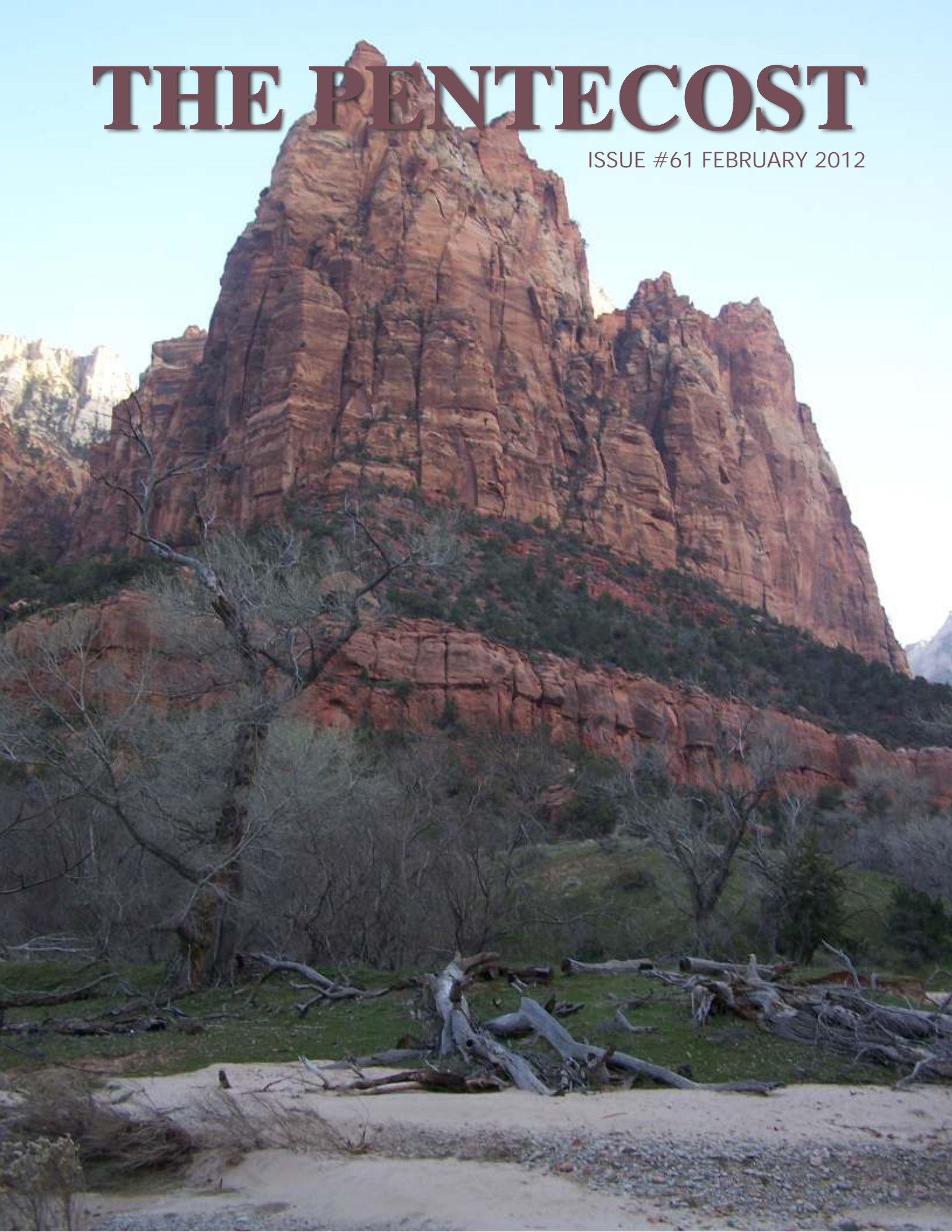


THE PENTECOST

ISSUE #61 FEBRUARY 2012



THE PENTECOST



IN THIS ISSUE

ISLAM AND
CHRISTIANITY

THE PENTECOST ISSUE 61

Christianity and Islam have spread their beliefs around the globe for centuries. How does Christian faith compare to Islamic religion? What does either side believe? In this February, 2012, issue of *The Pentecost*, we will try to answer these questions. God bless you.

Shawn Stevens

Although Islam and Christianity are both monotheistic, there are some major differences. Lets explore them together.

Ramona Stevens

Hey! Visit our ministry website at
zionchristianministry.com
Art, History, Music, and more!

Log on today.



ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

Did you know that there are more than one billion Muslims in the world today? Most westerners know little about Islam. Where did it come from? What does it teach? How does it compare with Christian faith?

Islam started with Mohammed, a Quraish tribesman born in the middle-eastern city of Mecca around 570 A.D. His parents died when he was young and, consequently, he was raised by his uncle. When twenty-five years of age, he married a wealthy widow merchant who was fifteen years older than him. In the year 610, he claimed to have a vision from Gabriel, the archangel, and from 610 to 622 there were more claims of angelic revelations. These alleged revelations were written down and compiled into what today is the *Koran*. The Koran was actually put together twenty-five years after Mohammed's death by scribes who claimed to remember what he had said.

Many in Mecca did not accept Mohammed's visions and he had some difficult years of rejection. However, some tribal leaders in the city of Medina requested that he come there and bring leadership to their tribes. He did so and soon was in a position of military power.

Medina was populated by conflicting Jewish and Arab tribes. Mohammed engaged in battle with the Jewish tribes, having Jews either expelled or executed. In his last battle against the Jews, around Medina, he slaughtered 700 to 800 men. Mohammed did not always kill the Jews, but would spare them if they would accept his leadership. The women and children became booty for his warriors. Mohammed himself would take a Jewish widow and another woman from the vanguard tribes.

While solidifying his control of Medina was advantageous politically, his next conquest would be even greater for his military and political success. On January 1, 630 A.D., Mohammed led an army of 10,000 against Mecca. Mecca offered little resistance. Mohammed took the city and made its citizens pledge their loyalty to him.

What was Mohammed's moral life like? The Koran teaches that a man can marry up to four women. However, Islam makes an exception for Mohammed. The history of this is not perfectly clear, but it is said that he had nine to thirteen wives or concubines. The wife that he loved most was Aisha, who was betrothed to him when she was six years old and their marriage was consummated when she was nine. She was one of his wives for the last nine years of his life. Mohammed also had female captives that he claimed sexual rights to. Mohammed died in 632 in Aisha's quarters. Even though Mohammed taught that a husband should not marry more than four wives, he also said; "But if you fear that you cannot maintain equality among them, marry one only or any slave-girls you may own." (Koran 4:3) According to Sunni Muslims, Mohammed permitted *mut'a*. In Islam, these are marriages that are only valid for a fixed and designated period of time. Then they are annulled. Shiites also have this practice.

Women in Islam are required to live under very strict regulations. Mohammed, allegedly, received special rules concerning women's dress, that they should be veiled and mostly covered. Traditional Muslims interpret this to mean that women should cover all of themselves except their faces and hands. Some more liberal Muslims interpret this differently. There have been cases where Muslim women were not permitted to receive normal hospital treatment because it would mean their personal exposure. In

2005, two doctors were executed for treating Iraqi women. In Islam, men are told to beat women in some cases. It is recorded in Sura 4:34:

Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because Allah has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and forsake them in beds apart, and beat them.

Some Muslim scholars have attempted to soften this command by saying that husbands should beat their wives lightly, not excessively.

Mohammed did not appoint a successor and a great dispute arose over who would lead them next. Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed, wanted to succeed Mohammed but the community, instead, chose a man named Abu Bakr. Abu then became the first *caliph* (leader). In time, Ali would become the fourth caliph. Disputes over Mohammed's successor eventually led to the largest rift in Islam, the rift between the Sunnis and the Shiites. Ali's rise to power was full of controversy. Some believe that he was involved in the murder of the previous successor, Othman. However, there is not solid evidence to confirm this. Nevertheless, there was great unrest and division concerning his leadership and civil war broke out. In 656, Ali defeated his enemies in a battle known as the Battle of the Camel and again at the Battle of Siffin, one year later. However, in this second battle Ali's opponent appealed for arbitration and Ali agreed. As a result, many of Ali's followers despised him for not completely obliterating his enemies. His support eroded away and he was assassinated in 661. Following this, leadership was given to Ali's son, Husayn. Husayn and his men were quickly ambushed and killed. To this day, Shiites support Ali and Husayn as successors of Mohammed and they reject the legitimacy of the first three caliphs.

During the reign of the caliphs, Islam would spread through military campaigns. Damascus was conquered in 635, Iraq in 636, Jerusalem in 638 and, in 641, Egypt surrendered. In 642, Persia fell under Islamic rule.

What kind of religion did Muhammed create?

Islam teaches such doctrines as:

Monotheism – the belief in one God.

Angels – that Gabriel appeared to Mohammed having the words of the Koran.

Prophets – many up until the time of Mohammed, whom they consider the last.

Scripture – belief that the Koran is infallible.

Judgment – God will judge all people.

Heaven and Hell – places of reward and punishment.¹

Islam has five pillars, or requirements, and a controversial sixth pillar.

The first pillar is to recite the *Shahadah*, which says; "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His messenger."

The second pillar is to pray. This includes seventeen prayers a day, noon hour prayer at a mosque on Fridays, and five specified prayer times, per day.

The third pillar is fasting, done in the month of *Ramadan*.

The fourth pillar is the giving of alms.

The fifth pillar is making a pilgrimage. Those who can afford to, and are physically able, are to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime.

The sixth controversial pillar is called *Jihad* (Holy War). Mohammed, and many after him, conducted violent jihads in conquering the Middle East, and beyond, but many Muslims do not interpret jihad in the literal physical sense.

What did Muhammed teach about Jesus Christ? Islam regards Jesus as a prophet but not as the Son of God. Islam also says that Jesus didn't die on the cross. This is because it says in the Koran:

That they (the wrong-doers) said (in boast), 'We killed the Christ Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah'; - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them [or it appeared so unto them], and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not: Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.

Koran 4:157. Quoted in Wikipedia.

There are several interpretations of this verse. Some Muslims believe that Jesus was not on the cross long enough to die, or that His immortal body simply did not die on the cross. Others believe that someone with the appearance of Jesus was crucified, but not Jesus Himself. However, it should also be acknowledged that there are a small minority of Muslims who do accept that Jesus was crucified and killed.

Having looked briefly at Islam, how do its teachings compare to Christianity?

The Bible, and Jesus Christ, treats women honorably and respectfully. Women, like men, are created in God's image. (See Genesis 1:27). They were involved in the fall and, like men, are fallen creatures. However, women are spoken of in the Bible as being loving and affectionate and tender. The Bible tells of the virtuous and good wife in Proverbs 31:10-29). We read further in Proverbs 31:28-31:

Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her:

'Many daughters have done well, But you excel them all.'

Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,

But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

Give her of the fruit of her hands, And let her own works praise her in the gates.

The Bible also warns of those women who do not choose the higher road of piety and purity. Although the Bible warns of such women, it does not focus on such but, rather, holds up a high ideal for women. Women are spoken of as fair and graceful. (See Genesis 12:11, 24:16; Song of Solomon 1:10).

The Bible declares punishment for those who would injure women when they are pregnant. (See Exodus 21:22-25). Jesus treated women with great dignity. There were numerous women in His life who followed Him and ministered to Him. (See Luke 8:2-3). In the Gospels, we read of Jesus' mother, Mary, who is favored and blessed (see Luke 1:28-30) and we see Jesus' respectful treatment of her, especially when He was dying on the cross and was giving the Apostle John instructions for caring for her. Jesus was followed by women, such as, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha and others, all of whom He treated respectfully. Sometimes, Jesus' courteous and tender treatment of women was misunderstood. In John, Chapter 4, Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman at a well and instructs her concerning salvation. When Jesus' disciples see this, they " ... marveled that He talked with a woman; ..." (John 4:27). We read of one time when the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who was guilty of adultery. The Pharisees, like fundamentalist Muslims, believed that adulterous women should be executed. Jesus intervened by addressing the Pharisees' own sinfulness. Because of

Jesus' intervention, the woman's life was spared. Jesus declared to her that He did not condemn her. (See John 8:1-11). Here, we see Jesus' care and mercy for women, even for those who had not lived honorably.

God's Word, the Bible, teaches us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. We read that Peter said to Jesus; "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:69). His disciples said; "Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'" (Matthew 14:33). John the Baptist said of Christ; "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:34). Nathanael said to Christ; " ... 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'" (John 1:49).

Jesus referred to God as His Father in the following Scripture verses:

Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. (John 6:32).

'I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.' (John 8:38).

I and My Father are one.' (John 10:30).

If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; (John 10:37).

Even in Jesus' lifetime on earth, many rejected His claim to be the Son of God. We read:

Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. (John 5:18).

Scripture records a conversation between Jesus and a lame man whom Jesus had healed. The man had been cast out of the synagogue. We read:

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' He answered and said, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' And Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.' Then he said, 'Lord, I believe!' And he worshiped Him.

John 9:35-38

Scripture also tells us of some Jews being offended at Jesus' claiming to be the Son of God. He responds with these words:

Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods' '? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.'

John 10:34-38

God the Father, in fact, testified of Jesus. We read:

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' *Matthew 3:16, 17*

Not only does God's Word, the Bible, declare Jesus to be the Son of God, it also declares Him to be God in human flesh. Jesus came to earth as a human baby, grew up and ministered as a man before being crucified, rising again and ascending to heaven, as a man.

Truly, Jesus Christ is the most amazing person to have walked this earth. His teachings were the most profound ever spoken by a man. His actions and works were the most faultless ever witnessed. Many individuals, or religions such as Islam, acknowledge Him as a good man, however, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was more than just a man. The Bible repeatedly refers to Jesus as being God, for example; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). The *Word* in these verses is a reference to Jesus. The Apostle Paul says; "of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen." (Romans 9:5) and; "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ," (Titus 2:13). The disciple, Thomas, testified that Jesus was God by addressing Him as such; "And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (John 20:28). When we read further, we see that Jesus did not rebuke this statement but accepted Thomas' worship. The Bible, addressing Jesus as the Son, also says; "But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.'" (Hebrews 1:8) Jesus is called *Emmanuel*, which means, "God with us." (see Isaiah 7:14/Matthew 1:23).

There are also divine actions or works that Christ has done, and shall do. Jesus created all things; "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:3) and; "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." (Colossians 1:16). Jesus preserves all things; "who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus forgives sin; "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you.'" (Mark 2:5). Jesus gives eternal life; "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:28) and; "as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him." (John 17:2). Jesus has power to raise the dead. He said, "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:39-40). Jesus receives prayer; "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:" (1 Corinthians 1:2) and; "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'" (Acts 7:59). Jesus will execute judgments; "I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:" (2 Timothy 4:1).

God, alone, may be worshiped, (see Luke 4:8) yet, Jesus' followers worshiped Him; "Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'" (Matthew 14:33). We also read; "And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, 'Rejoice!' So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him." (Matthew 28:9) and; "And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy," (Luke 24:52). Even the angels are commanded to worship him; "But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: '*Let all the angels of God worship Him.*'" (Hebrews 1:6). One day, every knee shall bow to Jesus Christ; "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10, 11). Some would ask, "Is not Jesus the son of God, and does that not make him someone other than God?" The terms "son" and "father" are not best understood from our Western World View, but rather from the Semitic backgrounds that these passages were written in. The Semitic concept of "son" emphasizes "likeness or sameness of nature" 2 Some will ask, "Are not Christians sons of God, and if so, isn't Christ the same as any Christian man"? Again, there is a difference. Jesus is the Son of God by His own right, but His followers are God's sons by adoption. Jesus is unique. Men and women begin their lives at birth. He, however, existed before His birth. He existed from all eternity. The Bible, referring to Jesus as the Word, teaches; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). Jesus Christ *is the Word*. Greek scholar, Spiros Zodhiates, says that the best translation of John 1:1 is "Before there was a beginning the Word had been" 3 Jesus *is by nature* God. We also read; "Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.'" (John 8:58). Jesus also prayed; "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." (John 17 :5).

As well as God's Word, the Bible, declaring Jesus Christ to be God in human flesh, it also tells us that He died by crucifixion, an atoning death for mankind. There is no man who has endured so great a torture, even to the point of death, as Jesus Christ. Jesus said; "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). We read in the Bible of Jesus sharing a final supper with His disciples before His crucifixion. As they gathered around a table, Jesus proceeded to break bread, hand it to them and say; "...Take, eat; this is My body." (Matthew 26:26). This broken bread symbolized His body which would soon be broken upon the cross. He then gave thanks and shared with the disciples a cup of wine, saying; "...Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:27-28). The drink symbolized His precious blood. The bread and drink were to be a sign to the disciples of what was about to happen shortly. Jesus and His disciples then went to a place called the Garden of Gethsemane. There, Jesus found a spot and He prayed to His Father. He struggled with what He knew was about to happen to Him. The Bible says that He was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death; "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:44). Soon, armed soldiers came for Him. His disciples, it appeared, were prepared to fight. One of His disciples did act violently and, with a sword, cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Jesus interrupted at this point. Let us look at two accounts of His response:

But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?'

Matthew 26:52-54

Again, in the Book of John, it is said this way;

So Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?' (John 18:11).

Jesus was then taken and tried by the Jewish leaders and Pontius Pilate and, at the will of the crowds of people, a death sentence was passed upon Him. He was blindfolded, beaten, spit upon, mocked and even a crown of thorns was placed on His head. Despite the agony of His wounds, He was made to walk to a place called Golgotha, while carrying His cross for a part of that distance. Nails were driven into His hands and feet and His cross, with Him upon it, was erected for all to see. In His final hours, He granted eternal life to one of the two thieves who was also being crucified beside Him. He prayed to God, His Father, asking God to forgive even the executioners who were doing this to Him. His very words were; "... 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' ..." (Luke 23:34). He cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His Spirit.

Dear reader, I wonder if you understand the cup from which Jesus Christ had to drink. For, remember, in the Garden of Gethsemane when His disciples, or at least Peter, would have fought for His freedom, He stopped them from doing any more than they did with these words; "... 'Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?'" (John 18:11). The cup, which symbolizes the wrath of God, was made for us as a

consequence for our many sins. Jesus drank it instead, in our place, to spare us from this fate. Remember, He could have prayed for twelve legions of angels to deliver Him. However, that would have left you and me holding the cup, leaving us without hope before the judgment throne of God.

He was despised and rejected by men. He was oppressed and afflicted. He was silent before His accusers, like a lamb before his shearers. He was cut off from the land of the living.

We read in Isaiah:

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;

The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way;

And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:4-6

The account of the life of Jesus Christ does not end with His death on the cross, but it triumphs with His resurrection from the dead. Before His death, Jesus repeatedly spoke about this great miracle that would occur:

Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.'

Luke 18:31-33

We also read in the Book of John:

Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

John 2:19-22

In this passage, Jesus is dealing with Pharisees who were insisting that they be shown a miraculous sign that would confirm Jesus' authority. Jesus responds by saying that the temple would be destroyed and He would raise it up. They thought that He was referring to the temple in Jerusalem but, rather, He was referring to His very own body which would be destroyed in death and raised in resurrection.

These and other prophecies of Christ's death found their fulfillment in the crucifixion. The greatest miracle, and further fulfillment of these divine prophecies, happened only three days later. His body was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The opening was sealed with a large boulder. A Roman garrison was deployed to guard the tomb. However, at the appointed time, the ground shook with a violent earthquake and an angel descended and moved the boulder. We read:

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.' So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. Matthew 28:1-8

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has very important meaning. It was the final proof that everything He had said was true. Because He rose from physical death to life, then ascended to heaven, He has the authority to grant spiritual life to spiritually dead men and women. His resurrection also is held out as proof that He will judge the world. God "... commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31).

In the book of Revelation, John records seeing a vision of Christ:

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.' Revelation 1:17-18

Jesus' death is pictured and prophesied throughout the Old Testament, being representatively seen through such sacrifices as Abel's sacrifice (see Genesis 4:4), the Passover lamb (see Exodus 12:1-28) and the Levitical sacrifices (see Leviticus 1-7). 4

While some have talked of Jesus' death as being simply a great example of obedience to God, it is this, and more. Jesus' death was not just an example; it was an *atonement*. The word "atonement" means "... to forgive sin, to discharge from punishment; in its noun form, an expiation, a propitiation, a redemption." 5 This is precisely what Jesus did, that is, He provided an atonement. The penalty which we deserve for our sins, He suffered in our place, that we might be forgiven.

Atonement is the basis for God's forgiveness. God is a God of great forgiveness. His Word tells us; "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." (Hebrews 8:12). Probably the best Old Testament scriptures which show us Christ's death as being on our behalf are in Isaiah 53:5-6:

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

(Isaiah 53:5-6).

We transgressed the laws of God – He was wounded. We committed iniquity – He was bruised. He was chastised for our peace. We had gone astray and the LORD laid on Him the iniquity of us all. This is atonement.

It is because Jesus' blood was shed that our life can be spared. It is because His blood was poured out that our sins may be forgiven and washed away. That is why the Scriptures say; "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Romans 5:9) and; "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit," (1 Peter 3:18). Another scripture which shows the cleansing power of Jesus' blood reads; "... and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7). We also read; "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8).

Jesus was condemned so that, through what He has done on our behalf, we may receive pardon. Pardon is to be acquitted of guilt and penalty. This is man's greatest need. We can receive pardon because Jesus' death has power to take away our sins. Again, the Scriptures say; "And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin." (1 John 3:5). Friend, the reason Jesus "was manifested," or came to this world, was to take away your sins and mine. Jesus is the Savior Who takes our sins away and brings salvation to our souls. That is why the Bible records the angels' announcement; "Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" (Luke 2:10,11).

Friend, one day, around two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ drank a very bitter cup. It was the cup of God's wrath. He did not deserve this wrath, but drank it on your behalf, and on mine. He was accused falsely. He was sentenced to death. He was mocked. He was whipped and beaten. He, Himself, carried His cross part of the way to Golgotha's hill. He was nailed to it. He did not utter threats or hate from the cross. Instead, He offered words of hope and forgiveness. Now that same forgiveness is offered to you. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The atoning sacrifice has been made for our sins. If you don't know what it is like to have your sins forgiven by God, then come to Him today. All that is needed is your response of having the atonement applied to your own sins, personally. Heaven waits, God the Father waits, and Jesus Christ waits for you to surrender your whole life to Him and His will, and for you to repent and put faith in Him and His sacrifice. Jesus has suffered for you and for me. We committed sin

and He was totally pure. Yet He suffered, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, that we would be brought to God for forgiveness, restoration, healing, deliverance and a new life of following Him.

It is right for the person who realizes his or her guilt and sin to cry out to God for forgiveness. Such a cry of surrendering one's life to God and pleading for His forgiveness will never be ignored by God. Scripture records numerous prayers of people who called on God for forgiveness. The prophet Daniel prayed; "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name." (Daniel 9:19). King David prayed; "For Your name's sake, O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great." (Psalm 25:11). We are told in Luke's Gospel of the tax collector, in Jesus' parable, who prayed; "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" (Luke 18:13).

We have learned that Jesus was not just a prophet, as Muslims believe, but that He is the Son of God. In fact, Jesus is God, Himself. He came to earth as human, lived a sinless life, did miracles, healed and taught the people. He gave His life in sacrifice to save mankind from their sins, and eternal judgment, then rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, from where He will return to take His followers home to heaven.

Christianity, like Islam, is evangelistic. Christianity has a message meant for all mankind. However, we also see that God's Word teaches that His gospel must not be spread through violent means. Jesus instructed His disciples to go and share His gospel:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

(Matthew 28.19-20).

Jesus taught His followers to spread His gospel but, when people rejected His message, His instructions were not to fight, instead; "And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet." (Matthew 10.14). In this verse, disciples are told to merely shake the dust off of their feet and move on, when they are rejected. God will judge those who reject His Word, but it is not for man to judge and act out violently for the spreading of the message.

Mohammed was a military man who had many of his enemies executed. Jesus Christ was, and is, the "Prince of Peace." He taught love and grace and forgiveness. When His enemies went about preparing His crucifixion, He submitted to God's plan and yielded His life up as the sacrifice. Jesus' death became an atonement for sinful mankind. Jesus was, and is, morally pure and did not take advantage of others. Jesus treated women honorably. His example is there for all to follow. Jesus is the Son of God, and He proved Himself to be so by resurrecting from the dead. Now He calls men and women to faith in Himself.

Friend, if you do not know the Lord's salvation and forgiveness, then it is time for you to pray. Call out to God in your own words.

I would like to pray for your soul:

Lord Jesus, today we have come, once again, to remember your sacrifice of love and atonement for us. Lord, You did not come to this world to be served, but to serve others and to give Your life a ransom for many. Your blood is precious. The shedding of Your blood at Calvary was the only sacrifice worthy and sufficient to atone for human sin. Your blood washes sin away. Lord, I pray for readers as they desire to be free from the curse of sin, guilt and judgment. They have gone astray; we all like sheep have gone astray. We have turned, every one, to our own way and the LORD has laid on You the iniquity of us all. Lord, the sacrifice of Your life was a substitution for ours. We transgressed, yet You were wounded. We committed iniquity, yet You were bruised. You were chastised for our peace. I pray for souls, that they would know the peace of having their sins taken away, that they would know the peace of pardon. Lord, You are a very forgiving God. As they call out to You in surrender and ask for Your forgiveness, be merciful to their unrighteousness and remember their lawless deeds no more. Lord, You not only died, You rose again and conquered death. You won the victory over sin, death and evil and You are triumphant. As ones cry out to You, committing to repent of their self-rule and give their life to follow You, let faith rise up in them. Let this be the moment of faith and belief that You call for. Let this be the moment that You establish a relationship with them. Hold them in Your arms and may they know in their heart Your great salvation. Amen.

Shawn Stevens

Endnotes:

- 1 George W. Braswell Jr. *What You Need to Know About Islam and Muslims* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000) 19.
- 2 Loraine Bottner, *Studies In Theology* (U.S.A.: Reformed Publishing Co., 1975) 152-153.
- 3 Spiros Zodhiates, *Was Christ God?* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994), 43.
- 4 Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures In Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 229.
- 5 John Miley, D.D., LL.D., *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publications, 1989), 79.

References :

- Ankerberg, John and Dillon Burroughs. *What's the Big Deal About Other Religions*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2008.
- Bottner, Loraine. *Studies In Theology*. U.S.A.: Reformed Publishing Co., 1975.
- Braswell Jr. George W. *What You Need to Know About Islam and Muslims*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000.
- Miley, John, D.D., LL.D. *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publications, 1989.
- Thiessen, Henry Clarence. *Lectures In Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989.
- Wikipedia : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_view_of_Jesus'_death
- Wolff, Richard. *The Popular Encyclopedia of World Religions*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2007.
- Zodhiates, Spiros. *Was Christ God?* Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.