

Islam and Christianity: Brothers at Odds

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Islam and Christianity share the belief in Jesus as the only promised Messiah, born of the Virgin Mary by way of a unique miracle unparalleled in human history. Both faiths posit that Jesus Christ will come back to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Despite this shared belief, the collective consciousnesses of the followers of Christianity and of the followers of Islam have been shaped to place the two faiths at odds.

Muslims and Christians not only share these beliefs, but they also both accept the miracles performed by Jesus, the Spirit of God, as religious fact. Both communities hold the belief that Jesus cured the ill, raised the dead, and ascended into heaven to be seated next to the throne of God. Furthermore, both communities hold fast to the belief that God sent down the Holy Spirit to be with Jesus while on earth. The commonality between Muslims and Christians is not limited to their belief systems, but extends to their moral codes. Both consider the Ten Commandments to be foundational to their moral code, and they both share the same high moral integrity based on teachings which are central to their faiths.

We shall examine each point separately and follow with Muslim arguments that Christians should accept Islam as a faith prophesied by Jesus himself, preceded by other prophets such as Moses and Isaiah, among others.

1. Solidarity Between Early Muslims and Christians

Although many in Western Christendom would like to paint a picture of a historical confrontation between Islam and Christianity, history shows the reality to be quite the contrary. For example, most in Christendom are not aware that had it not been for early Christian support and protection, Islam faced an existential threat by polytheist Meccans. Prophet Muhammad ordered a large group of his followers to escape persecution by taking refuge in Abyssinia, where a “just Christian king” would afford them protection. Indeed, King Najashi refused to hand over early Muslims to polytheist Meccans because he viewed the difference between Islam and Christianity as “thinner than the line drawn in the sand.”¹ Years later, the Muslim refugees returned to Medina where Islam established its first capital, and it is reported that when Prophet Muhammad heard of the demise of his friend, King Najashi, he was deeply saddened and held a special prayer service for his Christian friend.

Later, Islam was strengthened in the city of Medina, and the Prophet was able to engage other groups in debate and discussions instead of focusing on defending the very existence of his followers. At this time, the Prophet invited the Christians of Najran, a province in Arabia, to debate the similarities and differences between the two faiths. Upon their arrival, Prophet

¹ First Last, *Title* (City: Publisher, year), pp.



Muhammad ordered his mosque, the second holiest of all places in Islam, emptied to make way for his Christian guests to hold their prayer services without interference and indeed “they setup their mass, rang their bells, and erected their crosses.”²

The Prophet had many kind encounters with various Christians from an early age. The monk Baheirah recognized twelve-year-old Muhammad as “the prophet foretold in the scriptures,”³ and Waraqah Ibn Nawfal, whom we shall discuss below, immediately acknowledged Muhammad to be the awaited prophet.⁴ When the Prophet’s grandson, Hussein, was besieged by government forces, we find that devout Christians sided with him, and in fact died defending his cause.

When Muslims started conquests after the death of Prophet Muhammad, in spite of the lack of consensus of their leaders, the Muslim military commander of Egypt, Umr Ibn Al-As, sought and secured the help of Coptic Christians who were willing participants in the Muslim quest to root out Byzantine armies from Egypt. When Al-As desired to continue his quests further west, he asked Pope Benyamin (Benjamin) of the Coptic Church to hold a service at the largest Christian church to pray for victory of the Muslim armies. Not only did the Pope oblige, but he also saw the Muslim army off to the limits of the city of Alexandria in a clear show of support.

Indeed, these acts of solidarity between the early Muslims and Christians were consistent with the kind and loving way the Quran talks to Christians and about Christians. For example, the Quran says about Christians:

...we sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah. Quran 5:46⁵

and

⁸²*...and nearest among them in love to the believers (i.e. Muslims) wilt thou find those who say, “We are Christians:” because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.*

⁸³*And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: they pray: “Our Lord! we believe; write us down among the witnesses.”⁸⁴ “What cause can we have not to believe in Allah and the truth which has come to us, seeing that we long for our Lord to admit us to the company of the righteous?”⁸⁵ And for this their prayer hath Allah rewarded them with gardens, with rivers flowing*

² First Last, *Title* (City: Publisher, year), pp.

³ First Last, *Title* (City: Publisher, year), pp.

⁴ First Last, *Title* (City: Publisher, year), pp.

⁵ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*

underneath,--their eternal home. Such is the recompense of those who do good.
Quran 5:82-85

In fact, the story of Jesus Christ's infancy is mentioned within a complete chapter of the Quran named after Jesus' mother, the Virgin Mary:

In the name of God the most Compassionate, most Merciful

¹*Kaf. Ha. Ya. 'Ain. Sad.*

²*(This is) a recital of the Mercy of thy Lord to His servant Zakariya.*

³*Behold! He cried to his Lord in secret, ⁴praying "O my Lord! Infirm indeed are my bones, and the hair of my head doth glisten with grey: but never am I unblest, O my Lord, in my prayer to Thee! ⁵Now I fear (what) my relatives (and colleagues) (will do) after me: but my wife is barren: so give me an heir as from Thyself, ⁶(one that) will (truly) represent me, and represent the posterity of Jacob; and make him, O my Lord, one with whom Thou art well-pleased!" ⁷(His prayer was answered): "O Zakariya! We give thee good news of a son: His name shall be Yahya: on none by that name have We conferred distinction before." ⁸He said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son, when my wife is barren and I have grown quite decrepit from old age?" ⁹He said: "So (it will be) thy Lord saith, 'that is easy for Me: I did indeed create thee before, when thou hadst been nothing!'"*

¹⁰*(Zakariya) said: "O my Lord! Give me a Sign." "Thy Sign," was the answer, "shall be that thou shalt speak to no man for three nights, although thou art not dumb." ¹¹So Zakariya came out to his people from his chamber: He told them by signs to celebrate Allah's praises in the morning and in the evening. ¹²(To his son came the command): "O Yahya! Take hold of the Book with might:" and We gave him Wisdom even as a youth ¹³and piety (for all creatures) as from Us, and purity: He was devout ¹⁴and kind to his parents, and he was not overbearing or rebellious. ¹⁵So Peace on him the day he was born, the day that he dies, and the day that he will be raised up to life (again)! ¹⁶Relate in the Book (the story of) Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East. ¹⁷She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them; then We sent her our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. ¹⁸She said: "I seek refuge from thee to (Allah) Most Gracious: (come not near) if thou dost fear Allah." ¹⁹He said: "Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord, (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son. ²⁰She said: "How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?" ²¹He said: "So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, 'that is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us:' It is a matter (so) decreed." ²²So she conceived him, and she retired with him to a remote place. ²³And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree: She cried (in her anguish): "Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!" ²⁴But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the (palm-tree): "Grieve not! For thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee; ²⁵And shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm-tree: It will let*



fall fresh ripe dates upon thee. ²⁶So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye. And if thou dost see any man, say, 'I have vowed a fast to (Allah) Most Gracious, and this day will I enter into not talk with any human being'" ²⁷At length she brought the (babe) to her people, carrying him (in her arms). They said: "O Mary! Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought!" ²⁸"O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste!" ²⁹But she pointed to the babe. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" ³⁰He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah. He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; ³¹"And He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live. ³²(He) hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable; ³³So 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)!" ³⁴Such (was) Jesus the son of Mary: (it is) a statement of truth, about which they (vainly) dispute. ³⁵It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! when He determines a matter, He only says to it, "Be," and it is. ³⁶Verily Allah is my Lord and your Lord: Him therefore serve ye: this is a Way that is straight. Quran 19:1-36

2. Areas of Disagreement Between Islam and Christianity: The Trinity

According to Dr. John Nordin, professor of Communications at the University of Minnesota and an ordained Lutheran minister, upon careful examination, Islam can truly be viewed as a corrective movement to Christianity. The two most prominent doctrines in Christianity that Islam refutes are 1) the doctrine of the Trinity, and 2) the event of Jesus' crucifixion.

Islam gives Jesus a lofty place in God's creation, but dismisses the doctrine of the Trinity as a human invention. As aforementioned, Islam teaches that Jesus was indeed miraculously born without a father and that he is the promised Messiah whom God promised the Jews and the world. In fact, the Muslim belief that Jesus is God's promised Messiah is the central issue of disagreement between Jews and Muslims—Islam teaches that God did indeed promise Jews the Holy Land *providing they believe in Jesus as the Messiah*. In other words, Muslims contend that God's covenant with Jews was a conditional one. Jews must believe in Jesus as the Messiah, otherwise they would not qualify to gain possession of the Holy Land. Since Jews do not accept Jesus as the promised Messiah, they broke God's covenant, and therefore are no longer qualified to possess the Holy Land.

Furthermore, the Quran teaches that Jesus performed amazing miracles such as curing the ill and walking on water:

...and [will make him] an apostle unto the children of Israel. I HAVE COME unto you with a message from your Sustainer. I shall create for you out of clay, as it were, the shape of [your] destiny, and then breathe into it, so that it might become [your] destiny by God's leave; and I shall heal the blind and the leper,

and bring the dead back to life by God's leave; and I shall let you know what you may eat and what you should store up in your houses. Behold, in all this there is indeed a message for you, if you are [truly] believers. Quran 3:49⁶

2.1. Logical Challenges to the Theory of the Trinity

Islam takes issue with the doctrine of the Trinity. The Quran's stance on the Trinity and divinity of Jesus is very clear. It rejects these teachings outright and attributes them to human invention which made their way into Christianity after Jesus' departure:

⁷²They do blaspheme who say: "(Allah) is Christ the son of Mary." But said Christ: "O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord." Whoever joins other gods with Allah, Allah will forbid him the garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong-doers be no one to help. ⁷³They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One Allah. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them. ⁷⁴Why turn they not to Allah, and seek His forgiveness? For Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. Quran 5:72-74⁷

In another Quranic chapter, named after the family of Imran (Ale-Imran), God speaks directly to Christians:

O FOLLOWERS of the Gospel! Do not overstep the bounds [of truth] in your religious beliefs, and do not say of God anything but the truth. The Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was but God's Apostle—[the fulfillment of] His promise which He had conveyed unto Mary—and a soul created by Him. Believe, then, in God and His apostles, and do not say, "[God is] a trinity". Desist [from this assertion] for your own good. God is but One God; utterly remote is He, in His glory, from having a son: unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth; and none is as worthy of trust as God. Quran 4:171⁸

In the verse following that one, God tells us that Jesus submitted himself to God as a servant of His cause:

Never did the Christ feel too proud to be God's servant, nor do the angels who are near unto Him. And those who feel too proud to serve Him and glory in their arrogance [should know that on Judgment Day] He will gather them all unto Himself Quran 4:172

⁶ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*

⁷ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*

⁸ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*

As prophesied in the Quran, Jesus will deny having told his followers to worship him. In the following verse, he is depicted clearly submitting himself to God and denying outright having anything to do with the invention of the Trinity or with his or his mother's divinity:

¹¹⁶ *And behold! Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?" He will say: "Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, Thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in full all that is hidden.* ¹¹⁷ *"Never said I to them aught except what Thou didst command me to say, to wit, 'Worship Allah, my Lord, and your Lord'; and I was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them; when Thou didst take me up Thou was the Watcher over them and Thou art a Witness to all things."* Quran 5:116-117⁹

Perhaps high christology (assigning divinity to Jesus) made its way into the faith because of the miraculous birth of Jesus. As stated earlier, both Muslims and Christians believe that Jesus was born without a father. However, God reminds us in the Quran that this miracle is no more a miracle than the creation of Adam of no father or mother. "Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is."¹⁰ As Adam is not elevated to divine status because of his non-standard creation, neither is Jesus. Jesus' miraculous birth cannot stand as evidence of divinity.

Muslims do not rely solely on the Quran to argue the invalidity of the Trinity but also on the Bible itself. Trinitarian Christians often quote high christology verses while ignoring other verses that refute high christology and actually support the Muslim view of Jesus. In addition to the fact that Jesus never referred to himself as anything but the *son of man* in the Bible, the following verse clearly shows Jesus placing himself at a degree of subservience to God:

¹⁷ *Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"* ¹⁸ *So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."* ¹⁹ *"You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"* Mark 10: 17-19¹¹

Jesus' clear refusal to be called *good*, and to place this reference exclusively to God, supports the Muslim view that Jesus is not God but a submitter to God.

The same story is narrated in Matthew:

⁹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*

¹⁰ 3:59, Marmaduke William Pickthall, *The Meaning Of The Glorious Quran*

¹¹ The Holy Bible: New King James Version, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc.



¹⁶Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” ¹⁷So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ¹⁹‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Matthew 19:16-19

Furthermore, Jesus kept reminding the Jews and his followers of the first and most important commandment, pointing out that God is not to be assigned associates. “Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.’ (Mark 12:29)” Perhaps the most telling verse which clearly supports the Muslim view that Jesus is one of God’s chosen messengers is “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)” These verses, Muslims argue, are consistent with the teachings of both the Old Testament and the Quran.

The pure monotheism which Islam advocates is maintained throughout the Old Testament. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! (Deut. 6:4)” “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. (Isaiah 44:6)” “Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me. (Isaiah 46:9)”

Despite the pure monotheism which both the Old Testament and the New Testament quote, the concept of the Trinity, which wasn’t a doctrine in early Christianity, eventually made its way into Christian doctrine.

2.2. Doctrinal Challenges to the Theory of the Trinity

The history of and the development of the Trinity within Christianity cannot be understood without a review of the historical context in which it developed. We start with Paul. It was Paul who first introduced the idea of religious modification for the sake of conversion. He had to depart from key Jewish teachings such as circumcision and the prohibition of consuming swine flesh to accommodate otherwise resistant pagans of the areas north of Palestine. Paul contended that the changes were necessary prerequisites to invite people to the new Christian faith, despite strong opposition from Peter and the Jerusalem Church. Paul’s success in legitimizing these changes paved the way for more profound changes later on.

What caused the Christian establishment to depart from the most fundamental teaching of all previous prophets and revert to the insertion of a complex form of Godhead can be understood if one takes a closer look at the societal composition of the Roman Empire at the time. The Roman Empire was faced with a socio-religious challenge that threatened its national security. The vast majority of the empire’s inhabitants practiced and believed in a slew of pagan religions. Yet new Christians, who were increasing in number and having great success at converting many communities, including many intellectuals, rejected those forms of polytheistic beliefs. This created a situation which could have led to a disastrous internal religious strife with the potential to dismantle the otherwise strong empire from within.



Under this backdrop, Christian intellectuals, in order to stabilize the empire and further accommodate its pagan population, started debating various forms of pagan ideologies surrounding the nature of God. The most prevalent ideology was that of a trinity shrouded in a *mysterious* Godhead.

Since Jesus stated in what is called the Sermon on the Mount that he did not come to “destroy the Law or the Prophets,” but to “fulfill” them¹², it follows that the most fundamental teaching of Judaism (i.e., pure monotheism) must be preserved in Jesus’ teachings. In fact, pure monotheism *can* be seen in the teachings of early Christians. It is evident from the writings of an early adopter of the Trinity, Tertullian, that the majority of Christians rejected this new doctrine and found it to be in violation of their *Rule of Faith*.

*The simple, indeed (I will not call them unwise or unlearned), who always constitute the majority of believers, are startled at the dispensation (of the Three in One), on the very ground that their very Rule of Faith withdraws them from the world’s plurality of gods to the one only true God; not understanding that, although He is the one only God, He must yet be believed in with His own economy.*¹³

In clear violation of Mosaic Law, which Jesus declared he would not change, Paul’s success in legitimizing changes paved the way for the more profound change to the most fundamental Judeo-Christian teaching of pure monotheism.

In Colossians, Paul started speaking of what could be seen as an early form of the Trinity. It is notable that Paul himself referred to the nature of God as a *mystery*:

²My goal is that their hearts, having been knit together in love, may be encouraged, and that they may have all the riches that assurance brings in their understanding of the knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2-3

Philip Voerding, a specialist in comparative religion, writes in his monumental work *The Trouble with Christianity*, “A good case can be made that Paul presented the Gospel to Gentiles in such a way that the non-Jews within the Roman Empire would be converted. Gentiles would not be interested in a Jewish Messiah and the law given by Moses (PBUH), but might be interested in a ‘Christ’ that in some ways resembled other historical and mythological figures known from various mystery religions whose adherents lived within the Roman Empire.”¹⁴

¹² Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”

¹³ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 3. In Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (rpt, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, III, 598-599).

¹⁴ Voerding, Philip. *The Trouble with Christianity*. Author House, 2009, p. 136.

2.3. Conclusion of Trinity Discussion

Jesus himself never advocated the Trinity—it violates the very basis of his teachings, the belief in one God. Jesus clearly states so in yet another passage of the Bible when he said:

He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” Matthew 20:23

Philip Voerding, in *The Trouble with Christianity*, makes the following conclusion regarding the above mentioned passage:

Jesus is stating that, contrary to the Western view of the Trinity doctrine that the Son is co-equal with the Father, this is indeed not so. In fact, we would expect the One True God, by definition, to be able to do anything within His perfect moral character. Since Jesus states he cannot do something that the Father can do, not only is the “the son” not coequal with the Father, but “the son” cannot be eternal God, otherwise he would have the right to fulfill this request. (p. 128)

3. Areas of Disagreement Between Islam and Christianity: The Crucifixion

Trinitarian Christians submit the story of Jesus’ crucifixion as a historical fact and base many of their foundational beliefs on this admission. Muslims, on the other hand, dispute that Jesus was crucified. They base their arguments on theology, Biblical clarity, and [historical fact](#).

The issue of whether Jesus would die for his faith is not in question for Muslims, and Christians also believe that martyrdom is a praiseworthy act when called for. Both Islam and Christianity gave many martyrs over time to protect their faiths. Christians, in fact, gave many more martyrs to protect their faith than Muslims—the total number of people who died fighting against and for Islam in the time period leading up to the death of Prophet Muhammad does not exceed 600. Since Muslims won the majority of those existential battles against the enemies of the faith, it stands to reason that the majority of those killed in those wars were not Muslims. Therefore, the number of Muslims who died defending the faith does not exceed several hundred. On the other hand, Christians were fiercely fought and prosecuted by their early enemies, and many more of them were tortured and killed forcing them to flee to Palestine and surrounding areas, including Jordan where the oldest Christian churches are found, many underground. Paul, who later became a central figure to Trinitarian Christianity, was a leading figure in torturing and killing the Christian faithful early on.

3.1. Theological Arguments Against the Crucifixion

3.1.1. Jesus hadn’t fulfilled the prophecy said of him yet

As aforementioned, Muslims believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah whose role as the only promised and true Messiah is to establish God’s kingdom on earth. Thus Muslims argue that to accept the story of the crucifixion of Jesus as understood by Trinitarian Christians would violate

the very meaning of Jesus being the Messiah. To state that God allowed the murder of Jesus before Jesus fulfilled his role as the Messiah, which is to establish the kingdom of God, would violate his role as the promised Messiah. Instead, Muslims contend, God protected Jesus by raising him up to Heaven where he is seated next to the throne of God, waiting until his time to return and fulfill his task as the Messiah. Jesus was not able to complete his task the first time around because humanity was simply not ready to receive all that he had to teach it. The wisdom of his first coming is clear—it was the first phase in preparing humanity for the end of times. In other words, his first coming was not a failure, but a prerequisite to his final and more important coming.

3.1.2. Humanity was not ready for what Jesus had to say

As we shall explain in another section, Muslims argue that Jesus prophesied the coming of Prophet Muhammad, who in Jesus' words, will communicate all of God's words to humanity as humanity was not yet ready for what he, Jesus, had to say:

¹²*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*

¹³*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you unto all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.* ¹⁴*He shall glorify me.* John 16: 12-14

3.1.3. God's mercy and compassion would have prevailed

Furthermore, one of God's essential traits is that He is all merciful and all compassionate. Both Muslims and Christians accept the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to please God. They also accept the fact that God, by His mercy and compassion, saved Abraham's son by sending down a ram to be slaughtered instead. So Muslims ask, "If Jesus was God's begotten son as Trinitarian Christians contend, then would not He be more merciful and compassionate with His own son than the son of His servant, Abraham?" In other words, God's ultimate love for Jesus would not have permitted the murder of the Christ.

3.1.4. God can forgive sins outright without blood being shed

Trinitarian Christians have developed a number of arguments to justify Jesus' crucifixion, the most prevalent is that "he died for our sins" as originated by Paul, or that God must be paid back for the violation which took place during the story of creation—an argument known by some as "Government Theology" in which God sacrificed Jesus to be paid back. Neither argument is subscribed to by Muslims.

In Muslims' view, these arguments violate God's ultimate mercy and compassion. Since God is the Most Merciful, He has the power to forgive all sins without the shedding of anyone's blood, especially that of Jesus Christ. Further, to state that God has to be *paid back* is to state that He is not all powerful and is need of retribution which would make Him less than God. Who, except a being more powerful than God, could force God to be bound by any law and one where He can only be paid back by the murder of His own son? Such a being does not exist according to both Muslims and Christians.

3.1.5. According to Christian interpretation, blood sacrifice had been abrogated

Both Muslims and Christians agree that Jesus did not come to change the fundamental teachings of Moses (as stated in the Sermon on the Mount). However, according to Christian teachings, he did eliminate the need for blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins and permitted the consumption of pork (as interpreted from Matthew 15: 10-14). If this is the case, Muslims ask, why would Jesus have to be sacrificed for the atonement of sins if God no longer required blood sacrifice for the same thing?

There are numerous additional theological arguments brought by Muslims to refute the story of crucifixion which are outside of the scope of this short essay.

3.2. Biblical Arguments Against the Crucifixion

3.2.1. Positive identification of Jesus was not made

Muslims argue that the Bible itself does not conclusively support the view that Jesus was crucified. It is evident from the Biblical narratives that although Jesus was known by name and character, he was not physically known to many people, including the Sanhedrin and Roman soldiers. This is evidenced by the fact that Judas had to be hired as a spy and eyewitness to identify Jesus so that he could be captured:

⁴³And immediately, while he yet spoke, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. ⁴⁴And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely. ⁴⁵And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him. ⁴⁶And they laid their hands on him, and took him. ⁴⁷And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? ⁴⁹I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled. ⁵⁰And they all forsook him, and fled. ⁵¹And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: ⁵²And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked. ⁵³And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. ⁵⁴And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire. ⁵⁵And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. Mark 14:43-55

The disciples, the only reliable witnesses who could positively identify Jesus, fled upon his capture, save Peter who followed him from afar, and even Peter denied that the captured person was Jesus and in fact cursed him (Mark 14:71). The authorities' repeated attempts to locate

individuals who could positively identify Jesus by person are further evidence that Jesus was not familiar in person to many people—pictures and other forms of identification were not available during that time.

3.2.2. *That the cross was returned to Jesus is not mentioned in the narrative*

Moreover, when Jesus was no longer able to continue to carry the cross after being repeatedly tortured, the cross was taken away from his back and placed on the back of Simon of Cyrene. Nowhere does the Bible tell us that the cross was placed again on the back of Jesus, casting further doubt that the man on the cross was indeed the Messiah:

²⁷Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. ²⁸And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. ²⁹And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! ³⁰And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. ³¹And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. ³²And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. ³³And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, ³⁴They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. ³⁵And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. ³⁶And sitting down they watched him there; Matthew 27:27-36

3.2.3. *Jesus would not have bemoaned his state*

The doubt that it was Jesus on the cross is exacerbated by the contrary character and behavior of the man on the cross to that of Jesus. The Gospels tell of the cries of the man on the cross in objection to his plight as he was crying:

⁴⁵Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Matthew 27:45-46

If this was indeed Jesus on the cross, why would he believe that his Lord had forsaken him when the Bible tells us that just a short time before, Jesus submitted to his impending fate as shown in Matthew 26:39?

And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

Also, if Jesus knew that he would be seated next to God in three days and that his death would atone for the sins of humankind, why would he object to it in this fashion?

A common Christian answer to this question is that Jesus was repeating a prayer from Psalms 22.1. Yet the question persists. Why would Jesus react in this fashion to an otherwise great sacrifice? As stated above, Christianity gave many a martyr. According to Tertullian, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”¹⁵ Truly, the most famous statement of Ignatius (the Martyr of Antioch (circa 120 AD) who is said to have known the Apostle John and who is said to have lived to a ripe old age, but did suffer imprisonment and torture) is:

I am writing to all the Churches and I enjoin all, that I am dying willingly for God's sake, if only you do not prevent it. I beg you, do not do me an untimely kindness. Allow me to be eaten by the beasts, which are my way of reaching to God. I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become the pure bread of Christ.—Letter to the Romans¹⁶

Could these martyrs have been greater in their faith and sacrifice than the patriarch of the faith himself, Jesus Christ? Muslims say no they did not—the man on the cross was not Jesus.

3.2.4. Mary did not exhibit grief

Mary's observance of the crucifixion and of the man's cries did not reflect that of a mother who was witnessing her son experiencing such pain and suffering. Yes, her mood was somber as the mood of any human witnessing the death of another, even a criminal, but it certainly was not the mood of an average mother, or the mother of the Messiah Jesus Christ, the Chaste Mary no less!!

3.2.5. Jesus was not a ghost as he should have been if he had indeed died

Muslims further contend that Jesus himself denied that he was crucified when he tried to prove to the disciples that he was not a ghost. When Jesus appeared to the disciples three days after the cross was erected, Jesus scolded his disciples because they reacted as if they had seen a ghost. To prove that he was alive, Jesus asked them for bread and fish of which he ate and made them feel his torture wounds. However, Jesus taught his followers that death turns one into a ghost with no physical needs as ghosts are only spirits.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus refutes the Pharisees' question by explaining that upon their deaths, the woman in question and her seven husbands will be ghosts, and thus have no physical needs:

²⁸Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. ²⁹There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. ³¹And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they

¹⁵ Apologeticus, Chapter 50.

¹⁶ Reference for Ignatius' quote



left no children, and died. ³²Last of all the woman died also. ³³Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife. ³⁴And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: ³⁵But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: ³⁶Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.” Luke 20:28-36

Thus, if Jesus did indeed die on the cross, then he would have come back as a ghost and would not have scolded his disciples for their reaction or tried to ask for bread and fish to prove that he was not a ghost.

3.3. Conclusion of Crucifixion Discussion

These points which Muslims raise are further strengthened by several other Biblical statements and inconsistencies such as the fact that the Bible itself does not agree on which day the crucifixion took place and the fact that Pilate's wife's persuaded her husband not to crucify Jesus and he “washed his hands” of the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:19-24).

In short, Muslims believe that since Jesus is the only promised Messiah whose task is to establish the kingdom of God on earth, God did not permit his killing. Instead He took Jesus up to heaven where he is seated next to the throne of God until God sends him back to fulfill his task.

4. Biblical Prophecies

In anticipation of the coming of the promised prophet as foretold in both the Old and New Testaments, Jewish and Christian groups and individuals started to turn their attention to Mecca and Yathrib.

Approximately 200 years before the coming of Prophet Muhammad, two Jewish tribes emigrated from Palestine and settled in Yathrib, which was later renamed Medina by the Prophet Muhammad. Another Arab tribe converted to Judaism and moved to Medina to join their Jewish brethren in anticipation of the promised prophet. The Jews of Medina drew strength from their scriptures foretelling the coming of the new prophet; they used to threaten the non-Jewish citizens of Medina that when the new prophet came, he will lead the Jews in victory over non-Jews. In fact, the Quran lays blame on the Jews of Medina for not rallying behind the Prophet after he indeed came.¹⁷

Christians focused their attention on Mecca. Successive delegations visited Mecca to investigate signs indicating the close advent of the prophet. One notable Christian, a man by the name of Waraqah Ibn Nawafal decided to relocate to Mecca to wait for the new prophet. The name

¹⁷ Marmaduke William Pickthall, *The Meaning Of The Glorious Quran*, 2:89, “And when there cometh unto them a scripture from Allah, confirming that in their possession - though before that they were asking for a signal triumph over those who disbelieved - and when there cometh unto them that which they know (to be the truth) they disbelieve therein. The curse of Allah is on disbelievers.”

Waraqah means “the scroll,” a possible indication that he was well learned. Muslims agree that *Waraqah* accepted Muhammad as the promised prophet on the very first day Muhammad descended from the mountain after having received the first revelation.

4.1. Prophecies in the Old Testament

4.1.1. City of Mecca (Makkah) and the well of Zam Zam in Psalms

Jews and Christians found many references in their scriptures to the new prophet. Some of the scriptures clearly stated the prophet’s name while others prophesied the city where he and his followers would triumph. Psalm 84:4-6 mentions the city of Mecca by name (also known as Baca in the Quran to Muslims and Arabs before Islam):

⁴*Blessed are those who live in your house. They are always praising you. Selah.*

⁵*Blessed are those whose strength comes from you. They have decided to travel to your temple. ⁶As they pass through the dry Valley of Baca, they make it a place where water flows. The rain in the fall covers it with pools.*

These verses speak of the dry valley of Baca and of the Ka'aba, the house of worship built by Abraham, and describe the well of Zam Zam which continues to flow through the ages.

The well of Zam Zam was first miraculously started by the strike of the foot of baby Ishmael when he nearly died of thirst. His mother Hagar prayed to Yahweh while running between two hills known as Safa and Marwa. When she finished the seventh run between the two hills, she noticed that her baby’s cries had ceased, and upon examination she found flowing water gushing from the ground under his foot. Muslims reenact the actions of Hagar until this day when they make their trip to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. They also drink the water of Zam Zam and make sure to bring some back home as a prized and holy gift, for they consider Zam Zam a living miracle of God.

4.1.2. Prophet Muhammad’s name in Song of Solomon

Jews and Christians found the prophet’s name in the Song of Solomon 5:16:

חָפֹז, מִמְּתָקִים, וְכֹלֹ, מִמְּמַדִּים; זֶה דֹדִי וְזֶה רַעִי, בְּגוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם

Transliteration: Hakku mumitaqim wa kullu MAKHAMMADIM zah dawadee wa zah ra'ayee,banuwt Yerushalem.

The literal and figurative translation of this verse into the English language is:

His speech is most sweet, he is completely Muhammad, one out to another as a love-token from one out to another, my fellow friend, O you Daughters of Jerusalem.

But the King James Version of the Bible reports the verse as “His mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

In the Hebrew language, the suffix *im* is added to names to show respect. As such, *im* is added after the name of Prophet Muhammad in the above passage rendering it *Muhammadim*. However, as we in the English translation, the name *Muhammad* was translated as “altogether lovely.” In the Old Testament in Hebrew, the name of Prophet Muhammad is present.

It is truly unfortunate that the name was not translated “as is” in English Bibles. It is a clear violation of literary integrity to translate the meaning of names. A white man whose name is Mr. Green would take on an entirely different character if he is described as “having the color of plants” instead of maintaining Green as his name. In fact, the entire meaning of the passage and the message would change if such a translation were to be made. This is indeed what resulted in the above mentioned passage when the name *Muhammad* was translated into “altogether lovely” instead of being kept as the name *Muhammad*.

4.1.3. A blessing for the descendents of Ishmael

The lineage of Prophet Muhammad traces back to Ishmael, Abraham’s firstborn. Indeed, God’s covenant and promise to Abraham to bless his children was fulfilled with the blessing of Isaac and his descendants. Yet, per scripture, the covenant and promise were also fulfilled with Abraham’s firstborn (Ishmael) and his descendants.

Genesis 12:2-3 speaks of God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants before any child was born to him:

²I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great. You will be a blessing to others. ³I will bless those who bless you. I will put a curse on anyone who calls down a curse on you. All nations on earth will be blessed because of you.

Genesis 17:4 reiterates God’s promise after the birth of Ishmael and before the birth of Isaac, “As for me, behold, my covenant [is] with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.”

In Genesis 21:13,18, Isaac is specifically blessed, but Ishmael was also specifically blessed and promised by God to become “a great nation,”

¹³And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he [is] thy seed. ¹⁸Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

According to Deuteronomy 21:15-17, the traditional rights and privileges of the firstborn son are not to be affected by the social status of his mother (e.g., being a free woman such as Sarah, Isaac’s mother vs. a bondwoman such as Hagar, Ishmael’s mother). This is consistent with the moral and humanitarian principles of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The full legitimacy of Ishmael as Abraham’s son and “seed” and the full legitimacy of his mother, Hagar, as Abraham’s wife, are clearly stated in Genesis 21:13 and 16:3. After Jesus, the last Israelite messenger and prophet, it was time that God’s promise to bless Ishmael and his

descendants be fulfilled. Less than 600 years after Jesus came the last messenger of God, Muhammad, from the progeny of Abraham through Ishmael. God's blessing of both of the main branches of Abraham's family tree was now fulfilled.

4.1.4. The awaited prophet was to come from Arabia

The Old Testament clearly states that the awaited prophet was to come from Arabia. Deuteronomy 33:1-2 combines references to Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. It speaks of God (i.e., God's revelation) coming from Sinai, rising from Seir (perhaps the village of Sa'ir near Jerusalem) and shining forth from Paran.¹⁸ According to Genesis 21:21, the wilderness of Paran was the place where Ishmael settled, specifically in Mecca, Arabia.¹⁹

4.1.5. The awaited one was to be descended from Ishmael through Ke'dar

Isaiah 42:1-13 speaks of the beloved of God, His elect and messenger who will bring down a law to be awaited in the isles and who "shall not fail nor be discouraged till he have set judgment on earth." Verse 11 connects that awaited one with the descendants of Ke'dar. Ke'dar, according to Genesis 25:13, was the second son of Ishmael, the ancestor of Prophet Muhammad.

4.1.6. Help coming from Medina

As for Medina, Habakkuk 3:3 speaks of God (God's help) coming from Te'man (an oasis north of Medina according to J. Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible), and the holy one (coming) from Paran. That holy one was Prophet Muhammad who under persecution migrated from Paran (Mecca) to be received enthusiastically in Medina.

Indeed the story of the migration of the prophet and his persecuted followers is vividly described in Isaiah 21:13-17. That section also foretold the Battle of Badr on the outskirts of Medina in which the few ill-armed faithful miraculously defeated the mighty men of Ke'dar who sought to destroy Islam and intimidate their own folk who became Muslims.

4.1.7. A prophet "like unto Moses" from the Ishmaelites

The prophet "like unto Moses" from the "brethren" of the Israelites (i.e., from the Ishmaelites) was described as one in whose mouth God will put his words and that he will speak in the name of God (Deuteronomy 18:18-19):

¹⁸I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. ¹⁹And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

¹⁸ ¹And this is the blessing, with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. ²And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir to them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.

¹⁹ ²¹And he dwelled in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

Trinitarian Christians contend that this prophecy refers to Jesus because Jesus was like Moses. After all, Moses was a Jew, as was Jesus. Moses was a prophet and Jesus was also a prophet. However, if these two are the only criteria for this prophecy to be fulfilled, then all the prophets of the Bible who came after Moses such as Solomon, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Malachi, John the Baptist, etc. would fulfill this prophecy, given that all were Jews as well as prophets.

However, it is Prophet Muhammad who is more like Moses for both had a father and a mother, while Jesus was born miraculously without a father (Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:35 and also the Quran 3:42-47), and they both were married and had children, while Jesus, according to the Bible, did not marry nor had he any children. Furthermore, both Moses and Muhammad died natural deaths, but Jesus has been raised up alive according to the Quran (4:157-158), or was crucified according to Trinitarian Christians.

Up to the time of Jesus, the Israelites were still awaiting the prophet “like unto Moses” prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:18. When John the Baptist came they asked him if he was Christ and he said “no.” They asked him if he was Elias and he said “no.” Then, in apparent reference to Deuteronomy 18:18, they asked him “Art thou that prophet” and he answered “no.” (John 1:21).

So who was that prophet if it was not John the Baptist, Elias, nor Jesus? Clearly, with a bit of analysis, it becomes evident that it was Prophet Muhammad.

4.1.8. The Twelve Princes

Genesis 17:20 explains how God promised the continuation of the blessing of Ishmael by the eventual bringing about of twelve princes who will become a great nation:

²⁰As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.

This prophecy was only fulfilled through the twelve Imams who descended from Prophet Muhammad and who were foretold by Prophet Muhammad.

4.1.9. The prophet who was not learned

Yet perhaps one of the most telling passages in the English Bible is mentioned in the book of Isaiah 29:12:

¹²And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.

This prophecy was perfectly fulfilled when the archangel Gabriel transmitted the first revelation to Prophet Muhammad saying “Iqra! (Read!)” to which Prophet Muhammad replied, “I am not learned.”



The above are but a few of the verses Muslims cite to show how the Old Testament prophesied the coming of Muhammad as a prophet. The New Testament contains similar passages that Muslims contend clearly foretell the coming of Islam as promised by God.

4.2. Prophecy in the New Testament

According to the New Testament, Jesus spoke of the *Paraclete* or *Comforter* who would come after him who would be sent by the Father as another Paraclete.

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever. John 14:16

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. John 15:26

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. John 16:7

Many present day Trinitarian Christians claim that the Paraclete, or Comforter, is a reference to the Holy Spirit, as supported by John 14:26:

But the Comforter, [which is] the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

Muslims offer evidence to support their claim that the Comforter is Prophet Muhammad, not the Holy Spirit.

4.2.1. Early Christians were waiting for a man

History tells us that many early Christians understood the Paraclete to be a man and not a spirit. This might explain why some Christians responded to those men who claimed, without meeting the criteria stipulated by Jesus, to be the awaited Paraclete.²⁰

4.2.2. The Holy Spirit was already on earth

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. John 16:7

Muslims argue that the prophecy clearly states that *only if Jesus departs* will the Comforter come. The Bible states that the Holy Spirit was already present on earth before and during the

²⁰ Voerding, Philip. *The Trouble with Christianity*. Author House, 2009, p. 37.



time of Jesus, in the womb of Elizabeth, and again when Jesus was being baptized, etc. Hence this prophecy refers to another being, not the Holy Spirit.

4.2.3. *There are not two Holy Spirits*

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever. John 14:16

It is clear from this verse that whatever kind of being the Comforter is, there exist at least two of them. No Christian contends that there are two or more Holy Spirits, so this cannot be a reference to the Holy Spirit. It makes more sense that the term *Comforter* refers to a prophet.

4.2.4. *Prophet Muhammad fulfills the characteristics of the Comforter completely*

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever. John 14:16

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you unto all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me. John 16: 12-14

It is clear that the Comforter is a male human being who speaks. Prophet Muhammad was the *Paraclete*, Comforter, helper, and admonisher sent by God after Jesus. He taught new things which could not be borne at Jesus' time; he guided all humans, not only Muslims, unto truth, spoke not of himself but of what he heard (revelation from God via Gabriel), testified of Jesus, and told of many things to come which "came to pass" while he was still alive and after he died.

But how does Prophet Muhammad abide with us forever? The answer to this lies in the Jewish teaching that a man lives forever through his sons. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad named the twelve Imams from his descendants who will carry the message of God until the return of Jesus.²¹

It is evident to religious scholars that Prophet Muhammad was foretold in the Old and New Testaments. As stated above, these prophecies were well known to both Jewish and Christian contemporaries of the eras preceding and coinciding with the advent of Islam.

These prophecies were the clear motivation of three Jewish tribes and Christian scholars in seeking Mecca and Medina as their places of residence in awaiting the coming of the new prophet. Because of the clarity and presence of such clear references in the Bible to the coming of Islam, perhaps this can be a natural starting point where the followers of the three faiths can converge. After all, would not the acceptance of Muhammad's prophethood be a fulfillment of both Jewish and Christian prophecies, and thus a strengthening of their faiths?

²¹ Yanabe' Almwadeh 533, and Imam Ali, Ahmad Rahmani Hamadani, p 128

5. Conclusion

Social and political competition put Islam and Christianity at odds despite the numerous commonalities they share. No other two faiths share so many fundamental beliefs and moral codes as do these two faiths. Islam and Christianity share the belief that Jesus is the only promised Messiah who is in Heaven waiting to come back to establish God's kingdom on earth. They share the belief that he was miraculously born of the chaste Virgin Mary who is the central female figure for the followers of both faiths. Mary is the most common name for Muslim women throughout the 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide. Muslims and Christians also share the Ten Commandments, believe in the miracles of Jesus, and hold that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus since his miraculous birth. The histories of the two faiths are more intertwined than many believe. Had it not been for the aid of the early Christians, Islam's followers faced vexing challenges which threatened their very existence.