

Christianity and Islam: A Closer Bond in Messianic Expectation than Christianity and Judaism

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October 16, 2023

At the intersection of faith and history, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—three of the world's major monotheistic religions—share a rich tapestry of beliefs, stories, and prophecies. Among these shared narratives is the figure of the Messiah. Yet, a closer examination reveals that Christianity and Islam converge more intimately in their anticipation of the Messiah's roles and return than Christianity does with Judaism. Both Christianity and Islam acknowledge a prior advent of this pivotal figure—known as Jesus in Christianity and Isa in Islam—and ardently await His return. Meanwhile, Jewish eschatology centers on the Messiah's inaugural arrival. This piece seeks to delve into this shared bond of messianic expectation between Christianity and Islam, juxtaposing it against the backdrop of Jewish messianic beliefs.

Keywords: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Messiah, Isa, Jesus, eschatology, anticipation, return, inaugural arrival, monotheistic religions, shared narratives.

Introduction

In the vast landscape of religious traditions, the intricate relationships between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, the three pillars of the Abrahamic faiths, are both enlightening and thought-provoking. At the heart of this trinity of beliefs lies the figure of the Messiah, a beacon of hope, justice, and redemption. Christianity and Islam, despite their apparent theological differences, find themselves converging on a rather significant shared belief: the appearance of Jesus (known as Isa in Islam) on Earth and His anticipated return.

For Christians, Jesus Christ is not merely a prophet but the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, who took on human form to offer salvation. His life, teachings, crucifixion, resurrection, and eventual ascension form the core of Christian doctrine, promising His eventual return to judge the living and the dead. This belief finds resonance in the Islamic tradition, where Isa (Jesus) is held in deep reverence, recognized as one of the mightiest prophets of God, born of the Virgin Mary, and endowed with miraculous powers. Crucially, Islam diverges from Christianity in the crucifixion narrative, asserting that Jesus was neither crucified nor killed but was instead raised up by God. Yet, the common thread that binds them is the prophecised return of Jesus, emphasizing a future time of justice and harmony.

On the other hand, Judaism offers a contrasting perspective. Rooted in ancient prophecies, it awaits the coming of the Messiah for the first time, a righteous king from the Davidic line, who will rebuild the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, bring peace, and gather all Jews back to the Land of Israel. This waiting for the initial appearance is a distinct stance, setting Judaism apart from the return-centric views of Christianity and Islam.

In juxtaposing these beliefs, one discerns a fascinating closeness between Christianity and Islam, where the figure of Jesus forms a bridge of shared anticipation and hope. These parallels underscore a profound interconnectedness, a spiritual kinship that often remains unexplored, overshadowed by the focus on differences. As we delve deeper into this narrative, it becomes clear that in the realm of messianic expectations, Christians might find themselves feeling more akin to Muslims than they do to their Jewish counterparts.

Jesus (Isa) in Christian Belief

Within the rich tapestry of Christian tradition, the figure of Jesus Christ stands unparalleled, not merely as a historical personage but as the divine incarnate, the very essence of God's love and redemption for mankind. The New Testament, a collection of writings that chronicle Jesus' life, teachings, and the nascent Christian community's reflections, provides invaluable insights into His divine nature and mission.

The Gospel of John, distinct in its theological depth and poetic narrative, begins with a profound declaration: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). This passage underscores Jesus' preexistence and His oneness with the Divine. He is the 'Word' (Logos in Greek), an eternal entity that was present at the very inception of the universe. The subsequent verses elucidate that all things came into being through Him, emphasizing His role in creation.

By the time we reach John 1:14, the narrative takes a monumental turn: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This incarnation of the divine Logos into human form is central to Christian belief. Jesus, while

fully divine, took on human flesh, experiencing the human condition with its trials, tribulations, joys, and sorrows. His incarnation was not just a theological event but a profound act of love, bridging the chasm between the Divine and humanity.

Throughout His earthly mission, Jesus' teachings encompassed themes of love, forgiveness, and the Kingdom of God. He spoke in parables, offering profound spiritual insights wrapped in everyday scenarios, making them accessible to all. From the Sermon on the Mount to His discourses on love and compassion, Jesus urged humanity to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind and to love their neighbors as themselves.

Furthermore, His miracles—ranging from healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, and even raising the dead—attested to His divine authority and compassion. These weren't mere displays of power but testimonies of God's love and desire for the well-being of His creation.

However, His mission wasn't without opposition. His radical teachings, which often challenged the religious elite's established norms, coupled with His growing popularity, led to tensions. Yet, even in the face of adversity, Jesus emphasized forgiveness and love, epitomized in His words from the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

In the Christian tradition, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection form the core tenet of faith, offering hope and salvation. He is the embodiment of divine love, the Savior, whose teachings continue to guide millions in their spiritual journeys.

Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Belief

In the Islamic tapestry of belief, Jesus, known as Isa in Arabic, is regarded with immense respect and reverence. While the fundamental tenets of Islamic Christology differ from Christian doctrine, the significance of Isa is undeniably profound within the Qur'anic narrative and the broader Islamic tradition.

The Qur'an, Islam's sacred text, provides several accounts of Isa's life, emphasizing his miraculous birth, prophetic mission, and special relationship with God (Allah in Arabic). One of the most detailed narratives concerning Isa's birth is found in Surah Maryam (named after Mary, Isa's mother).

In verses 19:20-21, Mary (Maryam) says: "How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?" The angel responds, "Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter [already] decreed.'" This narrative underscores the miraculous nature of Isa's conception, a divine event free from human intervention.

Isa's birth is seen as a testament to God's limitless power, echoing the creation of Adam, who was fashioned without the agency of human parents. Mary, a paragon of piety and chastity in Islamic tradition, plays a central role in this narrative, her unwavering faith mirrored in her acceptance of God's will, even in the face of societal judgment.

The Qur'an consistently refers to Isa as "Isa, son of Mary" (Isa ibn Maryam), emphasizing his human lineage while also alluding to his unique birth. Far from being considered divine, Isa is acknowledged as one of the mightiest prophets, blessed with a special mission and miracles by God's permission. He spoke in the cradle, healed the sick, brought the dead to life, and fashioned birds from clay, all as signs for the Children of Israel.

Isa's teachings in Islam align closely with the central tenets of the faith: monotheism, righteousness, and the call to worship the One true God. While the Qur'an does not provide a detailed account of all his teachings, it emphasizes his unwavering proclamation of God's oneness and his role as a messenger.

It's essential to note that while Isa holds a revered position in Islam, he is not accorded the divine status that is central to Christian belief. Instead, he stands as a beacon of God's mercy, a prophet entrusted with a divine mission, and a testament to the wonders of God's creative power. His life and teachings, as conveyed through the Qur'an and Hadith (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad), offer guidance and inspiration for believers, reiterating the themes of faith, righteousness, and the overarching sovereignty of God.

The Crucifixion and Ascension in Christian Tradition

The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ stand at the heart of Christian doctrine, embodying not only the profound sacrifice and love of God for humanity but also the triumphant hope of redemption and eternal life. This narrative, richly woven through the Gospels, finds its culmination in the events of the Ascension, marking the climax of Jesus' earthly ministry and the dawn of His eternal reign.

Luke's Gospel, in particular, captures the essence of these transformative events with vivid detail and emotional depth. The narrative paints a poignant picture of a Messiah who, though innocent, willingly embraces suffering and death on the cross for the sins of humanity. This selfless act is seen as a fulfilment of ancient prophecies and the realization of God's redemptive plan. For Christians, the Crucifixion is more than a historical event; it is

the ultimate act of divine love, wherein God Himself bears the weight of human sin to offer salvation.

However, the narrative does not end in despair or defeat. The Resurrection, which swiftly follows the Crucifixion, signals victory over death and sin. Jesus' emergence from the tomb on the third day is heralded as the defining moment of Christian faith. It is in this miraculous event that death is swallowed up in victory, promising believers not just spiritual redemption but also the hope of physical resurrection in the end times.

Following a period of appearing to His disciples and many others, imparting teachings and establishing the foundation for the nascent Church, Jesus prepares for His Ascension. The verses in Luke 24:50-53 poignantly capture this moment: "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God."

The Ascension is not merely a departure but a coronation. Jesus returns to His heavenly throne, sitting at the right hand of God, not just as the crucified Savior, but as the reigning King. It establishes His divine authority over all creation and paves the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, empowering His followers to continue His mission.

Integral to the Christian understanding of the Ascension is the anticipated return of Jesus. He ascends with the promise of His Second Coming, an event awaited with fervent hope. This return is envisioned as a glorious culmination of history, where Jesus comes not as a suffering servant but as a triumphant King, ushering in a reign of peace, justice, and eternal joy.

In essence, the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension are foundational pillars of the Christian faith, encapsulating the love, sacrifice, triumph, and eternal hope offered through Jesus Christ. Through these events, believers find meaning in suffering, victory in defeat, and the promise of an unending communion with the Divine.

Jesus' (Isa) Status Post-Crucifixion in Islamic Tradition

Within the Islamic worldview, the narrative surrounding Jesus' (Isa's) departure from the earthly realm is distinct from the Christian understanding. While both traditions hold Jesus in high regard, their respective interpretations of his final moments on Earth diverge significantly. The Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam, offers a clear perspective on this, particularly in the verses from Surah An-Nisa (The Women).

The verses in question, Surah An-Nisa 4:157-158, read as follows:

"And [for] their saying, 'Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.' 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, Allah raised him to Himself. And ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise."

These verses make clear the Islamic position: Jesus was neither crucified nor killed. Instead, it appeared to the people that he was. The precise nature of this semblance—whether a substitute was placed on the cross or some other divine intervention occurred—is not detailed in the Qur'an, and various interpretations have

arisen over the centuries within Islamic scholarship. However, the central tenet remains firm: Jesus was spared the ordeal of the crucifixion.

The subsequent affirmation, "Rather, Allah raised him to Himself," is crucial. This elevating act by God is seen as a divine protection for Jesus, honoring his prophetic status and shielding him from the harm intended by his adversaries. He was taken up, not in the Christian understanding of a resurrection post-crucifixion, but as a direct, protective ascension.

This narrative ties into broader Islamic eschatology, where Jesus plays a pivotal role. He is expected to return in the end times as part of God's final plan for creation. This return will be characterized by justice, the defeat of the false messiah (known as the Dajjal), and the establishment of a period of peace and righteousness before the Day of Judgment. In this context, Jesus' preservation from death and his elevation to God holds added significance, as he remains with God until his prophesied return.

In essence, the Islamic perspective on Jesus post-crucifixion underscores God's omnipotent protection of His prophets and lays the groundwork for the profound role Jesus is yet to play in the culmination of human history. It's a narrative of divine intervention, honor, and the unwavering truth of God's plan.

The Second Coming in Christianity

The Second Coming, often referred to as the Parousia in theological circles, is a foundational hope of Christian eschatology—the study of the end times. This event is not just a theological concept but a fervent hope and expectation that has energized Christian faith and worship for two millennia. Central to this belief is the idea that Jesus Christ, having ascended into

heaven, will one day return to Earth in glory to fulfill God's redemptive plan for creation.

The New Testament is replete with references to the Second Coming, but few passages capture its magnitude and implications as vividly as the words of Jesus himself in the Gospel of Matthew. The referenced verses, Matthew 24:30-31, state:

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

Here's a deeper exploration of this passage and its wider context:

1. **The Sign of the Son of Man:** The exact nature of this sign remains a matter of speculation and interpretation, but its appearance is unmistakably a precursor to Jesus' return. It serves as a celestial announcement, heralding the imminent arrival of the Messiah.
2. **Universal Impact:** The Second Coming will not be a localized or obscure event. "All the peoples of the earth" underscores its global significance. The response is also universal: mourning. This could signify a collective realization of missed opportunities, rejection of Jesus, or simply the awe and fear of a divine encounter.
3. **Majesty and Power:** Jesus' return is depicted as majestic. He comes "on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory," reminiscent of Old Testament portrayals of God's appearances and echoing Daniel's prophecies (Daniel 7:13-14).
4. **Gathering of the Elect:** The angels, acting on Jesus' command, will gather the believers ("his elect"). This

gathering is global ("from the four winds") and cosmic ("from one end of the heavens to the other"), suggesting a reunion of all believers, possibly including those who have passed away and those still alive.

Beyond Matthew, the New Testament paints a fuller picture of the Second Coming. It's a time of judgment, where the righteous are rewarded and the wicked face retribution (2 Timothy 4:1). It's also an era of transformation—the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:52), the renewal of the heavens and the earth (2 Peter 3:10-13), and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom (Revelation 21:1-4).

For Christians, the Second Coming is more than an eschatological event; it's a promise. A promise that suffering, pain, and evil are not the end but will be overcome. It's an anchor of hope, encouraging believers to persevere in faith, await Jesus' return, and participate in God's redemptive work until that glorious day.

The Second Coming in Islam

The belief in the return of Jesus (Isa) holds a significant place in Islamic eschatology. While the Qur'an, Islam's central religious text, touches upon many aspects of Jesus' life and mission, it's the Hadith, the sayings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad, that expound on the concept of Jesus' return in the end times. One of the most referenced hadiths in this regard comes from Sahih Muslim:

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely (Jesus,) the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you and will judge mankind justly (as a Just Ruler); he will break the Cross and kill the pigs and there will be

no Jizya (i.e. taxation taken from non-Muslims). Money will be in abundance so that nobody will accept it, and a single prostration to Allah (in prayer) will be better than the whole world and whatever is in it." (Sahih Muslim, Book 41, Hadith 7023)

Diving into the elements of this Hadith:

1. **Righteous Judge**: When Jesus returns, he will "judge mankind justly." This denotes a period where divine justice, channeled through Jesus, will be the order of the day. Injustices, falsehoods, and all forms of evil will be addressed.
2. **Breaking the Cross and Killing Pigs**: This act is symbolic and has been subject to various interpretations. Some scholars believe it represents the abolition of certain religious practices and beliefs that are contrary to monotheism. Others see it as a figurative expression for the eradication of religious misconceptions.
3. **Abolition of Jizya**: Jizya is a tax historically levied on non-Muslims living in Islamic states, providing them protection and exempting them from military service. The abolition indicates a time when the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim will become irrelevant in terms of societal structure, as faith in the one God becomes universally recognized.
4. **Abundance of Wealth**: The time of Jesus' rule will be marked by such prosperity that "money will be in abundance so that nobody will accept it." This underscores a utopian era where the materialistic pursuits that often dominate human life become secondary to spiritual endeavors.
5. **Value of Worship**: "A single prostration to Allah will be better than the whole world and whatever is in it." This profound statement places supreme value on sincere worship, emphasizing the depth of a believer's connection with God over the fleeting allure of worldly possessions.

The teachings of Prophet Muhammad make it clear that Jesus' return is a cornerstone of Islamic eschatology. His descent will usher in a time of unparalleled righteousness, peace, and monotheistic devotion. During this period, Jesus will confront and defeat the Dajjal (the Antichrist in Islamic tradition), ensuring that truth triumphs over falsehood.

For Muslims, the return of Jesus reinforces several core beliefs: the interconnectedness of prophetic missions, the unwavering nature of God's divine plan, and the transient nature of earthly life in comparison to the eternal life that follows. Just as with the earlier prophets, Jesus' return serves as both a test and a beacon of hope for believers, inviting them to align their lives with the divine and to always be prepared for the unfolding of God's ultimate plan.

The Jewish Messiah: A Distinct Perspective

The Jewish understanding of the Messiah is rooted deeply in the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. For Judaism, the concept of the Messiah differs markedly from Christian and Islamic views. Instead of anticipating a second coming, Jews await the Messiah's inaugural arrival, which will herald an era of peace, justice, and unity under the observance of God's commandments. One of the most debated and significant chapters in relation to this expectation is found in the Book of Isaiah, specifically in Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53 is often referred to as the "Suffering Servant" passage. It depicts an individual who endures suffering and affliction, yet ultimately triumphs, bringing redemption and healing:

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:5-6)

Breaking down the Jewish perspective based on this passage and others:

1. **The Suffering Servant:** The identity of the "servant" in Isaiah 53 has been the subject of extensive debate. While Christians traditionally interpret this as a prophecy about Jesus, Jewish scholars have understood it in various ways: some see it as referring to the nation of Israel collectively, enduring suffering yet remaining faithful; others view it as a prophetic figure, potentially the Messiah, who suffers on behalf of the people.
2. **Redemptive Role:** The passage speaks of an individual whose suffering leads to the redemption and healing of others. This fits into the broader Jewish Messianic expectation, where the Messiah will play a redemptive role, uniting the Jewish people, rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, and ushering in an era of peace.
3. **Distinct from Divinity:** In contrast to Christian beliefs about Jesus being divine, the Jewish Messiah is anticipated to be a human leader, endowed with profound wisdom, understanding, and righteousness. He will be a descendent of King David, guiding the world towards universal worship of the one true God.
4. **Global Peace and Unity:** The Messiah's reign is often associated with a universal era of peace, as outlined in various prophecies. Weapons will be turned into plowshares, and nations will no longer wage wars (Isaiah 2:4). It's a time when the knowledge of God will fill the earth (Isaiah 11:9).
5. **Not a Return, but an Arrival:** Jewish eschatology doesn't encompass the concept of a second coming. Instead, the

focus is on the initial, transformative arrival of the Messiah. This is a notable distinction from both Christianity and Islam.

The Jewish anticipation of the Messiah offers a rich tapestry of hope, redemption, and global transformation. While distinct from Christian and Islamic views, it shares common threads of a world redeemed, justice restored, and the pervasive presence of divine truth. As Isaiah encapsulates so vividly, it's an era where suffering gives way to healing, and transgressions are replaced by peace—a universal yearning that transcends theological boundaries.