

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM SERIES NO. 2

**Nuzul-I-Isa:  
Tile Second Coming of  
Jesus Christ**

TITLE

**NUZUL-I-ISA: THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST 2**

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### *Nuzul-I-Isa: The Second Coming of Jesus Christ*

It is not every day that one sees a man being lifted from the earth to heaven with the assurance that he will return centuries later to stand on the earth again. Such an event must surely demand the attention of those who profess to believe that it will occur, and all the more so when the world's two greatest religions whose adherents jointly number half of those who dwell on the earth, both make this very profession about the same man. Christianity and Islam both hold to the firm conviction that Jesus Christ, who lived in the land of Israel nearly twenty centuries ago, was raised alive to heaven and will return to earth in the fulness of time. No one can regard such a belief purely as a tenet of each respective faith. The implications are so profound that the subject must be studied further.

It is universally believed, in both the Christian and the Muslim worlds, that Jesus will come again to this world at the end of the age. Although the two religions differ in their estimate of how he shall appear and what he is due to accomplish when he returns, they both unanimously teach that he will return from the heavenly places heralding the climax of human history. It is surely incumbent, therefore, on every Christian and Muslim, to analyse this great anticipated event and to discover the real meaning and purpose of his advent and to simultaneously come to know the true identity and character of the central figure in what will surely be one of the greatest spectacles of history.

We propose to make a brief study of both the Christian and Islamic teachings about the return of Jesus Christ from heaven and will then press on to examine the implications of this great event and the real identity of the one whose advent will interrupt the course of human history and bring it to a speedy conclusion.

### 1. THE RETURN OF JESUS IN THE BIBLE.

One of the great themes of the Christian Scriptures is the return of Jesus to earth at the end of the age. The ultimate glory of the Messiah, God's Supremely Anointed One, was foretold by many of the prophets who went before him and the Jewish Scriptures are replete with predictions about his eternal reign. So likewise early Christian writers dwelt much on this theme. It is our purpose, however, to begin by examining the words of Jesus himself on this subject to see what he, the focal point of this great drama which is yet to unfold, taught and believed about his coming return to earth.

On the last night that he was alive before the end of his natural life on earth, he sat with his disciples and, in a long discourse in which he poured out many of the deepest truths he could convey to them, he spoke much of his eventual return to earth. He said to them:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also".  
*John 14. 2-3*

With these words Jesus introduced a theme that was to recur again and again during his last message to his disciples. "I will come again" was his ultimate promise, one couched in terms calculated to bring comfort and hope to all who truly believe in him. He encouraged those who sat with him with the assurance that he was only going to heaven to make ready a place for them also and that he would duly return so that they could join him in his everlasting kingdom. As he continued with his deep teachings that night he went on to promise:

"I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you Will live also". *John 14. 18-19*

Again the reassuring words came, "I will come to you", this time with the added promise that, just as he would be alive for ever in the kingdom of heaven, so they too would be taken to be with him and would also enjoy eternal life. As his discourse continued he returned yet again to the day when he would return to earth, saying to them:

"A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me". *John 16. 16*

His disciples were perplexed, not understanding what he could possibly mean. Jesus promptly warned them that, as soon as he had gone, they would suffer much persecution and loss and that their lot in this world would be at best uncertain and of no abiding value. Yet to give them a thorough hope and assurance that their trials would be but for a while and that their ultimate destiny was eternal life and glory in the kingdom of God upon his return, he said to them:

"So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you". *John 16.22*

Before his own disciples Jesus set his eventual return to earth as their greatest hope and the ultimate objective of their faith. A promise of eternal rejoicing was placed before them as the great reward they would enjoy by keeping their faith in him until he returned and they duly saw him again.

Jesus himself obviously regarded his ultimate return to earth as the supreme hope of all his true followers. He told them they would suffer much anguish and rejection, many tears and trials, before that day, but exhorted them to endure

them all because of the glory that was to follow at his return. Not only did he make such promises to his disciples, however, but he also warned his enemies that his return would wipe away all their gaiety and confidence and would spell their eternal doom and disgrace. He boldly testified to the Jewish High Priest:

"But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven". *Matthew 26.64*

The predictions he constantly made of his return to earth, therefore, were given as words of comfort to his disciples and as a warning to his foes. The former would be raised to eternal glory in heaven, the latter would be cast down to eternal punishment in hell. He spoke not of returning at some time before the end of the age but, rather, on the Day of Judgment itself and summed up his teaching in these words:

"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, and the goats at the left".  
*Matthew 25. 31-32*

Those at his right hand, he promised, would inherit the kingdom prepared for them from before the foundation of the world, while those at his left would be thrown into the fire prepared for the devil and all his host. The return of Jesus, therefore, in the teaching of Jesus himself as it is recorded in the Bible, will be the great, climactic event of history when he will return to judge the living and the dead, awarding eternal life to those who love and obey him while casting the rest into

outer darkness where they will remain for ever and ever as objects of God's wrath and anger.

Let us now examine the teaching of Islam, as it appears in the Qur'an and the Hadith, regarding the return of Jesus to earth.

## 2. ISLAM AND THE DESCENSION OF JESUS.

It is universally accepted in the world of Islam that Jesus Christ will eventually return to earth. It is generally agreed that he will descend in the Middle East where he will destroy the *Dajjal* (Antichrist), that he will lead the whole world to embrace Islam, that he will marry and have children, and that he will die after forty years and be buried in Medina alongside the tombs of Muhammad, Abu Bakr and Umar. The Qur'anic text invariably referred to in support of the doctrine that Jesus will return to earth towards the end of human history is this one:

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. *Surah 43.61*

The context of this verse does indeed appear to support the interpretation that the ilm (knowledge) of the Hour will be determined by the return of Jesus to earth. The whole passage, from verse 57 to verse 67, centres on Jesus and there can be little doubt that he is the focal point of the sign of the coming Hour of Judgment. Yusuf Ali has the following comment appended to Surah 43.61:

This is understood to refer to the second coming of Jesus in the Last Days just before the Resurrection, when he will destroy the false doctrines that pass under his name, and prepare the way for the universal acceptance of Islam, the Gospel of Unity and Peace, the Straight way of the Qur'an. (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, p.1337).

Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi also has a similar comment on this verse in his translation, saying "The reference is to the second advent of Jesus" (*The Holy Qur'an*, Vol.2, p.493B). Indeed the vast majority of Muslim commentators take Surah 43.61 to be a prophecy of the descension of Jesus to earth, an interpretation sustained for centuries in Muslim writings. The anticipated event has become known as the *nuzul-i-Isa*, the "descension of Jesus".

The Hadith teach unambiguously that Jesus will return towards the end of the world. There are no less than seventy accredited traditions supporting this doctrine and they are regarded as *mutawatir*, "universally attested" traditions of unquestioned reliability. One of these traditions reads:

Abu Huraira reported that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: By Him in Whose hand is my life, the son of Mary (may peace be upon him) will soon descend among you as a just judge. He will break crosses, kill swine and abolish Jizya, and the wealth will pour forth to such an extent that no one will accept it. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.92).

Another tradition states that "spite, mutual hatred and jealousy against one another will certainly disappear" during his reign when returns (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.93) and in yet another tradition we read that Surah 4.159, which teaches that "there is none of the People of the Scriptures (Jews and Christians) but must believe in him before his death", is also a proof that Jesus will return to earth to receive the homage of all to whom the Scriptures have been given (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.4, p.437). Such are the testimonies to the return of Jesus to earth in Islam.

There are obviously key differences between Christian and Muslim beliefs regarding the return of Jesus from heaven but the fact of the event is universally agreed. Christians do not accept that he will come to live again as an ordinary human being on earth, least of all that he will die and be buried. He has been alive in the glory of heaven for nearly two thousand years and we find it very hard to seriously consider the suggestion that he must return to complete a life that was interrupted on earth at the age of thirty-three and live out a further forty years before dying and being buried like any other man. It is our firm belief that he is

already alive for ever more in the glory of the kingdom of God and that an earthly demise at a time yet to come would be an unfortunate anti-climax and a strange anachronism. Nevertheless there are principles in the Muslim beliefs about his earthly reign that Christians can accept as symbolic of his heavenly rule yet to be revealed.

Islam teaches that he will return from heaven, that he will destroy the Antichrist and all his host, that he will lead all true believers into an era of unprecedented bliss and prosperity, that he will rule over all the earth, and that he will establish a universal faith in God during his reign. To the extent that these beliefs can be transferred to a heavenly rule in an eternal kingdom, Christians can agree with Muslims.

### 3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE SECOND COMING.

Islam and Christianity are agreed that Jesus will return from heaven to earth. As said already, such an extraordinary event cannot be catalogued as simply one of the tenets of each respective faith. The implications of this persuasion are so profound that it must be analysed further. The concept of a man returning to earth from the realms of heaven itself, a man who once lived on the earth many centuries ago, begs further scrutiny. The **very uniqueness of the whole event and its climactic** character must surely lead us to conclude that there must be something very special about the one who is at the centre of it all - Jesus Christ. The return of no other prophet is awaited by Christians and Muslims. Indeed, even in their lifetimes, the influence of each prophet of God rarely spread beyond the confines of the prophet's own community and nation, yet it is agreed between Christians and Muslims that Jesus will, on his return, assume control over the whole world. There must be more to him than mere prophethood and his return will surely usher in greater benefits than a boom period in the economies of the nations.

A key to the real meaning of the return of Jesus is found in the expression used by both Yusuf Ali and Maulana Daryabadi in their comments on Surah 43.61. Yusuf Ali speaks of the "second coming of Jesus" and Maulana Daryabadi likewise refers to the "second advent of Jesus". Some years ago, in South Africa, Adam Peerbhai published a booklet entitled *Wadis Text On the Second Coming of Jesus* which canvassed the various traditions referring to the descension of Jesus. The key is in just one word used by all three Muslim authors - the word *second*. Each one speaks of the *second coming* of Jesus, a typical Christian definition of his return and one adopted by Muslim writers without much reflection on its immediate implications.

Christians speak of the *second coming* of Jesus from heaven because they believe that *he came from heaven the first time*. If there is to be a *second coming*, there must have been a *first coming*. This is, to us, the great key behind the return of Jesus to earth. He will come from heaven a *second time* because he came from heaven the *first time*. We believe that he pre-existed and that he was

in the beginning with God before anything was ever created (John 1.1). He came as a spirit into the world directly from heaven and was thus conceived in the womb of a woman without any normal human agency. This belief is to some extent supported by the Qur' an which says of Jesus that he was a *ruhun minhu*, a "spirit from him (i.e. God)", a title applied to no other human being in the book (Surah 4~171). This is just what Christians believe - that Jesus came into the world the first time as a spirit directly from God and this explains why his mother underwent such a unique experience in conceiving him without the agency of a human father.

It is in this expression *second coming*" that we see the first real implication of the outstanding event to come at the end of time. Jesus will come from heaven to earth simply because he came in precisely this manner the first time. We need to peruse some of the statements of Jesus himself which relate to this very subject to see what he said about his *first* coming into the world.

On numerous occasions Jesus declared that he had come down from heaven and in such plain language that it could not be interpreted in any other way than literally. He declared to the Jews:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me". *John 6.38*

In response to this the Jews murmured against him, saying "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven ? (John 6~42). In reply Jesus simply commanded them not to murmur among themselves about matters they did not understand, once again declaring that he had, in fact, come originally from heaven (John 6.51). When even some of his own followers began to murmur at his teaching, he said to them:

"Do you take offence at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" *John 6. 61-62*

Jesus spoke often about the fact that he had originally descended from heaven (John 3.13) and that he would ascend again (John 20.7), "ascending where he was before". It was his plain teaching that he had come down from heaven and that he would return there. Indeed it should not be too hard for Muslims to consider that Jesus had come down from heaven at the beginning. If it is possible for them to believe that he will come from heaven towards the end of the world, it should be equally possible and indeed logical to believe that he came from heaven in the first place.

On another occasion, while Jesus was debating with the Jews, he said to them:

"You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world". *John 8.23*

This was an outstanding statement - "I am from above ... I am not of this world". It is a true maxim that man returns whence he came. We all return to the earth because we come from the earth. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3.19). We are all from below and we therefore go back to the dust. Jesus was from above and he therefore ascended where he, too, was before. This is why he is in heaven now and why he will return from heaven - because he came from heaven in the first place. He could not have put it more plainly or simply than he did when he said:

"I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father". *John 16.28*

We do well to ask why Jesus has been kept alive in heaven for nearly two thousand years when all other men, both small and great, have returned to the dust. David lies buried in Jerusalem and Muhammad likewise lies dead and buried in Medina. Neither lived beyond a normal lifespan. "No one has ascended into heaven", Jesus said while he was still on earth (John 3.13). Why then should this one man be taken up above the clouds, indeed right out of this universe, into the presence of the eternal Father where he has been for nearly two thousand years?

There can only be one rational, logical conclusion. He must likewise have been in heaven for thousands of years before he came into the world. If he has been there for nearly twenty centuries since his ascension it is logical to assume that he had been there for at least a similar period before his first *nuzul*, his first descension into the world. Fortunately, however, we do not have to rely on logical presumptions or speculations for Jesus himself, on a number of occasions, made it plain that he had, in fact, been in the presence of God even before the world was made. When his disciples one day exclaimed to him that even the demons were subject to them in his name, he replied:

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven". *Luke 10. 18-20*

The statement that concerns us is the first one: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven". According to the Bible the fall of Satan took place when he attempted to usurp the throne of God in heaven and make himself like the Most High (Isaiah 14~14). We do not know exactly when this happened but it must have been either before or at the time of creation for he was cast down to become the devil and thus tempted our first parents, Adam and Eve. The Qur' an places the fall of the great *Shaybaun* whom it names *Iblis*, at the beginning of creation, saying that he refused to bow to Adam at God's command (Surah 2. 34), complaining that Adam had only been made of dust whereas he had been made of fire (Surah 7.12). As a result God cast him down and expelled him in disgrace (Surah 7.18). Both the Bible and the Qur' an therefore agree that the fall of Satan took place as far back at least as the very beginning of creation, yet

Jesus declared "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven". It was his way of saying "I was there in heaven, I saw it happen". This could only have been possible if he had in fact been alive in heaven before the creation of the world. Furthermore, in his last great prayer on earth he said:

"And now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made". *John 17.5*

In these words we have a very clear statement by Jesus himself that he had, in fact, shared the glory of the eternal Father in his own presence in heaven before the world was ever made. We thus have clear testimonies by Jesus himself that he was alive in heaven at the very beginning of the world - is it surprising, therefore, that he will return from heaven at the end of the world?

We are now beginning to get a clearer picture of the meaning of the *nazul-i-Isa*, the descension of Jesus to earth from heaven at the climax of history. He stands uniquely above all the prophets of God and men on earth as one who was alive in heaven at the beginning of time and as the only person today who has ascended to heaven where he has been for almost two thousand years. We will obtain further insight into his real identity and the purpose of his return to earth if we spend a little time considering how he will be recognised when he comes.

#### 4. HOW JESUS WILL BE IDENTIFIED ON HIS RETURN.

If we were to turn on a television set one night to find satellite coverage from Damascus showing a large crowd gathered excitedly around a man claiming to be Jesus returned to earth, how would we know whether it was really him or not? If, upon being interviewed, he said "I am Isa. I returned from heaven yesterday. No one saw me, but here I am", how could you be sure it was him?

Islam has not been unaware of the possible difficulties in identifying Jesus when he returns if he is to come purely as an ordinary man of flesh and blood. A superstition has arisen that a bone will be missing in one of his fingers. This is a typical myth, but it does show the consciousness of a required means to positively identify Jesus. Even in the Hadith there is a saying attributed to Muhammad which tells how to identify him. Muhammad is recorded as saying:

There is no prophet between me and him, that is Jesus (peace be upon him). He will descend (to the earth). When you see him, recognise him: a man of medium height, reddish hair, wearing two light yellow garments, looking as if drops were falling down from his head though it will not be wet. (*Sunan Abe Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1203).

The need to identify him positively has also led to speculation as to where he will descend on earth. Some say he will land on the Ka aba in Mecca, others that he will land on the eastern minaret of the great Umayyad mosque in Damascus which is accordingly known as the *Isaya Minarah*. Maulana Syed M.B. Alam, on

the cover of his book *Nuzut-e-Esa: Descension of Jesus Christ*, has a drawing of the Dome of the Rock with ladders alongside it. We take the picture to mean that Jesus will return by landing on top of the Dome of the Rock and that others will help him to the ground on a ladder. It seems absurd to consider that, after crossing the vast expanse of the universe on his way from heaven to earth, he will need a ladder to help him down the last thirty feet of his descent!

It is perhaps in this seeming absurdity that we see the weakness of all Muslim theories about his descent, all of which are based on the assumption that he will return as nothing more than an ordinary man of flesh and blood to rule the earth. On the other hand, a Muslim friend once said to me, "I believe Jesus will return from heaven shining like a light". I said, "What makes you say that? This is Christian belief". He replied, "Look where he is coming from. You cannot come from heaven looking like this" he said, pointing to himself. It takes an enlightened mind to draw what should be such an obvious conclusion.

He hit the nail on the head. The issue is not whether Jesus will return to Damascus, Jerusalem or Mecca, the issue is where he is coming *from*. He is *coming from heaven*. When he came the first time he assumed flesh and blood on earth and became a man but, having ascended to heaven, it is grossly unlikely that he will return as a man of nothing more than flesh and blood. His human nature must have undergone a transformation to enter the realm of the kingdom of heaven - is it not far more likely that he will return in heavenly splendour?

Jesus himself described how he will return to earth at the end of time. He told his disciples:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other". *Matthew 24. 29-31*

In these words we have a far clearer picture of how Jesus will return. The sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its light, the stars of the sky will fall, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and *then*, in their place, a new brightness will appear. The whole earth will **see Jesus** appear in a cloud with heavenly power and glory as he calls out all those who are his own. The contrast between the present order and the new order he will bring in is finely described in this passage. The glory, brightness and power of the present order will recede before the revelation of his majesty and power when he returns from heaven.

On a dark night a car with bright headlights can almost blind another driver's vision but, if that same car should drive down the road in the middle of a sunny day, the same driver will hardly be troubled if its bright lights are on. A candle in a dark room is very conspicuous, but on a sunny day it may not even be noticed.

The greater light makes the lesser fade and, as it were, be darkened. The sun is the one supreme source of light in the sky - before it all other lights fade into insignificance. No one can look directly into it without his eyes being blinded.

The point Jesus was making was this: when *he* appears in heaven even the sun will cast a shadow and be darkened. Before his glory not only the sun but all the stars will fade and recede. All the energies and powers in the universe will be shaken. His light will be so splendid that even the sun's light will not compare with it. When the Apostle Paul had his great vision of the glory of Jesus on the way to Damascus he said that he saw "a light from heaven, *brighter than the sun*, shining round me and those who journeyed with me" (Acts 26.13). The Apostle John likewise had a vision of Jesus in heaven after his ascension and testified that "his face was like the sun shining in full strength (Revelation 1.16).

In Jesus' own words, therefore, we get a very clear picture of how he will be recognized when he returns to earth. *No one will fade to recognise him*. He will not descend on to a mountain or minaret in a body of ordinary flesh and blood. He will be revealed from heaven in all his glory and power and his splendour will be the one dominating spectacle in that moment over all the earth, just as the sun to a lesser extent is the sole supreme light of our present skies. All the nations of earth will see Jesus as he returns from heaven in the glory of his Father, and all those who have not followed him will be in great torment when he appears.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so, Amen. *Revelation 1. 7*

## 5. THE PRESENT STATUS OF JESUS IN HEAVEN

It is not every day that men are raptured to heaven. Jesus was only taken up to heaven because he had come from there in the first place. We have also seen that he will return, not as an ordinary man of flesh and blood, but as a glorious, heavenly man shining with glory and power. We must therefore ask, what is his present status in heaven?

According to the Bible the angels of heaven number "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" (Revelation 5.11) and the glory of any one of these angels is such that, if he was to appear to any man in all his splendour, he would blind the man's eyes (Genesis 19.11). Their power is also beyond human comprehension. Just one angel has the power to destroy a whole city (2 Samuel 24.16) or a whole human army of up to two hundred thousand soldiers (2 Kings 19.35). Yet even the angels bow before the throne of God in awe and great reverence. The glory of all God's holy angels does not even begin to compare with his surpassing splendour.

The great prophet Daniel one day had a vision of God's glory and the angels of God before his throne and described what he saw in these words:

"As I looked, thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat; his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened". *Daniel 7. 9-10*

When Isaiah the prophet had a similar vision of the glory of God and his angels before his throne he trembled in fear and bemoaned his human weakness and uncleanness before the sight (Isaiah 6. 1-5). Daniel likewise must have felt right out of place as he beheld such glory and considered himself unworthy to be there. Yet, as he gazed at the courts of heaven he saw an amazing thing happen:

"Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one which shall not be destroyed". *Daniel 7. 13-14*

He went on to say, my spirit within me was anxious and the visions of my head alarmed me" (Daniel 7.15). Well might he have been perplexed and bewildered. "One like a son of man" means one just like himself, a man of ordinary flesh and blood. He seemed to be so out of place, and yet, instead of trying to hide from the glory of heaven, he was brought on a cloud and set before the throne of God, and to him was given all the authority of heaven and earth that all the nations of earth and the angels of heaven should bow down before him. Daniel saw a vision of Jesus Christ in heaven He lived before the first coming of Jesus into the world when he came as an ordinary man of flesh and blood and in that form Daniel saw him. Yet, as he beheld him, he realised that, notwithstanding his human nature, he was to become the eventual ruler of the whole universe.

When Jesus was on earth his disciples saw him as an ordinary man like themselves. He was so obviously human that to this day hundreds of millions of men cannot believe that he was anything more than a man. One day, however, he took three of his disciples up a mountain and suddenly he was transfigured before them.

His face shone like the sun, and his garment became white as light. *Matthew 17.2*

For a brief moment his disciples saw something of his real glory which, during the rest of his earthly life, was veiled within his body of flesh and blood. When he ascended to heaven he returned to the realm where he had always enjoyed that splendour and glory. Is it logical to believe that he is there today as just an ordinary man, the only one to ascend to heaven, feeling somewhat lost and out of place among millions of angels clothed in heavenly glory before the splendour of God's throne? In Daniel's vision we saw this man brought before the

throne itself and the authority of all the universe bestowed on him. What Daniel saw was a vision of the ascent of Jesus to heaven after his first coming when he returned in an ordinary human body.

Some time after the ascent of Jesus to heaven his disciple John had a similar vision of Jesus in heaven, only this time it was different. Daniel saw Jesus as he was to be on his return to heaven after his first coming to earth in flesh and blood - John saw him as he will be at his second coming when he will return in all his heavenly glory. He described his vision thus:

"I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle around his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength". *Revelation 1. 12-16*

Like Daniel John also saw one like a son of man", one just like himself, but whereas Daniel saw him presented to him who sits upon the throne of heaven, John saw him as the one seated upon the throne! Daniel saw the Son of man presented to the Ancient of Days", God himself, whose "raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool (Daniel 7.9), but John saw the Son of man himself upon the throne of God and *he* was "clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle around his breast" (Revelation 1.13) and "*his* head and *his* hair were white as white wool, white as snow" (Revelation 1.14). John did not see the Son of man as a lone human figure out of place among myriads of angels, he saw Daniel's vision fulfilled and the Son of man seated on the throne of God ruling over the whole universe. Another early disciple of Jesus named Stephen had a similar vision as he was about to become the first Christian martyr. He cried out:

"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God". *Acts 7. 56*

Jesus himself went on to testify to John as he fell before his glory, saying "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1. 17-18), and, after giving him many instructions for his followers in the form of seven letters to the seven churches throughout Asia Minor, he concluded by saying:

"He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne". *Revelation 3.21*

We have already seen that the Qur'an teaches that, at the creation of Adam, all the angels of God were commanded to bow down before him (Surah 20.116). It is hard to understand why such heavenly creatures should be required to bow

to a man of flesh and blood who came from the dust for a season, only to return to it. Yet it is not hard to understand why the angels of God should bow before the Son of man who sits on the throne of God in all heavenly splendour, ruling over the whole universe, angels and nations put together. It is also no wonder that the Bible says of Jesus, "Let all God's angels worship *him*" (Hebrews 1.6), he who has become "as much superior to angels" (Hebrews 1.4) because he has been crowned the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19.16).

There are nearly five billion people today alive on earth and billions of others have been buried in the earth, prophets, saints and all who have lived on the earth, small and great alike. But right now one man is alive in heaven where he ascended and from whence he will return. He has been there nearly two thousand years, whereas few other men live much beyond a hundred years. It is surely absurd to believe that he is, to this day, nothing more than an ordinary human being. No, he sits on the throne of heaven in all his glory "with angels authorities and powers subject to him" (1 Peter 3.22) and he will return in that same splendour to take control of all the earth until all things are subjected to his universal authority. "For God has put all things under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15.27).

We must conclude by recognising that Jesus is alive in heaven today because he came from heaven the first time, that he is not just an ordinary man but the Ruler of all the universe who will return at the end of time in all his splendour. This makes it essential that we enquire why he ever came into the world the first time and why he ever assumed human flesh. He lived in heaven for centuries before coming to earth for thirty-three years and has been alive in heaven for centuries ever since. The real question is not why Jesus ascended to heaven, the real question is why he ever came into the world in the first place.

## 6. THE PURPOSE OF HIS FIRST COMING TO EARTH.

There must have been a very special purpose for the coming of Jesus into the world if he came from heaven and returned there when his earthly course was over. He could not have been just a prophet for God had called many ordinary men out to be prophets and they had died at the end of their ministries and returned to the dust whence they had come. If Jesus came from heaven and returned there he must have come for a greater purpose.

There are, in the context of all that we have thusfar considered, two basic reasons for the coming of Jesus into the world. The first is that *he came to bridge the gap between heaven and earth*, between the God of holiness and sinful men. There is a very common phrase in the Qur'an - "To Allah is all that is in the heavens and in the earth" (Surah 2.284). Constantly the Qur'an distinguishes between the *samoawaat*, the heavens", and the *ardth*, the "earth", and in the Bible too we find, in the very first verse of the book, the same distinction: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1.1).

No matter how long men live on earth none ultimately ascend to heaven. Of no man can it be said "he lived happily ever after". On the contrary, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that disaster comes to one and all. We all return to the dust when we die and come to nothing. As Jesus said, "No one has ascended into heaven" (John 3.13). There is an unbridgeable gap between heaven and earth, between God and men, and no man from the earth is able to bridge it. "God is in heaven and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5.2), is an exhortation that likewise bears out the distinction between the realms of God and men. The reason for this chasm between heaven and earth is plainly set out in this passage:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear. *Isaiah 59. 1-2*

There is a great gulf between sinful men on earth and the holy God of heaven who dwells in unapproachable light with his holy angels. Sin has destroyed the capacity in man to rise by nature above the realm of the world in which he was made. He is, by nature, nothing more than mortal flesh and blood and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15.50). Jesus Christ, who from all eternity was in the presence of his holy Father and his angels in the kingdom of heaven, descended to the earth and was born in human form to bridge the gap between heaven and earth. He did this by *bringing something of heaven into the world* - he brought his very own self. He became a human being in every way and lived on earth as a normal man, but the spirit within him was a divine spirit which had come down from heaven.

He not only closed the gap between heaven and earth but bridged the gap the other way as well. When he came into the earth he came, as the Qur'an rightly puts it as a *ruhun minhu* - a *spirit* from him (i.e. God). But when he returned to heaven he returned as an *insaun*, a human being. His divine spirit returned to its heavenly abode but he took something of earth to heaven with him - he took the human nature he had assumed when he first came into the world. He came then purely as a spirit, but he returned as a man, as a human being. He thus fully bridged the gap between heaven and earth. His living presence in the kingdom of heaven as a human being is our pledge and assurance that we too, though mortal men of flesh and blood, can one day be in heaven with him in eternal glory and bliss.

The second, and the greatest reason for the first coming of Jesus into the world, was *to become Like us in every respect so that he might save us from our sins*. Because we are only flesh and blood, "he himself likewise partook of the same nature (Hebrews 2.14) so that he might deliver us from the power of Satan and redeem us to God. From his heavenly throne he saw all men under the power of the evil one, enslaved to sin, and unable to overcome death. He saw the need of a mediator between men and God so that they might be saved from their

sins and, to compensate for our guilt and sinfulness, he became a human being just like us so that, through the cross, he might endure the consequences of our sins in our place and make it possible for us to rise from earth to heaven and become partakers of the divine nature by receiving the Spirit of God (2 Peter 1.4), just as he had, in turn, descended from heaven to earth to become a partaker of our human nature by assuming a body of flesh and blood.

Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. *Hebrews 2.17*

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, so complacently overlooked in Islam as an unsuccessful plot of the Jews, alone explains why Jesus came from heaven the first time and why he will return again. He came not to be a mere prophet, he came as God's chosen Deliverer and Redeemer to save millions of men and women by dying for them on the cross of Calvary, where he endured what was due to all of them for their sins, so that they might receive the hope of eternal life by following him as their Lord and Saviour.

He did not come like the Superman of the American comics, a man who can fly through the skies at his own discretion and from whose body bullets simply bounce off. He came like us in every respect and at no time did he use his divine powers to give himself any advantage over us. He came as a normal human being and he suffered, died and was buried so that he might bridge the gap between heaven and earth completely - not only between God and men but to the very extreme of sinful man's separation from the Lord of heaven - between God and sinful men who lie hopelessly dead and buried in the dust of the earth.

Islam teaches that Jesus will return to earth because he did not finish his ministry as it likewise teaches that Jesus was raised to heaven without being crucified. It is no wonder that it teaches that Jesus did not accomplish his mission.-It makes the life of Jesus on earth end just six hours before Christianity does, yet in those six hours that Jesus spent on the cross the whole purpose of his coming to earth was indeed fulfilled. In his last great prayer the night before he died he said:

"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do". *John 17.4*

In triumph he could boldly claim that he had indeed *accomplished* the work he had been given to do. As he began to breathe his last on the cross, knowing that he had fully satisfied God's wrath against sin and that he had just **accomplished the greatest work ever to be done by a man on earth, he cried out in triumph, "It is finished"** (John 19.30). The original Greek text has **only one word to describe this exclamation and it can, perhaps, more** accurately be translated simply thus: *"Accomplished!"*. He had descended from heaven to earth, had become an ordinary man and was now at the point of death and about to be placed in a tomb. But this was no moment of defeat for him. It was all victory, the

fulfillment and accomplishment of all that he had been sent to achieve to bring men back to God. It is against this background alone that we can conclude our study and discover why Jesus will return at the end of time and what he is destined to do for those who love him as their supreme Lord and Master.

## 7. WHEN THE LORD JESUS IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN.

Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven whence he is to return. We have already seen that he came into the world to make himself like us in every way so that he might save us from our sins. What, then, is the supreme purpose of his second coming? It is just this - that *he might make those who believe in him dust Like himself*. The first time he was manifested in human flesh, the second time he will be revealed in all his heavenly glory and the whole earth will see him as he really is. Then those who have followed him will likewise be transformed into his image to be made just like himself. One of his disciples could confidently write to his Christian brethren:

Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.  
*1 John 3.2*

He will return shining with all the brightness of his heavenly glory, and then those who are his will be transformed into the same image and share his glory. After declaring that all sinners and evildoers will be cast into the fire on the Day of Judgment Jesus said: "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father' (Matthew 13~43). Those who have died in ordinary human bodies, who nevertheless followed him as their Lord and Saviour will, on that glorious Day, be raised from the dead and taken up to be with him in heavenly glory for all eternity. Their present bodies are perishable, but they will be raised imperishable. They are mortal now, but then they will be raised immortal. They share now the ordinary human body of flesh that Adam, their first father, shared, but on that Day they will inherit the same resplendent, heavenly body of spirit and life that Jesus Christ, their eternal Saviour and Lord, already shares.

As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. *1 Corinthians 15. 48-49*

The great Christian hope is to be raised from the dead to eternal life on that Day just as Jesus himself was raised from the dead. This was the supreme purpose of his coming into the world, not just to teach, preach and heal as if he were an ordinary prophet, but to give effect to the ultimate hope of all mankind - the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. No earthly prophet could bring such a thing about - only the Lord of Glory from heaven could do so.

When Jesus heard one day that his friend Lazarus was ill in Bethany, instead of going down to heal him, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was

(about a hundred kilometres away) and deliberately let him die (John 11.6). As soon as he suggested to his disciples that they should go down to Judea again, where Lazarus **had been buried**, they were appalled at the suggestion, exclaiming "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" (John 11.8). Their immediate fear was that he was going there only to die. But when Jesus insisted, Thomas said to his **fellow disciples**, "**Let us also go, that we may die with him**" (John 11.16). The spectra of death hung over the whole scene. Even when Jesus got to Bethany and found that Lazarus had been dead four days already, the two sisters of the dead man both said to him "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11. 21, 32), and some of the Jews, weeping in consolation with them, said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying"? (John 11. 37). The pall of death hung like a cloud over the scene.

The attitude of all of them was the same - if only Jesus had been there, in the right place at the right time, he could have healed Lazarus while he was still alive. But now that he was dead, what could Jesus do? The seemingly irreversible shadow of death hung over the whole place and Jesus appeared to have arrived too late to do anything.

The recent Superman film which did the rounds showed an incident where a huge truck was leaning over a bridge. Superman was called for and he flew through the sky in his fancy costume to lift it up with his great power. Before he arrived, however, the truck toppled into the river below. When Superman finally got there he was told "It is too late now and, despite his powers, there was nothing he could do.

Jesus wore no fancy costume. He did not come with power to fly through the skies, nor did he have superhuman powers to lift heavy objects. He was made just like us, but he had come for one supreme purpose and, as he arrived at the tomb of Lazarus, he did not stand by impotently as Superman was obliged to do. He challenged Martha, one of the dead man's sisters, saying, "Your brother will rise again (John 11.23). When she replied that she knew her brother would be raised on the Last Day, that he would be raised by a God who was far off on a day that seemed extremely remote, Jesus made a declaration that sounded forth with all the authority of heaven and breathed newness of life into an apparently hopeless situation. He said to her:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" *John 11. 25-26*

In the midst of the deathly atmosphere that prevailed over the scene came a glorious exclamation from one who in their very presence was not just a healing prophet but the very source of the resurrection and eternal life that will be given to all that believe in him and follow him. As a sign of the supreme purpose for which he had come to earth, he thereupon raised Lazarus from the dead and gave him back to his sisters. In that environment of death and despair - the destiny of all

men sooner or later - Jesus Christ, there and then the Resurrection and the Life himself, demonstrated the real purpose of his first coming.

Shortly after this great miracle he himself rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. Those who believe in him are now reaching out to one who has already conquered death, and who is even now alive in heaven for evermore. He alone is the world's hope of the resurrection and eternal life in the age to come.

The Qur'an often speaks of God as he who "bringeth the dead to life" (Surah 2.73). There are more than twenty passages which speak of God's power to raise the dead to life, to give *haya* to the *mayyitun* (e.g. Surah 10.31). Yet in one verse we read that Jesus said: "I give life to the dead by God's permission" (Surah 3.49) and in another verse God himself speaks of Jesus' power to raise the dead by his leave (Surah 5.113). Apart from these verses which attribute to Jesus the power to give life to the dead there is no other passage attributing to any other prophet or man the same power. In the Qur'an itself, therefore, we find that *God's power to raise the dead has been given to Jesus alone*. Here is a clear confirmation of the fact that Jesus did not come into the world purely as a prophet to preach and teach.

Jesus came the first time to conquer sin and rise from the dead in triumph, thus securing for his followers the assured hope of the resurrection at the Last Day. Jesus will return on that Day to raise all his own from the dead, to give them the fulness of eternal life, and to make them just like himself in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the supreme meaning and purpose of the *nazul-i-Isa*, the second coming of Jesus.

Instead of limiting him to the status of ordinary prophethood along with other mortal men, will you not put your faith in him as the appointed Lord of heaven and earth and be raised to eternal life on that Day "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven" (2 Thessalonians 1.7) to be glorified in all his saints? Or will you rather "shrink from him in shame at his coming" (1 John 2.28)? Will you not commit your life to the only man who has conquered death, who alone dwells in heavenly glory above billions of men on earth, both dead and living, and who alone will return to earth shining in all his heavenly majesty to award the crown of life to all who love him and remain faithful to him even unto death itself? Will you not bow to him as your Lord and Saviour and be saved by his grace?

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