

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM SERIES NO. 3

**Al-Masihu-Isa:
The Glory of
Jesus The Messiah**

TITLE

THE GLORY AND MAJESTY OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

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Al-Masih-Isa: The Glory of Jesus The Messiah

Who was Jesus of Nazareth? Was he the Lord and Saviour of all men as Christians believe? Was he just a prophet as Islam teaches? Was he an impostor as the leading Jews of his time claimed? (Matthew 27.63). Who really was this man Jesus?

There are few people in history who have demanded the attention of the world as Jesus has and few popular figures have been debated about as much as he has been. Indeed, right from the beginning, during the early days of his ministry, there was much discussion about him among the Jews, some approving of his good works with others claiming he was leading the people astray (John 7.12). The disputes continued right through his ministry

One day, when Jesus was retiring with his disciples to the district of Caesarea Philippi to the north of the Sea of Galilee, he asked them:

"Who do men say that I am?" *Mark 8.27*

They answered that some said he was John the Baptist, raised from the dead, while others claimed that he was Elijah and yet others that he was one of the prophets. The general consensus of opinion was that he was a prophet. John the Baptist is mentioned as a prophet in the Qur' an under the name *Yabya* (Surah 3.39) and Elijah is likewise named as one of the prophets under the name *Ityas* (Surah 37.123). The Jews concluded that Jesus was one of the prophets - which one, they were not sure -but nonetheless a prophet, no more, no less. So likewise Islam today regards Jesus (*Isa* in the Qur'an, Surah 3. 45) as a mighty prophet of God, but nevertheless as no more than a prophet.

After his disciples had told him that the Jews all appeared to agree that he was one of the prophets, he turned to them and said, "But who do you say that I am"? (Mark 8.29). One of them, Simon Peter, answered him:

'you are the Messiah". *Mark 8.29*

Peter's reply was, "the people may say that you are only a prophet, but I say you are far more than a prophet - you are the Messiah" (In most English translations the original Creek word *Christos* is usually translated "Christ", but as the Greek word itself is a translation of the Hebrew *Mashiah*, we shall always use the word "Messiah" in this booklet). The Jews had long believed that their Messiah was coming into the world and it was universally believed that he would

be far more than a prophet. Peter's exclamation was clearly intended to be in contrast with the opinion of the masses. They were prepared to accept Jesus as a prophet but he was willing to go much further and declared Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah.

The Jews cherished the hope that their Messiah would be a political leader who would free the nation from the Romans and set them up as the greatest nation on earth in a timeless reign of unparalleled prosperity. As Jesus regularly resisted their attempts to set him up as the King of the Jews (John 6.15) and spoke to them of their own need to repent and humble themselves before God, they turned away from him. The whole Christian world throughout the centuries, however, has openly declared Jesus to be the true Messiah and has also accepted him as far more than a prophet, indeed as the very Lord and Saviour of all mankind (Titus 2.13).

1. AL-MASIH: THE MESSIAH IN THE QUR'AN.

Islam, on the contrary, only accepts Jesus as a prophet like all the other prophets. In one passage he is joined with Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Moses

as simply one of the prophets (*an-nabiggin*) between whom no distinction of any kind is made (Surah 2.136). In another verse he is said to have been no more than a servant (*aid* - Surah 43~59) and in yet another as nothing more than a messenger (*rasul* - Surah 5.78). One would therefore expect to find the Qur'an denying that Jesus was the Messiah, especially as the Jews and Christians have always regarded the title as signifying more than prophethood and as Peter's testimony that Jesus was indeed the Messiah was intended to be in contrast with the opinion of the Jews that he was only one of the prophets sent by God.

It comes as a surprise, therefore, to find that the Qur'an openly admits that Jesus was the Messiah. He is often called in the Qur'an *al-Masih Isa* - "the Messiah Jesus" (Surah 4.157, 171). The title *al-Masih* ("the Messiah") sometimes appears by itself (Surah 4.172) and on other occasions he is called *al-Masihubnu Maryam* ("the Messiah, son of Mary - Surah 9~31), but on each of the eleven occasions where it appears the title *al-Masih* - the Messiah - is applied specifically to Jesus alone. The Qur'an even goes so far as to say that right in the beginning, when the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary, he deliberately stated that the name of her son was to be *al-Masih Isa* (Surah 3.45). Islam thus joins Christianity in declaring Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah promised to the Jews through the prophets of old.

Nevertheless, as said before, the Qur'an's acknowledgement that Jesus was indeed the Messiah comes as a surprise, for it denies that Jesus was anything more than a prophet, whereas the promises of God about the coming Messiah had made it plain that he would be far greater than a prophet. The Christian confession that Jesus is the Lord and Saviour of all men is thus consistent with

the teachings of the former prophets that the coming Messiah would be the supreme man of history, far above all the prophets (2 Samuel 7. 12-14) The Qur'an, on the other hand, declares *Maat-Masih* *anu Maryama illa rasul* - "the Messiah, son of Mary, was no more than an apostle" - like the other apostles who had passed away before him (Surah 5.78). Why, then, does the Qur'an also acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah if it denies that he was anything more than a prophet?

It is significant to discover that, while the Qur'an unreservedly applies the title *al-Masih* to Jesus, it attempts no explanation of it. This is all the more surprising in view of the Jewish and Christian belief that the title is reserved to the specially-chosen one of God, one man alone who stands above all other men, prophets and apostles included. The declaration that the Messiah was only an apostle appears to be self-contradictory and the Qur'an's complete silence on the meaning of the title hardly serves to avoid this conclusion.

The Qur'an's suggestion that Jesus was only a prophet is not only clearly compromised by its own admission that he was indeed the Messiah, but the issue is intensified even further by the fact that it calls Jesus, without exception in every case where the title appears, *al-Masih* - *the* Messiah. The definite article positively distinguishes him from all the other prophets. Not only is no other prophet in the Qur'an called Messiah, but by describing Jesus as *the* Messiah, the Qur'an declares that the application of this title to anyone else would be quite inappropriate.

Not only does the Qur'an attempt no explanation of the meaning of this title but even great scholars in Muslim history like Zamakhshari and Baidawi admitted that it was not an original Arabic word. The average Muslim will be hard-pressed to venture a plausible explanation of this supreme title given to Jesus, *al-Masih*, based on the use of the word in the Qur'an, and consistent with the claim that he was in no way different to the other prophets who went before him. It is therefore quite clear that we shall have to turn to the Bible if we are to find the true meaning of the title.

2. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF THE MESSIAH

The common word used for Messiah in the Christian Scriptures, in the original Greek texts, is *ho Christos*, Twice it is said to be a translation of the word *Messias* (John 1.41, 4.25) and, as in the Qur'an, no attempt is made to define or explain the meaning of the title. Nevertheless, just as the Qur'an uses the definite article *at* to apply the title to Jesus alone, so in the Christian Scriptures he is constantly called *ho* Christos, that is, *the* Messiah.

Throughout our scriptures the title is set forth as applying to God's supreme Deliverer who was eagerly awaited by the Jews. It is therefore to the Jewish Scriptures that we must turn to find its real meaning. In many places in the original Hebrew texts we find the word *mashiah*, meaning 'anointed' · It is applied

to the anointed high priest in Israel (Leviticus 4.3)- as well as the nation's king (2 Samuel 1.14). It is also given to the prophets of God (Psalm 105~15) as well as to the Persian king Cyrus who was anointed by God to prepare the way for the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and its Temple after its destruction by a previous king, Nebuchadnezzar (Isaiah 45.1). The prophet Daniel, however, predicted that after the rebuilding of Jerusalem, a period of time would pass "hereafter a *Mashiah*, an "Anointed One", would come (Daniel 9~25). This use of the word as a title for the coming Prince of God led the Jews to speak freely of him as *ha Mashiah* - "the Messiah".

The prophets of old spoke regularly of this great personality who God promised would come to the nation. The great prophet Isaiah spoke of him in these words:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. **And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.** And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. *Isaiah 11. 1-5*

The prophet went on to say of him: "In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11.10). The prophecy clearly could not be applied to any of the prophets who were appearing at times among the people. It spoke of one man alone who would rule the whole earth and who, by the breath of his mouth alone, would slay the wicked. In another passage of the same prophecy we read that God himself said of this coming Ruler:

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations". *Isaiah 42.1*

One after the other the prophets of Israel foretold the coming of this supreme representative of God on earth who would bring the justice of God to the whole world and rule over it. Through another prophet God also spoke of the coming Anointed One and described his glory in these words:

"Behold the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall grow up in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule upon his throne". *Zechariah 6. 12-13.*

The Jews began to realize that, whereas prophets arose at fairly regular intervals to declare the will of God, one great figure was to follow them all who would be far above all the prophets of God in honour and majesty. This supreme

ruler was destined to be God's own chosen representative who would establish his kingdom and rule upon his throne. Through yet another prophet God foretold where he would be born:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. *Micah 5.2*

As the predictions increased, so the outstanding features of the coming chosen one of God became more apparent. In this prophecy it was plainly stated that the coming ruler, although yet to be born, had in fact existed in the heavens from the beginning of time. Daniel the prophet gave a climactic review of his coming glory and authority when he described a vision he had seen during his time of exile in Babylon:

"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 that shall not be destroyed". *Daniel 7. 13-14.*

It was little wonder that the Jews concluded that the Ruler of God's own kingdom, whose origin was from of old, and whose dominion would last for ever, was to be far greater than a prophet. When Daniel spoke of him as God's Anointed One' (Daniel 9~25), the title *Mashiah* stuck and became **the common title** to describe him. "The Messiah" became their long-awaited Ruler and Deliverer

We therefore see that the title "Messiah" clearly means, not just a prophet among many prophets, but God's supremely Anointed One, whose origin was from of old and whose rule over the whole universe would last forever. It was an apocalyptic figure they awaited, the climax of God's revelations to the world. *Ha Mashiah* he was called - *the* one and only supremely anointed, chosen one of God to rule over all his dominions.

This brief survey of the real meaning of the title *al-Masih*, that is, "the Supremely Anointed One", shows how inappropriate the Qur'anic statement *Maal-Masihunu Maryama illa rasul* - "*the* Messiah, son of Mary, was no more than an apostle" (Surah 5.78) - really is. The whole meaning of the title *al-Masih*, as considered in its original Hebrew context, totally negates the suggestion that the one bearing this title was, after all, only an apostle like others who had-gone before him. One can only presume that Muhammad did not know the meaning of the title *al-Masih* and, hearing it freely applied to Jesus by the Christians, unquestioningly adopted it without realising that it completely undermined his belief that Jesus was only one of a long line of prophets.

3. THE MESSIANIC HOPES OF THE JEWS.

We have only considered a few of the predictions of the coming Messiah, yet these are sufficient to show that the Jews had every good reason to believe that he would be a majestic figure, far greater than any of the prophets who went before him.

At the time Jesus was born the Jews were eagerly awaiting their coming Messiah. They had been ruled for centuries by a succession of foreign, Gentile powers. Both the Persians and the Greeks had had their turn and, about sixty years before the birth of Jesus, the Romans conquered Judea and assumed control of the province. The Jews strongly resented this succession of foreign rulers and longed for their coming Messiah. They believed that, as they were the physical descendants of Abraham through his promised son Isaac, they enjoyed the special favour of God over all other nations. Accordingly, when they heard that *Hashish* was coming, they presumed that the prophecies about his eternal reign over the kingdom of God would be immediately fulfilled in the establishment of the Jewish race as the greatest nation on earth with all other nations subject to it. They believed the Messiah would be a climactic figure who would bring in God's eternal rule on earth.

A brief survey of some of their expectations about the coming Messiah, as expressed in their utterances recorded in the Gospel of John, one of the records of the life of Jesus in the Bible, give us some idea of the kind of Messiah they were awaiting. On one occasion, when Jesus told them that the Son of man would be "lifted up" (John 12.32, cf. John 8.28), a prediction of the manner of his death to follow a few days later by crucifixion (John 12.33), the Jews answered him:

"We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" *John 12.34*

They recalled the prophecies of their former prophets which foretold the eternal reign of the Messiah. They could not understand how Jesus could speak of the "lifting up" of the Messiah, the Son of man, to die. On another occasion they recalled the prophecy of the prophet Micah that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Although Micah did not describe the ruler he spoke of as the Messiah, yet by his mention of the fact that he had existed long before the world was made, they realised that he spoke plainly, not of an ordinary prophet to arise among men, but of the Messiah whose goings forth were from everlasting days and whose reign would last for ever. The prophecy clearly applied to the one great supremely anointed Ruler and Deliverer to come. When some of the Jews said of Jesus, This is the Messiah" (John 7.41), others recalled this prophecy about the place of his birth and said:

"Is the Messiah to come from Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" *John 7. 41-42*

Because Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, they presumed he could not be the Messiah. It appears that they were unaware that he had, in fact, been born in Bethlehem in perfect fulfillment of Hicah's prophecy that he would come from this small Judean village (Luke 2. 4-7). On yet another occasion, when some of the people questioned whether, perhaps, Jesus really was the Messiah, they said to themselves:

'Yet we know where this man comes from; and when the Messiah appears, no one will know where he comes from". *John 7.27*

The outstanding predictions of the coming Messiah, especially those which made it plain that he had already existed right through the ages and would come from heaven, made the Jews speculate that no one would really know whence he had come. In reply Jesus told them plainly that they really did not know where he had come from (John 7.28) and on other occasions bluntly told them that he had, in fact, come down directly from heaven (John 6.38, 6.51).

The question whether Jesus really fulfilled the prophecies of the coming Messiah does not really concern us, however. While stating plainly that he did in that he was an eternal personality who came from heaven into the world as the Son of man, we nevertheless must constantly bear in mind that Christianity and Islam both unreservedly acknowledge that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. This is not an issue between us - the question is purely one of the true meaning of the title *al-Masih* which is left unexplained in the Qur'an. There can be no valid dispute between Christians and Muslims as to the identity of the Messiah, however. It was clearly Jesus.

The important thing to note here, however, is the expectations of the Jews at the time of Jesus regarding the coming Messiah. They were wrong when they expected him to exalt the nation and set himself up as a ruler of an earthly kingdom, but they were quite right insofar as they believed that he would come from heaven, would have existed for ages prior to his advent, and would ultimately establish the kingdom of God and rule over it as its Lord and Sovereign. In these convictions we can very plainly see that *ha Mashiah*, the long-awaited, promised Anointed One of God, was anticipated as a glorious figure far above the status of the prophets who had preceded him.

The first great mistake of the Jews was to fail to distinguish between the two separate advents of the coming Messiah. Their scriptures indeed foretold the coming of a glorious King who would establish the kingdom of God and rule over it for ever and ever, but these same scriptures, as we shall see, also spoke of a phase of relative obscurity when the Messiah would first suffer and come apparently to nothing. In truth these prophecies referred to two separate occasions when the Hessian would appear on earth - firstly to suffer in a comparatively insignificant lifespan, and secondly to reign in a glorious triumph over the established kingdom of God. Christians take these predictions to refer, firstly, to the life of Jesus on earth when he was relatively unknown and apparently devoid of rule and authority, and secondly, to his return at the end of

time when he shall return to establish the kingdom of God and rule over it as the manifestly Anointed One of God, now visibly triumphant in a glorious reign of power over all the universe. As Islam itself accepts that Jesus will return to earth, it should not be too hard for Muslims to accept these two distinct phases in his revelation as the Messiah, the supremely Anointed One of God. Islam itself accepts that Jesus will have a universal rule when he returns to earth.

The second great mistake of the Jews was to presume that they, as an earthly nation, would constitute the kingdom of God and that the Messiah would be a Jewish king ruling on the earth as we know it over the nations. They failed to see that God was speaking of a heavenly king who would become the Messiah by appearing in human form and that his rule and authority would be a spiritual one over the true people of God, the true followers of the Messiah in spirit and truth, and that it would only be manifested at the end of time.

The one great perception of the Jews, however indeed the one thing in which they were most certainly not mistaken, was that the Messiah would not be a mere prophet or messenger but that his origin would be in heaven, that his goings forth would be from many ages past, and that his throne and rule over the kingdom of God would be established as an everlasting dominion. These were vital perceptions and it is a great pity that they could not see that the Messiah would first come in relative obscurity to prepare the way for his dominion before it would be finally established and revealed in all its fulness at the end of time when he would return to the earth in glory and power.

4. JESUS OF NAZARETH: GOD'S ANOINTED MESSIAH.

We have already seen that the Qur'an openly acknowledges that Jesus was indeed *al-Masih*, "the Messiah", the long-awaited Deliverer whom God had promised. We have also seen how the Jews failed to recognise the Messiah when he came because they could not fully understand the prophecies of the former prophets regarding him and the purpose of his coming to earth (Acts 13.27). We now proceed to see whether Jesus regarded himself as the Messiah and whether his coming was announced.

The Qur'an openly acknowledges John the Baptist (*Yabya*) as a true prophet of God and confirms that he was announced to his father Zakariya (Surah 3.39). He is listed along with Jesus, Elijah (*Ilyas*), and a number of other prophets as one of the righteous messengers of God to whom favour was given over the nations (Surah 6. 8486). As the Qur'an states that all the prophets were equal to one another and that no distinction is made between them, we would not expect to find John regarding Jesus as superior to himself. If they were both kinsmen of equal prophetic status, John would hardly have looked on Jesus as more worthy of honour and respect than himself or any other of the prophets who went before him.

Yet, when we read a contemporary record of John's life and ministry' we find that he looked toward the coming Messiah as one far superior to himself. As all the people of that time were in expectation of the coming Saviour and "questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Messiah (Luke 3.15), John replied to them all:

"I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire". *Luke 3.16*

John clearly regarded the coming Messiah as far superior to himself, even though he was a true prophet of God, so superior in fact that he boldly proclaimed that he was not even worthy to bow at his feet and untie his shoelaces. On another occasion he said:

"You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Messiah but I have been sent before him ... He must increase, but I must decrease". *John 3. 28, 30*

He clearly regarded the Messiah as far mightier than himself and on yet another occasion he gave way to him, saying of Jesus as he saw him coming towards him:

"This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me'". *John 1. 30*

These statements were all consistent with those of the former prophets who had predicted the glory of the coming Messiah whom John openly identified as Jesus. John too spoke of the pre-existence of the Messiah as Micah and others had done before him and, being the only prophet to rise at the same time as Jesus, rejoiced at the honour of being appointed to reveal him to the nation (John 1.31). He was indeed sent from God, but only as a prophet to bear witness to the true light who was coming into the world just as the former prophets had done. "He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light" (John 1.8).

Some months later a Samaritan woman came to the well of Jacob at Sychar and saw Jesus sitting next to it. A brief discussion followed and, when she saw that he could see right through her and could read the background of her life, she said, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (John 4.19). Yet, as he continued to discuss with her and now began to speak of a new age that was about to be brought in where opportunities would arise for all men in all nations to have a living knowledge of the truth of God in their hearts and thus worship him fully in spirit and in truth, she sensed that he was far more than a prophet and said to him:

"I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things". *Jolm 4.25*

To this Jesus openly replied, "I who speak to you am he" (John 4.26). Her question was an indirect way of prompting Jesus to disclose himself - was he just

another prophet or was he possibly God's Supremely Anointed One, the heavenly ruler of ancient days who would bring the full and final revelation of God to man? Jesus gave her an emphatic answer - I am he. On another occasion, when the Jews said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" (John 10.24), Jesus again answered quite openly "I told you, and you do not believe" (John 10~25). He had no doubt whatsoever that he was the Messiah, the man of glory foretold in the prophecies of the prophets who came before him. Indeed when the high priest of Israel himself directly asked him "Are you the Messiah?" (Mark 15. 61), he answered equally directly, I am" (Mark 15.62).

Jesus of Nazareth, the lowly man from a village in Galilee, was indeed God's Messiah, his Anointed One whom he had promised to send into the world as its Saviour and Deliverer. Both the Bible and the Qur'an openly declare Jesus to be the Messiah and it is therefore incumbent on every Christian and Muslim to acknowledge him as such. Much time has been spent showing that the Messiah was to be far greater than any of the prophets of God. The time has now come to analyse who he really was and what he was sent to accomplish as God's Anointed One and chosen Saviour on earth.

5. WHAT DO YOU THINK, WHOSE SON IS HE?

Among the many prophecies of the coming Messiah were regular promises that he would be descended from David, the great prophet and king who foreshadowed his coming in many ways-- A distinct prophecy of this kind was given to the prophet Jeremiah some six hundred years before Jesus was born. Although the elders of Israel had turned away from leading the nation in God's ways, he promised to send a Deliverer:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he shall be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'". *Jeremiah 23.5-6*

Once again the prophecy contains hints of the Messiah's glory but, as the Jews could not distinguish between the first coming of the Messiah in comparative obscurity and his second coming in a blaze of glory, they failed to identify Jesus as the one promised when he came. But they got one thing right - the Messiah would be descended from David. A very similar prophecy appears in Jeremiah 33. 14-18 and also in Ezekiel 34.24, where David is openly identified as the forerunner and type of God's supreme shepherd and prince to come.

The most emphatic promise of the coming Messiah as one of the sons of David, however, was made to David himself. During his great reign as king over Israel David sought to build a great temple to house the ark of the covenant of

God. Through the prophet Nathan, however, God stopped him from doing so, at the same time making this promise to him:

"Moreover I declare to you that the Lord will build you a house. When your days are fulfilled to go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son; I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom for ever and his throne shall be established for ever". *1 Chronicles 17. 10-14*

When Solomon, David's son, duly built a great Temple for God (known in Islam as *baitul-mugaddas*, "the holy house", and spoken of in Surah 17.7 as *al-masjid* - "the Temple"), it seemed that the prophecy had been fulfilled. Nevertheless, shortly after Solomon's death the kingdom of Israel was split in two and within three hundred years fell away completely, Solomon's temple being destroyed in the process.

The Jews then realised that God had, in fact, been speaking ultimately of the Messiah as the prophecy had been couched in eternal language - I will establish his throne for ever ... I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom for ever and his throne shall be established for ever" (1 Chronicles 17. 12,14). God had clearly spoken of his Supremely Anointed One who would establish his kingdom and rule it for ever. Solomon and his temple were clearly only shadows and types of the Messiah and his kingdom to come. 'One of your own sons', therefore was to be applied ultimately to David's "greater son" yet to come, the Messiah, who would be descended from David's line. As a result the Jews coined the expression "Son of David" as a title for their coming Messiah and often used it of him to identify the line of offspring from which he would rise. Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" (John 7.42), was the constant belief of the Jews, a belief Jesus duly fulfilled when he was born of David's line in Bethlehem (Matthew 2.1).

It is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew that about two days before his crucifixion, Jesus engaged in lengthy debate with the Jewish leaders. Firstly the Pharisees and then the Sadducees tried by every verbal twist and trick to trap him in his talk. At the end of the day, when their efforts were exhausted and they all were standing before him, he finally put a question to them. It was to be the last time he would engage in debate with them. He said to the Pharisees:

"What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" *Matthew 22.42*

They promptly answered: "the Son of David", in accordance with the prophecies in their holy scriptures. Jesus then replied to them:

"How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet'? If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?" *Matthew 22. 43-45*

David, said Jesus, called the Messiah his Lord and Master, how then could he be David's son? What man looks on his son as his lord and master? We read that "no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did any one dare to ask him any more questions" (Matthew 22.46). This momentous question ended all debate between Jesus and the Jews.

Any Jew in the crowd who had been awake, however, could have given a very complete answer to the question. Let us go back to the prophecy Nathan gave David that one of his sons would establish his throne for ever and ever. We have read it already, but let us now repeat the key words of God to David. He said of the Messiah who would be descended from him:

"I will be his father, and he shall be my son". *1 Chronicles 17.13*

I will be his Father and he shall be my Son, God said to David - a prophecy contained to this day in the scripture of the Jews, a people who no more believe that Jesus is the Son of God than Muslims do. Yet there it is, right in their scripture. Any discerning Jew could have said, in answer to Jesus' question, "What do you think of the Messiah, whose son is he?" (Matthew 22.42) - "he is the Son of God", for so God had spoken to David. This is why David called the Messiah his Lord, for he knew that although he would be descended from him, God would be his true Father and he would be God's Son. He might well have said, as John did, "After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me" (John 1.30).

David knew that the Messiah would be the Son of God and therefore openly called him his Lord and Master. "The Lord said to my Lord" to David meant simply "The Father says to his Son, sit at my right hand till I put thy enemies under thy feet". In one of the great Psalms of old God spoke of the coming glory of the Son of David at his second advent at the end of time:

"He shall cry to me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation'. And I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth. My steadfast love I will keep for him for ever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his line for ever and his throne as the days of the heavens ... Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His line shall endure for ever, his throne as long as the sun before me". *Psalms 89. 26-29, 35-36.*

No one but the Son of God could so boldly address the Lord of heaven and earth. Bedded into the glorious predictions of the coming Messiah, who would rule the kingdom of God for ever and ever, are clear statements that he would be God's own Son. The promises to this effect came directly from God himself. The

Messiah, God's Supremely Anointed One, would far surpass the prophets in glory and majesty because he would be no less than the Son of God himself.

Jesus himself gave the answer to his own question how the Messiah could be both the Lord and the Son of David at one and the same time. In the last great book of the Bible and at the very end of the book Jesus made this bold declaration:

"I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star." *Revelation 22.16*

Because he was David's offspring he could indeed be called his son, but he was also his root and was therefore rightly called his Lord. In effect Jesus was saying "I am indeed the Son of David, his offspring, for I am descended from him. But ultimately I am his root, for he came originally from me". We have already seen that a host of prophecies spoke of the Messiah as one who would come from "ancient days", from the beginning of the world. How gloriously the exalted status of Jesus the Messiah is described in these words:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation) for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together". *Colossians 1. 1 5-16*

"The world was made through him", another scripture says (John 1.10), and in this way he could truly be said to be *the Root of David* (Revelation 5.5), his ultimate Lord and Master. "What do you think of the Messiah, whose son is he?" Jesus asked the Jews, a final, climactic charge at the end of his public confrontation with them. Its significant timing makes it universal for all men in all ages. What do you think of him - whose son is he really? Moses wrote of him (John 5.46), Abraham rejoiced to see his day (John 8.56), and David called him his Lord (Matthew 22.45), Jesus declared. If such great prophets as these recognized that his coming would herald the arrival of God's Supreme Ruler and Saviour, should not all men bow before him even now and become heirs of the hope of eternal life, which is in him, and partakers of the glory which is to be revealed when he, Jesus the Messiah, returns to bring forth the kingdom of God over which he will rule for ever?

We have now seen who the Messiah really was. We must press on and conclude with a study of what he came to do at his first coming and what he will achieve at his return at the end of time.

6. THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF GOD.

As already pointed out, the Messiah came the first time in relative obscurity. Jesus was a lowly man, living in a small village in Galilee, an insignificant district north of Judea which itself was an unimportant province in the vast Roman

Empire. Most of the Jews missed their Messiah because they confused the prophecies of his second coming, which all foretold his eternal glory and rule over God's everlasting kingdom, with those of his first coming which spoke of him as a humble servant destined to suffer reproach and rejection by the masses who would not follow his path of righteousness and holiness.

Throughout the prophecies in the writings of the former prophets there are predictions of his coming sufferings. Indeed, in the very prophecy in which he is called *Mashiah*, from which the title "Messiah" came, there is a plain statement that he would be struck down in the middle of his course.

And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing. *Daniel 9.26*

The prediction was quite clear: "*mashiah* shall be cut off, and shall have nothing." This was a direct warning that the Anointed One of God would be suddenly struck down and killed - a clear reference to the death of Jesus the Messiah on the cross which came quite unexpectedly upon his disciples.

There are many such predictions in the prophetic writings (e.g. Jeremiah 11.19, Lamentations 3.30, etc.), but we shall confine ourselves to the three most prominent passages which foretold the coming sufferings of the Messiah. The first is Psalm 22 where the spirit of the Messiah spoke through the prophet David, beginning with a cry of desolation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22.1). These are the exact words that Jesus himself uttered from the cross a millenium later (Matthew 27.46). The promised Messiah himself took these words on his own lips during his hour of trial, so we can see right from the outset that the Psalm is a Messianic prophecy anticipating his sorrows. The prophecy continues:

But I am a worm, and no man; scorned by men, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads; I have committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him". *Psalm 22. 6-8*

As the prophecy develops we hear the cries of a desolate man being reviled by those around him for his commitment to God. Indeed, as the chief priests stood around the cross after Jesus had duly been nailed to it, they mocked him saying:

'He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God'". Matthew 27.43

This insult was precisely that which was foreseen in Psalm 22.8. The priests seemed to be blissfully unaware that they were reviling him just as the prophecy a thousand years earlier said they would. Right from the outset we see the crucifixion and sufferings of Jesus being foretold in fine detail centuries beforehand. The suffering one goes on to cry in his heart:

Yea, dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones - they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.
Psalm 22. 16-18

Me had just cried out that all his bones were out of joint and that his tongue was cleaving to his jaws (Psalm 22. 14, 15), words which describe precisely those sufferings that a crucified person would undergo in his ordeal. In verse 16 there is a blunt statement, "they have pierced my hands and feet", which can only be a prediction of the crucifixion of the one thus suffering. Crucifixion was only invented some centuries later by the Phoenicians and it is remarkable to find a clear prediction of the crucifixion of the Messiah, his hands and feet duly being pierced, many ages before the form of execution was actually invented.

The last verse contains an unusual riddle. The speaker says that those gloating over him would divide his clothing among themselves and would cast lots for them. This riddle would have confused those who first heard it - were his garments to be split up and divided among the bystanders or were lots to be cast for them? It is only in the story of the crucifixion of Jesus that the riddle is solved. We read:

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be". *John 19.23-24*

The garments of Jesus were duly divided among the soldiers but, as his tunic had no seam, lots for it were cast alone. The Gospel writer had no hesitation in stating that this incident fulfilled Psalm 22.18 to the very finest detail of its contents (John 19.24). We therefore see that the suffering of the Messiah, through which he would be "cut off", was clearly predicted to be by crucifixion and that its attendant events were foretold in fine detail.

Psalm 69 is a similar Messianic prophecy of the great prophet David. Agonising like a man suffocating in deep waters the same man cries: "I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched" (Psalm 69.3). He continues:

More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause.
Psalm 69.4

On the night before his crucifixion Jesus plainly told his disciples that this very prediction in their prophetic writings was about to be fulfilled in him (John 15.25). As he had done with Psalm 22, Jesus deliberately applied the sufferings of the despised one in Psalm 69 to himself. The theme is so similar to that in Psalm 22 as we see in this cry:

For it is for thy sake that I have born reproach, that shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brethren, an alien to my mother's sons. For zeal

for thy house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me. *Psalm 69. 7-9*

The first part of verse 9 is also directly applied to Jesus in the Christian scriptures (John 2.17) and in the following section, which likewise speaks of the agonies and desolation of the suffering Messiah, another point of detail occurs which was fulfilled at the crucifixion as it had been foretold.

I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. *Psalm 69. 20-21.*

When Jesus cried out "I thirst" shortly before he expired on the cross (John 19.28), the bystanders took a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink (John 19.29). Once again we have a prophetic text written centuries before the crucifixion of Jesus which foretold his sufferings and the events around it in fine detail.

Our last passage not only predicts the sufferings of the coming Messiah but also gives the full reason for them, namely that he would suffer that others might be healed and die that others might live. It comes from the prophet Isaiah who lived some centuries before Jesus was born and begins:

Behold my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. As many were astonished at him - his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men - so shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they shall see, and that which they have not heard they shall understand. *Isaiah 52. 13-15*

The text contains clear predictions of the coming glory of the Messiah at his second advent, but in between these promises of his ultimate exaltation comes a clear warning of his rejection and suffering at his first advent - "his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance". The prophecy contains an unambiguous declaration that he would have no apparent honour at his first coming and would generally be overlooked and rejected by his people:

He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. *Isaiah 53. 2-3*

Almost immediately after this, however, comes a clear prediction of the atoning character of his sufferings. In this Jewish scripture written some six centuries before the coming of Jesus we find his crucifixion foreshadowed, not as a defeat, but as the means by which many would be saved:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement

that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. *Isaiah 53.4-6*

These words clearly show that the great chosen servant of God, the long-awaited Messiah, would have the sins of the world placed on him in his hour of trial and that he would die that others might live. "Stricken for the transgression of my people" (Isaiah 53.8) he would be, dying for the sins of those he was suffering to save. Once again we not only find the sufferings of the Messiah foretold but also attendant events which were fulfilled to the letter. The next verse states:

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death. *Isaiah 53.9*

Here again we have a riddle - how could a man be buried with honour among the wealthy if his grave was prepared among the wicked? In the crucifixion of Jesus we have a perfect answer. All Jews put to death by crucifixion were, upon their demise, cast into a large pit reserved only for criminals. But when Jesus died, a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea came and took the body of Jesus and buried it in his own tomb which he had hewn out of a rock (Matthew 27.60). The prophecy **continues** with a similar detail: "he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53.12). As with Psalm 22 and Psalm 69, Jesus directly applied

this prediction (and thus the whole prophecy) to himself the night before he was crucified, saying to his disciples as he sat at table with them:

"For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfillment". *Luke 22.37*

We see quite plainly, therefore, that the prophets of old foretold that the coming Messiah would suffer and die for the sins of the world at his first coming and, to give substance to their predictions, they recorded in fine detail events surrounding the climactic hour of desolation to come upon him, all of which were duly fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus. These great prophecies, made and recorded centuries before his coming, are incontrovertible proofs that Jesus the Messiah came not simply as a prophet to teach the people but as God's anointed Saviour to save them from their sins.

7. THE GLORY OF GOD'S ANOINTED SAVIOUR.

Nevertheless the majority of the prophecies in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures refer, not to the first coming of Jesus, but to his second coming as the eternal Lord of Glory. It has been estimated that there are up to five hundred prophecies relating to his second coming. On that Day he will be revealed in all his glory.

Let us not anticipate, however. We left off at the point of crucifixion and death of Jesus the Messiah in fulfillment of the hosts of prophecies foretelling his sufferings and atoning work. Did he simply come to nothing and remain buried in the tomb? Not at all. The Bible plainly teaches that *Jesus rose from the dead* on the third day and subsequently ascended to heaven. Indeed, in the three great passages predicting the sufferings of the Messiah, we find clear hints and predictions of his resurrection.

The first twenty-one verses of Psalm 22 contain a heart-rending plea for comfort as the subject of the Psalm cries out in awful anguish to God in heaven above. In the following verses, however, the tone changes completely. The subject cries out in complete peace and in joyful triumph:

I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee: You who fear the Lord, praise him! all you sons of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you sons of Israel! For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. *Psalm 22. 22-24*

The rest of the Psalm is a glorious expression of confidence in God for his complete deliverance and faithfulness towards the one who just a short while before was expiring in considerable agony and desolation. The sudden transition can only be explained in one way - the one who but a few days before was suffering and dying in unimaginable agony had suddenly been raised to perfect health and newness of life. It is important to note that the confident exclamation of praise in the congregation of the righteous in verse 22, following immediately upon a long section of despairing isolation, is applied directly to Jesus Christ himself in Hebrews 2.12. The passage is a clear prediction of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead after his awesome ordeal and trials just a few days earlier.

In Psalm 69 we find precisely the same thing. Here too the first twenty-nine verses set out the inward pleas of a suffering man staring an awful death in the face. The passage comes to a climax when the subject, the Messiah, cries out "But I am afflicted and in pain let thy salvation, O God, set me on high!" (Psalm 69.29). Suddenly the whole Psalm changes into an exclamation of praise and triumph as the subject, in perfect peace and joy, praises God for the wonderful deliverance he has suddenly experienced:

I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.
Psalm 69.30

Once again we have a clear foreshadowing of the resurrection of the Messiah from the dead. The lonely agony of the greater part of the Psalm suddenly gives way to a glorious expression of triumph and praise as the subject glorifies God in the remaining verses for his salvation.

Needless to say, Isaiah 53 too contains obvious prophecies of the resurrection of the Messiah after his death through which he wrought salvation for

all those who were to become his own by faith in him. The prophecy contains this wonderful promise that his lonely death would not be in vain:

When he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand; he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. *Isaiah 53. 10-11*

Although he would die for the sins of the world, he would yet see the heirs of his salvation, he would yet look in triumph on the immense benefits of his redeeming work, and the fulness of God's saving grace would yet be brought to light in his own hands. He poured out his soul to death", the prophecy continues (v.12), yet the Lord God of heaven himself left him with the assurance that he would still, in good time, obtain the fruits of his victory.

There are many other prophecies of the resurrection of the Messiah in the writings of the former prophets. David himself plainly foretold that he would rise again to life in these words:

For thou wilt not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore. *Psalms 16. 10-11*

David could hardly have been speaking of himself as he both died and was buried and his tomb remained untroubled through the centuries that followed (Acts 2.29). He passed away and was laid with his fathers and his body duly saw corruption (Acts 13.36). Just as his son Solomon was only a type of the Messiah, so that the Jews soon realised that the prophecies of the eternal rule of the Son of David referred not to Solomon but to David's greater son, the Messiah, so the disciples of Jesus realised that David's prediction that God's holy one would not see corruption after his death was not to be applied to the prophet himself but rather to his offspring, the coming Messiah. As one of Jesus' closest companions duly declared just after his resurrection from the dead:

"Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah. that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses". *Acts 2. 30-31*

It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that Jesus himself made much of the fact that the former scriptures foretold not only the crucifixion of the Messiah but also his resurrection. On the very day that he was raised from the dead he joined two of his disciples who were walking to Emmaus near Jerusalem and he discussed with them as they walked. Their eyes were kept from recognising him, but in the end he rebuked them, saying:

"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" *Luke 24. 25-26*

Indeed, when he was gathered together with all his disciples that same evening, he said to them: "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24.44). And what was it that was written about him by Moses, David and all the other great prophets who preceded him? Just this:

"Thus it is written that the Messiah should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem". *Luke 24. 46-47.*

Jesus plainly told his disciples that all the previous prophets had spoken of both his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead three days later. The same close companion of Jesus referred to earlier once wrote to the early companions of the Messiah, saying:

The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of the Messiah within them when predicting the sufferings of the Messiah and the subsequent glory. *1 Peter 1. 10-11*

Here again is a clear reference to the two advents of the Messiah - the first time to suffer, the second to reign in glory. Forty days after his resurrection Jesus ascended to glory in heaven where he has been alive for nearly twenty centuries. On the great Day of Judgment he will return to earth, not like his first coming when he came almost unnoticed as a baby child born in a stable of common Jewish parentage. At his second coming he will return in all his glory.

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*

In perfect humility he came the first time as a lowly man, apparently no different to his kinsmen. He sought not to be praised as one of the kings of earth but was content to appear in the form of a servant. And being found in human form he emptied himself further and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2.8). From the heights of heaven he did not disdain to plumb to the lower parts of the earth. His condescending grace and humility, however, were to lead him from the depths of human despair to the heights of divine glory and triumph.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. *Philippians 2. 9-11*

As another scripture says, God "raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1. 20-23). Such is the glory to which he has attained.

Jesus the Messiah is destined to reappear at the end of time in unspeakable glory. He was no ordinary prophet. He came from heaven where, in his eternal spirit, he had been throughout all ages. He was not raised up purely as a messenger to preach and teach, he was sent from above to bring the salvation of God to all the earth. He did not simply die and return to dust, he was raised from the dead in an outstanding victory over death and hell, and he returned to his eternal home in heaven where he rules to this day.

The Messiah was no ordinary messenger of God. "I came from above", he declared (John 8.23), and he will yet return from above to reveal the true children of God, establish the kingdom of God, and be anointed as its ruler for ever and ever. *At-~asih* the Qur'an calls him, "the Anointed One" it duly owns him to be, yet in all its teaching it unwittingly robs him of his glory, suggesting he appeared only as a messenger and that he will return as a servant. If so, then there is no meaning in the title. Its specific application to Jesus alone loses all meaning if he is discounted and regarded purely as a prophet among prophets.

Jesus the Messiah is the Lord and Saviour of the world, the one whom God set forth for the salvation of all who are prepared to believe in him as their only Master and Deliverer and commit themselves in faith to him as the one who will return as the Ruler of the Kingdom of God. Will you not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah in all that the title really means and submit to God's Supremely Anointed One who once appeared to die for your sins and who will appear a second time to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Hebrews 9~28)? Will you not believe in him as your Lord and Saviour and be saved?

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