

Man with a Message

**The Greatest News
Ever Told**

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All quotes from the Qur'an are from THE HOLY QUR'AN by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 1989.

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Man With A Message

In days past, when letters were sent, it could take many days, even weeks or months before it reached its destination. There was no e-mail, internet or mobile phones available. Not even post offices as we know them today. And still people found ways and means to communicate with each other.

Messages were not only sent by someone via some kind of messenger to the recipient. It also happened that messages were sent from God via messengers to people. We believe that God has 'spoken' to communicate with mankind. Would one not expect the designer and creator of the world to reveal who He is and to send instructions on how to live in harmony with their Maker.

A man who claimed to have received messages from God, was called a 'prophet'. Translated correctly, the Hebrew and Arabic word *Nabi* actually means 'messenger'.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims, agree to a considerable extent on who these messengers were. They are, among others, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Job and David. The Jews would deny the title 'prophet' to Jesus, while Muslims call Jesus 'Nabi Isa'. Interesting is the fact that while he is called 'messenger', the actual message he brought is not recorded in the Qur'an. It is found in the Gospel.

Strangely, Muslim teachers today allege that Jesus' message was given to the Jews only, yet the Qur'an mentions Jesus as being "a sign for **all** peoples [beings]" (Sura 21:91).

The Qur'an teaches: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob ... to Moses and Jesus and that given to all prophets from their Lord. We make no differences between one and another of them" (Sura 2:136).

To justify such contradiction to the Qur'an, Muslim teachers declare that the Bible, which originally recorded the messages of "Abraham... Moses and Jesus", is no more the Word of God, but has been changed and corrupted.

That again is not what the Qur'an teaches, when it says: "People of the Book! ... stand fast by the Law, the Gospel and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord" (Sura 5:68) These words were written in the seventh Century. Many old Bible manuscripts that are still in existence today, are considerably older than that, yet they do *not* differ from today's Bibles. One would expect Muslim teachers to state when the Bible was supposedly changed, and why, but they do not.

The Qur'an actually challenges Muslims: "If you were in doubt as to what we have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee" (Sura 10:94). Which Book? The one given before the Qur'an. No man can honestly claim on the basis of the Qur'an that the Bible has been corrupted. It actually orders: "Ask those who possess the message" (Sura 21:7). That were the Jews and Christians.

As we already noticed, the Qur'an explicitly states that the Gospel *is* the Word of God. And it also states categorically that "no man can change the Words of Allah" (Sura 10:64 and 6:34).

Since relatively few people read the Gospel for themselves, this little booklet presents a selection of the actual words that Jesus spoke, while on earth. They are ordered topically to make the reading easier. Everything printed in colour is the actual message of Jesus.

WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT HIMSELF

His message comes from God and its truthfulness can be tested:

“So Jesus told them, “My message is not my own; it comes from God who sent me”. John 7:16

His message is eternal and will not be changed:

“Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear”. Matthew 24:35

He came into the world (i.e. from outside):

“Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true”. John 18:37

He came from heaven, i.e. from God:

“No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven”. John 3:13

God was always with Jesus:

“And the one who sent me is with me—he has not deserted me. For I always do what pleases him”. John 8:29

Jesus had this one thing in mind, to please and honour his heavenly Father and to complete His task.

“Then Jesus explained: “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work””. John 4:34

And why we should believe him:

“Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me?” John 8:46

Muslims are taught that all prophets of God were sinless. That again is a deviation from the facts. Only Jesus is called sinless or holy (Sura 19:19), while we read of the sins of Adam (Sura 7:22-23), Moses (28:15-16), Abraham (26:82), Jonah (37:141-144), David (38:24-25), and also of Muhammad (40:55, 47:19, 48:1-2).

For us to do the work of God includes to believe Jesus:

“Jesus told them, ‘This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent’”. John 6:29

To reject Jesus is to reject God Himself!

“And anyone who rejects me is rejecting God, who sent me”. Luke 10:16

He not only came to bring a message, but to fulfill a task.

“For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost”. Luke 19:10

He came to call sinners to repentance and to rescue them from hell. Those assuming to be good enough to enter God’s Presence, deem not to need Jesus anyway.

*“Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners”.
Mark 2:17*

To the weary he becomes like a brother. He wants to bring peace to troubled hearts.

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light”. Matthew 11:28-30

Water is needed for life. Spiritually speaking Jesus offers “living water” not only to meet our needs, but also to be a fountain to let others taste of it as well.

“On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me!”. John 7:37

“But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life”. John 4:14

To accept Jesus for what he is proves our love for God:

“I know you don’t have God’s love within you. For I have come to you in my Father’s name, and you have rejected me. Yet if others come in their own name, you gladly welcome them”. John 5:42-43

(Following the custom of the time, Jesus often spoke of himself in the third person). Here Jesus makes a tremendous claim about himself:

“There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants”. John 3:18-21

“I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life”. John 8:12:

“If you trust me, you are trusting not only me, but also God who sent me. For when you see me, you are seeing

the one who sent me. I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark". John 12:44-46

Jesus often spoke in parables and used allegories. Here he speaks of himself as a gate and a shepherd, and his followers as sheep.

"Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life". John 10:9-10

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep". John 10:11

"After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice". John 10:4

This 'laying down' of his life was a voluntary act based on his own authority.

"The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again". John 10:17

The 'life in full' that Jesus came to provide includes the assurance here and now of the life to come:

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one". John 10:27-30

To a person whose brother had been in the tomb for three days, and then been raised by Jesus from the dead, he said:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this?” John 11:25, 26

Jesus makes it clear that he himself is the only means to eternal salvation:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me”. John 14:6

Jesus sometimes used metaphors to illustrate spiritual matters. One is particularly striking. By it he describes where he came from and his reason for coming to this earth:

“The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”. John 6:33

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty”. John 6:35

“However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day”. John 6:37-39

“The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life”. John 6:63

Here Jesus is quite specific and to the point:

“If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me”. John 8:42

“You are from below; I am from above. You belong to this world; I do not. That is why I said that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am who I claim to be, you will die in your sins”. John 8:23, 24

Before his death, Jesus spoke to his closest followers, saying:

“I came from the Father into the world, and now I will leave the world and return to the Father”. John 16:28

He urged his followers to believe in his divinity and again substantiated his claim: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!”

“Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do”. John 14:9-11

In a recorded prayer Jesus communed with his Father and, referring to his eternal existence:

“Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began”. John 17:5

Because Jesus had a human mother, he appeared to be and was a real human person. He, like we, was hungry and tired, felt a need to pray and experienced grief and pain. But because God had inspired and by that effected his birth without a human father, he was divine, could heal, raise the dead, walk on water, forgive sins, still the storm and perform many more reported miracles. He therefore could claim a relationship that may shock us at first:

“They all shouted, “So, are you claiming to be the Son of God?” And he replied, “You say that I am”“. Luke 22:70

Liberation from fear, including the fear of death, satanic influences and freedom from sin comes from him alone:

“So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free”. John 8:36

Once Jesus made an astounding remark about himself. Can we understand what he meant? His listeners knew!

“I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I Am!” John 8:58

It is important to note that “I am” in Hebrew is the same as “Yahweh”, the very name of God! This provoked the Jews to kill him. Here we find an additional explanation. Since God is eternal there is to him no ‘was’ or ‘will be’. He always ‘is’. What he really says here is: ‘Before Abraham was, I was eternally alive!’

Even so he is not aloof up there in highest heaven. He loves you and me! And He wants us to respond to his love!

“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me”. John 15:9

His love is more than just a kind of fondness. He proved his love!

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”. John 15:13

Several times Jesus spoke of his approaching death and the purpose of his dying:

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many”. Matthew 20:28

The word ‘ransom’ is seldom used these days. We read occasionally that e.g. kidnappers demand a ransom. This is the price to set a captive free. Jesus paid the price to set us free from the condemnation of sin.

Four times Jesus predicted his death to his close followers. But even to them it made little sense in the beginning:

“Listen,” he said, “we’re going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. They will mock him, spit on him, flog him with a whip, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again”. Mark 10:33, 34

Before his death the man Jesus agonized in prayer when he contemplated the terror, pain and suffering of his imminent crucifixion:

“Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, “My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done”“. Matthew 26:42

It was not a godless mob that wanted to arrest him. They were the supreme religious authority of the day, and they feared that their religious authority was being threatened by Jesus. At his arrest one of his companions drew a sword wanting to resist and fight. But Jesus said:

“Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?” Matthew 26:53, 54

To understand the words “fulfilled Scriptures”, we ought to know that the prophets in the Old Testament many hundreds of years before had foretold many of the important events in the life of Jesus. His pre-existence in eternity, his miraculous birth by a virgin and his divinity, his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, were recorded. In Jesus they were now being fulfilled.

Jesus' claim to be divine, was as upsetting to the Jews as it is to many people today:

"Once again the people picked up stones to kill him. Jesus said, "At my Father's direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?"

They replied, "We're stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God". John 10:31-33

Even at this very crisis situation of his life, Jesus thought not of himself, but of others.

"When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing". Luke 23:33,34

After his resurrection from the dead Jesus joined some of his companions on their way home, but remained unrecognized by them. They were in great sorrow over his death, which they could not fathom. Jesus said to them:

"You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself". Luke 24:25-27

Again Jesus pointed to the prophecies concerning him in the Old Testament.

Some people have speculated that Jesus did not actually die, but that he was taken down from the cross unconscious and later revived. This was quite impossible,

for the soldiers, to make sure he was dead, pierced his chest before he was taken down (John 19:33). What did Jesus have to say to that?

“I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave”. Revelation 1:17, 18

Jesus did not come for the Jews only, as some believe. He said:

“Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem”. Luke 24:46, 47

39 days after his resurrection from the dead Jesus was taken up to heaven before the very eyes of his disciples. His last words to them were:

“I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age”. Matthew 28:18-20

That is why Christian believers have it on their hearts to make him and his message known. When the end of time comes, Jesus will be the judge:

“In addition, the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge, so that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him.

I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life. And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it's here now, when the dead will hear my voice—the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live. The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son ". John 5:21-28

If nothing else makes us think and consider - this should! To reject this offer for fear of any kind is simply foolish.

Jesus encourages us to trust him and in what he is doing for us:

"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am". John 14:1-3

Jesus will come again. This time not to save, but to judge all those who did not accept his offer of pardon and forgiveness. It is therefore so important to be prepared for his coming at any time:

"You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected". Luke 12:40

How this is going to happen he told us as well:

"And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven". Mark 14:62

“For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes”.
Matthew 24:27

Jesus is coming again to judge the world – all nations and all people. But perhaps we die before that. In that case he meets us at the point of our death.

Why is Jesus speaking of himself as the ‘Son of Man’, and not of the ‘Son of God’? The title ‘Son of Man’ is first mentioned in the Old Testament in the year 555 BC:

“As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed”. Daniel 7:13-14

In the light of this statement we can easily see that there is really no difference between the ‘Son of Man’ and ‘Son of God’?

The time to receive pardon is not yet over. Jesus is still waiting. He left us with an invitation:

“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in...”. Revelation 3:20

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT US

Jesus did not teach high theology or deep philosophy. He spoke to the people as they were able to understand and comprehend:

“He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.-.....

Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and

produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”. Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23

God criticized the unwillingness of the hearers to respond. So Jesus warned:

“When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them ”. Matthew 13:14-15

“So pay attention to how you hear”. Luke 8:18

Also in a parable Jesus explained another important truth:

“A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if there was any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. Finally, he said to his gardener, ‘I’ve waited three years, and there hasn’t been a single fig! Cut it down. It’s just taking up space in the garden. The gardener answered, ‘Sir, give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I’ll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer. If we get figs next year, fine. If not, then you can cut it down “. Luke 13:6-9

In another parable Jesus explains:

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch

cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father". John 15:1-8

None of us could honestly claim to bring such fruit by our own effort. Elsewhere in the Bible we are instructed that this fruit consists of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:23). Who does not want to bear such fruit?

Another parable shows a different facet of the same topic:

"To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. 12 The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."

So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. ²¹ His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.

But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began." Luke 15:11-24

We need "to come to our senses", as the wayward son did. He did not attempt to compensate for his wrongdoing by offering a repayment, which he could not produce anyway. His father did not expect it either. He simply wanted to go home - and he went. The "best robe" is symbolic for the covering of his filth, the ring for his acceptance again as son into the family and the sandals to show he was now a free man again, for slaves were to walk barefoot. The principle is the same as taught in yet another parable:

"Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" Luke 7:41-42

Forgiveness is a gift of God to those who sincerely seek it and ask for it. Stories illustrating the compassion of God are repeated again and again:

“So Jesus told them this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!” Luke 15:3-7

I suppose most of us never saw God in this light. We think in terms of compensating God for the sins we committed. But what He wants is our heart. Remember, neither of the men who “owed” could repay. A sin, once committed, can never be undone. It is a colossal misunderstanding or misjudgment of God’s holiness. Our sin results in a vast unbridgeable gulf between Him and us. We are totally and utterly dependent on what God does for us! Let us look at a last parable of Jesus to hear what he has to say about this point:

“Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’

But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he

beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted". Luke 18:10-14

A Pharisee was a highly respected religious leader in the contemporary society. He did indeed stick to a rigorous, self-disciplined life style in an effort never to break one of God's Laws. But in his self-deceit he gloried in his achievements, his fasting, giving etc., thinking that he would by that effort be acceptable to God.

But Jesus explained:

" When you obey me you should say, 'We are unworthy servants who have simply done our duty ". Luke 17:10

Jesus indicated that there is no merit in doing right or good. It is our duty to do. God's standard is the norm. Therefore, forgiveness for failure is always due to God's grace. It is an unmerited act of His compassion:

"Then he said to them, "You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God". Luke 16:15

When Jesus was once asked about the most important commandment, he answered:

"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments". Matthew 22:37-40

The military application of the word `obedience' is mellowed and changes its meaning, when something is done out of love!

While Jesus taught to love and fear the Lord God, he also told us not to fear what men can say and do to us:

“Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell”. Matthew 10:28

It is when we trust in what he says, when we lovingly serve him with all our hearts, that we honour him:

“For the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God”. John 16:27

“Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me”. John 12:26

Faith in God is in fact linked to faith in Jesus. There is really no difference:

“If you trust me, you are trusting not only me, but also God who sent me. 45 For when you see me, you are seeing the one who sent me. 46 I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark”. John 12:44-46

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him”. John 3:16-17

“For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day”. John 6:40

“For the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God”. John 16:27

Every decision we make has consequences. To follow Jesus as well. We might be ridiculed or even persecuted:

"... all nations will hate you because you are my followers. But everyone who endures to the end will be saved". Matthew 10:22

"A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you". John 15:20

But Jesus comforts us:

"God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. 12 Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven". Matthew 5:11-12

Jesus wants us to love, respect and honour him more than anybody or anything else:

"If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine". Matthew 10:37

As God's children (He is our Father!), and because we need one another's support in our walk with God, Jesus said:

"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other". John 13:34

He also left us a test, to enable us to assess ourselves:

"Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them". John 14:21

We are obedient, because we trust and love him. Obedience is not a tool to merit forgiveness and Paradise.

God's Kingdom is of a different kind and greatness is measured by different values:

"You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your". Matthew 20:25-27

Likewise outward religious rules are exposed and corrected by Jesus:

"Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. "All of you listen," he said, "and try to understand. 15 It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart." Don't you understand either?" he asked. "Can't you see that the food you put into your body cannot defile you? Food doesn't go into your heart, but only passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer." (By saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes.)

And then he added, "It is what comes from inside that defiles you. 21 For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you ". Mark 7:14-15, 18-23

That is why Jesus scolded the religious leaders:

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to

clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence!”
Matthew 23:25-26

Religious practices concern themselves mostly with outward dietary and cleansing rituals. In stark contrast to this Jesus taught

“God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God”. *Matthew 5:8*

Jesus addresses a number of issues regarding human relationships and our relationship with God. His words stir our minds and hearts:

About truthfulness he said:

“You have also heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.’ But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, ‘By heaven!’ because heaven is God’s throne. Just say a simple, ‘Yes, I will,’ or ‘No, I won’t.’ Anything beyond this is from the evil one”. *Matthew 5:33-34, 37*

About loving other people Jesus sets yet another standard than we would normally have:

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect”.
Matthew 5:43-48

About piety and prayer he cautions:

“Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this:

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who
sin against us.
And don’t let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.
If you forgive those who sin against you,*

*your heavenly Father will forgive you.
But if you refuse to forgive others,
your Father will not forgive your sins”.*
Matthew 6:1-15

Jesus also emphasizes the relationship between forgiveness and prayer:

“But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too”. Mark 11:25

He taught **about our dependence on God** – and God’s willingness to respond:

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him! Matthew 7:7-11

About fasting Jesus warned:

“And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal.

Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be". Matthew 6:16-21

The real value of goods, our attitude to them, and our responsibility regarding them Jesus also clarified:

"Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own". Luke 12:15

"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. 11 And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? 12 And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own? No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money". Luke 16:10-13

Anxieties and worries are part of our life. Jesus shows us a better way to deal with them:

"That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for

wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." Matthew 6:25-34

Our life is made up of many choices. Jesus tells us that one choice exceeds all others:

"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it". Matthew 7:13-14

Do we find hypocrisy in religion? We all know that it abounds. Therefore Jesus said:

"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws. Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and

doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash". Matthew 7:21-27

Problem number one in the world is that of **broken relationships**. In particular the broken relationship with God. Jesus, according to his own statements, came primarily to reconcile us with God. But He also came to heal broken human relationships. Very particularly he addressed partners in marriage regarding unfaithfulness:

"You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery. But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart". Matthew 5:27-28

To describe the severity of sin, which causes broken relationships, Jesus uses a very drastic metaphor:

"So if your eye—even your good eye causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your hand—even your stronger hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell". Matthew 5:29-30

Divorce is an issue that Jesus addressed quite emphatically:

"Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female. And he said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together". Matthew 19:4-6

“You have heard the law that says, ‘A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce. But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery’”. Matthew 5:31-32

“And anyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery”. Luke 16:18

“Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not what God had originally intended. And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery—unless his wife has been unfaithful”. Matthew 19:8-9

Jesus wants us to forgive each other. This is, in fact, a prerequisite to receive **forgiveness from God**. In a model prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

“And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us”. Matthew 6:12

He also said:

“If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive. Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive”. Luke 17:3-4

When one of Jesus’ disciples asked him, how many times he should forgive his brother, mentioning: “Seven times?”, Jesus answered:

“No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven”. Matthew 18:22

By his deeds Jesus confirmed his words. A touching example is recorded of this. We have to tell the whole story, not just the words spoken by Jesus, to transmit his spirit of forgiveness:

“Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, 2 but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. 3 As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. “Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?” They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. 7 They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” 8 Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?” “No, Lord,” she said And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more “. John 8:1-11

We all know that God hates sin. But did we also recognize Jesus’ compassion for sinners, as this story demonstrates? It is matchless. He is in fact waiting for all of us to come to him to plead for forgiveness. Once we have received it our love and appreciation for him will not make it difficult for us to turn away from sin.

Obedience and commitment do not lead to bondage, but rather to true freedom:

“You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. 32 And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”. John 8:31-32

“Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins (= keeps on doing it) is a slave of sin”. John 8:34

Jesus spoke of the supernatural element in believing and following him:

“I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God”. John 3:3

Continuing, Jesus added that no one can enter the Kingdom of God without such an experience. This illustrates that as natural life begins with the natural birth, so spiritual life begins with a spiritual birth. It starts when we are “set free” or “born anew”. We are set free after God has forgiven our sin and by that cleansed us from it. Then the bondage is broken, our guilt is removed and the “new life” i.e. the working of God’s Spirit in us causes a constant renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). This soon makes us hate sin, love righteousness and follow the one who set us free, Jesus - the Messiah. It all begins with the decision to accept God’s gift - his pardon. The result is always the desire to know more about God. That happens when we let God speak to us through His Word and live in close union with our heavenly Father.

THE CHALLENGE

The message of Nabi Isa is, and always has been, a challenge to mankind. It is a personal challenge to respond to. Since it is impossible to separate the Message from its Messenger, we are facing an existential question: Are we prepared to receive and accept this message and the Messenger for what they are, God’s revelation?

Of course, it is in conflict with what many Jews, Muslims and even many nominal Christians believe. However, Truth is not a matter of opinion, customs, culture or upbringing. If, for example, one source claims

that Jesus was crucified and died as a sacrifice for our sins, and another that he was neither crucified nor killed, both statements cannot be true. If the one is right, the other is essentially wrong.

The right answer to that question is ultimately the crucial issue of our lives. It decidedly effects our eternal destiny, and by that the quality of life here and now! We are well advised not to take for granted what our particular cultural or religious circumstances dictate, neither to rely on our feelings, or worse, on the expedient opinions of others.

THE PROOF

Are there any tangible facts that can prove this case in point? If God holds us responsible for detecting and choosing the truth about him and us, we can expect him to provide some mode, which allows us to distinguish between divine revelation and any counterfeit.

To make the right choice, we do need some basic insight and knowledge, and this must be weighed and applied fairly, honestly and wisely. Any preconceived conviction or idea is an unfit tool to differentiate between Truth and error.

Thank God, He did provide evidence to ascertain His Truth. It is accessible to all that care enough to find it. "You will... find me when you seek me with all your heart!" (Jer. 29:13). That is a promise of God. But not the half-hearted.

In his message to Moses (Deuteronomy 18:21-22), and later through many of the prophets (Isaiah 41:21, Amos 3:7, Jeremiah 28:9 etc.) God provided one proof of his authorship, which no man can imitate: predicted unforeseeable events and their fulfillment. Unpredictable

historical events were correctly foretold in one Book only, and that is the Bible. Once these were fulfilled, they provided the proof of its divine authorship. Moses, David, Isaiah and others predicted the coming and life of Jesus the Messiah 750, 1000 or even more years before his birth in great detail. God has given a signal. It is up to us to take notice of it

When these prophecies, which are absolutely unique in every way, were fulfilled in Jesus, it became clear to anyone who cared enough to check, that they must have come from God. They state i.a. that Jesus is “God among us”, and that he was born by a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). It says that he would be a “wonderful counselor, mighty **God**, everlasting Father and Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). As such, he became their Saviour” (*‘Jeshua’* in Hebrew. It was the name by which **Jesus** was called by his contemporaries). “He saved” and “in his love and mercy redeemed” his people (Isaiah 63:7-9). “Yet they rebelled and grieved his **Holy Spirit**” (vs.10). This rebellion culminated in the rejection of Jesus and his killing which is foretold in Isaiah 53:3-12 and Psalm 22:14-18, where we read:

‘He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Surely He has borne our grieves and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on

Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

And they made His grave with the wicked—and with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief...

By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities...He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

"Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

These are just a few of the many prophecies, which were fulfilled in Jesus. They are more than just some rational facts or an argument to prove the trustworthiness of the Bible. They carry a message. In it God reveals and demonstrates His love for us. We will react to it in some way. It may be in a hostile manner, indifferently, or responsive. The message of Jesus beckons us to turn to him in love.

Remember, Jesus said: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in ...!"

Will you let him?

You, the reader, may still find in your heart and mind some open questions. If they are genuine, they need and will have to be answered in time. We, the partners of the Life Challenge team, are offering to help you in any way we can. We do not represent any particular church or religious sect, but are believers from various backgrounds, but we all love and honour God and His Word.

To help you get an overall view of what the Bible is all about, a little book by the name of 'al-Kitab' ('the Book') has been compiled. It is available in a number of languages.. You find it on the internet www.answering-islam.org/Nehls/index.html

If you happen to be a Muslim and wrestle with problems like the concept of the 'Son of God', the 'Gospel of Barnabas', the alleged falsification of the Bible or the like, you may write to us for a free copy of the booklet 'Dear Abdallah'.

DEAR READER,

Only a message that is understood can help us!

Please take time to think through these questions. A free copy of another of our publications will be yours in return to your answers.

1. What is the most important 'work' which God expects man to do?
2. What is the message of Jesus to people who are weary and tired of life?
3. How can we know whether Jesus' message is trustworthy or not?
4. Give a reason why Jesus' death was not an unforeseen accident, but had been in God's plan all along?
5. Why is it not enough to accept Jesus as just one of the prophets?
6. In what way did Jesus give proof of his love for man?
7. What was the last instruction Jesus gave to his disciples?
8. What is the significance of the title 'Son of Man'?
9. What can we learn from the parable about the two sons?
10. Someone once asked whether the Pharisees mentioned in the Bible were Muslims. What would you answer?
11. Note some of the differences between the Islamic way of prayer and Jesus' teaching on prayer.
12. What is the one unique proof for the truth of God's revelation to the prophets?

If there is any other way how we can help you in your search for the truth, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Thank you.

**Booklets recommended
for our readers:**

1. Made for a Purpose
2. Dare to compare
3. Destination unknown
4. Dear Abdallah
5. Why trust the Bible
6. Man with a message
7. Qur'an and Bible
8. Follow your heart

Al-Kitab (Bible Course for Muslims)

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