 2:30 – 33 vs. Midrash Rabbah on Leviticus and Genesis, and Sanhedrin 28). (2) God commanded the angles to bow down to Prophet Adam (Qur'an 2:34; 7:11; 15:28 – 29; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116; 38:71-74 vs. Midrash of Rabbi Moses). (3) A raven's scratching on the ground served as the inspiration for Cain's (Qur'an 5:31) or Prophet Adam's (Pirke Rabbi Eliser 21) idea of burying Prophet Abel's body after he was murdered by Cain. (4) As a youth, Prophet Abraham destroyed numerous idols, earning him the enmity of the idol worshippers who then unsuccessfully attempted to burn him to death (Qur'an 21:51 – 70; 29: 24; 37: 83 – 98 vs. Midrash Rabbah on (Genesis). (5) Prophet Joseph is found to be innocent of attempting to rape his Egyptian owner's wife when it is

found that she tore Prophet Joseph's garment from the back (indicating that she had chased him) and not from the front (Qur'an 12:21 – 29 vs. Midrash Jalkut). (6) The wife of Prophet Joseph's Egyptian owner invited other Egyptian women to a meal, where upon they all cut their hands with knives in amazement when they were confronted by the magnificence of Prophet Joseph (Qur'an 12:30 – 31 vs. Midrash Jalkut). (7) Prophet Jacob urged his sons to enter the Egyptian city by different gates when they went to Egypt to get food during a time of famine (Qur'an 12:67 – 68 vs. Midrash Rabbah on Genesis). (8) The golden calf made by the Israelites in the wilderness, while Prophet Moses was on the mountain, actually seemed to low (Qur'an 7:148; 20:83 – 89 vs. Pirke Rabbie Eliser).

True, there are places where the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions contradict each other or at least differ rather more dramatically than previously illustrated. For example, while both traditions maintain that God created the universe in six days, the Qur'an offers no parallel to the biblical account of God resting from his work on the seventh day. While both traditions maintain that Prophet Adam "fell" from grace by eating of the forbidden fruit in the garden, Islam, unlike traditional Western Christianity, does not interpret this event as creating a state of Original Sin, in which all of humanity inherits Adam's initial sin through being conceived through sexual intercourse. Further Islam does not necessarily see Adam's earthly sojourn as being a divine punishment for his original mistake. While both traditions maintain that prophet Abraham was called upon to offer his son in sacrifice, the Judaeo-Christian tradition maintains that the sacrificial victim was Prophet Isaac and that the site of sacrifice was Jerusalem, while the Islamic tradition usually holds that it was prophet Ismail and that the site of sacrifice was just outside Makkah at Mina. While both the Islamic and Christian traditions

maintain the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, Islam sees this as a miraculous act of divine creation, while traditional Christianity interprets this as a divine begetting.

## **DIVINE REVELATION IN HISTORY**

At this point, it might be helpful to digress for a moment and consider the Islamic view of the concept of revelation, a topic that was briefly introduced in the preceding chapter. Islam views the prophet being given a divine covenant. Therefore, unlike the Christian notion of a first covenant with Prophet Abraham (later ratified and expanded in the so-called mosaic covenant) and a second covenant with Jesus Christ, Islam sees a multiplicity of covenants, in which each prophet and his followers were given a covenant by God. Furthermore, Islam, does not limit the prophetic tradition to the Israelites and their precursors, with the Qur'an specifically mentioning such non-Israelite prophets as Ismail (the eldest son of Abraham), Hud of the 'Ad people, Salih of the Thamud people, Shu'ayb of the Midianites (Madyan), and Muhammad (the last of the prophets of God). In addition, the Qur'an specifically states that God sent a messenger or prophet to every people, although many of their names and identities may no longer be known to us.

*Before thee We sent (messengers) to many nations, and We afflicted the nations with suffering and adversity that they might learn humility.  
(Qur'an 6:42)*

*Verily, We have sent thee in truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner: and there never was a people without a warner having lived among them (in the past). (Qur'an 35:24)*

*To every people (was sent) a messenger: when their messenger comes (before them), the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged. (Qur'an 10:47)*

As the sequence of prophets unfolded over time and across different ethnic groups, successive revelations would sometimes add to or abrogate prior revelations. Thus, the totality of the revelation given to Prophet Moses might be somewhat different than that previously given to Prophet Abraham, the revelation given to Prophet Jesus might be different than that received by Prophet Moses, and the revelation presented to Prophet Muhammad different than that taught by Prophet Jesus. From an Islamic perspective, this evolution in the revelatory message indicates a gradual unfolding of God's divine plan and message, with specific changes paced to the spiritual development of humanity or to that of a specific group of people.

*O People of the Book! There hath come to you Our messenger, revealing to you much that ye used to hide in the book and passing over much (that is now unnecessary): there hath come to you from God a (new) light and a perspicuous book – wherewith God guideth all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety and leadeth them out of darkness, by His will, unto the light – guideth them to a path that is straight. (Qur'an 5:15-16)*

*None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: knowest thou not that God hath power over all things. (Qur'an 2:106)*

*This Qur'an is not such as can be produced by other than God; on the contrary it is a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it and a*

*fuller explanation of the book – wherein there is no doubt – from the Lord of the worlds. (Qur'an 10:37)*

*We did send messengers before thee, and appointed for them wives and children: and it was never the part of a messenger to bring a sign except as God permitted (or commanded). For each period is a book (revealed). God doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the mother of the book. (Qur'an 13:38-39)*

However, throughout all of the progressive revelations given to successive prophets, Islamic thought maintains that two core elements of the revelations remained constant. Firstly, there is no god but God Who alone is to be worshiped in His Oneness. Secondly, avoid evil and wickedness, for there will be a general resurrection and a Day of Judgment.

*For We assuredly sent amongst every people a messenger (with the command), "Serve God and eschew evil:" of the people were some whom God guided and some on whom error became inevitably (established). So travel through the earth and see what was the end of those who denied (the truth). (Qur'an 16:36)*

With those two constants, one again meets the essential commonality that is to be found among Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, for these same two constants may be seen as being fundamental within both Judaism and Christianity.

#### **THE ISLAMIC VIEW OF MARY AND JESUS**

As noted earlier, Jesus is mentioned by name over 30 times across multiple passages in the Qur'an. However, much of the information on Jesus in the Qur'an

is confined to two lengthy passages (chapter 3, verses 35 – 60; and chapter 19, verses 1 – 40), both of which like Luke, preface the account of the birth of Jesus with the story of the miraculous birth of John the Baptist, and the former of which prefaces the story of the birth of John the Baptist with the story of the birth of Mary. In what follows, the Islamic portrayal of Jesus and Mary is drawn from the Qur'an and from the sayings of Prophet Muhammad.

Qur'an 3:35 – 37 begins the story of Mary (Maryam) with a brief statement about her birth. The reader is first introduced to an otherwise unidentified "woman of 'Imran", i.e. descendant of Imran, presumably a reference to the Biblical Amran, who was the father of Prophets Moses and Aaron (Exodus 6:16 – 20), and who was the founding ancestor of one of the clans of the Israelite tribe of Levi (3:14 – 27). This "woman of Imran" supplicated to God and dedicated her unborn daughter to "Thy special service". The girl was born, was named Mary, and was accepted by God, who "made her grow in purity and beauty". She then entered the care of Prophet Zechariah, the father of Prophet John the Baptist at which time she was "supplied with sustenance" from God. Additionally, Qur'an 3:44 states that several individuals "cast lots with arrows" to see who would have final care of Mary.

*Behold! A woman of Imran said: "O my Lord! I do dedicate unto thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: so accept this of me: for Thou bearest and knowest all things." When she was delivered, she said: "O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child! – and God knew best what she brought forth – and no wise is the male like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Thy protection from the evil one, the rejected". Right graciously did her Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty: to the*

*care of Zakariya was she assigned. Every time that he entered (her) chamber to see her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: "O Mary! Whence (comes) this to you?" She said: "from God: for God provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measures." ...they cast lots with arrows, as to which of them should be charged with the care of Mary... (Qur'an 3:35 – 37, 44)*

While much of the above may be unfamiliar to many Christians, each of the above statements has important parallels in early Christian scripture and apocrypha writing. For example, The Gospel of the Birth of Mary 1:6 states that Mary's parents devoted her "to the service of the Lord" even before she was conceived, and 5:6 of the same apocryphal gospel further states that her parents rededicated her to that service after she reached puberty. A variant fragment of The Gospel of the Birth of Mary, preserved in a statement by Faustus, the bishop of Riez in Province, states that Mary was a Levite. The Protoevangelion of James 8:2 notes that an angel fed Mary during her stay at the Temple in Jerusalem and that Zechariah petitioned the High Priest about Mary. The Protoevangelion of James 8:6 – 16 and The Gospel of the Birth of Mary 5:4 – 6:7 both state that various males cast lots by way of their rods for the care of Mary that Joseph, to whom Mary was later betrothed, was the winner. Finally, Luke 1:39 – 45, 56 reports that Mary stayed with Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, for three months.

The above noted fragment of The Gospel of the Birth of Mary is not the only Christian reference suggesting that the family of Mary was of the Israelite tribe of Levi. In addition there are at least two Biblical reference that may provide circumstantial evidence of a link between the tribe of Levi and the family of Mary and Jesus, firstly, Luke 1:36 reports that Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist,

was a relative of Mary, while Luke 1:5 clearly states that Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron, who was a descendant of Aaron, who was of the tribe of Levi (Exodus 4:14). If Elizabeth was a Levite and if Mary was Elizabeth's relative, is it not probable that Mary was also a Levite? Secondly Luke 3:23 notes that Jesus was "about thirty years old" when he began his mission and ministry. This reference becomes important when one realized that the Levites began their religious duties at the tabernacle (later the temple) at 30 years of age.

The following were sons of Levi, by their names: Gershon, Kohath and merari... The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: Take a census of the Kohathites separate from the other levities, by their clans and their clans and their ancestral house, from thirty years old up to fifty years old, all who qualify to do work relating to the tent of meeting... Take a census of the Gershonites also, by their clans and their ancestral houses; from thirty years old up to fifty years old you shall enroll them, everyone who qualifies to do work of the tent of meeting. (Numbers 3: 16; 4: 1- 3, 22 – 23, 29 – 30).

Resuming the Islamic portrayal of Mary, Qur'an 66:12 states that Mary was a virtuous woman who guarded her chastity, who testified to the truth of the words God and his revelations and who was a devout servant of God. In addition, Qur'an 3:42 declares that God purified Mary and chose her above the women of all nation, while Qur'an 3:45 notes that an angelic visitor announced to Mary the coming virgin birth of one who would be called Christ Jesus and who would be "held in honor in this world and the hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God." These last two verses from the Qur'an are remarkably similar to the themes enunciated

in Luke 1:26 – 33 and further illustrate the inherent similarity between the Islamic and early Christian portrayals of Mary.

*Behold the angels said: "O Mary! God hath chosen thee and purified thee – chosen thee above the women of all nations... Behold! The angels said: "O Mary! God giveth thee glad tidings of a word from him: his name will be Christ Jesus.*

*The son of Mary held in honor in this world and the hereafter and of the company of) those nearest to God... "(Qur'an 3:43, 45)*

... The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."... The angel said to her "Do not be afraid, Mary for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. (Luke 1:27b - 28, 30 – 32)

Both Islam and Christianity proclaim the virgin birth of Jesus. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two religions in terms of how the virgin birth is typically conceptualized. Contemporary Christianity portrays the virgin birth of Jesus in terms of Jesus being the "begotten" son of God. For example, Matthew 1:18 states that Mary was "with child from the Holy Spirit", and Luke 1:35 has an angel telling Mary that the "Holy Spirit will come upon you." While these Biblical verses may be seen as rather ambiguous by some, the Nicene Creed of Christianity allows for no such ambiguity when it states: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only son of god, eternally begotten of the father, God from God, light from light,

true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the father". Further, the so-called Apostles' Creed holds that: "I believe in God the Father Almighty; maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost... In contrast, Islam's portrayal of the virgin birth is that of a miraculous creation, not that of divine begetting. With regard to that point, two verses from the Qur'an are especially relevant:

*She said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?" He said: "Even so: God createth what He willeth: when He hath decreed a plan, He but saith to it "Be" and it is ... The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: "be" and he was. (Qur'an 3:47, 59)*

While many passages in the Qur'an deal with the mission, ministry and miracles of Jesus, Qur'an 3:49 provides the most succinct encapsulation. This single verse informs the reader that Jesus was appointed by God as a messenger to the "children of Israel", that he performed many miracles by God's leave" (e.g. turning a clay figure of a bird into a living bird, healing the blind and the lepers, and quickening the dead), and that he declared "What ye eat and what ye store. In addition, Qur'an 19:27 – 34 states that Jesus spoke during infancy, and Qur'an 5:46 reports that God gave Jesus a gospel containing "guidance and light, and confirmation of the law that had come before him.

The story of the clay birds and of Jesus speaking in infancy may be new to most Christians, but both stories appear in early Christian literature. The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ 1:2 details Jesus speaking in infancy, while 15:6 of the same apocryphal gospel and 1:2-10 of Thomas's Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ narrate the story of the clay birds coming to life. Further, the list of

miracles given in Qur'an 3:49 appears to overlap quite comfortably with similar lists given in the New Testament gospels. For example, the Qur'an has Jesus saying:

*... I heal those born blind and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by God's leave, and I declare to you what ye eat and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you if ye did believe. (Qur'an 3: 49b)*

Similarly, the New Testament gospels have Jesus saying:

... "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them..." (Luke 7:22)

..."Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleanse, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and poor have good news brought to them..." (Matthew 11: 4b – 5)

Additionally, there are certain affinities between the statements in Qur'an 5:46 regarding Jesus being "confirmation of the law that had come before him" and Mathew 5:17 – 19, where Jesus is reported to have said that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does

them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

(Mathew 5: 17- 19)

Finally, Islam, like Christianity, maintains that there is yet a future role for Jesus in the end times prior to the Day of Judgment. In a remarkable similarity to Christian through, numerous sayings of Prophet Muhammad (Muslim, Ahadith # 293, 6924, 6931 – 6934, 7015 and 7023; Abu Dawud, hadith #4310; and Al-Bukhari, Ahadith #3:425, 656; and 4:657 – 658) contribute to the Islamic perspective that Jesus will descend back to earth, will slay Dajjal (the antichrist), and will establish an earthly rule before dying.

An-Nawwas b. Sam'an reported that Gods' messenger (Said) ... God will send Christ, son of Mary and he will descend at the white minaret in the eastern side of Damascus wearing two garments lightly dyed with saffron and placing his hands on the wings of two angels. When he would lower his head, there would fall beads of perspiration from his head, and when he would raise it up, beads like pearls would scatter from it. Every non-believer who would smell the odor of his self would die for him (Dajjal or the antichrist) until he (Jesus) would catechu hold of him (the antichrist) at the gate of Ludd and would kill him. Then a people whom God had protected would come to Jesus, son of Mary, and he would wipe their faces and would inform them of their ranks in paradise ... then God would send Gog and Magog and they would swarm down from every slope. The first of them would pass the lake of Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee) and drink out of it. And when the last of them would pass, he would say: "There was once water there." Jesus and his companions would then be besieged here

(at Tur, and they would be so much hard pressed) that the head of the ox would be dearer to them than one hundred dinars and God's Apostle, Jesus, and his companions would supplicate to God, Who would send to them insects (which would attack their besiegers' necks) and in the morning they (the besiegers) would perish like one single person... God's Apostle, Jesus, and his companions would then again beseech God... Then God would send rain which no house of clay or (the tent of) camels hairs would keep out, and it would wash away the earth until it could appear to be a mirror. Then the earth would be told to bring forth its fruit and restore its blessing and, as a result thereof, there would grow (such a big) pomegranate that a group of persons would be able to eat that and seek shelter under its skin, and the milk cow would give so much milk that a whole party would be able to drink it. And the milk camel would give such milk that the whole tribe would be able to drink out of that, and the milk sheep would give so much milk that the whole family would be able to drink out of that. At that time, God would send a pleasant wind that would soothe (people) even under their armpits and would take the life of every Muslim. Only the wicked would survive who would commit adultery like asses, and the Last Hour would come to them. (Muslim, Hadith #7015)

There is a particularly dramatic Old Testament passage that many Christians interpret as referring its coming messianic reign. It is striking for its contrasts and juxtapositions.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the lord as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesus shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him and his dwelling shall be glorious. (Isaiah 11:6 – 10)

The Messianic reign is described in remarkably similar terms in the following hadith.

During Jesus's reign such security will exist that a camel will graze with the lion and the beast of prey with cows and sheep. Children will play with snakes and none harm the other. (Musnad 406:2)

*Insha'Allah* (the One God willing), this brief treatment illustrates that there are several and major similarities in the understanding of Jesus and Mary by Islam and early Christianity, although differing in their assessment of the nature of Jesus, a topic to be addressed in the following chapter, both contemporary Christianity and Islam view Jesus as being an instrument of God. In contrast, no such perspective is demonstrated in some of the ancient Jewish texts. For example, consider the following statements, the first of which appears in the Baraitha and the second of which appears in the Tosefta, both being supplements to the Mishnah, the older of two main parts of the Talmud.

It has been taught: on the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (Jesus)... because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray ... (Baraitha, Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a)

It happened with Rabbi Elazer ben Damah, whom a serpent bit, that Jacob, a man of Kefar soma, came to heal him in the name of Yeshu(a) (Jesus) ben pantera; but Rabbi ishmae did not let him. (Tosefta, Hullin (prfane things) 11, 22, 23)

The first of the above quoted statements clearly identified Jesus Christ as having been a sorcerer who led the children of Israel astray from true worship and religious practice. In the second statement, the reference to "Yeshu(a) ben Pantera", i.e. Jesus the son of Pantera, reflects the one prevalent view within Judaism that Jesus Christ was the bastard son of an illegitimate union between Mary and a roman soldier named Pantera. Fortunately, this is view that has seldom been propagated publicly for many years.

Nonetheless, this ancient Jewish belief that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Pantera may be echoed in the following new testament verses, in which the Jews of Jesus's day appear to contrast themselves with Jesus by: (1) announcing that they are the legitimate children of both Abraham and of God; and (2) stating that they, at least, are not illegitimate children, implying perhaps that Jesus was illegitimate in his lineage.

They (the Jews answered him (Jesus), Abraham is our father". Jesus. Said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.

You are indeed doing what your father does". They said to him, "we are not illegitimate children we have one father, God himself". (John 8:39 – 41)

The ancient Jewish propaganda that Jesus Christ was the illegitimate son of Pantera Mary also appears to find an echo in two passages from the Qur'an. In the first, it is stated that the Jews slandered Mary with a "Grave false charge". In the second, Jesus speaks in infancy to define his prophethood and thus defend his mother's honor and chastity against the innuendo of onlookers.

*... They (the Jews) uttered against Mary a grave false charge. (Qur'an 4:156b)*

*At length she brought the (babe) to her people, carrying him (in her arms). They said. "O Mary! Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought! O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste! But she pointed to the babe. They said, "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" He said: "I am indeed a servant of God: he hath given me revelation and made me a prophet, and he hath made me blessed whosoever I be and hath enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live: (He) hath made me kind to my mother and not overbearing or miserable; so peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (Again)". Such (was) Jesus the son of Mary: (it is) a statement of truth, about which they (vainly) dispute. (Qur'an 19: 34)*

Before ending our discussion of the Islamic perspective on Jesus Christ, it should be noted that the Qur'anic statement that "the day that I die, and the day

that I shall be raised up to life (again)' does not in anyway support the alleged crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, as the Qur'an explicitly denies that Jesus was crucified, an issue that will be more fully discussed in the next chapter. Rather, the statement refers to a future death, following the return of Jesus Christ to earth in the end times, which will be followed by his resurrection during the general resurrection.

Abu Huraira narrated that the prophet said: "... Jesus ... will descend (to the earth)... he will destroy the antichrist, will live on the earth for forty years, and then he will die. The Muslims will pray over him". (Abu Dawud, Hadith #4310)

Abdullah ibn Salam narrated that the description of Muhammad is written in the Torah, and also that Jesus, son of Mary, will be buried along with him. Abu Mawdud said that a place for a grave had remained in the house (where prophet Muhammad was buried). (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith #5772)

## **RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL TEACHINGS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

So far, we have been confining our exploration of the three Abrahamic faiths to the domain of religious history. However, it is equally profitable to consider the realm of religious and ethical instruction. All three Abrahamic faiths stress that proper adherence to the divine revelation involves establishing a proper relationship with God and with one's fellow man. In what follows, various examples of such religious and ethical instruction will be identified from the bible, and then

the Islamic parallels to those biblical passages will be presented from the Qur'an and Ahadith.

## THE UNITY OF GOD

A central tenet of Judaism is the concept of the unity of God. This is succinctly expressed in the following verse, which is known as the Shema.

Hear O Israel, the lord our God, the lord is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

According to the New Testament and in what appears to be a clear refutation of the doctrine of the trinity, Jesus quoted these very words of the Shema when he was asked about the greatest of all commandments.

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "the first is, hear O Israel: the lord our God, the lord is one..." (Mark 12:28 – 29)

Further, the anonymous author of James also stressed the unity of God, noting that even the demons (jinn in Islam) believe in God's oneness.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder. (James 2:19)

The Unity of God is also repeatedly emphasized in the Qur'an. The following represent just a couple of those verses.

*And your God is one God: there is no god but He: most gracious most merciful* (Qur'an 2: 163)

*Say: he is God, the one and only ...* (Qur'an 112: 1)

## **GOD, THE BEGINNING AND THE END**

The New Testament uses many illustrations and metaphors to refer to the majesty and greatness of God. One of the more dramatic examples states that God is the "first and the last, the beginning and the end".

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. (Revelation 22: 13).

The same concept regarding the nature of God is succinctly stated in the Qur'an where God refers to himself as "the first and the last, the evident and the hidden".

*He is the first and the last, the evident and the hidden ... (Qur'an 57:3a)*

## **GOD'S OMNIPOTENCE**

The three Abrahamic faiths all stress that God is all-powerful and that there is nothing beyond His competence and ability. Numerous Old Testament verse praise and glorify the unlimited power of God, and the following verse are just a few representations of that fact.

The lord said to Moses, "is the lord's power limited? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for or not. (Numbers 11:23)

Yours, O lord are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O lord and you are exalted as head above all. (11 chronicle 29: 11)

Great is our lord, and abundant in power ... (psalms 147: 5a)

Daniel said: "Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his". (Daniel) 2: 20)

All three of the synoptic gospels of the New Testament report that Jesus even more directly spoke of omnipotence of God by noting that "for God all things are possible".

Jesus looked at them and said, "for mortals it is impossible, but not for God: for God all things are possible". (Mark 10:27: see also Matthew 19: 26 and Luke 18: 27)

Similarly, the concept of the omnipotence of God is recognized and taught by Islam.

*... knowest thou not that God hath power over all things. (Qur'an 2:106b)*

## **THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD**

The omniscience of God is also a central concept within all three of the Abrahamic faiths. There is nothing that happens under heaven and earth that is not visible and known to God. More specifically God knows our innermost thoughts, hopes wishes and fantasies. In the following New Testament passage, Jesus reportedly makes this point by way of a metaphor.

... but God knows your hearts ... (Luke 16: 15)

The same point is made with an almost identical metaphor in the Qur'an, when it is said that God knows the secrets hidden in our hearts. An even stronger statement regarding the omniscience of God is made in a second Qur'anic passage that stresses that God knows all "that is in the heavens and on earth."

*For God knoweth well the secrets of your hearts. (Qur'an 3: 154)*

*Seest thou not that God doth know (all) that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret consultation between three, but he makes the fourth among them – nor between five but he makes the sixth – nor between fewer nor more, by he is with them, wheresoever they be in the end will he tell them the truth of tier conduct, on the day of judgment, for God has full knowledge of all things. (Qur'an 58:7)*

## **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

One of the earliest classical expressions of an ethical system is presented in the Decalogue or Biblical Ten Commandments, as found in exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:1–21. In summary form, these commandments maybe summarized as (1) you shall have no other gods before God (2) you shall not make any graven images or idols: (3) you shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain; (4) remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy; (5) honor your father and your mother; (6) you shall not murder; (7) you shall not commit adultery; (8) you shall not steal; (9) you shall not bear false witness and (10) you shall not cover. These Ten Commandments serve as a basic underpinning of the Judeo-Christian system of ethics and are reflected quite dramatically in the ethical teachings of the Qur'an.

*Thy lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor... nor come nigh to adultery; for it is a shameful*

*(deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils). Nor take life – which God has made sacred – except for just cause. Give full measure when ye measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight; that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination... and in nowise cover those things in which God hath bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others... (Qur'an 17:23, 32–33a, 35; 4:23a)*

Let's pause for moment to consider these Qur'anic injunctions. (1) "Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him" is a direct restatement of you shall have no other gods, before God. (2) "... Be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor..." honor your father and your mother. (3) "Nor come nigh to adultery; for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)."You shall not commit adultery. (4) Nor take life – which God has made sacred – except for just cause..." you shall not murder. (5) give full measures when ye measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight: that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination..." You shall not steal, and perhaps also, you shall not bear false witness. (6) And in nowise covet those things in which God hath bestowed his gifts more freely on some of you than on others..." You shall not cover.

As to the remaining three or four moral injunctions of the Ten Commandments. One can easily find Qur'anic parallels to most of them. The command not to make any graven images or idols is consistent with Islam's traditional avoidance of creating artistic likenesses of any living creature, and with the following Qur'anic injunction.

*...shun the abomination of idols... (Qur'an 22:30)*

You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain is paralleled by the following Qur'anic passage.

*They swear their oaths by God that, if only thou wouldst command them, they would leave (their homes). Say: "Swear ye not; obedience is (more reasonably; verily God is we acquainted with all that ye do. (Qur'an 24: 53)*

You shall not bear false witness finds expression in many passages of the Qur'an (e.g. 2:42; 4:112; 25; 72 – 75; 40; 28; 45; 27; 51; 10; 56; 92 and 85; 14 – 15), but is perhaps expressed best in the following verses.

*And cover not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth when ye know (what it is)... woe to the false hold mangers – (Qur'an 2:42; 51:10)*

Thus, only the Decalogue's injunction to remember the Sabbath day is not to be found in Islam.

### **The Lex Talionis**

A second fundamental ethical precept of the Old Testament is the Lex Talionis (law of retaliation in kind), which is found in the so-called Mosaic Law of Exodus. Briefly stated, the Lex Talionis authorized the victim of a wrongdoing to seek equivalent retaliation or retribution against the perpetrator of the wrongdoing.

If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (Exodus 21: 23 – 25)

Of note, the New Testament reports that Jesus Christ urged his followers not to insist on their rights under this Lex Talionis when he reportedly said:

You have heard that it was said, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. "But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. (Matthew 5:38 – 41; see also Luke 6:29)

In the above verses, Jesus reportedly suggests that the Lex Talionis should be softened with charity, mercy and forgiveness. This call for a compassionate modification of the Lex Talionis is also found in two separate passages in the Qur'an. In neither case is the Lex Talionis forbidden per se, but in both cases the alternative of forgiveness, patience and charity is recommended to the victim. In the first example presented below, remission of retaliation is said to result in "an act of atonement for" the victim. In the second example, the replacing of retribution by patience and forgiveness is stated to be "an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs.

*We ordained therein for them: "life for life, eye for eye nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth and wounds equal for equal". But if anyone remits the retaliation by way of charity it is an act of atonement for himself... (Qur'an 5:45).*

*The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from God: for (God) loveth not those who do wrong (done) to them, against such there is no cause of blame. The blame is only against those who oppress men with*

*wrongdoing and insolently transgress beyond bounds through the land, defying right and justice: for such there will be a penalty grievous. But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs. (Qur'an 42: 40 – 43)*

Similar sentiments can be found in two other passages from the Qur'an, both of which are quoted immediately below.

*Repel evil with that which is best: well-acquainted with the things they say. (Qur'an 23: 96)*

*Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (evil) with what is better; then will be between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate! (Qur'an 41: 34)*

### **God's Burden Upon Us**

In a passage of great tenderness and compassion, the New Testament reports that Jesus addressed the issue of being "burdened" by following God's message and commandments.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light". (Matthew 11:28 – 30)

God's "burden" upon us is light, and his yoke is easy. In fact, accepting the yoke of God allows one to lay down our worldly burdens and to find rest from the weariness of the demands of this early life. In two different Qur'anic passages, God's words strike a similar theme. In the first verse, we are reassured that God

recognizes our weaknesses and wishes to lighten our burdens. In the second, God comforts us by noting that none of us will actually be called upon to carry a burden greater than he or she can bear.

*God doth wish to lighten your (difficulties): fro man was created weak (in flesh). (Qur'an 4:28)*

*No soul shall have a burden laid on in greater than it can bear. (Qur'an 2:233)*

### **God's Caring for Us**

Not only des God wish to lighten our burdens, He actively cares for us and sustains us. As such, we are free to concentrate less on our material lives, and focus more on our spiritual beings. This point is made quite beautifully in the Sermon on the Mount.

*Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:26)*

Remarkably similar sentiments are stated in the Qur'an, even to the point of illustrating that God makes substances available for the animals of the earth.

*How many are the creatures that carry not their own sustenance? It is God who feeds (both) them and you, for he hears and knows (all things). (Qur'an 29:60)*

## **God vs. Caesar**

How does one balance one's duties to God vs. one's duties to secular and governmental authority? All three of the synoptic gospels relate that the Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus into giving an incriminating answer to this question by asked to see a coin from them, and asked them whose image appeared on the throne. They responded that it was the Roman emperor's. At that, Jesus reportedly said:

"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's. (Mathew 22:21; see also mark 12:13 – 17 and Luke 20:20 – 25)

This pithy answer demonstrates that in the normal course of human events there is typically no conflict between fulfilling one's secular and national duties and fulfilling one's religious duties to God. The following hadith of prophet Muhammad conveys the same message, but adds an additional caveat pertaining to those exceptions where a conflict exists between secular and religious responsibilities. It is hard to imagine that any devout Christians would object to the fundamental truth of this addition.

Ibn Umar narrated that the Prophet said: "it is obligatory for one to listen to and obey (the rulers' orders) unless these orders involve one's disobedience (to God); but if an act of disobedience (to God) is imposed, he should not listen to or obey it. (Al-Bukhari, Hadith #4:203; see also Hadith #9: 258)

## **Social Duty and Responsibility**

Let us consider another of the great ethical teachings attributed to Jesus in the New Testament, one that dramatically illustrates our social duty and responsibility to our fellow man.

Then he will say to those at his left hand. "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. "Then they also will answer, "Look, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you? Then he will answer them, "truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me, "and these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Mathew 25: 41 – 46)

Islam offers an almost identical ethical instruction, which is found in the Sayings of Prophet Muhammad.

Abu Huraira narrated that God's apostle said: "Verily, God, the Exalted and Glorious, will say on the Day of Resurrection: "O son of Adam, I was sick but you did not visit Me. He will say: "O my Lord, how could I visit Thee when Thou art the Lord of the worlds? Thereupon He will say: didn't you know that a certain servant of Mine was sick, but you did not visit him, and were you not aware that if you had visited him, you would have found Me by him? O son of Adam, I asked you for food but you did not feed Me. He will say: "My lord, how could I feed Thee

when Thou art the Lord of the worlds? He will say: didn't you know that a certain servant of Mine asked you for food but you did not feed him, and were you not aware that if you had fed him you would have found him by My side? (The Lord will again say:) O son of Adam, I asked you for something to drink, but you did not provide Me with any. He will say; my Lord, how could I provide Thee with something to drink when Thou art the Lord of the worlds? Thereupon. He will say: a certain servant of Mine asked you for a drink but you did not provide him with one, and had you provided him with a drink you would have found him near Me". (Muslim, Hadith #6232)

Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari narrated that the Prophet said: "Feed the hungry, visit the sick and ransom the prisoner". (*Fiqh Al-Sunnah*, 3:93c)

### **False Piety and Charity**

In another passage, the New Testament reports that Jesus warned his followers against false piety and stressed that one's heavenly reward is based upon one's intentions as much as one's behavior. In conveying this message, Jesus reportedly focused initially on the issue of charity and suggested that one's acts of charity should not be made public simply to be seen by men.

*Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may*

*be done in secret; and your father who sees in secret will reward you.*  
(Matthew 6:1 – 4)

Remarkably similar sentiments are recorded in the Qur'an, where God informs that the rewards associated with behavioral acts of charity are actually canceled out by "reminders of your generosity".

*O ye who believe cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury – like those who spend their substance to be seen of men, but believe neither in God nor in the Last Day... if ye disclose (Acts of) charity, even so it is well, but if ye conceal them, and make them reach those (really) in need, that is best for you: it will remove from you some of your (stains of) evil. And God is well-acquainted with what ye do. (Qur'an 2: 264a, 271)*

However, the Islamic parallels to Matthew 6:1 – 4 are not just confined to the Qur'an. Even more dramatic convergence is to be found in the following hadith of Prophet Muhammad.

Anas Ibn Malik narrated that God's Messenger said: "When God created the earth... the angels ... asked if anything in his creation was stronger than wind, and he replied, "Yes the son of Adam who gives charity with his right hand while concealing it from his left". (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith #192; see also Al-Bukhari, Ahadith #1:629, 2:504, & 8:798)

### **False Piety and Prayer**

According to Mathew, Jesus did not confine his teachings against false piety to the issue of charity; immediately following his reported discourse in Mathew 6: 1- 4, Christ reportedly preached against false piety creeping into someone's prayer.

*And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your father who is in secret; and your father who sees in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. (Matthew 6: 5 – 7)*

The following passages from the Qur'an appear to be a direct parallel to the ethical sentiments expressed in the above New Testament verses about false piety while praying.

*Call on your lord with humility and in private: for God loveth not those who trespass beyond bounds. (Qur'an 7: 53)*

*The hypocrites – they think they are over-reaching God but he will over-reach them: when they stand up to prayer, they stand without earnestness to be seen of men, but little do they hold God in remembrance. (Qur'an 4: 142)*

*So woe to the worshippers who are neglectful of their prayers, those who (want but) to be seen (of men) but refuse (to supply even) neighborly needs. (Qur'an 107: 4 – 7)*

The ethical considerations stated in Matthew 6: 5 – 7 also find clear and unambiguous expression in several sayings of Prophet Muhammad. Perhaps, the most dramatic such example can be seen when Muhammad implied that the antichrist was less of a threat to the believer, than was the believer doing an otherwise virtuous act for reasons of false piety.

God's messenger came out to them when they were discussing the antic Christ and asked if they would like him to tell what caused him more fear for them than the antichrist. They replied that they certainly would, she said, "Latent polytheism, meaning that a man will stand up and pray and lengthen his prayer because he sees someone looking at him". (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith #5333)

Within Islam, worshipful prayer to God is one of the most virtuous acts a person can undertake. However, if he lengthens that prayer for show or for praise because someone is watching him, he is, in essence, performing that prayer for the sake of show or praise and not for the sake of God. Further, there is a subtle implication that he has compromised his belief in the Oneness of God by assigning a weight to the onlooker's praise or commendation, which is equal to or superior to the weight that he is assigning to God. (Within the framework of Islamic law (Shariah), this type of action is known as *Riyaa*, i.e. to perform acts that are pleasing to God with the intention of pleasing others than God).

Running throughout reported teachings of Prophet Jesus against false piety in both charity and prayer in Matthew 6:1 – 7, one can identify the clear theme that one must not only do the proper action and behavior, but that one should also have the correct intention. Given this consideration, it may be helpful to quote another example from the saying of Prophet Muhammad, one which parallels the reported teaching of Prophet Jesus that one's intentions are crucial in evaluating the moral, ethical and spiritual worth of any action.

God's apostle said, "The reward of deeds depends upon the intention, and every person will get the reward according to what he has

intended. (Al-Bukhari, Hadith #1:51; see also Al-Bukhari, Hadith #7:8, Muslim, Ahadith #4692 – 3693, and Abu Dawud, Hadith #2195)

Avoid false piety, one's action are judged on one's intention, and do not make a public display of charity and prayer. These are the illustrated and confirmed in the sayings of Prophet Muhammad.

### **Adultery and Intentions**

The New Testament alleges that Jesus also addressed the issue of one's intention with regard to the specific issue of adultery.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery". But say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

Once again, these reported words of Jesus find a direct parallel in the saying of Prophet Muhammad.

Ibn 'Abbas narrated that he did not see anything so resembling minor sins as what Abu Huraira said from the Prophet, who said: "God has written for the son of Adam his inevitable adultery whether he is aware of it or not. The adultery of the eye is looking (at something that is sinful to look at), and the adultery of the tongue is to utter (what it is unlawful to utter), and the inner self wishes and longs for (adultery), and the private parts turn that into reality or refrain from submitting to the temptation," (Al-Bukhari, Hadith 8:609; see also Al-Bukhari, Hadith 8:260)

## ***The Golden Rule***

For many Christians, the pinnacle of the reported ethical instruction of Jesus Christ can be found in the so-called Golden Rule.

In everything do to other as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12; see also Luke 6:31)

Variations on the Golden Rule can also be found in prior Jewish writings. For example, a “negative” version of the Golden Rule is attributed to Rabbi Hillel. In which he instructed that one should not do to others what one would not done to oneself.<sup>14</sup> An additional “negative” version of the Golden Rule can be identified in Tthe Old Testament apocryphal wrings.

And what you hate, do to no man. (Tobit 4:14)

The Islamic parallel to the Golden Rule can be found in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

Anas narrated that the Prophet said: “None of you will have faith till he wishes for his brother what he likes for himself.” (Al-Bukhari, Hadith 11:12)

## **Man’s Search for God**

The New Testament author of the epistle of James offers a concise guide and instruction regarding man’s search for god. In so doing, the unknown author states two basic principles. Firstly, “submit” to god (it should immediately be noted that in the single word “submit.”) one finds the English translation of a variant form of the Arabic word “Islam.” Secondly whatever action man takes in reaching out to God will reciprocate in turn.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you (James 4:7-8a)

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” are words of great spiritual comfort and assurance. However, the Islamic teaching goes even further in offering spiritual comfort and assurance. Than does the author of *James*. Prophet Muhammad instructed not only that God will reciprocate any attempt man makes to reach out to him, but that . In reaching back to man, God will multiply whatever effort man has made.

Abu Huraira narrated that the prophet said: ...I am with him (man) if he remembers Me. If he remembers Me. if he remembers Me in himself, I too, remember him in Myself; and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I remember him in a group that is better than they; and if he come span (about eight to nine inches) nearer to Me, I go one cubit (about 18-20 inches) nearer to him; and if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two out-stretched arms nearer to him; and if he come to Me walking, I go to him running.” (*Al-Bukhari, Hadith 9:627*)

### **God and Supplication in Prayer**

In a moving passage that uses the metaphor of a father and his child, the *New testament* report that Jesus preached the efficacy of supplication to Good in prayer.

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives and

everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:7-1; see also Luke 11:9-13)

Likewise, the Qur'an offers direct reassurance that God will not turn away from those who call on Him.

*And your Lord says: "Call on Me, I will answer your (prayer)..."* (Qur'an 40:60a)

### **Backbiting**

The author of *James* does not address the issue of man's relationship to God but also confronts man's relationship to his fellow man. Thus, the reader of this epistle is told to refrain from any backbiting regarding one's fellow congregants. One is not to "speak evil against one another," for others are one's "brothers and sisters."

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)

The Qur'an also instructs believers to avoid backbiting and speaking "ill of each other behind their backs." However, the words of God go well beyond those of the writer of James. God instructs Muslims to avoid all mockery, sarcasm, and ridicule of others, and to refrain from all needless and inappropriate suspicion of others.

O ye who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor let some women laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames: ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used of one) after he has believed: and those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong. O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: and spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs... (Qur'an 49:11-12a)

Those who love (to see) scandal...broadcast among the believers, will have a grievous penalty in this life and in the hereafter: God knows, and ye know not. (Qur'an 24:19)

### ***Insha'Allah or God Willing***

The author of James warns man against taking himself too seriously, and of becoming so arrogant that he believes that he can actually say what he will be doing later in the day or during the following day. Rather than saying, "I will do such and such, God willing or if God wishes,"

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and sure a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring what is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such basting is evil. (*James 4:13-16*)

Likewise, in the Qur'an, God warns against this specific type of arrogance and instructs His believers to temper their statement about their future actions by saying "*Insha'Allah*" (God willing or so please God).

*Nor say of anything, "I shall be sure to do so and so tomorrow" – without adding, "So please God!" And call thy Lord to mind when thou forgettest, and say, "I hope that my Lord will guide me ever closer (even) than this to the right road."* (Qur'an 18:23-24)

### **Priorities during War**

The so-called Mosaic Law of the Old Testament specifies that a man is excused from all modes of warfare during the first year of his married life.

When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be charged with any related duty. He shall be free at home one year, to be happy with the wife whom he has married. (*Deuteronomy 24:5*)

This sentiment, i.e., that marital responsibilities early on in a marriage take precedence over serving in the army, also find direct expedition in at least two sayings of Prophet Muhammad on this subject.

Jabir ibn 'Abdullah narrated: "I participated in a military expedition along with God's Apostle... Then I said, 'O God's Apostle! I am a bridegroom,' and requested him to allow me to go home. He allowed me... (Al-Bukhari, Hadith #4:211; see also Al-Bukhari, Hadith #3:589)

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad taught that certain marital responsibilities may override a man's duty to serve in the military even later in married life.

Ibn 'Abbas narrated that a man came to the Prophet and said, "O God's Apostle! I have enlisted in the army for such and such military expedition, and my wife is leaving for Hajj (the Muslim's pilgrimage to Makkah)." God's Apostle said, "Go back and perform Hajj with your wife." (Al-Bukhari, Hadith #4:295; see also Al-Bukhari, Hadith #4:250)

Ibn 'Umar narrated that 'Uthman did not join the Battle of Badr, because he was married...and (his wife) was ill. So, the Prophet said to him, "(Take care of your wife and) you will get a reward and a share (from the war booty) similar to the reward and the share of one who has taken part in the Battle of Badr." (Al-Bukhari, Hadith #4:359)

### **The Final Day**

In response to questions concerning the Final Day or Day of Judgment, the New Testament informs the reader that Jesus reportedly said that no one knew the time except "the Father." Of note, these reported words of Jesus Christ clearly state that Jesus was not privy to certain information known only to God and suggest the subordination of Jesus to God.

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Matthew 24:36; see also the parallel in Mark 13:32-37)

As repeatedly stated in the Qur'an, the timing of the Final Day is knowledge that rests solely with God, Glorified and Exalted is He. No man, no jinn, no angel, and no prophet or messenger has that knowledge. During his ministry, Prophet Muhammad was asked repeatedly about the timing of the Day of Judgment. In response to such questioning, God provided the following revelations to Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel.

*"They ask thee about the (final) Hour---- when will be its appointed time? Say: "The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone): none but He can reveal as to when it will occur. Heavy were its burden through the heavens and the earth. Only, all of a sudden will it come to you." They ask thee as if thou wert eager in search thereof: say: "The knowledge thereof is with God (alone), but most men know not." (Qur'an 7:187)*

*"They ask thee about the Hour – "When will be its appointed time?" Wherein art thou (concerned) with the declaration thereof? With thy Lord is the limit fixed thereof. Thou art but a warner for such as fear it. (Qur'an 79:42-45)*

*"Men ask thee concerning the Hour: say, "The knowledge thereof is with God (alone):" and what will make thee understand? - perchance the hour is nigh!" (Qur'an 33:63)*

*Say: "As to the knowledge of the time, it is with God alone: I am (sent) only to warn plainly in public." (Qur'an 67:26)*

*"Verily the knowledge of the Hour is with God (alone)" (Qur'an 31:34a)*

## Dietary Restrictions

The *Old Testament* lists numerous dietary that were reportedly placed upon the Israelites by God. Of these, two of the best known are the prohibition against pork and the prohibition against eating carrion.

But among those that chew the cud or have divided hoofs, you shall not eat the following .... The pig, for though it has divided hoofs and is cleft – footed, it does not chew the cud; with it is unclean for you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean for you. (*Leviticus 11:4a,7-8*)

You shall not eat any abhorrent thing. These are the animal you may not eat.... And the pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. You shall not eat their meat, and you shall not touch their carcasses...You shall not eat anything that dies of itself... (*Deuteronomy 14:3-4a, 8, 21a*)

These same dietary restrictions are found in three separate passages of the Qur'an. In all three cases, Muslims are prohibited from eating pork and carrion. However, the Qur'anic prescriptions do allow for the issue of necessity. If a person were starving or if there were some medical necessity, the prohibition does not apply to that person, so long as the person is not engaged in "willful disobedience" and in "transgressing due limits." Other dietary restrictions mentioned in these Qur'anic verses prohibit eating: (1) the meat of animals slaughtered under an invocation to some deity other than God, (2) the meat of animals that have been sacrificed on stone altars (implying a pagan sacrifice), and (3) meat that has been raffled off (gambling is prohibited in Islam).

He hath only forbidden you dead meat (carrion) and blood and the flesh of swine, and that on which any other name hath been invoked besides that of God. But if one is forced by necessity, without willful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits – then is he guiltless, for God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (Qur'an 2:173)

Forbidden to you (for food) are dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than God; that which hath been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by being gored to death; that which hath been (partly) eaten by a wild animal; unless ye are able to slaughter it (in due form), that which is sacrificed on stone (altars); (forbidden) also is the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows: that is impiety... But if any is forced by hunger, with no inclination to transgression, God is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (Qur'an 5:3a, c)

Say: "I find not in the message received by me by inspiration any (meat) forbidden to be eaten by one who wishes to eat it, unless it be dead meat, or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine – for it is an abomination – or what is impious, (meat) on which a name has been invoked other than God's." But (even so), if a person is forced by necessity, without willful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits – thy Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (Qur'an 6:145)

The Qur'an also directly to the issue of where Islamic dietary restrictions differ from those practiced by the Jews. For example, Muslims may eat camel meat and shellfish, while Jews may not. In short, such differences are said to have

resulted from the Jews having been prohibited certain foods as a direct punishment "for their willful disobedience".

For those who following the Jewish law, We forbade every (animal) with undivided hoof, and We forbade them the fat of the ox and the sheep, except what adheres to their backs or their entrails, or is mixed up with a bone: this in recompense for their willful disobedience: for we are true (in our ordinances). (Qur'an 6:146)

### **Gaining Entrance to Heaven**

All three of the synoptic gospels report that Jesus referred to the difficulties of a rich man in gaining entrance to heaven. Presumably, such a rich man's gains were ill-gotten or were amassed through miserly disregard of the requirements of brotherly love and charity.

*Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. (Mathew 19:24; see also mark 10:25 and Luke 18:25)*

The identical metaphor, i.e., that of a camel passing through the eye of a needle, is used in the Qur'an in referring to the likelihood of someone entering heaven who has rejected the signs of God.

*To those who reject our signs and treat them with arrogance, no opening will there be of the gates of heaven, nor will they enter the garden, until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle; such is our reward for those in sin. (Qur'an 7:40).*

## **Do Not Aggrandize God's Messengers**

In what appears to be a direct repudiation of any claim to divinity, three different New Testament gospels imply that Jesus Christ denied that he was good and insisted that only God was good.

*As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone". (Mark 10:17 – 18 see parallel versions in Luke 18:18 – 19 and Mathew 19:16 – 17).*

"Why do you call me good? No one is God but God alone". In other words, Jesus is saying do not aggrandize me and not attribute to me that were expressed to Prophet Muhammad in several Ahadith, six of which are quoted below.

*At the time of the Prophet there was a hypocrite who rendered so much harm to the believers that some of them summoned the others to ask the help of the prophet against him. When the Prophet heard of it, he said: "no man may seek my help. Only the help of God is worthy of being sought". (Kitab al-Tawhid, page 43)*

Narrated 'Umar: "I heard the Prophet saying, 'Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a slave. So, call me the slave of God, and his apostle". (Al-Bukhari, Hadith # 4:654)

Mutarraf said, quoting his father ('Abd Allah ibn Al-Shikhahir): "I went with a deputation of Banu 'Amir to the Apostle of God, and we said; "You are our Lord (*Sayyid*)'. To this he replied: 'The Lord is God, the blessed and exalted'. Then we said: 'And the one of us most endowed with excellence and superiority'. To this, he replied: 'Say what you

have to say, or part of what you have to say, and do not let the devil make you his agents'." (Abu Dawud, Hadith #4788).

When some people addressed the prophet with the words, "O Prophet of God", "O the best of us", "O son of the best", "our master", or "son of our master", he interrupted them and said: "O men, say what you came here to tell and lend not your feelings to Satan. I am but Muhammad, the servant of God and his prophet. I do not approve of your raising me above my station assigned to me by God – may he be praised and glorified". (*Kitab al-Tawhid*. Page 163)

Al-Nasa'i also reported from Ibn Abbas: "Once, a man said to the Prophet, 'How wonderful that God and you have willed it'. The Prophet objected: 'Have you made me an equal associate to God? Rather, say, 'How wonderful that God alone has willed it!'" (*Kitab Al-Tawhid*, page 121).

Ibn Majah reported from Tufayl, 'Aisha's half-brother on her mother's side, that Tufayl said: "I came upon a group of Jews, I said to them: you are indeed the people of God, if only you didn't claim that Uzayr (Ezra) is his son. They answered: You are indeed the people of God, if only you didn't say, 'how wonderful that God and Muhammad have willed it" then, I came upon a group of Christians, and said to them: you are indeed the people of God, except that you claim that Christ is the son of God'. They said: you too are indeed the people of God, except that you say, 'how wonderful that God and Muhammad have willed it! I related what happened to some of my fellows and then went to the

prophet. He asked: 'Did you tell anyone else? I answered, yes. He praised God and thanked him and then said: Tufayl has already communicated to some of you his judgment or vision. You have been repeating words which I would rather have forbidden you to use much earlier, but did not for such and such reasons. Henceforth, do not say, how wonderful that God and Muhammad have willed it, but how wonderful that God alone has willed it". ... (*Kitab Al-Tawhid* pages 121 – 122)

### **The Message of the Prophets**

As an additional consideration regarding the inappropriate aggrandizement of the prophets of God, the New Testament reports that Jesus clearly stated that the message he conveyed was not of his own making, but was the message conveyed to him from God.

Then Jesus answered them, "my teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him".  
(John 7:16 – 18)

Likewise, the Qur'an states that prophet was explicitly instructed to say that the message he preached was merely his recitation of the revelation that he had received from God. Additionally he was told to point out that he was without

treasures and that he had no secret knowledge beyond that conveyed to him through revelation.

*Say: "I tell you not that with me are the treasurers of God, nor do I know what is hidden, nor do I tell you I am an angel. I but follow what is revealed to me". (Qur'an 6:50)*

### **Family Ties vs. Loving One's Prophet**

In a striking new testament passage, Jesus reportedly warned that the one was not worthy of him unless one loved Jesus more than one loved his father, mother, son, daughter etc.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or slaughter more than me is not worthy of me... (Matthew 10:27; see also Luke 14: 26)

In two different narrations, Prophet Muhammad voiced similar sentiments regarding how individuals were to relate to their own families, just as Jesus had instructed his contemporaries to love him above their own families.

Anas narrated that the Prophet said, "None of you will have faith till he loves me more than his father, his children, and all mankind". (Al-Bukhari, Hadith #1: 14)

‘Abd Allah ibn Hisham narrated that ...the Prophet said... “(you will not have complete faith) till I am dearer to you than your own self.” (Al-Bukhari, Hadith #8:628)

## **False Prophets**

Both Jesus and Prophet Muhammad warned against the dangers of false prophets, people who attempted to use religion for their own nefarious ends. Furthermore, in giving these warning, these two prophets used sticking similar words.

Beware of false prophet, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

Abu Huraira narrated that God's Messenger said, "In the last times, men will come forth who will fraudulently use religion for worldly ends and wear sheepskins in public to display meekness. Their tongues will be sweeter than sugar, but their hearts will be the hearts of wolves..."

(Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith #5323)

## **Serving Multiple Masters**

In the so-called Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reportedly instructed his followers that it is impossible to serve more than one master and to do justice to both. Thus, one must choose between serving God and the worldly life.

No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6: 24).

In a similar vein but with a slightly different twist, the Qur'an speaks about the person who vainly tries to serve multiple masters and raises the rhetorical question as to whether he is really as well off as the person who serves only a single, unitary master, i.e. God.

God puts forth a parable – a man belonging to many partners at variance with each other, and a man belonging entirely to one master: are those two equal in comparison? Praise be to God! But most of them have no knowledge (Qur'an 39: 29)

### **Love vs. Hate**

The New Testament gospels say that Jesus preached a message of love to one's fellow man and insisted that one should even love one's enemies. By so doing, one would be a brother to one's fellow man, as we all are children of God.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy". But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your father in heaven... (Matthew 5:43 – 45; see also Luke 6:27)

Likewise, Prophet Muhammad disavowed hatred and taught that we all are brothers.

Anas ibn Malik narrated that God's Apostle said, "Do not hate one another, nor be jealous of one another, and do not desert one another. But O God's worshippers, be brothers! (Al-Bukhari, Hadith #8:99; see also Ahadith 8:90 – 92 & 717)

### **Meekness and Humility**

For many Christians, the Sermon on the Mount represents the finest in the reported ethical instruction of Jesus Christ. In particular, many Christians are drawn to the simplicity and beauty of the beatitudes as reported in Matthew. In a concise

and pithy manner, these beatitudes highlight the characteristics of the truly virtuous and religious individual. For example, the beatitudes stress that meekness and humility are to be prized.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)

Meekness and humility are also characteristics that are valued in Islam. As illustrated in the following verse from the Qur'an the true servants of God are said to be those who live their lives in humility and graciousness.

*And the servants of (God) most gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace!"* (Qur'an 25:63)

## **Righteousness**

The New Testament beatitudes continue with a statement of reassurance for those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness." Likewise, the Qur'an emphasizes that "(every) blessedness" awaits those who "work righteousness".

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

*For those who believe and work righteousness is (every) blessedness and a beautiful place of (final) return.* (Qur'an 13:29)

## **The Peacemakers**

In yet a third Beatitude, Jesus reportedly taught that being a peacemaker was a virtue and a blessing. Once again the basic meaning of beatitude finds

expression in the Qur'an, where Muslims are instructed to make peace between and reconcile contending parties.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

*So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers, and fear God that ye may receive mercy. (Qur'an 49:10)*

### **Mercy and Forgiveness**

The New Testament instructs us that we are to be merciful and to following the examples of God's mercy to us when dealing with our fellow man. In fact, in one particularly telling passage, we are instructed that God's forgiveness of our sins is contingent upon our having forgiven those who have wronged us.

Be merciful, just as your father is merciful. (Luke 6:36)

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others neither will your father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14 – 15)

The Qur'an also teaches that God is Most Merciful. Further the Qur'an suggests that if we forgive others, then God will be "oft-forgiving" and "most merciful" to us.

*But God is the best to take care (of him), and he is the most merciful of those who show mercy. (Qur'an 12:64)*

*But if ye forgive and overlook, and cover up (their faults), verily God is oft-forgiving, most merciful. (Qur'an 64:14b)*

## **The Greeting of Peace**

In an interesting New Testament passage, Jesus reportedly taught proper etiquette upon entering a house. Such etiquette includes addressing the worthy occupants of the house with greeting of "peace". However, if the occupants are unworthy, one is instructed to "let your peace return to you".

As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

(Matthew 10:12-13)

The Qur'an teaches a similar etiquette regarding the entering of houses. Upon entering a house, a Muslim is to salute the occupants with "a greeting of blessing and purity as from God." As to the nature of this greeting, a previously quoted passage from the Qur'an instructs Muslims to address others with the greeting of "peace." However, there is no instruction to "let your peace return to you" if one judges the occupants to be unworthy. As noted previously, one is to greet even the ignorant with the greeting of "peace".

*But if ye enter houses, salute each other – a greeting or blessing and purity as from God. .. (Qur'an 24:61)*

*And the servants of (God) most gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace". (Qur'an 25:63)*

## **An Offending Hand**

Many non-Muslims are deeply troubled by that aspect of Islamic law that prescribes the amputation of a hand in certain situations of thievery. Typically, they fail to understand that the punishment is only carried out in certain situations and

not in every case. Nevertheless, they still find the punishment cruel and barbaric. Ironically, the same reaction is not engendered by an almost identical prescription reportedly given by Jesus in the new testament, an instruction that most Christians prefer to treat as a metaphor, even though the reported words of Jesus are quite straight forward and unambiguous.

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away, it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. (Matthew 18:8; see also Mark 9: 43 – 45)

The corresponding concept from the Qur'an is presented below. Again it is emphasized that Islamic law prescribe the amputation of a thief's hand only in certain situations.

*As to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands; a punishment by way of example from God for their crime: and God is exalted in power, full of wisdom. (Qur'an 5:38)*

### **Treasures on Earth and in heaven**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reportedly warned against storing up treasures on earth, and noted that such treasures are transitory at best. Rather than seeking treasures on earth, the New Testament has Jesus suggesting that one should strive for eternal treasures in heaven and that one's heart will typically be with one's treasure.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for

yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19 – 21; see also, Luke 12:33 – 34)

The Qur'an conveys a similar message, noting that those who desire the "title of the hereafter" will find that tilth increasing for them. In contrast, those who desire the "tilth of this world" will be granted a portion thereof but will be denied an eternal reward in the hereafter. Further, the Qur'an notes that "what is with you must vanish", while "what is with God will endure".

*To any that desires the tilth of the hereafter, We give increase in his tilth: and to any that desires the tilth of this world, We grant somewhat thereof, but he has no share or lot in the hereafter. (Qur'an 42:20)*

*What is with you must vanish: what is with God will endure. And We will certainly bestow on those who patiently persevere their reward according to the best of their actions. (Qur'an 16:96)*

### **Being Tested with Gifts**

The New Testament says that Jesus taught that God's expectation of each of us is based in part on the amount of blessings we have been given in this earthly life. More will be expected from those of us who have been given much.

From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one of whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. (Luke 12:48b)

The Qur'an states a parallel message and speaks of the gifts that we have been given in this life as actually being a trail for us.

*It is He Who hath made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: He hath raised you in ranks, some above other: that He may try you in the gifts He hath given you: for thy Lord is quick in punishment: yet he is indeed oft – forgiving, most merciful. (Qur'an 6:165)*

### **One's Light on Judgment Day**

All three Abrahamic faiths stress that there will be a final day of judgment at the end of time. Within the New Testament, Jesus reportedly taught that one must constantly be vigilant and prepared for this Day of Judgment, for it may come "As a thief in the night". To illustrate this point, the New Testament attributes the following parable to Jesus.

*Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them: but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept, but at midnight there was a shout. "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him". Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, "give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out". But the side replied, "No there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves".*

And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord opens us. But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you. Keep awake therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matthew 25:1 – 13)

According to the above passage from Mathew, there will be some who will not enter heaven because their lamps are incapable of giving light. They have foolishly left tier oil behind and have to beg vainly for oil from those who are prepared. Because they have no light, they are unable to enter heaven. A similar metaphor if fund in the Qur'an. Once again, there are those who have no light and are not able to enter heaven. Once again, these unfortunate ones beg their more fortunate and prepared others for the ability to general light. Once again, they ask in vain.

*One day shalt thou see the believing men and the believing women – how their light runs forward before them and by their rights hands: (their greeting will be): “Good news for you this day! Gardens beneath which flow rivers! To dwell therein for aye! This is indeed the highest at achievement” one day will the hypocrites – men and women- say to the believers: “wait for us let us borrow (a light) from your light” it will be said: “turn ye back to your rear. Then seek a light (where ye can)! So a wall will be put up betwixt them, with a gate therein. Within it will be mercy throughout and without it all alongside, will be (wrath and) punishment! (Qur’an 57:12 – 13)*

## **The Saved and the Condemned**

In illustrating the relative positions of the saved and the condemned following the Day of Judgment, the New Testament says that Jesus provided a parable about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man was reward with heaven. According to the parable, the suffering rich man later gazed from hell upwards to heaven and begged that Lazarus might come down and ease his thirst just a bit. His request was denied, as there was an impenetrable chasm between heaven and hell.

There was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and who fasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table, even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by this side. He called out, "father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue for I am in agony in these flames. "but Abraham said, "child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good thing, Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony besides all this, between you us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." (*Luke 16:19-26*)

The same exact message is provided in the Qur'an, even extending to the issue of the condemned begging water from the saved. Once again, the request of the condemned is denied.

*The companions of the fire will call to the of the garden: "Pour down to us water or anything that God doth provide for your sustenance." They will say: "Both these things hath God forbidden to those who rejected Him – such as took their religion to be mere amusement and play, and were deceived by the life of the world." That day shall We forget them as they forget the meeting of theirs, and as they were wont to reject Our signs. (Qur'an 7:50-51)*

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In closing this chapter, it may be helpful to note just one more example of the commonalities between the Bible and the Qur'an. The gospels of Matthew and Luke detail an alleged saying of Jesus that is probably immortalized song in the mental recesses of each reader who ever spent much childhood time in Sunday school, school or in vacation *Bible school*

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who man who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fall, and the floods

came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall! (Matthew 7:24 – 27; see also Luke)

The above sentiments also find expression in the Qur'an, where God warns mankind of build the foundation of his religious and spiritual edifice on the bedrock of "piety of God". Mankind is to avoid building his foundation on the weakness of "an undermined sand-cliff", which will "crumble to pieces", and which is never free from suspicion and shakiness.

*Which then is best? He that layeth his foundation on piety to God and His good pleasure, or he that layeth his foundation on an undermined sand cliff, ready to crumble to pieces? And it doth crumble to pieces with him into the fire of hell. And God guideth not people that do wrong. The foundation of those who so build is never free from suspicion and shakiness in their hearts, until their hearts are cut to pieces. And God is all-knowing, wide. (Qur'an 9:109- 110)*

As one can see, there is substantial overlap between the Judeo-Christian scriptures and the Islamic religious texts. These areas of commonality include both religious history and ethical teachings. These similarities are indeed, quite impressive and obviously go beyond the realms of chance and happenstance. For Muslims, such similarities attest to the divine revelation that lies behind all three of the Abrahamic faiths, however much the non-Islamic Abrahamic faiths may have deviated from that divine revelation.

In the Abrahamic faiths, Dr. Jerald Dirks explores the similarities and contrasts among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Using the analogy of a tree, he notes that each of the three Abrahamic faiths claims to be the one, true, vertical extension of a trunk of primary revelation, with the other two religions being seen as lateral branches that deviate from the true verticality of the original trunk. Working within the framework of this metaphor, Dr. Dirks focuses on a series of topics, including his own journey from Christianity to Islam, the extensive common ground that is to be found among the three Abrahamic faiths, the basic differences that separate Islam and Christianity, the issue of religious pluralism in a global world, Islam phobia in the Christian West, and the role of women in the scriptures and foundational texts of the three religions. Along the way, he exposes and corrects numerous myths about the Abrahamic faiths, myths that are too often accepted as common knowledge. Dr. Dirks concludes by calling for a reconciliation among the Abrahamic faiths that embraces and celebrates the commonalities to be found among them and that honestly and respectfully acknowledges their difference.

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