

Who is the Muslim Jesus?

Background and terms

The term 'Muslim Jesus' was popularised in a book written by the Muslim author Tarif Khalidi. What Khalidi is doing is making a helpful distinction between the Jesus figure found in Islam and the Jesus of the Bible

Yet, Khalidi shows his true colours when he makes the following statement:

"In its totality this gospel is the story of a love affair between Islam and Jesus and is thus a unique record of how one world religion chose to adopt the central figure of another, coming to recognize him as constitutive of its own identity... Jesus is always identified as a Muslim prophet... for he is, after all, a figure molded in an Islamic environment. Here, then, is the true Jesus, "cleansed" of the "perversions" of his followers, a prophet truly obedient to his Maker and offered up as the true alternative to the Jesus of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Redemption."

(*The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. 2001. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 15)

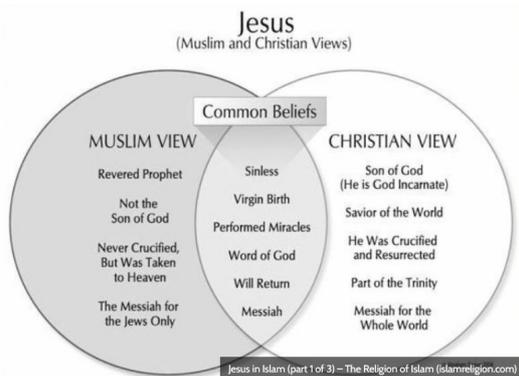


As we will see, the Qur'anic term in Arabic for the Muslim Jesus is always 'Īsā, sometimes with an addition, such as 'Īsā ibn Maryam ['Isa the son of Mary] or 'Īsā al-Masih ['Isa the Messiah]. It is important to note that any similarity of these terms to Biblical ones does not suggest that they have the same meanings.

Whereas present day Arabic-speaking Christians always use the term Yasu' which is derived from the Hebrew, Yeshua, from Yehoshua [God who saves/God is salvation] for Jesus, they never use the term 'Īsā.

A caution:

It is popular for students of comparative religions to try to find commonalities between religions, and this is the case with those who try to do so with the Muslim Jesus.



For example, take this frequently quoted description by Geoffrey Parrinder:

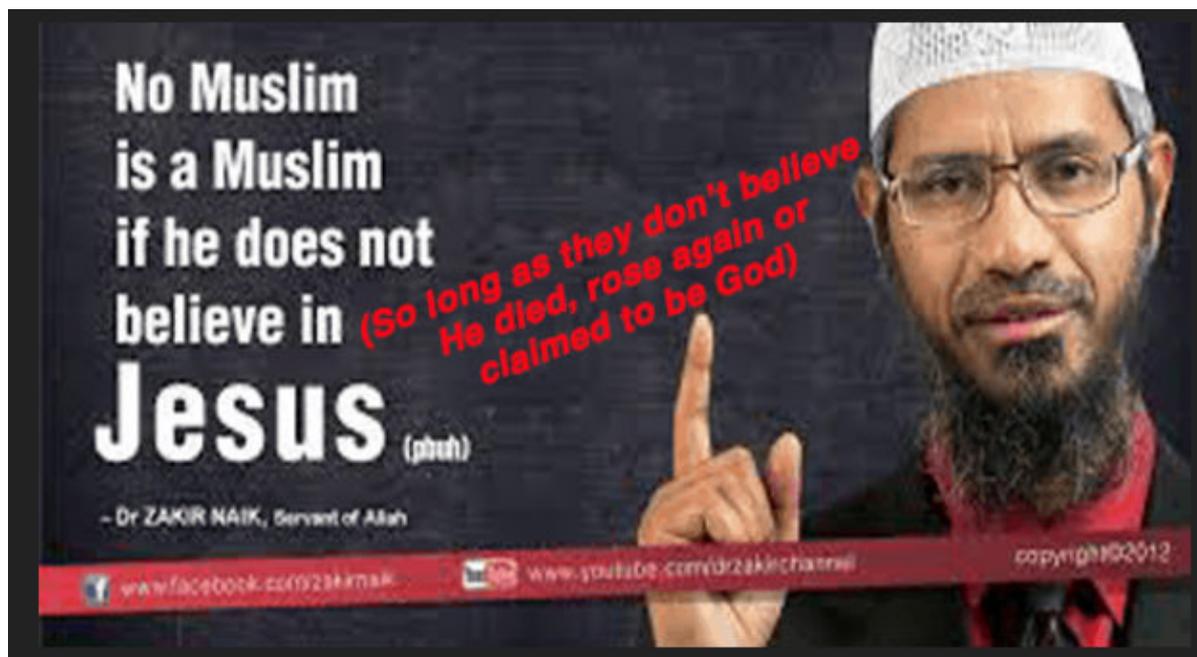
The Qur'an gives a greater number of honorable titles to Jesus than any other figure of the past. He is a 'sign', a 'mercy', a 'witness', and an 'example.' He is called by his proper name Jesus, by the titles of Messiah (Christ) and Son of Mary, and by the names Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word and Spirit of God. ... Jesus is always spoken of in the Qur'an with reverence; there is no

breath of criticism, for he is the Christ of God. (Geoffrey Parrinder. 1965. *Jesus in the Qur'an*, p. 16)

It is as if Samuel Zwemer had anticipated the likes of Parrinder's sentiments when he wrote,

"The portrait of Jesus Christ as given in the Koran and in tradition is a caricature. It is folly to reckon it one of the points of Islam that the Koran speaks highly of Jesus our Savior. No; Islam is of all religions most false in this respect, that it betrays the Son of man with a kiss. Mohammed has hidden Christ from his followers; he has eclipsed the Sun of Righteousness." *A Primer on Islam: and the Spiritual Needs of the Mohammedans of China*. 1919, p. 31.

'Isa in the Quran



'Isa is used 25x in the Qur'an: 2:87,136,253; 3:45,52, 55,59,84; 4:157,163, 171; 5:46,78,110,112, 114,116; 6:85; 19:34; 33:7; 42:13; 43:63; 57:27; 61:6,14

- **Honored**

At times Muslims say the name of Jesus and then say: "May Allah honor him and grant him peace". This can also be rendered simply as "peace be upon him" or "pbuh" or even "A.S".

.....Messiah, 'Isa, the son of Mary - distinguished [Ar. *wajihan*] in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allah]. (Q. 3:45)

- **"Isa, the son of Mary"** [Ar. *'Isa ibn Mariyam*]

23x---- (Q. 2:87,253; 3:45; 4:157, 171; 5:17(twice),46,72, 75,78,110,112,114,116; 9:31; 19:34; 23:50; 33:7; 43:57; 57:27; 61:6,14)

Orders are given to Mary to prostrate in prayer in a Muslim fashion (Q. 3:43.) In effect she is Islamized and so will be her son. This term displaces the Biblical Son of God.

- **Created as a creature like Adam by Allah**

"The similitude of Jesus before Allah is that of Adam: he created him from dust, then said to him, "Be": and he was. (Q. 3:59, Yusuf Ali)

Clearly this verse ayah suggests that Jesus was a created being, no different than Adam.

"Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than a messenger [Arabic *rasūlun*]; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. . ." (Q. 5:75, Yusuf Ali).

- **Born of a virgin and sinless and faultless**

(Q. 19:16-24, cf Q. 6:19; 3:45; 19:19)

According to a tradition, Muhammad said, "When any human being is born, Satan touches him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except Jesus, the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch but failed, for he touched the placenta-cover instead"

(Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4, Hadith 506).

- **An involuntary slave of Allah**

'Isa could talk at birth. "Then she pointed to him. They said: How can we talk to one who is in the cradle, a young boy? He spake: Lo! I am the slave [Ar. *'abdu*] of Allah. He hath given me the Scripture [Ar. *l-kitāba* =book] and hath appointed me a Prophet. (Q. 19:29-30, Pickthall) (Q 3:46; 5:110; 4:172; 19:93; 43:59)

"I will then say what the Pious Slave Jesus the son of Mary said."

(Sahih Bukhari: Narrated by Ibn Abbas, Volume 4, Book 55, Number 568)

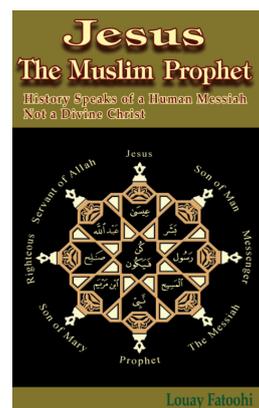
- **The Messiah [Ar. *'Isa al-Masih*]**

11x in the Qur'an. (See Q. 3:45; 4:157,171,172; 5:17 (twice),72 (twice), 75; 9:30,31)

In a collection dated 2001, Ibn Bāz, the former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia issued a religious decree or a fatwa as a response to the question, "Why is 'Isa, the son of Maryam, called *al-Masih*?" His response encapsulates the ideas of a number of Muslim commentators before him:

'Isa, the son of Maryam is called *al-Masih* because he did not touch any sick or disabled person except that they were cured by Allāh's permission. Some of the *Salaf* also said that he was called *al-Masih* due to his contact with the earth and his frequent travelling therein for the propagation of the earth of the religion. According to these two sayings, *al-Masih*, meaning Maasih (one who touches).

It was also said that he is *al-Masih* because his feet were flat, with no hollow to the soles of his feet and it was said that he was touched with blessings, or that he was purified from sins and was therefore blessed; in these cases, *Al-Masih* would mean *mamsuh* (one who is touched), but the first [meaning] is the most apparent [obvious], and Allah knows best. In any case, there is no connection between this and belief or action, and the benefit of knowing it is minimal.



- **Purpose of Life**

'The Messiah said, "O children of Israel, serve Allah".' (Q. 5:76/72)

"But when Jesus felt [persistence in] disbelief from them, he said, "Who are my supporters for [the cause of] Allah?" The disciples said," We are supporters for Allah. We have believed in Allah and testify that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]." (Q.3:52, Sahih International)

- **One made blessed [Ar. *mubarak*] by Allah**

He ('Isa) said: "Verily! I am a slave of Allah. He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet; And He has made me blessed ('mubarak') wheresoever I be, and has enjoined on me prayer, and Zakat, as long as live, and dutiful to my mother, and made me not arrogant, unblest. And Salaam (peace) be upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!" (Q. 19:30-33)

- **A righteous one or one of the righteous ones [Ar. *min al salihin*]**

“And Zachariah and John and ‘Isa and Elias, all of the righteous ones.” (Q. 6:85).

“...all in the ranks of the righteous” (Yusuf Ali) and others render this as “one of the good ones.”

- **A spirit from Allah [Ar. *rūḥ al-quḍus*]**

“‘Isa a spirit of it...” (Q. 4:171; 21:91; 66:12)

“...the spirit of the Holy is never called the Holy Spirit in Islam. This is the trick of the translators; they make the spirit of the Holy out to be the Holy Spirit. In Islam the spirit of the Holy is not holy, but he is a property of the Holy, a slave of Allah (Abd Allah), and at the disposal of Allah....” (Abd al-Masih, “Who is the Holy Spirit in Islam?” <http://grace-and-truth.org/AM-WholsTheHolySpiritInIslam-Lecture.htm>)

- **An Apostle [Ar. *rasul*] of Allah**

“O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians)! Do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of Allah aught but the truth. The Messiah 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah and His Word, (“Be!” - and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a spirit (Ruh) created by Him; so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not: “Three (trinity)!” Cease! (it is) better for you. For Allah is (the only) One Ilah (God), Glory be to Him (Far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is All Sufficient as a Disposer of affairs.” (Q. 4:171, Moshin Khan cf. Q. 3:49; 4:157; 6:61)

“Christ the son of Mary was no more than a messenger/apostle ('*rasul*): many were the messengers that passed away before him.” (Q. 5:75, Yusuf Ali)

Samuel Zwemer in his book, *The Muslim Christ* observes:

...“we must remember that the highest in rank among the prophets and apostles is said to be Mohammed. He is considered not only the greatest prophet and apostle, but the most excellent of all created things.” (p. 32)

- **A mercy [Ar. *rahma*] from Allah**

“And We wish to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us” (Q. 19:21, Yusuf Ali). Ibn Kathir, comments, (and a mercy from Us,) This means, “We will make this boy a mercy from Allah and a Prophet from among the Prophets. He will call to the worship of Allah and monotheistic belief in Him.” That is to say, that Allah, out of his mercy/compassion sent ‘Isa to guide people to Islam.

- **Message and worthiness of worship:**

The Qur'an claims that Allah will ask Jesus son of Mary if he ever claimed to be worshipped and the answer is no (Q. 5:116). The following verse further elaborates: “Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord; and I was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them; when Thou didst take me up Thou wast the Watcher over them, and Thou art a witness to all things” (Q. 5:117). i.e. ‘Isa is not Lord, nor to be worshipped

- **A prophet or one among the prophets**

Q. 2:61,91,136,213; 3:21,80,81,112,181; 4:69,155,163; 17:55; 33:7; 39:69; et al.

Q. 19:30 puts these words in ‘Isa’s mouth, “He said, “Truly I am a slave of Allah. He has given me the Book [i.e. the *Injil*] and made me a [Ar. singular] prophet.”

'Isa as a prophet [Ar. *nabi*] who came with a book to the people of Israel as it says, "And Allah will teach him ('Isa) the Book and Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel, and (appoint him) as a messenger to the Children of Israel" (Q. 3:48).

"'Isa, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them. And we bow to Allah (in Islam)." (Q. 2:136, Yusuf Ali)

- **Denies the Sonship of Jesus**

"That they ascribe a son (or offspring or children) to the Most Gracious (Allah). But it is not suitable for (the Majesty of) the Most Gracious (Allah) that He should beget a son (or offspring or children). There is none in the heavens and the earth but comes unto the Most Gracious (Allah) as a slave." (Q. 19:88-93)

"Whoever joins other gods with Allah, Allah will forbid him the garden [Paradise] and the Fire will be his abode." (Q. 5:72)

- **A word [Ar. *kalimah*] from Allah**

"....Allah gives you glad tidings of Yahya (John), confirming (believing in) the Word from Allah [i.e. the creation of 'Isa (Jesus), the Word from Allah ("Be!" - and he was!)], noble, keeping away from sexual relations with women, a Prophet, from among the righteous." (Q. 3:39, Moshin Khan, cf. Q. 3:34-39, 40-45; 4:169-171)

Yusuf Ali, commenting on Surah 3.39, says, "Notice: "a Word from God", not "*the* Word of God", the epithet that mystical Christianity uses for Jesus. As stated in iii. 59 below, Jesus was created by a miracle, by God's word "Be", and he was."

(Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, p. 132)

- **The word/statement of truth**

"That is Jesus, the son of Mary - the word of truth [Ar. *qawl al-haqq*] about which they are in dispute." (Q. 19:34, Sahih International)

This translation would imply that Jesus is "the word of truth" but Pickthall renders this as "(this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt." (cf. Shakir and Moshin Khan). It implies that the qur'anic rendition of the life of Jesus is the correct one.

- **Came to confirm the law ('Taurat'/Torah) and to receive the Gospel**

"And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came before him in the Torah; and We gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirming that which preceded it of the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous." (Q. 5:46, Sahih International, cf. 61:6)

- **A 'miraculous' sign [Ar. *ayah*]**

"So (it will be), your Lord said: That is easy for me (Allah): And (We wish) to appoint him as a sign (*ayah*) to mankind and a mercy from Us (Allah), and it is a matter (already) decreed, (by Allah)." (Q 19:18-21). The Muslim Jesus, according to Nasr, is a 'sign' as "he serves as a proof of God's Power as Creator" who created him and Adam simply by divine command. (p.769).

- **Deliverer of the gospel [Ar. *injiil*]**

Allah teaches 'Isa "the Book and the wisdom and the Tavrāt and the Injeel [Ar. *injiil*]." (Q. 3:48, Shakir cf. Q. 57:27 "...gave him the Injiil")

Ibn Kathir expands Q. 3:48 to read: "Almighty Allah also revealed: And He Allah will teach him (Jesus) the Book and Al Hikmah (the Sunna, the faultless speech of the Prophets, wisdom, etc.), (and) the Torah and the Gospel." Note that Kathir includes the 'Sunna' which is the example of the prophet Muhammad

- **Receives wisdom [Ar. *hikmah*] from Allah**

'Isa did not have to learn anything. All his wisdom came from Allah.

"...How I [Allah] taught you [i.e. 'Isa] writing, wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel." (Q. 5:110, cf. 5: 111-117)

- **A submissive one**

'Isa does not do anything in the Qur'an without the permission of Allah (cf. Q. 3:49; 5:110, 113)

- **A miracle worker**

'Isa is said to make clay birds alive and speak from the cradle (Q. 3.49; 5:113)

These stories are from apocryphal gospels which circulated at the time of Muhammad

- **Appeared to be crucified**

'Isa was never crucified.

"...but they killed him [Jesus] not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them the resemblance of Jesus was put over another man (and they killed that man)... For surely; they killed him not... But Allah raised him up (with his body and soul) unto Himself (and he is in the heavens). And Allah is Ever All Powerful, All Wise" (Q. 4:157-158, cf 3:199)

- **Raised to heaven**

"Nay, Allah raised [Ar. *rafa'a*] him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise..." (Q. 4:158, Yusuf Ali). Note, the word *rafa'a* does not mean resurrection. In (Q. 19:57) 'Isa is said to be "raised to a high place" using the same Arabic root word. He is also said to be brought "near [Ar. *min al-muqarrabin*] to Allah" (Q. 3:45). This puts him in his Islamic place!

"During the Meraj (Ascension), I met Hadrat Isa (A.S.) on the second heaven. I found him of medium stature, reddish white. His body was so clean and clear, that it appeared as though he had just performed 'ghusāl' (ablution, cleaning of the entire body) and come."

(Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 8, Number 345)

- **An indicator [Ar. *la'il'mun*] of the Day of Resurrection**

"And he ['Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)] shall be a known sign for (the coming of) the Hour (Day of Resurrection) [i.e. 'Isa's (Jesus) descent on the earth]. Therefore have no doubt concerning it (i.e. the Day of Resurrection). And follow Me (Allah) (i.e. be obedient to Allah and do what He orders you to do, O mankind)! This is the Straight Path (of Islamic Monotheism, leading to Allah and to His Paradise)" (Q. 43:61, Mohsin Khan, cf. 11:102)

According to the *Study Qur'an* "In traditional Islamic eschatology, Jesus' return to earth is among the signs of the end of time" and he will "fight the Antichrist (al-Dajjāl), eventually

die, and be resurrected like other mortals.” (Nasr, Seyyed Hossein; Dagli, Caner K.; Dakake, Maria Massi; Lumbard, Joseph E.B.; Rustom, Mohammed. *The Study Quran* (p. 1201). HarperCollins.)

As well, there is a hadith which says that on Jesus' return he will judge by Islamic laws. Narrated Abu Huraira:

”Allah's Apostle said "How will you be when the son of Mary (i.e. Jesus) descends amongst you and he will judge people by the Law of the Quran and not by the law of Gospel.”

(Sahih Bukhari Volume 4, Book 55, Number 658)

- **A witness [Ar. *shahid*] on resurrection day**

“And there is not one of the followers of the Book but most certainly believes in this before his death, and on the day of resurrection he (Isa) shall be a witness against them.” (Q. 4: 159, Shakir)

Ibn Kathir expands S. 4:159 to read:

"And there is none of the people of the Scripture (Jews & Christians), but must believe in him (Jesus, son of Mary, as only a Messenger of Allah, and a human being, before his (Jesus or a Jew's or a Christian's) death (at the time of the appearance of the angel of death). And on the Day of Resurrection, he (Jesus) will be a witness against them."

What is implied by Kathir's interpretation is that Jesus will witness against Christians who believe that Jesus was divine.

- **Mediator and Intercessor**

The Prophet said, "Allah will gather the believers on the Day of Resurrection in the same way (as they are gathered in this life), and they will say, 'Let us ask someone to intercede for us with our Lord that He may relieve us from this place of ours.' ...They will go to Jesus who will say, 'I am not fit for this undertaking, but you'd better go to Muhammad whose sins of the past and future had been forgiven (by Allah)'

(Sahih Bukhari, Hadith Volume 9, Book 93, Number 507, related by Anas)

- **Return to earth**

His first appearance after ascension---will be at the judgment.

And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): Therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow ye Me: This is a Straight Way. (Q. 43:61, Yusuf Ali)

Jesus (peace be upon him). He will descend (to the earth). When you see him, recognize him: a man of medium height, reddish fair, wearing two light yellow garments,”

(Sunan Abu Dawud Book 37, Number 4310)

On his return, Isa... will live for forty years during which he will marry, have children, and perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage). After his death, he will be buried beside the grave of the Prophet Muhammad (Wali ad-Din, *Miskat Al-Masabih*, (tr. James Robson), Vol.II, p.1159; Sahih Muslim, Vol.1, p.92).

The one eyed antichrist, accompanied by seventy thousand Jews, will be killed by Isa, at the place called Lod. The Jews will be badly defeated. Isa will break the crosses, annihilate swine and will end all wars and *jizya* (poll tax). His position will be like that of a judge. During this period there will be an abundance of all sorts of goods. Muslims will dominate the world and there will be an end of all religions except Islam”

(Mawdudi, A.A, *Finality of Prophethood*, pp. 58-61; also see Sahih Bukhari, Volume 3, Book 34, Number 425).



- **Jesus denies divinity**

At the Day of Judgment, the Muslim Jesus will emphatically *deny* before Allah that he ever claimed divinity (Q. 5:116):

“And when Allah will say: O Isa son of Marium! did you say to men, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah he will say: Glory be to Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say); if I had said it, Thou wouldst indeed have known it; Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I do not know what is in Thy mind, surely Thou art the great Knower of the unseen things.” (Shakir)

Summary

This composite sketch from the Qur’an provides us with the essence of the Muslim Jesus. For yet, a more fully orbed picture of the Muslim Jesus, we would need to consult the Hadiths, the Sira, and Islamic devotional literature.

Conclusion

For all of its superficial honorifics of 'Isa in Islam, one must be very cautious to Christianize him. Seminars like Jesus in the Qur’an read Biblical views into the Qur’an and baptize it as closer to the gospel than it actually is. The data shows that 'Isa of Islam is largely a creation in the mind of Muhammad and his followers, and clearly he is not able to:

1. "save His people from their sins" (Luke 1:30-31)
2. "destroy the works of the devil" (Acts 10:38; 1 John 3:8)
3. "deliver the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power" (I Cor 15:24)
4. reign with his people forever
5. be the substitutionary sacrifice demanded by a Holy God
6. serve as the perfect High Priest
7. act as the head of the Church
8. give the gift of 'adoption as sons' as the Son of God to his Church
9. receive the worship that is due to Him as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16)
10. rise above the prominence of Muhammad, for it is as Samuel Zwemer said, "Mohammed's mission, whatever else it may have been or done, was a blindfolding of Jesus, an eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness by the moon of Mecca."
11. satisfy the deepest needs of humanity, especially that of Muslims.

All in all the caricature of Jesus as embodied in the Muslim 'Isa is not worthy of worship, not worthy of devotion, and not worthy of proclaiming. Even with a few miracles in his pocket and the title of 'Messiah' he is a false Christ (Matt 24:24 and Mark 13:22) and "another Jesus" (2 Cor 11:14). He was simply a tool in the hands of Muhammad to validate his own mission. How much more glorious are Jesus' own words found in the Biblical revelation: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by me." It is only in the Holy Scriptures that one can ask "What do you think of the Christ?" and expect a correct answer.

By Dr. John Span, Sept. 2022