

A lexical and theological study of 'Īsā ibn Maryam in the Arabic Qur'ān

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1. Introduction

The encounter between Islam and Christianity dates back to the 7th century, the time of Muhammad. Scholars agree that because Muhammad met heretics of Christianity, not true followers of Christianity, he was not able to learn about the true doctrines of Christianity. Although historically, the assessment of Muhammad is varied, it is clear that he is not one of God's prophets in the Bible and that he did not understand the Bible correctly.

At its primary stages, Islam received more influence from Jews than Christians, as it can be seen from the fact that the Qur'ān mentions Jewish tribes in Medina. After Muslims began to conquer the neighbour regions such as Syria they encountered more Christians. One significant detail recorded in several Islamic sources

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is that Muhammad's wife Khadija's first reaction on hearing of Muhammad's Wahy(Message of Allāh) was to send him to her cousin, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, and most scholars agree that he was a Christian. In Muhammad's Hadith, it says when Muhammad received the first verse of the Qur'ān, he asked Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a heretic of Christianity, what the verse meant. Indeed, Muhammad himself did not know whether the Qur'ān was the word of Allāh or the word of Jinn(non-physical beings that can be either good or evil). Waraqa ibn Nawfal confirmed that Muhammad had received the message of Allāh, just as Musā had received the Ten Commandments.

Historically, Islamic theology was also influenced by Greek philosophy. Therefore, Gnosis, Docetism and Neo-platonism influenced Islamic theology. The commentators of the Qur'ān turned to Christians and Jews in an effort to understand the people and events in the Old Testament. Hence, in the Qur'ānic verses from Mecca, it says that if Muslims do not understand something they should ask those who received the holy book before them (Surah 2:136, 5:69, 40:78), which applied to Jews and Christians in particular, and thus this verse provided an opportunity for Muslims to meet with Christians and Jews.

But the Crusades and the anti-Islam tendencies led Muslims to turn their backs from Jews and Christians. A primary example is in the opening chapter of the Qur'ān. Commentators interpret "those who have incurred anger and those who are lost" as Jews and Christians, respectively. This indicates Islam's hostility towards these two religions. The Korean translation of the Qur'ān published in 1998 referred to "those who have incurred anger and those who are lost" as Jews and Christians, respectively. However, in the Qur'ān translated recently by a Korean muslim, the word "Christian" was deleted¹⁾.

1) Choi Young-gil, *Qur'ān commentary*(in Korean), 15.

This is one of the instances in which present-day Muslims' interpretation of the Qur'ān has become distorted from the original meaning. The reason is that 7th century Qur'ānic Arabic and 21st century literary Arabic differ in meaning of some words, and also it is because of the difference in historical background and the different commentaries. One cannot accurately understand a verse in the Qur'ān if one is not familiar with the historical situation at the time of Muhammad. Moreover, over 50% of Arabs in Morocco and Egypt today are illiterate, and thus there are not many Muslims who understand the original meaning of the Qur'ān. It is apparent that a foreigner cannot derive an accurate understanding of the Qur'ān and Islam merely by asking Muslims. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to examine the differences and similarities between 'Īsā ibn Maryam of the Qur'ān and Jesus Christ in the Bible.

This paper aims to first examine how Jesus Christ of the Bible and 'Īsā ibn Maryam differ in name and title, and then to compare the birth, work, ascension and return of 'Īsā bin Maryam with Jesus Christ in the Bible. Islam seen through a Muslim's eyes, and Islam seen through a Christian's eyes is vastly different²⁾. In the Islamic tradition, 'Īsā was a Muslim and nothing of the divine reposed in his being, even though the Qur'ān gives him an honored place as a prophet.

In the present Korean society that stresses globalization and multi-culturalism, an accurate understanding of the Qur'ān is not only timely but also essential. This paper probes the long-held assumption that 'Īsā ibn Maryam and Jesus Christ are in fact the

2) Previous research conducted on this topic consist of Cheok Cheon's Christology (mainly on understanding Jesus in the Qur'ān), Jesus seen from the three religions of revelation (Younggwang Son, Myungji University, 2009), A comparative study on the concept of Jesus in Islam and Christianity (Okjung Nam, Mediterranean regional studies Vol.3), A study on the images of Jesus in Islam and Christianity: with special reference to the Qur'ān(Sinyee Ahn, Korean Middle Eastern Forum, Vol.30 Number 1). These papers are based on the assumption that the 'Īsā bn Maryam is Jesus Christ of the Bible.

same person in order to verify its validity. Hence, in this paper, the two are distinguished by different names. Eventually, through research on 'Īsā ibn Maryam and Jesus Christ of the Bible, this paper aims to examine:

- ① Are 'Īsā ibn Maryam of the Qur'ān and Jesus Christ of the Bible the same person?
- ② If the Qur'ān and the Bible differ on 'Īsā, then what are their similarities?
- ③ How much of the popular Muslim portrait of 'Īsā is really based on the Qur'ān?

This paper focuses on the precise meaning of Arabic Qur'ānic words both lexically and theologically. Therefore, many Arabic terms, such as al-Masīh, 'Īsā ibn Maryam are transliterated, with explanations for their meanings because this paper aims to examine the original meaning of the Arabic Qur'ān from its language. When a researcher finds it difficult to choose the precise meaning of a word, the best approach for a translator would be to simply translate the text of the classical tafsirs³⁾(commentaries) like tafsīr bi-al- Riwayah(tafsīr according to transmission, al-Tabari(839-923), Ibn Kathīr(1300-1373)) and tafsīr bi-al-dirayah (tafsīr according to commentaries of al-Razi(1150-1210) and al-Baydawi (d.1291) who are all respected by Muslim scholars). For more elaborate word study, this paper does not refer to a Korean translation of the Qur'ān, but refers to only the Arabic Qur'ān. Existing "translations" in English or Korean may serve to convey the general idea of the Qur'ān to those who cannot get it from the Arabic Qur'ān themselves. Therefore, this paper concentrates on the Arabic Qur'ān to use the exact meanings of the words related to this paper.

3) Tafsīr refers to Qur'ānic exegesis or Qur'ānic commentary and interpretation. Tafsīr is carried out in linguistic, juristic, and theological fields. Muhammad is considered the most authoritative interpreter of the Qur'ān.(John L. Esposito, The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, 310).

2. Names and titles of 'Īsā ibn Maryam

The Bible uses "Jesus Christ, Jesus or Christ" and the Qur'ān uses " 'Īsā ibn Maryam or Al-Masīh 'Īsā ibn Maryam". However, since a lot of books related to Islam do not distinguish between these names and titles, we are led to believe they are equivalent terms. A majority of books related to Islam use "Jesus" to refer to both Jesus of the Bible and 'Īsā of the Qur'ān. Of course, in the Qur'ān and the Bible, the terms are used differently. In Greek, "iesou" is used. Christians and Muslims use these names to express their faiths. Most Muslims understand the Arabic word "Al-Masīh" as a title.

" [And mention] when the angels said, "O Maryam, indeed Allāh gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be al- Masīh, 'Īsā ibn Maryam - distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allāh]".(Surah 3:45)

In the Qur'ānic verse above, it says, "whose name will be al-Masīh, 'Īsā ibn Maryam". When Arab Muslims were asked whether "Al-Masīh" means "the one who has been anointed", they answered that there is no such meaning. In other words, Al-Masīh does not have the Biblical meaning, Messiah. Muslims do not use "Al-Masīh" as a title referring to the anointed one but rather use it just as a title without such meaning. 'Īsā is merely a name.

1) 'Īsā

'Īsā is referred to 16 times- in all cases in conjunction with Ibn Maryam. In 17 additional cases, he is referred to only as Ibn Maryam in conjunction with another title.⁴⁾

Some say that the Arabic name 'Īsā was created to rhyme with "Musā"⁵⁾, but there is no concrete evidence to support this claim. This term has been the subject of debate as it began to be used in translation of the Qur'ān. Presently, in al-kitāb al-Sharīf that is used by Christians in an effort to reach Muslims, 'Īsā is used instead of Jesus. Traditional Arab Christians use "Yasū'a" to refer to Jesus in the Bible. In the minorities of non-Arab Christians living in Muslim communities, 'Īsā is used to refer to Jesus.⁶⁾ The etymology of the appellation 'Īsā is commonly held to be derived from Syriac⁷⁾ Yeshū'(cf. Hebrew Yeshua').⁸⁾

"Say, "We have believed in Allāh and in what was sent to us and what was sent to Ibrahim, Ismail, Ishaq, ya'qub, and the Descendants, and in what was given to Musā and 'Īsā and to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [submitting] to Him"(Surah 3:84).

In the Qur'ānic verse above, the word "Musā" appears before 'Īsā. Muslims refer to Moses as Musā and Jesus as 'Īsā. Muslims claim

4) Oddbjorn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, Uppsala, 1999, 26.

5) William J. Saal, *Reaching Muslims for Christ*, 113.

6) Ibid., 113.

7) Syriac is the Aramaic dialect of Edessa, now Urfa in Eastern Turkey. Edessa Syriac was rapidly accepted as the literary language of all non-Greek eastern Christianity and was the primary vehicle for the Christianization of large parts of central and south-central Asia. Today Syriac is the classical tongue of the Nestorians and Chaldeans of Iran and Iraq and the liturgical language for Jacobites of the Eastern Anatolia and the Maronites of Greater Syria. After the Arab conquests and the advent of Islam in the seventh century to the area over which eastern Christianity held sway, Syriac became the language of a tolerated but disenfranchised and diminishing community and began a long, slow decline both a spoken tongue and as a literary medium in favor of the dominant Arabic. Although there are a few scattered pockets of Aramaic speakers left in remote areas of Near East, there are no immediate descendants of Syriac spoken today(W. H. Thackston, Introduction to Syriac, Maryland: IBEX Publishers, 1999, vii-viii).

8) Oddbjorn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 26.

that 'Īsā of the Qur'ān is equivalent to Jesus of the Bible, and as a result, Christians are led to believe Jesus is the same as 'Īsā. Hence, a lot of Christians in the West began referring to the 'Īsā of the Qur'ān as Jesus. However, when we focus on the identity of 'Īsā of the Qur'ān in relation to Jesus, we find that there are conflicting opinions.

- ① Those who refer to 'Īsā as Jesus: Muslims and Christians of the insider movement⁹⁾ who are using contextualization.
- ② Those who do not refer to 'Īsā as Jesus: Christians who have discovered the differences between the original meanings in the Bible and the meanings in the Qur'ān or those who have paid attention to the fact that Arab Christians in the early stages of Islam recognized and believed that Qur'ān was not the Word of God.

However, as it was revealed in many studies, 'Īsā did not die on the Cross or become resurrected, and his works are different from the works of Jesus Christ in the Bible. Hence, we are led to question whether Jesus and 'Īsā indeed do represent the same person. The Qur'ān has a number of polemical references to the Christian belief in the sonship of Christ and the Trinity.

2) The son of Maryam(Ibn Maryam)

In the Qur'ān, 'Īsā is often introduced as the son of Maryam. Whereas Christians refer to Jesus as the son of God, Muslims say

9) The current strategy of Insider methodology is the purposeful re-using of Islamic forms, vocabulary, and concepts by outsiders as an evangelistic tool. Outsiders, who have a skewed view of the type of connection between form and meaning, are not the best people to make those decisions. Moreover, contemporary Insider methodology emphasizes the continuity between Islam and Christianity and between Muhammad as an actual prophet and the gospel.

ʿĪsā is the son of Maryam. Traditionally, when naming their sons or daughters, Arab parents place the name of the father after the name of their sons or daughters. Thus in the Arab culture, ʿĪsā ibn Maryam is not common in that the name ʿĪsā is followed not by his father's name but by his mother's name.

"And We did certainly give Musā the Book and followed up after him with messengers. And We gave ʿĪsā, the son of Maryam, clear proofs and supported him with the rūh al-qudus. But is it [not] that every time a messenger came to you, with what your souls did not desire, you were arrogant? And a party [of messengers] you denied and another party you killed." (Surah 2:87)

In the Qurʾānic verse above, "we" refers to Allāh, and the messenger refers to the one who has brought the book. The word "rūh al-qudus" refers to the angel Jibrīl, and the verse above also mentions "ʿĪsā ibn Maryam".

Richard J. Jones tell us in his field research of Nairobi Muslims in their perceptions of ʿĪsā and Jesus, "It is true that speakers who know something of Swahili, Somali, or Arabic and of English, when speaking or writing in English, readily substitute the name 'Jesus' for 'Issa' (i.e. ʿĪsā in the Arabic Qurʾān). Because they move in English-speaking environments, they are in fact likely to employ the term 'Jesus'. However, I find that these meanings and practices form two rather distinct clusters, two figures of quite different shape and weight."¹⁰⁾

3) kalimah minhu

In the Qurʾānic verse below appears "kalimah minhu" (a word from him). It says that Yahyā confirms "kalimah min Allāh".

10) Richard J. Jones, Nairobi Muslims' Concept of Prophethood, with Particular Reference to Issa ibn Maryam, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2002, 475.

Commentators interpret "kalimah min Allāh" as 'Īsā. It means that Yahyā came before 'Īsā and confirmed 'Īsā. It may be difficult to understand the Qur'ānic verse above without turning to the Bible. Those with knowledge of the Bible believe that Yahyā corresponds to John the Baptist and thus interpret it as John the Baptist witnessing for Jesus.

"So the angels called him while he was standing in prayer in the chamber, "Indeed, Allāh gives you good tidings of Yahyā, confirming a word from Allāh and [who will be] honorable, abstaining [from women], and a prophet from among the righteous." (Surah 3:39).

In the Qur'ān, there are no verses that offer detailed explanation of the New Testament, and therefore, at times it is difficult to understand some verses in the Qur'ān. However, if one uses Biblical passages to better understand the Qur'ān, the probability of interpreting the Qur'ān from a Christian perspective may increase. So Muslims say that they cannot accept this type of interpretation. When witnessing to Muslims, Christians use "Word of God" (Note the capital letters). In fact, the "Word of God" has two other meanings as follows.

- ① The Bible is the Word of God.
- ② The Word is Logos in Greek, and therefore the Word of God is Jesus Christ (logos).

But is "Kalimah min Allāh" (a word¹¹⁾ of Allāh) in the Qur'ān always referring to "'Īsā"? If "kalimah min Allāh" is Jesus Christ then "Kalimah min Allāh" assumes divine meaning. Since Muslims say that "there is no god other than Allāh", if "kalimah min Allāh" has divine meaning then it goes against Islamic theology. Islamic theology holds that 'Īsā does not have divinity but only humanity. The interpretation of logos in Christian theology differs markedly from the interpretation

11) Pay attention to the fact that word is not capitalized.

of “kalimah” by Muslim scholars.¹²⁾ For Christians, according to the Gospel of John, the Word was God and the Word became flesh. For Muslims, on the other hand, the word is a creature, for it is in Allāh’s utterance of the word “Be!”.

“O People of the book, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allāh except the truth. Al-Masīh ‘Īsā ibn Maryam, was but a messenger of Allāh and His word which He directed to Maryam and a rūh [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allāh and His messengers. And do not say, “Three”; desist – it is better for you. Indeed, Allāh is but one god. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allāh as Disposer of affairs”.(Surah 4:171)

In the Qur’ānic verse above we can find several terms. Al-Masīh ibn Maryam is Allāh’s messenger (rasūl), Allāh’s kalimah and Allāh’s rūh (rūh minhu). It is not difficult to understand why ‘Īsā is Allāh’s messenger, but the fact that ‘Īsā is stated to be Allāh’s kalimah and Allāh’s rūh requires further study in order to verify the meaning of the statements.

“ [‘Īsā] said, “Indeed, I am the slave of Allāh . He has given me the Book and made me a prophet.”(Surah 19:30)

In the Qur’ānic verse above, it states that ‘Īsā was a prophet. It claims that ‘Īsā is the slave of Allāh (Abdullah).

“[And mention] when the angels said, “O Mary, indeed Allāh gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be al-Masīh, ‘Īsā ibn Maryam – distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allāh]”.(Surah 3:45)

In the Qur’ānic verse above, the angel brings Maryam “good tidings of a word from Him[Allāh]... [His] name will be al-Masīh, ‘Īsā

12) Mahdi Muntazir Qaim, *Jesus through the Qur’ān and Shi’ite Narrations*. Tahrike Tarsile Qur’ān, Inc, 2005, 13.

ibn Maryam." Al-Tabari gave the four meanings of kalimah sanctioned by the various traditions. According to his commentary, the expression "of a word from him" means:

- ① A message from Allāh and an announcement from Him, as one says: so and so communicated to me a word by which he gladdened me.
- ② His utterance, "Be", Allāh, then, calls him('Īsā) His word because he had his origin from His word.
- ③ A name of 'Īsā, just as the rest of His creation is designated by whatever names He wishes.
- ④ According to Ibn 'Abbās (d. A.H. 68), one of the early companions of Muhammad, the word is 'Īsā.

Al-Tabari preferred the first meaning of kalimah as <message> over the other meanings as he shows on his repeated observations on Qur'ān 4:171. "al-Masīh, 'Īsā, the son of Maryam, was but a messenger of Allāh and His word (kalimah) which He directed to Maryam and a rūh [created at a command] from Him." How did Muhammad understand the term "kalimah" when he used it of 'Īsā in the two Qur'ānic texts (Surah 3:45, 4:171)? According to one explanation, "he used both "word" and "rūh" of 'Īsā mechanically, without any knowledge of their real meanings, and merely because he had heard them so used by the heretic Christians."¹³) It can be inferred that Muhammad was not aware of the real meaning of "kalimah" and that he simply "borrowed it from the Christians of his time".¹⁴)

Timothy 2:5 says "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus". In the Bible, Jesus is the son of God and the Mediator. But in the Qur'ān, there is no mention that 'Īsā is the son of Allāh and the Mediator.

13) Ibid., 50.

14) Ibid., 51.

Muslims believe that Allāh cannot become human, and what is divine is not human. In Islamic theology, if 'Īsā is man he can never be Allāh. John 1:14 makes it clear that Jesus is the son of Man. Jesus is wholly man and wholly God. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth"(John 1:14). Jesus Christ is God's eternal son who has appeared in man's flesh. The concept of "the son of God" is the biggest obstacle for Muslims. They find it very difficult to understand this concept and to accept a Biblical picture of Jesus. As a result, it is evident that 'Īsā of the Qur'ān is not the same as Jesus of the Bible. The fact that Muslims cannot easily accept Jesus of the Bible after they have learned about 'Īsā in the Qur'ān proves that even Muslims know that there is a big difference between the two.

But why do Muslims translate 'Īsā of the Qur'ān as Jesus? First, it is because they want facilitate the spread of Islam to Christians by stating that Jesus of the Bible is the same as 'Īsā in the Qur'ān. Second, it is because they believe that the Bible has been corrupted, so 'Īsā of the Qur'ān is the real prophet. As a result, Christians who follow Muslims' thought and believe that 'Īsā of the Qur'ān is equivalent to Jesus of the Qur'ān fall into self-contradiction. Moreover, since most Christians do not know classical Arabic of the Qur'ān, they are not able to find a way to refute the Qur'ān. In addition, among Arab Christians there is hardly anyone who is willing to learn Islam, and even if they are willing to study Islam, they cannot learn the essence of the Qur'ān because the language of the Qur'ān in the 7th century is different from Modern Standard Arabic. Thus, over time, Christians have repeatedly failed to understand the Qur'ān as it was written. Also, in light of the fact that Muslims do not accept 'Īsā as the Son of Allāh, Christians at large divide into the following opinions on the son of God in the Bible.

- ① Christians must keep the Biblical term "the son of God".

- ② Some of them argue to change the “son of God” to “the one who God loves”.
- ③ Some of them argue to delete the “son of God” from translations of the Bible and replace it with “the Lord” or similar terms.

Islam theologians state that in the Qurʾān, sonship is limited to the biological concept of physical birth through a sexual relationship. Christians do not believe that the concept of “the son of God” refers to a physical relationship creating the son of God. In Arabic, Ibn (somebody’s son) has both a physical and a metaphorical meaning¹⁵⁾. For example, Arabs often use the phrase Ibn al-balad. A literal translation would be “the son of the region” but Arabs understand it in its metaphorical meaning as “one who is most familiar with the region”. Therefore the word “son” in the term “son of God” may be used for a metaphorical meaning.

The gospel of John refers to the Son of God as the “eternal Word”. In fact, all of the four gospels emphasize the eternity of the Son. Therefore, in order to avoid a conflict in opinions, while explaining “the Son of God” to Muslims, one must not only emphasize the theological meaning but also the eternal loving relationship.

Christians can easily understand that Jesus is the Word of God because it is so clearly written in the gospel of John. You can find the word “logos(Word)” written in John 1:1 in the Greek Bible. Realizing the personality of God’s Word helps in understanding the concept of the “Son of God”. In addition, Christians who confess Christ to be the son of God understand the incarnation and the son of God. However, Muslims deny that ʿĪsā is the son of Allāh and that ʿĪsā was incarnated. This leads to the conclusion that ʿĪsā of the Qurʾān is indeed not Jesus of the Bible.

15) William J. Saal, op.cit., 117.

"His word" in John 1:1¹⁶⁾ and Qur'ān 4:171 evidently have similarities, but the same title is interpreted differently in the Christian and Muslim communities¹⁷⁾. Traditional Muslims interpret this title to mean that 'Īsā is the word of Allāh based on the fact that 'Īsā was created from the word of Allāh. Therefore, the 13th century Qur'ān commentator Al-Baydawi said, "'Īsā existed without a father because of Allāh's command, and therefore was called "A word". Another commentator Al-razi gave another interpretation. He believed that 'Īsā was called "A word" because 'Īsā fulfilled the words spoken by prophets¹⁸⁾.

In the prologue of the gospel of John, the Bible thoroughly explains the meaning of the Word. Before the writing of the gospel of John, Greek philosophers used logos as the rational principle by which the universe is sustained. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, Jews used the "Word" to refer to the creative Word of God or to reflect the wisdom of God. When John referred to Jesus as "the Word", most readers understood "the Word" to mean either one of the two Jewish meanings stated above. When John referred to Jesus as "the Word of God", it meant that the universe was created through Jesus. In other words, the fact that John believed that Jesus is the Word of God means that Jesus reveals God in the fullest possible way (John 1:18).¹⁹⁾

There are differences between Muslims' explanation of the birth of 'Īsā and Christians' explanation of the birth of Jesus. Muslims say that before Maryam became pregnant, she knew that the name of her son was 'Īsā. And it was written in the Qur'ān that 'Īsā will speak to her when he's only an infant, and that rūh al- qudus

16) "In the beginning was the Word..."

17) Colin Chapman, Cross and Crescent, 331.

18) Ibid., 332.

19) Ibid., 334.

(al-rūh al-amin) blew into her. Ahmad Bahjat says that the wind came to her as a light that she could not see. Rūh al- qudus came silently and disappeared. The light became a baby in her womb.²⁰⁾ She was resting under a date tree. She felt the pains of labor, and as the pain increased, she soon gave birth. The child was to be a messenger. 'Īsā was created by a word of Allāh. Therefore, we summarize titles and names for 'Īsā in the Qur'ān as follows.

- ① 'Īsā is a prophet.
- ② 'Īsā is a messenger.
- ③ 'Īsā is the kalimah of Allāh
- ④ 'Īsā is rūh from Allāh
- ⑤ 'Īsā is al-Masīh.

'Īsā is one of the great prophets in Islam (Adam, Nūh, Ibrāhīm, 'Īsā, Muhammad). Out of them, three have the following similarities. Musā, 'Īsā and Muhammad brought the Torah, Injīl, Qur'ān, respectively. It is written that 'Īsā received help from rūh al-qudus, and Muslim commentators believe that this rūh al-qudus (Surah 2:87, 253; 5:113) is the angel Jibril. According to the Qur'ān, 'Īsā is just a created human being.

"Al-Masīh, ibn Maryam, was not but a messenger; [other] messengers have passed on before him. And his mother was a supporter of truth. They both used to eat food. Look how We make clear to them the signs; then look how they are deluded".(Surah 5:75)

In the Qur'ānic passage above, Al-Masīh ibn Maryam is just a messenger, like the messengers that died before him. 'Īsā and his mother ate food. This sentence is Qur'ān's explanation that 'Īsā was just an ordinary man. Of course, the New Testament of the Bible presents Jesus as God's apostle or prophet but this is markedly different from the Qur'ān's treatment of 'Īsā.²¹⁾ The Bible reports

20) Ahmad bahjat, 'Īsa, al- ahram newspaper, 2011. Jan, 18

21) Chawkat Moucarry, Faith to Faith, 2001, 176.

that at the time of Jesus Christ, some people considered Jesus as one of the prophets (Matthew 16:14; 21:11; Mark 6:15). Even after the resurrection of Jesus, his disciples considered him to be a prophet (Acts 3:20-22). The gospel of John presents Jesus as an Apostle that God sent from heaven. However, the Bible emphasizes that this prophet is not sent by God but "comes from God" (John 8:42; 17:8) and returns to God (John 13:1).²²⁾

The Qu'ran refers to 'Īsā as "his word"(kalimatuhu, 4:171) and "word from him" (kalimatun minhu, 3:39,45). Muslim commentators say that these two are actually one title. Al-razi believes that this must be interpreted from the perspective of the miraculous birth of 'Īsā. When Allāh says "let it be so", all babies gain life. According to another interpretation, 'Īsā is the word of Allāh because he spreads the word of Allāh with a lot of miraculous signs in order to prove the divine origin of his message.

Here we can pose several questions. If 'Īsā was called the word of Allāh because of the method of creation, then why isn't Muhammad called the word of Allāh? If 'Īsā received this title because he strongly witnessed the word of Allāh then why isn't Muhammad given this title? Isn't Islam giving inadequate explanations to uphold the theology that there is only one Allāh? Only the gospel of John provides the real meaning of this title, because the Qur'ān does not give any information regarding the meaning of this title. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God(John 1:1)". The reason why Jesus is referred to as the Word of God is because Jesus is the incarnation of God's eternal Word (John 1:1-3, 14). The eternal Word of God was revealed in the person of Jesus, whereas for Muslims, the word of Allāh became the Qur'ān. For Christians, Jesus is both man and God but for Muslims, the Qur'ān is a book from Allāh.

22) Ibid., 176.

In Qur'ān 4:171, 'Īsā is referred to as "rūh-un minhu". In the context of this verse, "him" in "minhu(from him)" is interpreted in two ways. Some Muslims believe that "him" refers to Allāh and others believe that "him" refers to the angel Jibrīl. Al-razi offers four different interpretations.

① Since 'Īsā was born without a father, it is believed that he was born through the angel Jibrīl breathing into Maryam. The word "Him" here is the angel Jibrīl.

② 'Īsā is rūh from Allāh.

"And thus We have revealed to you an inspiration of Our command. You did not know what is the Book or [what is] faith, but We have made it a light by which We guide whom We will of Our servants. And indeed, [O Muhammad], you guide to a straight path".(Surah 42:52)

In the Qur'ānic passage above, it says we (Allāh) have revealed to you('awhayna). The word <'Awha> means "to send, to give inspiration, to confide a secret."²³⁾ In another dictionary of the Qur'ān, <'awha> means "to indicate, send a messenger, give inspiration, talk secretly, send a quick sign, whisper something excluding other people"²⁴⁾. When this kind of meaning is applied to the Qur'ānic passage above, it comes to mean "Allāh gave you rūh or sent rūh". In this aspect, 'Īsā was rūh from Allāh. Now we need to discern the meaning of rūh. Al-Tabari interprets the above verse "rūh-an min 'amrina" as "a mercy or wahy from 'amrina".

"You will not find a people who believe in Allāh and the Last Day having affection for those who oppose Allāh and His Messenger, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred. Those - He has decreed within their hearts faith and strengthened them with

23) Kong Il Joo, *Understanding Qur'ān*, 140.

24) Abdul mannan Omar, *Dictionary of the Holy Qur'ān*, 604.

"Rūh-in" from Him. And We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally. Allāh is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him – those are the party of Allāh . Unquestionably, the party of Allāh – they are the successful". (Surah 58:22)

In the Qur'ānic passage above, it says "...strengthened them with Rūh-in from Him". It means that Rūh in this verse is a light or guidance.

- ③ 'Īsā is rūh because 'Īsā was created by the angel Jibrīl breathing into Maryam. Since these actions were in compliance with Allāh's orders, Jibrīl is referred to as rūh from Allāh in the following verse.

"And [mention] the one who guarded her chastity²⁵⁾, so We blew into her [fīhā] through Our angel [Jabrīl], and We made her and her son a sign for the worlds".(Surah 21:91)

The Qur'ānic passage above states that "we breathe into her" through our (Allāh's) rūh. According to the Dictionary of the Qur'an, the word "rūh" means "breath of life, soul, spirit, inspiration, revelation, essence, the Qur'an, joy and happiness, mercy, life-giving words of Allāh, prophet's divine message, angel, Gabriel".²⁶⁾ In the Qur'an, "rūh al-qudus" is used to refer to Jibrīl(Gabriel) and other angels, since Muhammad seems to have ceased differentiating between Jibrīl(Gabriel) and the Spirit.²⁷⁾

Therefore, in comparing the Qur'an with the Bible, one must

25) (farj) refers to the cleft between two things like a pudendum of the female(farj) and between two legs. So ('ahsanat farjaha) means forbade to get married(refer to Arabic commentary <http://www.altafsir.com/>). The phrase "guarded her chastity" was not a literal translation.

26) Abdul Mannan Omar, *Dictionary of the Holy Qur'an*, Noor foundation international Inc, 2008, 225.

27) Eric R. Bishop, "The Qumrān scrolls and the Qur'an", edited by Ibn Warraq, What the Koran really says, New York: Prometheus Books, 253.

examine the difference between stories and their meanings. There are many instances in which the Qur'ān has distorted the Biblical story. In some cases, there are even differences in meaning, and therefore one must thoroughly read the Arabic Qur'ān in order to identify these differences. When anyone reads one of its translations, he must look up the real meaning in case the meaning was distorted in translation..

- ④ The reason why Allāh referred to 'Īsā as "rūh" was to exalt him.

In the explanations above, the rūh in Surah 21:91 was said to be Jibrīl. However, rūh does not always indicate angels; it also has many other meanings such as nafs(soul) (Surah 70:4; 78:38; 97:4). Also, rūh refers to rūh al-qudus that supported 'Īsā(Surah 2:87, 253; 5:113). However, in the New Testament, there is one verse that refers to Jesus Christ as a Spirit. It is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit."(1 Corinthians 15:45) In the context of this verse, a life-giving Spirit refers to Jesus Christ who overcame death and was resurrected to give new life to those who believe in him. Contrary to the Qur'ān, the Gospels clearly distinguish between the angel Gabriel and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God who caused Mary's conception of Christ, but the role of Gabriel was to explain what will happen to Mary and how she will become pregnant (Matthew 1:20, Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God who descended upon Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3:16). The Holy Spirit was active during the ministry of Jesus (Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:1-2, John 3:34). Before the death of Jesus (John Chapters 14-16) and right after his resurrection, Jesus promised his disciples that he will send the Holy Spirit to them after his ascension. This spirit is the spirit of righteousness (John 14:15-18; 15:26-27; 16: 7-15).

4) al-Masth

The Qur'ān uses the title Al-Masīh for 'Īsā eleven times. Some Muslim exegetes believe that al-Masīh came from the Hebrew name for Jesus, mashiah. Some Muslims say that al-Masīh is not a title but rather a personal name. The majority of Muslims, however, consider that the word is not a personal name but a title. They differ as to its derivation.²⁸⁾ On the other hand, Arab Christians believe that al-Masīh is the title of Jesus as it means "one who has been anointed".

In the Old Testament, prophets, kings and head priests were anointed using sacred oil. Messiah is the promised king who is one of the descendants of David (2 Samuel Chapter 7). However, al-Masīh of the Qur'ān does not have the same position as the messiah of the Bible. Therefore, the titles given 'Īsā in the Qur'ān do not share the same meaning as the equivalent titles in the Gospels.²⁹⁾

3. The Birth of 'Īsā ibn Maryam

Before the Arabic translation of the Christian Bible was completed in the eighth century, Islam was started in A.D. 610 in Arabia. At the time, Muhammad did not understand the source of the voice who called him to "Read. In the name of the Lord who created you (Surah 96:1)." What he had gathered of Christianity was from heretics of Christianity. He had not heard the true gospel of Christianity from Christians. In the beginning, he was favorable towards Jews and Christians in the Meccan surahs in the Qur'ān. However, even so, the stories in the Qur'ān are not exactly the words from the Old Testament and the New Testament. In other words, regardless of whether the Qur'ān used some stories heard

28) Chawkat Moucarry, Faith to Faith, 179.

29) Ibid., 182.

from Jews and Christians, it cannot be regarded as an extension of the revelations of the Old and New Testament.

Then whose book is the Qur'ān? Muslims believe that the Qur'ān is the book of Allāh and the word of Allāh. However, evangelical Christians firmly declare that the Qur'ān is not the Word of God. The laws and doctrines Allāh gave Muslims through Muhammad are included in the Wahy given through the lips of Muhammad. This wahy³⁰⁾ is in fact the Qur'ān; now let us examine the record of the birth of 'Īsā ibn Maryam in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān reports that a virgin gave birth to Al-Masīh (Surah 3:45-47).

"[And mention] when the angels said, "O Maryam, indeed Allāh gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be al- Masīh, 'Īsā ibn Maryam - distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allāh]. He will speak to the people in the cradle and in maturity and will be of the righteous." She said, "My Lord, how will I have a child when no man has touched me?" [The angel] said, "Such is Allāh ; He creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is." (Surah 3:45-47)

The Qur'ān derived a different meaning from the virgin's giving of birth. According to the Qur'ān, Al-Masīh is like Adam. Although 'Īsā ibn Maryam is a unique human, the Qur'ān states that he is nothing more than human. In the Bible, Luke 1:26-38 and Matthew 1:18-25 clearly report the birth of Jesus from a virgin.

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus (Luke 1:30-31). And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy- the Son of God (Luke 1:35). But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of

30) Wahy is the direct transmission of the specific words of revelation through Muhammad or divine inspiration of the Qur'ān. So Wahy can be a book or a message or an angel who sent the message.

the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins"

In the Qur'ān, "Rabb" in Arabic refers to Allāh. In addition, the Bible says that Jesus will be conceived through the Holy Spirit but the Qur'ān emphasizes Allāh's omnipotence and His destiny. Towards the end of Chapter 3, verse 47 in the Qur'ān, Allāh says that if Allāh creates as he wants and plans one's destiny, then everything is done as Allāh says. The Qur'ān stresses Allāh's omnipotence and the creation's fate. Let us look at Surah 21:91 and re-examine the birth through a virgin that is regarded as so important in the Qur'ān. In verse 89 appears Zakariya, in verse 90 Yahyā and verse 91 Īsā; because the story of Īsā is not a smoothly flowing sequence of events, if one just reads the Qur'ān, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the sentences.

"And [mention] Zakariya, when he called to his Lord, "My Lord, do not leave me alone [with no heir], while you are the best of inheritors." So We responded to him, and We gave to him Yahyā, and amended for him his wife. Indeed, they used to hasten to good deeds and supplicate Us in hope and fear, and they were to Us humbly submissive. And [mention] the one who guarded her chastity, so We blew into her through Our angel [rūhina: jibrīl], and We made her and her son a sign for the worlds".(Surah 21:89-91).

In chapter 21, verse 89 of the Qur'ān, Zakariya calls to the Lord(Allāh) for a son, and in verse 90 Allāh (we) responds to him and gives him Yahyā. In verse 91 after allowing "the one who guarded her chastity" to appear, Allāh (we) blows into her through rūhina (i.e. our Jibril). It says that Allāh wanted to make a sign for her and her son. Here, the literal meaning of "rūhina" is "our spirit". However, since the notion of a "Holy Spirit" is entirely absent in the Qur'ān, Muslims interpret "Rūhina" to mean "our

angel". Here, the angel refers to Jibrīl(Gabriel). In the history of Islam, the Qur'ān is said to be the words of the heavenly preserved Tablet read by Jibrīl. In other words, Jibrīl is the angel who conveyed words of the heaven to Muhammad, living on earth.³¹⁾

In fact, through 'Īsā 's similar birth through a virgin, Muslims are distorting the realities of the Bible's birth through a virgin. The Qur'ān says that 'Īsā was born without a father and that 'Īsā was created not through the Holy Spirit but through an angel blowing into her. So apart from the fact that 'Īsā's birth is a supernatural birth, the Qur'ān's birth through a virgin is significantly different in detail and meaning from that of Jesus in the Bible. The meaning of a miracle is as important as the fact of a miracle.

In 1 Corinthians 15:45, it is recorded, "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." Jesus Christ is the last Adam and is described as the second man. This means that Jesus Christ is the head of regenerated humanity. In Adam all die, whereas in Christ all shall be made alive, so regeneration is necessary. To be reborn in Christ is to be born from above. John 3:7 says " Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' In the meantime, the Qur'ān has no notion of regeneration and reports that 'Īsā was created through an angel blowing into his mother. Therefore 'Īsā in the Qur'ān is not a life-giving spirit.

31) Belief in the angels is fundamental in the Creed of Islam. There are the four Archangels, two of whom figure in the New Testament. In the heavenly hierarchy in Islam, the archangels are supplemented by the guardian angels, the recording angels, the throne bearers; while there is Ridwan in charge of paradise; Malik, who presides over hell; Munkar and Nakir, who visit the graves of the dead (Eric R. Bishop, "The Qumrān scrolls and the Qur'ān", edited by Ibn Warraq, What the Koran really says, New York: Prometheus Books, 257.)

4. The Miracles of 'Īsā ibn Maryam

93 verses in 15 chapters of the Qur'an tell of 'Īsā. Christians and Muslims are similar in that they consider 'Īsā or Jesus to have performed many miracles, but these two faiths are very different in how much they value 'Īsā or Jesus. Do the similarities overshadow the differences? Are the differences more important because they indicate the fundamental differences between these two faiths? Although it is said that Islam's perspective on 'Īsā is based on the Qur'an, the perspective has been colored though centuries of Islamic history. In the Qur'an, 'Īsā is one of many prophets that appear between Adam and Muhammad. Like Muhammad, 'Īsā is a prophet, a messenger, a servant('Abd).

"['Īsā] said, "Indeed, I am the slave of Allāh. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I am and has enjoined upon me prayer and zakah as long as I remain alive".(Surah 19:30-31).

In the Qur'an, it is written that 'Īsā adhered to two of the five pillars of Islam: daily ritual (salah) and almsgiving (zakah).

"And [remember] when I inspired to the disciples, "Believe in Me and in My messenger ('Īsā)." They said, "We have believed, so bear witness that indeed we are Muslims [in submission to Allāh]." [And remember] when the disciples said, "O 'Īsā ibn Maryam, can your Lord send down to us a table from the heaven? ['Īsā] said," Fear Allāh, if you should be believers."(Surah 5:111-112)

The Qur'anic verse above demands 'Īsā's disciples to believe in Allāh and his messengers and to witness that they have submitted (i.e Muslims). Today's muslims interpret "they were submitted" as "they are Muslims". If those who believe in 'Īsā were Muslims, we have to declare that this 'Īsā is different from Jesus in the Bible.

The miraculous signs of 'Īsā are well-described in the Qur'ān (Surah 5:110). In this verse, 'Īsā heals the sick and the blind, heals the lepers, creates a living bird from clay, but all things are done with the permission of Allāh. The Qur'ān distinguishes Allāh and 'Īsā by making it clear that 'Īsā could not perform such miracles without the permission of Allāh.

"[The Day] when Allāh will say, "O 'Īsā ibn Maryam, remember My favor upon you and upon your mother when I supported you with the rūh al-quḍuṣi and you spoke to the people in the cradle and in maturity; and [remember] when I taught you writing and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and when you designed from clay [what was] like the form of a bird with My permission, then you blew into it, and it became a bird with My permission; and you healed the blind and the leper with My permission; and when you brought forth the dead with My permission; and when I restrained the Children of Israel from [killing] you when you came to them with clear proofs and those who disbelieved among them said, "This is not but obvious magic". (Surah 5:110).

But Jesus Christ of the Bible in Mark 2:10-12 said, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!" The works of Jesus—healing the sick, bringing the dead to life—are all through the power of Jesus Christ himself. And in the Qur'ānic verse above we see the term, "Rūh al-Qudus"—that this "Rūh al-Qudus" helped 'Īsā and his mother. As was mentioned several times before, in the Qur'ān, "Rūh al-Qudus" refers to the angel Jibrīl. Also, it is written that 'Īsā talked to people from his cradle.

And in the last verse above, it says "kafaru minhun" and the English translation is "they disbelieved among them". However, the Arabic verb "kafaru" does not make clear what it is they did not believe. This verb "kafaru" has three possible meanings. First,

before Islam, this verb was originally used to mean “to be ungrateful”, and was the antonym of the verb “shakara” which means “to thank”. But as this word entered the Qur’ān it embraced a special meaning in the context of Islamic theology. In the Qur’ān, this term became the antonym of “to believe (Allāh)³²⁾. Thus, in the dictionary of the Qur’ān, it is translated as “to become an unbeliever; to be ungrateful; to curse”.³³⁾ Fazlur Rahman gave its noun form(kufr) “of rejection of truth”³⁴⁾. The second possible meaning of “kafara” is therefore “one who does not believe (in Allāh)”. However, Muslims today understand “kafara” to indicate rejection of the whole system of Islamic doctrine and the laws of the Qur’ān.³⁵⁾ In 2003, when Americans entered Iraq, the sheikh of Saudi Arabia declared that “American soldiers who enter Iraq are kuffār(plural of Kāfir)”. Actually, if one takes the meaning of “kafara” to be “one who does not believe (in Allāh)”—as in the Qur’an—it is difficult to understand the words of the sheikh of Saudi Arabia. Muslims in Iraq also reported that US “infidels(kuffār)” were slaughtered in Baghdad. From these expressions, we can learn that today, Muslims use “kafara” to mean “to reject the whole system of Islamic doctrine and the laws of the Qur’ān” rather than “to not believe”. Thus, the meaning of “kafara” is not limited to “unbeliever or infidel”. This is because Muslims today accept “kafara” to mean rejecting Islamic law or not adhering to Islamic law³⁶⁾. Therefore, it is apparent that one’s interpretation of the word “kafara” will markedly color one’s interpretation of the Qur’an. Even if the same vocabulary has been used in the 7th century Qur’ān as in the 21st century, it is clear that there are instances in which the meaning

32) Kong Il Joo, *Understanding the Qur’ān*, 2010, 80.

33) J.G. Hava, *Arabic English Dictionary*, 2006, 659.

34) Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’ān*, Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Book Trust, 1999, 32.

35) Abdul Mannan Omar, *Dictionary of the Holy Qur’ān*, 2008, 490.

36) Kong Il Joo, *Understanding the Quran*, 2010, 81.

has changed over time.

In Qurʾān 13:38, there's another story about a miracle. In this verse it says that just as the prophets before him, Allāh gave messengers their wives, and that without Allāh's permission, a messenger cannot come with a sign. In Qurʾān 5:110, it also says that ʿĪsā could not perform miracles without the permission of Allāh.

"And We have already sent messengers before you and assigned to them wives and descendants. And it was not for a messenger to come with a sign except by permission of Allāh . For every term is a decree<kitāb>."(Surah 13:38).

However, in the Bible, Jesus' miracles demonstrate His sovereign power as it was written in Mark 4:35-5:43. The Gospel recorded 35 miracles that Jesus performed. A miracle is also a "wonder", a "power", and a "strange event". Jesus Christ completes the work that God gave him. Throughout His ministry, Jesus' work was done in obedience to the Father's will(cf. Luke 4:42; 6:12; 11:1; Matt 26:36). "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you" (John 17:1). Jesus could approach God in prayer because of their Father-Son relationship. "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do"(John 17:4). The "work" the Father gave him to do is one of five things in Jesus' prayer which the Father "gave" the Son: ① work(John 17:4), ② Believer(John 17:2, 6, 9), ③ glory(John 17:5, 24), ④ words(John 17:8, 14), and ⑤ a name(John 17:22,24). For Jesus Christ in the Bible, to glorify his Father in this world was to complete the work given him by his father. If so, except for the fact that one or two miracles performed by ʿĪsā and Jesus are of similar kind, the natures of these two persons are different.

5. The Ascension and the return of 'Īsā ibn Maryam

It can be said that incarnation and the cross are the main differences between Islam and Christianity. Some Muslims accept the death of 'Īsā. However, most Muslims say that 'Īsā did not die but was lifted to heaven. The Qur'ān is not entirely clear about this. However, almost all Muslims understand the Qur'ān to mean that 'Īsā did not die. The Qur'ānic verse about the death of 'Īsā says that 'Īsā will die in the future. Let us read the following several Qur'ānic verses.

"And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive."(Surah 19:33)

In the Qur'ānic verse above, it mentions the day he was born (past), the day he will die (future) and the day that he will be lifted to the heavens alive.

"And the disbelievers planned, but Allāh planned. And Allāh is the best of planners. [Mention] when Allāh said, "O 'Īsā, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve and make those who follow you [in submission to Allāh alone] superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me is your return, and I will judge between you concerning that in which you used to differ".(Surah 3:54-55).

Above, in verse 55 of the Qur'ān, the Arabic term for "I will take you" is "mutawaffika". If one translates this word not as "to take" but as "to make you die"³⁷⁾, it is unclear what the Qur'ān is saying about the death of 'Īsā. In the verse above, the term "mutawaffika" means "I will accept you" and the verb "tawaffa" means "to request

37) Kong Il Joo, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 293.

repayment (of loan)". Muslims generally say that 'Īsā did not die but was lifted to heaven, but some Qur'ān commentators interpret this verse to mean "I will lift you by making you fall asleep" or "I will grab you from the earth and lift you up to me."³⁸⁾ According to traditional commentary such as al-Tabari, this verse can have several interpretations.

- ① I will make you fall asleep then lift you up to me when you are asleep.
- ② I will grab you from the earth and lift you up to me.
- ③ I will make you die then lift you up to me.³⁹⁾

Christian apologetics annotated the verb "tawaffa" in Qur'ān 3:55 and 6:117 as "cause to die".⁴⁰⁾

"And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed al-Masīh 'Īsā ibn Maryam, the messenger of Allāh." And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain. Rather, Allāh raised him to Himself. And ever is Allāh Exalted in Might and Wise".(Surah 4:157-158).

The Qur'ānic verse 4:157 printed above says "they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him". And the phrase that stands as the heart of controversy amongst many Islamic scholars is "but [another] was made to resemble him to them (shubbiha lahum)". In verse 158 it says that "Allāh raised him to Himself". There are the following three opinions on the part "but [another] was made to resemble to them"⁴¹⁾ :

- ① one who resembles him was crucified on the cross

38) Ibid., 293.

39) Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 119-120.

40) Ibid., 125.

41) Kong Il Joo, *Understanding the Qur'ān*, 287-292.

② a volunteer died on the cross

③ 'Īsā died

Most Muslims agree with the first two opinions. Most Qur'ān commentators believe that the last sentence of the Qur'ān 4:159 means that 'Īsā was to die in the future and was lifted alive to the heavens so that he can return to kill the anti-prophet(dajjāl) in the future. In Qur'ān 4:157, <shubbiha lahum> means a semblance was made to them. In other words, the one who died on the cross was not 'Īsā but one who resembled him.⁴²⁾

"And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed al-Masīh 'Īsā ibn Maryam, the messenger of Allāh." And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain."(surah 4:157).

In fact, commentators of the Qur'ān such as Al-Tabari interpreted this in two ways: ⁴³⁾

- ① Some say that all the disciples were made to resemble 'Īsā. And the Jews killed one of them who they thought was 'Īsā.
- ② Some say that 'Īsā asked his followers to volunteer to be killed in his place. One of them accepted to have 'Īsā's semblance projected on him and to be killed in his place.

Muslims ask how Allāh could crucify his holy prophet on the cross and therefore they deny that 'Īsā died on the cross. In other words, the concept of Allāh and the concept of a prophet according to a Muslim do not correspond to God and Jesus in the Bible at all. The Bible shows that Jesus conquered death by his death on the cross and his resurrection. "...that the Son of Man must be

42) Neal Robinson, op.cit., 106.

43) Ibid., 127-129.

delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." (Luke 24:7) In the Qur'ān it says that 'Īsā was lifted to heaven but it does not explicitly refer to 'Īsā's return. Classical exegetes tried to detect references to his return in Surah 4:159 and 43:61.

"And there is none from the People of the Book but that he will surely believe in him before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection he will be against them a witness". (Surah 4:159).

In the Qur'ānic verse above, it is not clear what the third person singular masculine pronoun "his, him" is referring to. Therefore, classical commentators tried to solve this problem.

1) Al-Tabari

In evaluating the meaning of this verse, Al-Tabari referred to different early commentators. First, there were some commentators who interpreted "him(bihi)" in "that he will believe in him" to mean 'Īsā, and these commentators interpreted "before his death(mawtihi)" to mean "before the death of 'Īsā". These commentators believed that the People of the book refers to those who believe in 'Īsā who will return to kill the anti-prophet.⁴⁴⁾ Also, according to Al-Tabari, "against them('alayhim) a witness" means that 'Īsā will go against the People of the book. In addition, all commentators agree that "before his death" means "before the death of 'Īsā". Some commentators mentioned that 'Īsā will return but none mentioned that every religious entity will be unified into Islam. Other commentators said that before the People of the book die, they will believe in 'Īsā.⁴⁵⁾

44) Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 1991, 78-79.

45) *Ibid.*, 79.

2) Al-zamakhshari and Al-razi

Al-zamakhshari had no doubt that he who “will be against them a witness” is ‘Īsā. An affirmative evidence of his confidence is that in his commentary, he did not cite his references, and just began his sentences with “It is known...”. In interpreting the return of ‘Īsā, he connected it with Hadīth (Muhammad’s tradition). Al-Tabari said that only the People of the book who are alive at the time will believe in ‘Īsā. On the other hand, Al-zamakhshari said that it is only when Allāh raises the dead from the grave and informs them of ‘Īsā’s return that they will all believe in ‘Īsā. Al-razi said that when ‘Īsā returns he will be a follower of Muhammad. Al-razi believed that the last of the prophets is Muhammad and there will be no other prophets after him.⁴⁶⁾

3) Ibn Kathīr

Ibn Kathīr began with the words of Al-Tabari stating that early commentators differed in their opinions. Ibn Kathīr collected all the verses in the Hadīth about the return of ‘Īsā. Just like the early classical commentators, Ibn Kathīr said that ‘Īsā is the one who will be a witness against them on the day of the Resurrection. His interpretation followed that of Ibn Jurayj that connected this verse with Surah 5:116-8.⁴⁷⁾ All Qur’ān commentators agree that ‘Īsā will be a witness against the People of the Book—Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and others. If ‘Īsā is to be a witness against Christians, let alone Jews and Zoroastrians, then there cannot be clearer evidence that ‘Īsā of the Qur’ān is not Jesus of the Bible. In the Qur’ān, it says that Allāh sent messengers to all nations. And on the Day of the Resurrection, every people will be accompanied by one such messenger who will act as a witness

46) Ibid., 84.

47) Ibid., 87.

against them. However, the commentators mention three possibilities for whom the People of the Book will come to believe in. It may be 'Īsā, Muhammad or Allāh. However, Al-Tabari ruled out Muhammad on the basis that <him> must refer to someone mentioned shortly before. If 'Īsā is to be a witness, then it is most probably 'Īsā who will be believed in. The expression <before his death> is the most confusing. It could mean ① before 'Īsā' death ② before the death of the People of the Book.⁴⁸⁾

Many of the transmitters whose names appear in Al-Tabari's book were interpreters, and scholars of subsequent generations could not distinguish between what a scholar transmitted and what he said or wrote. There were commentaries that interpreted the Qur'ānic passages above in light of the Hadīth about 'Īsā' descent to kill the dajjāl (anti-prophet). However, Qur'ānic commentators found an allusion to Isa's return in 43:61.

"And indeed, He will be [a sign for] knowledge of the Hour, so be not in doubt of it, and follow Me. This is a straight path".(Surah 43:61).

Let us examine the verse beforehand, verse 57, in order to find out who this verse is talking about.

"And when the son of Maryam was presented as an example, immediately your people laughed aloud".(Surah 43:57).

Since Maryam's son is presented as an example, Qur'ān commentators interpret the "he(from inna-hu)" in verse 61 above to be 'Īsā, "the knowledge of the Hour". However, the link between these two ideas is not very clear, since one cannot tell for certain who the pronoun "he" is referring to. According to the Qur'ān commentator Al-Tabari, some argue that "hu(i.e. he)" refers to 'Īsā and others believe that "hu" refers to the Qur'ān.⁴⁹⁾ According to

48) Ibid., 89.

the former, 'Īsā's appearance is knowledge by which one will know the coming of the Hour. This is because his coming was considered as the vanishing of this world and the arrival of the world to come. As for the latter type of commentators, the meaning of verse 61 was taken to be that the Qur'ān is knowledge of the Hour since it provides information about judgment and resurrection. Although Ibn Kathīr believed that the first interpretation was correct⁵⁰⁾, Al-Tabari did not select one of these two interpretations.⁵¹⁾ A third interpretation was that 'Īsā is "knowledge of the hour" because his bringing people to life points to Allāh's power to do so (on the Day of Resurrection). We can thus summarize Muslims' beliefs about the return of 'Īsā.⁵²⁾

- ① One can never verify that the Qur'ān is alluding to the return of 'Īsā. There are two verses that can be considered (4:159 and 43:61) but they both have lexical reasons to render this kind of interpretation as questionable. Moreover, there are the words of Muhammad's companions who had different interpretations.
- ② Despite this, the concept of 'Īsā's return has become well-established among Muslims. Qur'ānic commentators related several verses of the Qur'ān to this concept. This concept also appears in the Hadīth of Bukhari and Muslim.
- ③ The Hadīth depended on the Christian eschatological faith more than the Qur'ān .

6. Conclusion

49) Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 90.

50) Ibid., 92.

51) Ibid., 91.

52) Ibid., 103-104.

Is 'Īsā ibn Maryam of the Qur'ān the same as Jesus Christ of the Bible? Christians and Muslims both agree that 'Īsā and Jesus is al-Masīh in the Arabic Bible and the Arabic Qur'ān. In the Qur'ān, 'Īsā ibn Maryam was also recorded as al-Masīh. Al-Masīh is just another title for 'Īsā ibn Maryam. What does it mean for al-Masīh to be the Messiah? In the words of Kateregga and Shenk, "the Biblical witness is that the Messiah is the fulfillment of all the Scriptures and the prophets. Christians believe that he is the savior of mankind. Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew title Mašiah (Messiah, Anointed One). It was used specifically of the Deliverer anticipated in the Jewish world who would be God's agent in fulfilling Old Testament prophecies(e.g. 48:10; Zech 9:9-10). The anticipated Messiah is Jesus in the Bible. The title "Christ" became part of Jesus' personal name in early Christian usage.

Therefore, when a Christian looks at Muhammad, he needs to evaluate Muhammad in the light of the total biblical witness on the central significance of Jesus the Messiah. Muslims do respect al-Masīh, but they do not believe that he is, therefore, superior to all other prophets.⁵³⁾ Therefore, it is different in meaning from the Messiah in the Bible. 'Īsā of the Qur'ān is referred to as the son of Maryam (ibn Maryam). In the Bible, in Mark 6:3, it is written, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary ...?" but it isn't the official title of Jesus.

Arab Christians refer to Jesus of the Bible as "Yasu'a", so if one uses "'Īsā" it is obvious to them that 'Īsā is not Jesus (Yasu'a). In the same way, Arab Muslims do not consider "Yasu'a" to be 'Īsā. But most English versions of the Qur'ān translate 'Īsā to be Jesus because scholars, motivated by various purposes, seek to emphasize the continuity between Islam and Christianity and that between Muhammad as an actual prophet and the gospel. One such scholar takes the opposite track by calling Islam "incomplete" rather than

53) Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *Islam and Christianity*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 47.

labeling it as inferior to Christianity.⁵⁴⁾ Nevertheless, this paper has continuously stressed the discontinuity between the Qur'ān and the Bible because the meanings of the theological vocabularies in the Qur'ān and the Bible as well as the contents of these books are entirely dissimilar. Actually, 'Īsā of the Qur'ān is :

- ① Not the son of Allāh but a human creation.
- ② Was not crucified, did not die, and Allāh raised him up to heaven before he was actually crucified.
- ③ According to Islamic traditions, 'Īsā will return, break all crosses, kill swine and will make war on behalf of Islam. Also in his time Allāh will destroy the lying al-Dajjāl(anti-prophet). Then 'Īsā will die, and the Muslims will pray over him and bury him at Medina beside the grave of Umar⁵⁵⁾.
- ④ 'Īsā was never incarnated.
- ⑤ 'Īsā has the same nature as man.

In the Qur'ān, 'Īsā was called kalimah min Allāh(a word from Allāh) or kalimah minhu(a word from Him) because he was conceived through the "word of Allāh", and not through a father.⁵⁶⁾ Can this 'Īsā be considered to be the same person as Jesus of the Bible? The Qur'ān says that al-Masīh was born from a virgin (Surah 3:45-47). In the Bible it says, "...for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20). The Qur'ān attributes the conception of 'Īsā to the omnipotence of Allāh. Allāh blew into Maryam from "our rūh" (Surah 21:91) and 'Īsā was conceived. In the Qur'ān , "our rūh" indicates angel or the archangel Jibril. 'Īsā is referred to as prophet, messenger, the servant of Allāh and

54) J. Henry Wolfe, Insider Movements: An Assessment of the Viability of Retaining Socio-Religious Insider Identity in High-Religious Contexts, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011, 305-306.

55) Colin Chapman, Cross and Crescent, IVP Books, 2007, 256.

56) John Penrice, A Dictionary and Glossary of the Qur'ān, Library of Islam, 1988, 127.

Muslims believe that 'Īsā is a Muslim. 'Īsā of the Qur'ān heals the sick, heals lepers and allow birds made from clay to breathe through the permission of Allāh. Of course, 'Īsā started to speak as an infant in the cradle.

According to traditional Qur'ān commentators such as Al-Tabari, 'Īsā was lifted to Allāh after he was made to fall asleep or Allāh let him die then lifted him to Allāh (Surah 3:55; 5:117). However, most Muslims believe that 'Īsā was lifted alive to heaven and that he will return to earth to kill the anti-prophet. However, Christian apologetics interpret "tawaffa" to mean "make one die" and so interpret the Qur'ān differently. According to the Qur'ānic verse 4:157, the one who was crucified was not 'Īsā. However, in the commentary about this verse, ① it is said that all disciples came to look like 'Īsā and the Jews killed one of them who they thought was 'Īsā ② 'Īsā asked one of his followers to volunteer and one of them was made to look like 'Īsā then was killed.

The Qur'ān mentions that 'Īsā was lifted to the sky but there is no verse that indicates that he will return to the earth. However, the tradition (Hadith) that 'Īsā will return to the earth has been well-established among Muslims. Most Qur'ān commentators say that upon his return, 'Īsā will stand against People of the Book (i.e. Christians, Jews and others). If 'Īsā is Jesus Christ, it is inconceivable that Jesus will stand against Christians. Therefore 'Īsā who will stand against the People of the Book cannot be Jesus Christ in the Bible.

Since the name, title, miracles, ascension and return of 'Īsā are so different from the content in the Bible, we can conclude that 'Īsā ibn Maryam of the Qur'ān is different from Jesus Christ of the Bible. The Qur'ān does not accept 'Īsā as "the son of Allāh" but Islam and Christianity both share the similarity that they believe 'Īsā or Jesus is a prophet that brought a message for humanity.

In actual fact, the Jewish understanding of God, especially the

unity of God, is close to the Muslims' understanding of Allāh. Jews (Deuteronomy 6:4) and Muslims (Surah 112:1-2) both emphasize the unity of their deity.

In the Qur'ān, the miracles of 'Īsā occur through the permission of Allāh (Surah 5:110). In the gospels, the disciples see these miracles as signs of the coming of the kingdom of God.⁵⁷⁾ Jesus liked to refer to himself as the "son of man" but his disciples called him the Messiah. Muslims translate al-Masīh of the Qur'ān as the Messiah but in fact the Qur'ān does not give any indication of the meaning of Messiah close to that in the Bible and its hidden concept.⁵⁸⁾ It refers to just a title which indicates 'Īsā ibn Maryam.

In order to examine the meaning of the Messiah in the New Testament, one must know the history of the Jews. In the Old Testament, kings and high priests were anointed with oil to officially indicate that they were set apart for special work by God. However, over the course of history, this concept developed, and led to an understanding that one day God will personally intervene and will continue the kingdom on earth through a descendent of David. The descendent of David was to be a special representative of God, his Messiah. However, al-Masīh of the Qur'ān does not contain this kind of meaning or concept of Messiah.

Jesus did not call himself Messiah. This was because at the time of his life, Jews believed that the Messiah was to be a political or military figure. In Mark 8:27-30, Peter confesses Jesus to be Christ(Messiah). Peter believed that Jesus is the anointed servant of God and the one appointed by God to bring back the kingdom of God.

It is said that the Christians of Najran⁵⁹⁾ sent a delegation to

57) Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 341.

58) *Ibid.*, 345.

59) Najran is a city in southwestern Saudi Arabia near the border with Yemen and is known as an ancient settlement ground for Christians in the Arabian peninsula.

Muhammad at Mecca to question him about the teachings of Islam concerning Jesus, and that Allāh sent His verses of Surah Al-Imran in response. The response is a denial of Christian teachings and the divinity of Christ is clearly rejected.⁶⁰⁾ “Muslims have tended to produce their own polemical works showing how much of what is in the Bible is consistent with the Islamic view of al-Masīh as prophet rather than as a person of the Trinity.⁶¹⁾ Anyone who wants to examine this research needs to study the interpretation of Sufi Muslims on their opinions about al-Masīh.

Muhammad used both “word(kalimah)” and “rūh” of 'Īsā mechanically, without any knowledge of their real meaning, and merely because he had heard them so used by the heretic Christians. In other words, we can admit that Muhammad did not know the real meaning of “word(kalimah)” when he used it of 'Īsā and that he borrowed it from the Christians of his time.

Key words: 'Īsā, Qur'ān, 'Īsā ibn Maryam, 'Īsā bn Maryam, al-Masīh

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60) Mahdi Muntazir Qaim, op.cit., 13.

61) Ibid., 15.

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<국문 초록>

아랍어 꾸란의 이싸 이븐 마르얌에 대한 어휘 및 신학적 연구

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꾸란에서 이싸 이븐 마르얌은 알마시흐, 이싸 본 마르얌으로도 기록되었다. 꾸란에서 알마시흐는 이싸 이븐 마르얌의 다른 이름이다. 꾸란의 이싸는 마르얌의 아들(이븐 마르얌)로 불린다. 성경에서는 마가복음 6:3절에 “이 사람이 마리아의 아들 목수가 아니냐”라는 말에서 마리아의 아들이란 말이 나오지만 예수의 공식적인 칭호는 아니다. 아랍 기독교인들은 성경의 예수를 “야수아”라고 하므로 누군가가 “이싸”라고 하면 이싸가 예수가 아니라는 것을 금방 안다. 마찬가지로 아랍 무슬림들은 누군가가 야수아라고 하면 그가 이싸가 아닌 다른 사람을 호칭하는 것으로 생각한다. 그런데 영어로 번역된 일부 꾸란 번역을 보면 이싸를 예수(Jesus)라고 번역했다. 그렇다면 꾸란의 이싸는 누구인가? 꾸란의 이싸는 (1)하나님의 아들이 아니고 인간 피조물이다. (2)십자가에 못 박히지 않고 죽지도 않았으며 하늘로 올리워 갔다. (3)이슬람의 전승에 따르면 이싸가 다시 와서 십자가를 다 부수고 돼지를 죽이고 이슬람을 전한다고 한다. (4)이싸는 성육신하지 않았다. (5)이싸는 인간과 본성이 같다.

꾸란에서 이싸는 <칼리마 민 알라> 혹은 <칼리마 민후>라는 다른 칭호가 있었는데 그 이유는 그가 아버지 없이 알라가 “있으라”라고 하니 “알라의 말(칼리마)”로 그가 잉태되었다는 생각에서 비롯되었다. 꾸란에서 알마시흐는 동정녀에게서 태어났다(수라 3:45-47)고 했으나 성경에서는 “잉태된 자(예수)는 성령으로 된 것”(마 1:20)이라고 했다. 꾸란에서 이싸는 알라의 전능하심으로 잉태되었다. “우리의 루흐”로부터 알라가 마르얌에게 바람을 불어서(수라 21:91) 이싸가 잉태되었다. 이 꾸란 구절에서 “루흐”는 지브릴 천사를 가리킨다. 이싸는 꾸란에서 예언자, 메신저, 알라의 종이라고 하고 무슬림들은 이싸가 무슬림이라고 한다. 꾸란의 이싸는 알라의 허락으로 병

자를 고치고 흠으로 빛은 새가 숨을 쉬고 맹인과 문둥병자를 낫게 하였고 이사가 요람에서 말을 하기 시작했다. 성경에서 예수는 자신을 가리켜 “인자(son of man)”라고 부르기를 좋아했으나 제자들은 그를 메시아라고 불렀다. 꾸란의 알마시흐를 무슬림들은 메시아라고 번역했는데 실제 아랍어 꾸란의 알마시흐는 그 단어의 실제 의미가 성경의 메시아 개념과 다르다

알따바리를 비롯한 전통적인 꾸란 주석에 의하면 알라가 이사를 잠지게 하여 잠자는 동안 알라에게로 그를 들어 올리었다고 하거나 알라가 이사를 죽게 하여 이사를 알라에게로 들어 올리어 갔다고 한다(수라 3:55; 5:117). 그러나 대부분의 무슬림들은 이사가 죽지 않고 하늘로 올리어 갔다고 믿고 그가 적예언자를 죽이기 위하여 다시 지상으로 돌아올 것이라고 한다. 그러나 기독교 변증학자들은 꾸란에 나오는 타왁파(tawaffa)를 “죽게 한다”라고 번역하여 무슬림들의 꾸란 해석과 달리한다. 꾸란 주석가들은 꾸란 4:157에서 십자가에 돌아가신 분은 이사가 아니었다고 한다. 그러나 이 구절에 대한 주석에서 모든 제자들이 이사처럼 보이게 되었다고 하고 유대인들이 그들 중 이사라고 생각되는 사람을 죽였다고 하거나 이사가 그를 따르던 사람에게 자원하여 달라고 하고서 그들 중 한 사람이 이사와 겉모습이 같게 하여 그가 죽임을 당했다고 한다. 꾸란에는 이사가 하늘로 올리어졌다는 내용은 있으나 이사가 지상으로 되돌아온다고 명시한 구절은 없다. 그러나 대부분의 꾸란 주석가들은 이사가 경전의 백성들(기독교인, 유대교인, 조로아스터교인 등)에게 대항할 것이라고 강조했다. 이상과 같이 이사의 이름과 칭호, 기적과 승천 그리고 되돌아오심에 대한 내용들이 성경과 유사한 점이 있고 또 차이점도 크다.

주제어: 이사, 꾸란, 이사 이븐 마르얌, 알마시흐