

Jesus: More Than a Prophet? (Part 2)

In our last installment of this study we noted that Christians and Muslims agree in saying that Jesus was a prophet. But we also asked the question: Was Jesus more than a prophet? We saw that the coming of this prophet Jesus had been announced several times and quite clearly by God's prophets who had preceded him. God even sent the prophet John the Baptist (Yahya) to prepare the people so that Jesus might be received in a worthy manner, something that God had not done for any other prophet. We also saw that the Qur'an and the Bible agree in saying that Jesus was "pure." He was without sin. Neither Moses nor Muhammad nor any other prophet is described this way.

Let us pursue our study by looking at other ways in which Jesus is unique among the prophets of God.

HIS PRE-EXISTENCE

No one found anything to condemn in the actions of Jesus. He is the only Jew to ever perfectly keep the law that God had given to the Jews. The words of Jesus were, on the other hand, often very surprising, not to say shocking. One day while speaking with the Jews, Jesus told them:

"If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.' Then the Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, "If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death." Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?' Jesus answered, 'If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. [The One] who honors Me [is the One] of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him... Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.' Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' [The patriarch Abraham had lived almost two thousand years before the time of Jesus.] Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.'" (John 8:51-58)

These words of Jesus agree with the testimony that John the Baptist had given. Remember that the angel Gabriel had announced to Zachariah, the father of John, that his wife, Elisabeth, would have a son. Remember also that she was already in her sixth month of pregnancy when this same angel appeared to Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of the Christ. John was therefore six months older than Jesus. But what does John say in the Gospel of John 1:30? When he saw Jesus, John the Baptist said, "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"

In speaking to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, Jesus had been a little more precise. He said, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." "Son of Man" was the expression that Jesus used most often to speak of himself.

The prophet Jeremiah said that God knew him when he was still in his mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5). But Jesus claims to have been in heaven before his birth and to have spoken with Abraham.

HIS CLAIM TO FORGIVE SINS

The prophet Jesus made other claims that shocked the hearers of his time and which continue to shock some who read them today. A plain example is found in the Gospel of Mark 2:1-12:

"And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you.'

And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this Man

speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?

But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, 'Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Arise, take up your bed and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins'—He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.' Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'"

THE TITLE OF MESSIAH

The word, prophet, designates someone who receives a message directly from God, an inspired message that he is supposed to communicate to men. Of course, there have always been men who claim to speak for God but who, in fact, deceive their listeners. The Qur'an treats Jesus as a true prophet, but at the same time it insists that Jesus was not more than a prophet, that he was a mere messenger. But it must also be said that the Qur'an speaks of "al-Masih" (3:28) or "the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary" (4:171). If, therefore, Muhammad recognized Jesus to be the Messiah, it would be worthwhile to examine the meaning of this title.

In the Gospel according to John, we see in the first chapters two future apostles of Jesus, Andrew and his brother, Peter. John the Baptist had just born testimony to Jesus of Nazareth, and Andrew, who was already a disciple of John the Baptist, heard it. John 1:41 says: "He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ)." In this verse we have a Hebrew word and a Greek word that have each been Anglicized. The Hebrew word, *mashiah*, and the Greek word, *christos*, mean the same thing: they mean "anointed," or "one who has been anointed." But what is the meaning of this curious term?

In the Bible we find three categories of people who were anointed with oil—that is, oil was poured

on their heads when they took on their particular roles. These three categories were: priests, charged with presenting to God the sacrifices of His people; prophets, charged with communicating messages from God to the people; and kings, charged with governing and leading the people in the name of God, the true King of kings. But the term, the Messiah, is even more special. It was the subject of several prophecies in the Old Testament. The Messiah would be prophet, priest and king all at the same time. He would be anointed, not by the hand of man, but by God Himself. In the Psalms (known to Muslims at the Zabur), David wrote concerning the enemies of God:

"He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure, 'Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.'" (Psalm 2:4-6)

All the Jewish people in the time of Jesus waited longingly for the coming of this individual who was to be anointed by God. Even among the Samaritans, those of mixed origin whose pagan ancestors had intermarried with Jews, people were aware of the One who was to come. In John 4:25,26 a Samaritan woman who was speaking with Jesus stated, "I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When He comes, He will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am He.'"

HIS MIRACLES

What shall we say of the miracles performed by Jesus? Is there a difference between what he did and what others were able to do? The Gospel is filled with stories of the miracles of Jesus. The Qur'an also attributes miracles to him. In Surah 5, aya 110, Allah says to him:

"When Allah will say: O Jesus, son of Mary, remember My favour to thee and to thy mother, when I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit... and thou didst heal the blind and the leprous by My permission; and when thou didst raise the dead by My permission; and I protected thee from the Children of Israel when thou camest to them with clear proofs."

The various miraculous deeds of Jesus not only showed his power over the forces of nature, over demons, over disease and over death; they not only demonstrated his knowledge even of the secret thoughts of men; they not only constituted very often proofs of his great compassion in the face of suffering; they also testified of his identity. And Jesus did not hesitate to draw men's attention to what his miracles signified. In the Gospel according to John we read, "Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, 'How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe.

The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me'" (John 10:24,25). The enemies of Jesus recognized the reality of the miracles of Jesus, but they were not ready to believe, in spite of the proofs. John 11:47,48 says: "Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, 'What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him.'"

Other prophets had done miracles before Jesus, but as we have suggested, one of his miracles surpasses all the others. This miracle will be the subject of the next part of our study.