

**God's**

**Chosen**

**Saviour –**

**Jesus!**

**by Colin Salter**

**A primer in thinking about Jesus:  
with examples drawn from  
Sudanese life and culture,  
plus some comparisons with Islam.**

**This section separately published in January 2007.  
Taken from “Christian Theology in a Sudanese Context” published in Khartoum,  
Sudan, June 2004,  
in English and in Arabic.**

**DVDs are available of Colin teaching this material, recorded in 2005.  
God lent him a voice for 57 years.**

**He took it back when Colin’s voice-box was removed  
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Reading this it is important to keep in mind these comparisons between Christianity and Islam:

**In Christianity,**

God reveals himself,  
in the Son,  
one with God from eternity.

The ultimate revelation is:  
Christ,

the living Word of God,

(Arabic – kalimat allah)  
a person.  
(John 1:1-5; John 1:14;  
Hebrews 1:1-3).

**In Islam,**

God reveals his will,  
in the 'preserved tablet' or  
'Mother of the Book'.

The ultimate revelation is:  
the Qur'an,

the Speech of God,

(Arabic – kalam allah)  
a book.  
(Qur'an 85:21-22; 42:52;  
43:4; 3:3-7; 27:91-92;  
13:39)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from lecture notes given to me by Peter Ford, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2003.

## 1. Jesus, the man who is God

What is remarkable about Jesus as a man, is that he is actually God! And what is remarkable about Jesus as God, is that he is actually man! The message from God to the shepherds, through the angels at the birth of Jesus, was: “Today in the town of David a *Saviour* has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Nine months earlier the angel had told Joseph that Mary’s expected son “will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

At his baptism, when he was an adult, Jesus and many other people heard God’s audible voice from heaven saying: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). A couple of years later, a similar statement was made from a glorious cloud covering Jesus at his transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-6). This was probably on Mount Hermon, 2814 metres above sea level, north-east of Caesarea Philippi.

Jesus was God walking on our earth. He is God speaking to humankind. He is God himself overcoming our separation from him. The incarnation is “the act of God the Son whereby he took to himself a human nature”.<sup>2</sup>

During his earthly life, Jesus showed some of the attributes of God. He showed *omnipotence* in stilling the violent storm (Matthew 8:23-27). He showed he could do anything his character allowed him to do. He changed water into wine at a friend of the family’s wedding (John 2:1-11). Jesus showed *omniscience* by knowing the unspoken thoughts of his opponents (Mark 2:5-8). He proved he knew everything, even where he was not present. He said to Nathanael “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you”, John 1:43-51. This convinced Nathanael that Jesus was the Son of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press) 1994, p.543.

Jesus revealed his *eternity* by saying to the Jews who thought he was demon possessed, that he was alive before the patriarch Abraham (John 8:57,58). As God the Son, he was apart from and above time. He spoke of having been in the presence of God the Father before the creation of the world (John 17:5). Answering the disciples questions about his second coming to the earth, Jesus spoke about an everywhere visible and spectacularly glorious return, in the future, for himself (Matthew 24:3, 30,31). The immediate mention, in verse 36, that only the Father knows the timing of this event, shows Jesus 'hidden omniscience' in a specific area.<sup>3</sup> As we'll see in a moment, this is consistent with Jesus' full entrance into the condition of humanity.

In a similar way, God the Son is *immortal* and could not die (John 2:19-22; John 10:17,18). Yet as a man Jesus did die for the sin of the world. These things do not prove that Jesus is not God, or that he is not a man. Rather they point to the fact of Jesus being both God and man.

The *sovereignty* of God was seen in Jesus. He claimed to have the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-8). He also assumed the right to sharpen the application of Scripture. He exercised his power over his own word. The much acclaimed 'Sermon on the Mount' shows this six times, 'You have heard in Scripture ... but I tell you' (Matthew 5:22,28,32,34,39,44). If Jesus was not the sovereign Lord God, he would have to be seen as a false prophet for 'changing' Scripture! If anyone else did it, it would be wrong. Only Jesus' divinity gives him the right to say what he says and to do what he does.

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<sup>3</sup> Mounce, Robert H., Matthew, New International Biblical Commentary (Carlisle: Paternoster) 1995, p. 229.

Jesus is called 'God' in the Bible (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8; Titus 2:13). He is shown to do what only God can do (Hebrews 1:2,3). His claim of equality with God was a cause of conflict with the Jews (John 5:16-23), but it was something he consistently reaffirmed (John 8:23,24; John 10:30).

The early disciples realised Jesus was more than just a man. Peter said to him, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God", Matthew 16:16. Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God", John 20:28. The Christian church recognised the significance of the man Jesus being God. One of their earliest hymns is recorded in our Bibles as Philippians 2:6-11. It is "the cross as seen through the eyes of the Crucified, and allows us to enter the mind of Christ".<sup>4</sup> God the Son while in heavenly glory, did not hold on at all costs to his equality with God. He did not exploit for his own advantage, his equality with God. Instead, Jesus chose to appear on earth in the exact likeness of men. He still kept all of the very nature of God. God became flesh and lived in our world. His purpose was to do something as a man that no other person could ever do. Jesus would give his human life away, to pay once and for all humanity's outstanding debt which was owed to God (Matthew 20:28).

Jesus the man was the fullness of God. He was not just a part of God (Colossians 1:19,20; Colossians 2:9). This miracle is possible when we remember three things we already know: first, that God is Spirit; second, that God is omnipresent – everywhere present at the same time; and third, that God is omnipotent – able to do anything his character allows him to do. God himself became the *second* Adam he had made! (1 Corinthians 15:45).

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<sup>4</sup> Motyer, Alec, The Message of Philippians BST (Leicester: Inter- Varsity Press) 1984, p. 108.

As Oxford University theologian Alister McGrath teaches: “Jesus is a window into God”.<sup>5</sup>

***Thinking it through.***

- (a). Give at least five reasons to believe ‘Jesus was God as a man’.
- (b). Was Jesus ‘part of God’ or ‘all of God’?
- (c). Explain your answer, using some of the attributes of God.

**2. Jesus, the God who is man**

Khartoum is famous for its bridges. The bridge over the White Nile to Fittihab, Omdurman, was built while I was in Sudan. Watching it at the different stages of building was interesting. The pillars were sunk firmly to the river bed. The spans were connected one by one. Eventually, all was finished. The Chinese built it for the Sudanese. Unfortunately, when it first opened, traffic going to the bridge from either side had enormous bumps and ridges to slowly struggle across before actually joining the new, fast, smooth road. Someone from the Chinese embassy once apologised to me at an embassy function, pointing out that his Chinese government were only responsible for the bridge itself, and not for the adjoining roads!

Imagine for a moment, a bridge with a piece missing. If the White Nile bridge had a gap on either the Khartoum side or on the Fittihab side, it would *not* be possible to cross. A bridge broken anywhere, is no longer a bridge.

Jesus is the bridge between God and humankind. If he is not God, then the bridge is broken at the far end from us. If Jesus is not man, then the bridge is broken at the end nearest to us. In either case, no-one can cross over the bridge.

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<sup>5</sup> McGrath, Alister E., Studies in Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 1997, p. 74.

The disciples who lived with Jesus for about three and a half years, saw many things in his life that showed he was a real man. He was connected to humanity! The Gospels record Jesus being tempted to sin (Matthew 4:1-11), sleeping (Matthew 8:24), being hungry (Matthew 21:18), being angry (Mark 3:5). He is seen in emotional agony (Luke 22:44), being physically tired (John 4:6), crying sadly (John 11:35), being thirsty (John 19:28), and physically dying (John 19:33). Luke, who was a doctor, records Jesus' natural birth (Luke 2:6,7), his human growth and development (Luke 2:52), and his physical death (Luke 23:46). Even after the resurrection, Luke notes that Jesus had 'flesh and bones', and could eat food (Luke 24:39-42).

Many of the people who did not agree with what Jesus was saying and doing emphasised his manliness. It was as if they said: 'He is not God, he is just a man'. The people of his home synagogue at Nazareth knew the family Jesus was part of (Matthew 13:53-57). His brothers did not believe he was anything more than a man seeking to be famous (John 7:1-5). These people who had seen Jesus living and working among them for about 30 years, saw him as an ordinary man, with some rather extraordinary ideas.

Over the centuries people have reacted differently to Jesus. Many believe he was *only* a man. In so doing they acknowledge half of the truth! He was a genuine man. He was one hundred per cent a real man. But that is not *all* he was!

We should think about two key points in Jesus' life, which are both denied as truth by some who think he was merely a man:

1. The *incarnation* of Jesus involved God the Son,

who lived from eternity past, becoming a human being. (See chapter 1). Until the miraculous conception happened, God was not man. When the human baby was *born*, God the Son was *given* flesh. God the Son was *sent* from heaven and he *arrived* as the baby Jesus. (Isaiah 9:6; Galatians 4:4-5). The incredible fact of the incarnation is that God took on to himself the complete experience of life as a man.

2. The *crucifixion* shows us the reason for the incarnation. No human being could ever be free from sin, since Adam our representative turned away from God's will. God wanted people to be free from sin. Therefore he himself became the one and only perfect human being. Living as Jesus he gave that human life over to death on the cross. It was the ransom payment made to the justice of God. It, and it alone, brings salvation from sin. "God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" 1 Timothy 2:3-6. God the Son was born as Jesus in order to die as a man on Calvary's cross.

In Sudan I learned what being a mediator meant. As a pastor I was asked to speak to people I knew, on behalf of others I also knew, about different things. The situations ranged from marriage proposals, to job opportunities, even the repayment of debts.

This 'mediator' of 1 Timothy 2:5 must represent God to humankind, and humankind to God. He must be in touch with both and yet distinct from both. He must be the go-between in the process of reconciliation. The very best go-between would know all about being God and would also

know all about being man. He would understand completely the needs of both parties, because of his personal experience of being both parties. No-one except God could be the man in this role.

How Jesus Christ is truly human and the true God at the same time is a mystery. Through Christian history, there have been many errors. The explanations which countered the errors form the basis of the Church creeds, but there always remains room for worshipping and wondering. Some have thought Jesus was only a divinely appointed human being. Others believed he appeared to be human, but was not really so. Different people taught that God came upon the man Jesus in a special way, making him neither man or God, but some 'half-caste' being. Arius (A.D. 246-336) taught that Christ was a created being: the best of all God's creatures, but a creature at best. How the two natures of Christ are complete and yet not compromised in one person, is something only the omniscient God himself knows. And he has chosen not to explain it to us!<sup>6</sup>

A striking difference between Christianity and Islam can be highlighted at this point. Muslims believe that Jesus Christ was only a man, though an important prophet equal to Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses. Like them, Jesus is believed to be below Muhammad in importance. Muslims do not believe Jesus was crucified for the sin of the world. The Qur'an states that the Jews *thought* they crucified Jesus, but somehow it only *appeared* so to them; in reality Jesus was not killed at all (Qur'an 4:157). The understanding of this passage for most Muslims today is that the Jews *actually* crucified Judas, although they *thought* it was Jesus.

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<sup>6</sup> Milne, Bruce, Know the Truth (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press) 1994, p. 179-188.

Christians believe the Lord Jesus Christ to be: “the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us...”

The Nicene Creed, A.D. 325.<sup>7</sup>

We must always remember that Jesus is in a class of his own, yet he is also one of us – and he is God!

Jesus is referred to more than eighty times in the New Testament as “the Son of God”, (Mark 1:1). Jesus speaks of God as “Father” fifty-one times in the first three gospels, and more than one hundred times in the fourth gospel. He always addressed God in prayers as “Father”, (for example: Matthew 11:25; Mark 14:36; John 11:41; John 12:27; John 17:1,5). Matthew’s gospel carefully presents Jesus as the Son of God, from the time his birth was announced, (Matthew 1:23), through his baptism, (Matthew 3:17), his temptations – which have no real force if Jesus was *not* the Son of God, (Matthew 4:3,6), and his transfiguration, (Matthew 17:5). His claim to be the Son of God was challenged again at his trial before the Jewish high priest, (Matthew 26:63-64), and even while he was being crucified (Matthew 27:40,43). Jesus was put to death for simply claiming to be who he really was! Matthew concludes his writing with a clear statement of the three-in-one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:18-20). Christians are commissioned to disciple, baptise and teach all people everywhere that ‘Jesus is the Son of God’ – and he is in a way that no-one else is. This Son of God is God the Son!

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<sup>7</sup> quoted Grudem, Wayne, Systematic Theology (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press) 1994, p.1169.

Jesus is *not* the Son of God *because* he was miraculously conceived in Mary's womb. The reverse is actually true! It is because Jesus is God the Son that he could be conceived so miraculously. His existence before he lived on this earth raises the important question of why he became a man (John 17:1-5).

Jesus refers to himself more than eighty times in the four gospels as "the Son of Man". When challenged by the high priest to say if he was the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus answered: "Yes, it is as you say. In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). The high priest immediately knew this was a reference back to the prophet Daniel. In the Old Testament book of Daniel "one like a son of man" appears. He stands between the Almighty God in heaven and the suffering people on earth. This 'son of man' mediates between God and the people. He is given complete reign over all peoples of the entire world (Daniel 7:9-14). So, in his answer to the high priest, Jesus has claimed to be both Son of God and Son of Man. God the Son, from forever in the past, stepped into our world as Jesus. As the man Jesus, he died on a cross: God himself paying the price of humankind's sin. And because it was God who paid the price there is no balance left for anyone else to pay!

If I could re-write Matthew 16:13-16 as a question for ourselves, it would read like this:

'Who do people think Jesus, the Son of Man, is?'

'Some say a prophet. Others say a good, moral teacher. One of the best. But nothing more'.

'Never mind the others for a moment. Who do *you* think Jesus is?'

What would your answer be?

*My answer is:* "Jesus is God the Son in human form – the only Saviour for all people of the world".

### ***Thinking it through.***

- (a). What is the best evidence we have supporting the fact that Jesus was a real man?
- (b). Why did God become a man?
- (c). What difference would it make to the Christian gospel if Jesus was not God?

### **3. Jesus, past, present, and future**

The Bible's book of Revelation opens a window into the future for us. The title comes from the first verse in the first chapter and it means an 'uncovering' (Greek – apokalupsis, which transliterates into the English word 'apocalypse', an event of very great importance, usually including some violence with dramatic change). A lot of symbolism is used in Revelation because the scenes described in it are beyond anything mankind has ever yet experienced. The symbols represent truth, but need not be understood as literal realities themselves.

Other Scriptures sometimes give us clues to understanding what is meant in Revelation. As an example, you could study Revelation 5:5-6 and compare the words used in it to those in Genesis 49:8-10, Isaiah 42:1-4, Matthew 2:1-12, Matthew 27:27-56 and John 1:29. My conclusion from doing so is that the central person, at the throne ruling all of creation, is Jesus Christ. He is born within the descendants of the family of Judah. He existed *before* King David (like the root before the fruits on the mango tree), yet he came *after* David into history. His right to rule came from his sacrificial death on the cross.

A careful reading of Revelation chapter 4 and on into chapter 5, shows that Jesus, God the Son, is at the centre of the throne of God the Father, 4:2, in the presence of

God the Holy Spirit 4:5. Jesus is standing *alive* although he had been *dead*, 5:6, and is receiving the worship of everyone 5:13. All of this points to the central truth of Revelation: Jesus is God, who is working out his purpose, which will definitely be fulfilled (Revelation 22:12,13).

However, I do not deny that many mysteries in Revelation will remain. We will do well to hold our beliefs about the details gently and with graciousness towards those who understand them differently.

Jesus is the central message of Scripture. The Old Testament shows the roles of the prophets, the priests and the kings during Israel's early history. The *prophets* represented God to the people, (for example: Elijah – 1 Kings 18:1-46; Jeremiah – Jeremiah 1:1-19). When they spoke, the prophets spoke in the name of God. The *priests* represented the people before God. They brought the sacrifices God required to make the people fit to be God's people, (for example: Aaron and his sons – Leviticus chapters 7 & 8; the Levites – Ezra 6:19-22). The *kings* were to reign over the people of God for the glory of God, (for example: David – 2 Samuel 5:1-5; 2 Samuel 7:16; Solomon – 1 Kings 2:1-12). None of these men were perfect. They were only human. But they all pointed towards the New Testament revelation of Jesus Christ as prophet (Luke 24:19); Jesus Christ as priest (Hebrews 2:17); and Jesus Christ as king (Matthew 4:17; Matthew 27:27-31; Revelation 19:16). Jesus Christ meets our need for a prophet, for a priest and for a king. The old need, to be born into an earthly nation, is replaced by the new need, to be born again into the kingdom of God (Jeremiah 31:31-37; Hebrews 9:1-28).

We have already seen (chapters 1 & 2) that God the Son existed before his incarnation as Jesus. His birth into humanity was prophesied (Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6), and so

was his death (Isaiah 52:13 - 53:6). The fact that Jesus existed as a man is well known from history, both in the Bible and in historical documents. His resurrection from the dead sharply divides believers from unbelievers. The Gospels are clear that Jesus really died on the cross (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30 – 34), that he was buried, and that he rose again to life afterwards. Those who believe, and receive the living Christ into their lives, are born again into eternal life (John 20:31; John 1:12).

The resurrection was testified to by angels (Matthew 28:5,6; Mark 16:5,6). It was testified to by an empty tomb (Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1-8). The guards being posted earlier at the entrance to the tomb, and the bribery given to false story-tellers later by the chief Jewish priests and elders, add impressive evidence for the resurrection (Matthew 27:62 – 28:15). Though he had always existed as God the Son, the man Jesus Christ was actually born twice. “The (first) birth at Bethlehem was a birth into a life of weakness. The second time, he was born from the grave – ‘the first-born from the dead’ – into the glory of heaven and the throne of God”.<sup>8</sup> Jesus opens the eyes of the heart in those who listen to, and learn from, his teaching through Scripture (Luke 24:25-27 and 44-45).

We could summarise that in *past* history, God the Son pre-existed, Jesus was born as a human being, Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus was buried, and later he was raised to life.

At the *present* time Jesus is at the right hand of God acting as a mediator on our behalf. He represents us, advocating our case, like a barrister or lawyer in a court of law (Romans 8:34).

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<sup>8</sup> Sproul, R.C., The Gory of Christ (Wheaton: Tyndale) 1990, p.167.

Jesus is now in the place of highest honour. He is exercising his sovereign right to save and secure people from their sins. He is waiting for the full benefits of his death to become actual reality *in our human history*, which is obviously restricted to the passing of time.<sup>9</sup> The certainty that they will do so comes to us from the glimpses into this eternal reality that the book of Revelation gives us.

The disciples saw Jesus ascend into heaven (Acts 1:9-11). They ministered the gospel knowing that Jesus was standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56; 2 Timothy 4:8). They believed that the omnipresent Son of God was with the Father in heaven, yet, at the same time, he was with the disciples in the events of life they were passing through. His presence was both here and there, during every moment of time.

Jesus has taken into heaven the very humanity he assumed on earth. Jesus, the human being, is on the seat of power over the entire creation. At the very centre of everything, supervising and working together everything that is happening, is a man showing the glory of God! (Luke 24:50-53).

The words describing Jesus' ascension indicate how it happened. He was 'taken up' (Greek – analambano), meaning to be received or taken to oneself. He was 'lifted up' (Greek – epairo), meaning exalted and raised up higher. He was 'received' (Greek – hupolambano) meaning to be carried up under a cloud. The NIV translates this as "a cloud hid him from their sight". The disciples were inspired to witness immediately. And although Jesus had been taken from them into heaven, he was still there working with them! (Mark 16:19,20).

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<sup>9</sup> Stott, John R.W., The Message of Romans (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, BST) 1994, p. 257.

Now, Jesus sits in authority at the right hand of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3). He acts as the High Priest, representing us there (Hebrews 4:14-16). The head of the church is in heaven. He has released God the Holy Spirit to equip the church with every grace and gift necessary for the mission of the church to be completed (Colossians 1:18; John 16:7; Ephesians 4:8-13). When that job is done, the same Jesus will come back to this world as a man blazing with fire, to bring judgement and reward (Acts 1:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

Jesus who was real in the past, is also real in the present. He has gone from being seen to being unseen. The beginning of Psalm 110:1 is often behind New Testament thinking. “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘*Sit at my right hand* until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’”. Jesus seemed to have this in his mind as his destiny (Mark 14:61-62).<sup>10</sup> The apostles used it against their powerful critics (Acts 5:31). The writer to Hebrews highlights the difference between the Old Testament Jewish priesthood and Jesus. Theirs was an endless series of sacrifices and ceremonies to be performed. Jesus completed his sacrifice once and for all, and sat down at the right hand of Father God (Hebrews 10:11-14). Jesus is the one in the honoured position of real authority. The earlier sacrifices were simply pictures.

How do you usually think of Jesus Christ? He is at this *present* moment waiting in heaven’s glory for the time to be right – then he will come back!

When Jesus comes again he will complete our salvation and bring this world to judgement. These are two certainties of the *future*. There is no doubt they will

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<sup>10</sup> See also Mark 12:36-37; John 14:12-14; 16:5-11; 16:23-28; Luke 22:29; Acts 2:43; 7:55; Hebrews 1:3; 1:13; 8:1; Romans 8:34; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:25; Colossians 3:1; Ephesians 1:20.

happen. Eschatology is the term used for the study of the last things. The word is made up from two other words literally meaning 'the word of the last' (Greek – eschatos meaning 'last', and logos meaning 'word'). It is often translated in the NIV as 'the last day' (John 6:40; 11:24; 12:48).

God has a purpose in history. The future is planned. Our all-wise and all-powerful God will achieve what he wants. Whether we are alive or dead we will meet the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:27,28). Every person will see him, but nobody knows when (Revelation 1:7; Mark 13:32). The second coming of the Lord Jesus will not be forced into our neat timetables! We are not to guess, but we are to be ready (Matthew 24:44).

I noticed that the brides and grooms were not usually on time for weddings I attended in Sudan. As a westerner I was sometimes told of two starting times for wedding ceremonies: one given to the public generally, and the other for khawajas (foreigners, often white or western) like me. They were quite different, for example 4pm and 5.30pm. The public were given the earlier time and us khawajas the later. It appears that everyone knew that everyone else would be late and so an earlier starting time was announced in an attempt to get the late arrivals to be on time! As far as I am aware it did not work! In any case, even if the whole congregation had arrived, either one or both from the couple getting married would not be there. Wedding days were waiting days. Wait, wait and wait some more!

Jesus is coming. God has his own timetable. He may not turn up for a while. Yet we must be ready *at any time* to be welcomed into the heavenly city of God (Matthew 25:14-30; Revelation 22:12,13).

There are various Christian theological understandings of the major events surrounding Jesus' return. I am unable to be dogmatic in teaching these when I know well-respected and used-by-God Christians who hold very different views from one another. I also think that none of these understandings are *essential* to the views every Christian should have about the future.<sup>11</sup>

The usual Muslim view of events leading up to the last Day of Judgement is taken from the Hadith literature (traditions) more than the Qur'an. Signs of the coming Day include great tribulation, a widespread decline of faith, the sun will rise from the west instead of the east. A mystery monster will come, possibly out of the Ka'ba (Qur'an 27:82). The anti-Christ (Arabic – Dajjal) will appear and then Jesus Christ will return to the earth and kill him. Jesus' return is the firm sign of Judgement Day approaching (Qur'an 43:60-61). Jesus will lead the Muslims in prayer, he will preach Islam, destroy all crosses and pigs, and will defeat the Jews. Jesus will then die himself and be buried, to be raised on the last Day. Justice will be given to everyone according to the balance of good and bad deeds in scales (Qur'an 101:6-9).

Muslims differ over which ahadith to accept as authoritative. In the less widely accepted literature are teachings of Jesus destroying all Christians who refuse to submit to Islam, of Jesus marrying and having children, and of Jesus being eventually buried next to Muhammad in Medina.<sup>12</sup>

Christians believe in death followed by judgement. Hebrews 9:27-28 says that we will all die and face judgement, unless we happen to be alive when Jesus

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<sup>11</sup> Readers are referred to good summaries of various views in:  
Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press) 1994, p. 1091-1166.  
Milne, Bruce, *Know the Truth* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press) 1998, p. 312-347.

<sup>12</sup> *Islam* – a course by Carey College, London, 1987, study topic 5, p. 12-15.

Christ returns to bring salvation to completion. We do not know when either death, or Christ's return, will happen. Physical death is part of the result of sin in humankind, (Romans 6:23). Christians believe that *when* they are 'away from the body', they will be 'at home with the Lord', (2 Corinthians 5:6-9). But they do not know the date when that will happen. Eternity is not a prisoner of time.

Everybody in human history will be judged by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:11-15). A person's religion makes no difference at all. At that judgement, even those who do not believe in Jesus will "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). It is a person's commitment to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that decides their eternal destiny – heaven or hell (Matthew 25:31-46). Since Jesus has received God's judgement on my behalf, I do not have to face it any more (1 Peter 2:24-25).

Approximately about the same time, Christians will stand before the "judgement seat" of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10). Some Christians will receive a reward in heaven for their pure following of Christ, while others will enter heaven, but only just! (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). It is *not* 'good works' that save a Christian. Jesus is the Saviour (Luke 2:11; Acts 4:12). It is good works done *because* a person is following Jesus in daily life, which will bring a reward.

As a Christian I believe I must seek to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus whatever the spiritual climate is around me. I should plan my life and ministry to use every day of my life obediently serving God (Matthew 25:1-13). I need to be personally ready to meet the Lord Jesus at any moment. I must pay close attention to my invisible heart-attitudes as well as my visible actions. I should expect Jesus to come back soon, but I should not wait aimlessly

doing nothing. I must learn to look up towards his coming from heaven. Yet I should also keep looking at the needs of the world around me. I should try to discern what God is doing in my part of human history and think about where that fits into his overall plan.

In all of this, I am able to trust Jesus Christ to have clothed my life with his own righteousness, so that I do not need to trust in my own resources on the Day of Judgement (Matthew 13:36-43; Romans 1:16-17; Revelation 19:6-9). I can look forward to the mysterious reality of heaven and not be afraid of the equally mysterious reality of hell (Matthew 25:31-46).

### ***Thinking it through.***

- (a). How can Jesus have lived before King David and yet also lived several hundred years after him? (John 17:5; 2 Timothy 2:8).
- (b). In which ways is Jesus like a prophet? Like a priest? Like a king?
- (c). How is Jesus different from all human prophets, priests and kings?
- (d). What can we definitely know about Judgement Day?

## **4. A 'Just Peace' with God**

In Sudan's long running civil war, there have always been those people who are seeking what they call a 'just peace'. While all sides militarily try to defeat the others, aiming to win a great and final victory, those seeking a 'just peace' are looking for ways the war can stop immediately – with a fair distribution of wealth, equal treatment for all people, shared rewards and responsibilities, plus full appreciation of each individual with his or her abilities and needs.

To bring together two or more human enemies, there will always have to be some 'give and take', some compromises made. One side will give way on this demand as the other side gives way on that. The seemingly endless rounds of negotiations between the Sudanese Government, the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement, mediators from neighbouring African and Arab countries, and the past colonial and present world powers, have shown that reaching a 'just peace' is very, very difficult.

When thinking about the need for peace between people and God, there is a rather different emphasis. People and God do not 'negotiate' on any terms, and certainly not as equal partners. How can the created dare to negotiate with the Creator? Humankind has become the enemy of God due to sin. In Jesus Christ, God has made a 'just peace' between himself and us (Romans 5:10,11). Each individual now has a choice. 'Do I remain an enemy of God?' Or, 'Do I accept his offer of friendship to me and meet the terms that he sets down?'

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:9). An individual's peace with God depends upon him or her approaching God through the Saviour Jesus Christ. There is nothing any person can do to earn or buy peace with God (Galatians 2:16). God has graciously *given* us the way we can come to him.

This is a huge difference between human peace negotiations and 'peace with God'. In talks between warring sides, concessions are often grudgingly given. This party does not really want to give up its claim to something, but it has to do so for peace to come. The party resents what it has to do. How different from God,

who has freely, generously, willingly, liberally and lovingly given us what we in no way deserve: a peaceful friendship with himself!

This does not mean that the serious things which make us God's enemies do not matter. They are permanently real barriers between us and God. He has a holy hatred of sin and everything sinful. But – and here is the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ – God has fairly taken the barrier down himself. What no person could ever deal with, God has dealt with himself. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross paid the full penalty that was owing to the wrath of God (Romans 3:21-26).

Because God has paid himself what we owed to him, he remains 'just' while forgiving us for our sin. He can only forgive us 'justly' because everything that was due has been paid. Because of our sin we deserved eternal death. God the Son, Jesus Christ, died *that* death in our place. We do not owe God our death anymore. And, since Jesus Christ rose from the dead, we can now live life at peace with our holy Creator. "If, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" Romans 5:10.

Justification is a legal declaration by God that we are made instantly right with him. My sin has been taken away – paid for by Jesus Christ on the cross – and his righteousness is given to me for my clothing in front of holy God.<sup>13</sup>

Imagine a man buys bread regularly from the back of a Hilux truck. Almost every day he pays his money and takes his bread home. Then imagine the time comes when he has no money to pay. He is hungry and still needs the

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<sup>13</sup> Grudem, Wayne Systematic Theology (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press) 1994, p. 723.

bread. What can he do? He could try and steal bread, grabbing some and running away fast through the suk (market). If he did so, the law would be against him and he could be caught and taken to prison. But supposing someone else came along and gave the man selling bread a very large amount of money. He said to the seller, 'Every time this man comes for bread, please give him some, and take the cost from this very large amount of money I have given to you'. Our man could then take bread every day, without paying for it himself. The shopkeeper and the police would not mind him doing so, because the price has already been paid by someone else. He could keep on taking daily bread until this money was all used up.

God's just provision for our peace with himself through Jesus Christ our Saviour, will never, ever, be used up!

***Thinking it through.***

- (a). How does God's holiness affect our sin and our salvation?
- (b). What is the difference between receiving justice from God and getting what we deserve from him?
- (c). Describe how a person can experience complete peace with God.

## **5. The Unique Jesus**

The word 'unique' means "being the only one of a particular type; single; sole; without equal or like; unparalleled".<sup>14</sup> It is the uniqueness of Jesus Christ that makes Christianity unique among the religions of the world. Jesus Christ is the definitive way for humankind to come to know peace with God. In trying to compare the value of all religious systems around the world, it is their

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<sup>14</sup> Collins English Dictionary (Glasgow: Harper Collins) 1995.

view of Jesus Christ which will finally show their truth or falseness.

In many universities of the western world it is taught or assumed that there is nothing much to choose between religions. Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism etc. are all seen as different ways of approaching the same thing. The secularisation of my country, the United Kingdom, reflects this. Religious pluralism is promoted and yet relegated to the relatively unimportant. There is a tolerance of all religions *except* any religion that claims to be unique! Once people do not have a positive belief of their own, they seem to think everyone who does have a definite belief is a fanatic or a fundamentalist. This is where real Christians in England discover themselves more and more in conflict with the British and European governments, which are moving step by step further away from their historical Christian heritage.

Islam believes Jesus was only a man, a prophet equal to other prophets but below Muhammad in importance. He did not die on the cross. Orthodox Jews mostly believe Jesus was a good human teacher of human ethics, but they do not accept him as Messiah. They still await a man who will be sent from God to deliver the nation of Israel from oppression. Hindus believe Jesus to be only one of many incarnations, or sons of Brahman, the eternal being. He was *a* son of god, not *the* Son of God. He did not die for humankind's sin. Buddhists believe that Jesus was a good teacher, though less important than Buddha. Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus was not God, but God's first created creature. Some of them believed Jesus returned to this earth in A.D. 1914, but remained unseen by men. Groups who try to combine all 'Christian' groups or even all faiths, like Unitarianism or the Bahai, believe that Jesus was no more than a good man, and certainly he

was not God. His life and death were inspirational, but did not bring salvation to humankind.<sup>15</sup>

The unique recognition of Christianity is that *God himself has revealed* that “Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, and will be so forever”.<sup>16</sup> It is this narrow and singular claim for Jesus Christ that makes Christianity the way of salvation for everyone and anyone. “Every tribe and language and people and nation” will be represented in heaven because of the uniqueness of Jesus (Revelation 5:9,10). Who he was, was unique. And what he did was unique as well. As God he has a unique authority over all people. As the God-man Jesus has a unique significance among all people. Jesus shows us God. His death on the cross is God’s only appointed way for our salvation. Christians pray to God only through Jesus. And we preach ‘Jesus Christ’ to all who will listen. The person of Jesus Christ is more important than any practice of Christianity. All people of the world should judge Christianity by Jesus Christ, not ultimately by any Christians they may know. It is Jesus, and no one Christian or no one church, who is unique.<sup>17</sup>

The Sudanese Christian Church will be at its strongest and most authoritative when all the members know, love and live like Jesus Christ. This is more powerful than political or economic power. Sudanese Christian culture should not be so much a matter of freedom to worship every Sunday in the church. It should be much more a matter of every Christian’s determination to live like Jesus, in the every day workaday world. Sudanese Christian theology will only ever change society when it is carefully applied by Christians in daily life.<sup>18</sup> It must never be forced

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<sup>15</sup> Interfaith Witness Department (Atlanta: Southern Baptist Convention) 1987, produced summary leaflets under the ‘Belief Bulletins’ title.

<sup>16</sup> Grudem, Wayne Systematic Theology (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press) 1994, p.529.

<sup>17</sup> McGrath, Alister E., A Passion for Truth (Leicester: Apollos IVP) 1996, p.25-51.

<sup>18</sup> O’Donovan, Wilbur, Biblical Christianity in African Perspective (Carlisle: Paternoster) 1992, p. 6.

upon anyone, but it must be able to be seen as an option for everyone. This is noted in the gospels about Jesus, and in the Acts about his disciples. (Matthew 7:28,29; Acts 4:12,13; Acts 11:25-30).

There is a right time for holy boldness. When the early Christians were told not to preach 'Jesus' any more, they prayed. As they prayed, they thought about their situation. They put it alongside Scripture. And they prayed, 'Lord, you look after the opposition, we'll keep taking our opportunities' (Acts 4:23-31). They obviously believed in the sovereignty of God and in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. As they chose to risk their freedom and even their lives, God gave them as much as they could possibly have of his own holy presence, through the Holy Spirit.

### ***Thinking it through.***

- (a). Why does 'their view of Jesus Christ' ultimately show the truth or falseness of any religion?
- (b). List all the ways that Jesus was (and is) unique.

## **6. 'Another one like me', Jesus said**

While it is true that Jesus Christ is unique, it is also true that he told his disciples: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you *another* Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth." John 14:16,17. In English, 'another' means 'one more'. It can also mean 'a different example of the same sort'.<sup>19</sup> The Greek New Testament uses two words, both of which are translated 'another' in English. However, they actually have separate meanings. 'Allos' signifies a numerical difference, another one of the *same* kind. 'Heteros' signifies a qualitative difference, another of a *different* kind.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Collins English Dictionary (Harper Collins: Glasgow) 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Vine, W.E., Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament words (Nashville: Nelson) 1996.

This is an important distinction to make. Think about oranges and grapefruit. You buy three oranges in the suk. You want to get some more later on. The man in the suk does not have any oranges, but he offers you some grapefruit. It is a similar kind of fruit, a citrus fruit, but it is quite a different size, colour and shape. You do not want these. You want three more oranges – not exactly identical to the ones you have eaten, but very similar.

Jesus promises the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, is another one like himself. The Holy Spirit will not be a stranger to those who have known Jesus. They will recognise him. Just as Jesus had lived with his disciples, so the Holy Spirit will live with them. In fact, the Holy Spirit will be living inside of them as well as with them.

We must try to understand this truth, even though we are thinking about God. God is so great and beyond our full understanding. Whatever we can grasp of him, there will always be so much more that we know is there but we cannot understand.

I know that when it rains in places like Fittihab, Omdurman, there are large puddles of water and mud left around for days afterwards. Someone looking at the puddles may say, 'that's a lot of water just lying around'. But compared to the flow of water in the river Nile that puddle is nothing at all!

The Nile starts in south-central Burundi as a remote stream, called the Luvironza. That flows into Lake Victoria and then leaves as the Victoria Nile, flowing into Lake Albert. The water then flows through the Albert Nile into the White Nile on the border between Uganda and Sudan. In Khartoum this is joined by the Blue Nile from near Lake Tana in Ethiopia. From Khartoum the River Nile flows

north into Egypt and the Mediterranean sea. Altogether, it is 6741 km (4187 miles), the longest river in the world.

Yet even the water in the whole of the rivers and lakes that make up the Nile is nothing at all, compared to the water in the mighty Pacific Ocean. The world's deepest and largest Ocean is between Asia, Australia, South and North America. It's area is about 165,760,000 sq.km. (64,000,000 square miles). It is 11,033 metres deep at it's deepest point, the Marianas Trench.

Our understanding and appreciation of God is more like that of a man looking at a puddle and thinking about the river, while the reality of God is that our God created the Pacific Ocean and told it to stay in its place! (Genesis 1:9,10).

Before he left the disciples, Jesus told them he would not leave them on their own. He would come to them himself (John 14:18). And the Holy Spirit would come to them (John 14:15-17; John 14:25-26; John 15:26-27; John 16:7-11; John 16:12-15). What we have learned already will help us here. The doctrines of the Unity of God: *God is one complete God*; the Holy Trinity: *one God in three persons*; and the Omnipresence of God: *God is everywhere present at the same time*, must be brought into our minds to think about how this can all happen. God has disclosed all of these things about himself. It is up to us to enlarge our minds and hearts by thinking about them. As we do, we have a wonderful promise from God to claim for ourselves.

In those verses from John's gospel we discover that the Holy Spirit will teach us all we need to know. He will remind us of the teachings of Jesus. He will continually bear witness to Jesus and to the truth. He will convict people of sin, of righteousness and of judgement – making

us conscious of our accountability to God for falling a long way below his purposes. The Holy Spirit will glorify Jesus by representing him and his word to us. The focus of everything the Holy Spirit does will be to make Jesus bigger and more important in our lives. He will prompt our minds and our hearts as we learn to love him in the right way (Matthew 22:37).

Some Muslims today claim that Muhammad is the ‘other one’ referred to by Jesus, in John chapters 14 – 16. They argue that the Greek text has been corrupted in John 14:16; 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7. They say the Bible’s word usually translated “Counsellor” or “Comforter” (Greek – *parakletos*), was originally “the praiseworthy one” or “Muhammad” (Greek – *periklytos*). This view is helped for them by twelve predictions in the Gospel of Barnabas that Jesus announced the coming of Muhammad after him.

We must remember that there is not one single Bible manuscript in existence that has this word ‘*periklytos*’ in these texts. None at all! Also remember, the Gospel of Barnabas is *not* in the Bible, and is not accepted by Christians as the real teaching of Jesus. It makes the false statement that Barnabas was one of Jesus’ twelve apostles. The New Testament tells us that Barnabas was a close friend and fellow-worker *with Paul*, after Jesus’ death and resurrection (Acts 9:26-28; Acts 11:25-26; and Acts 13:1-4). The only surviving manuscript of the Gospel of Barnabas is written in Italian, a language that was not spoken in the time of Jesus. It is kept in a library in Vienna, Austria, and was probably only written in the sixteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Thinking it through.***

(a). Why do people who know Jesus in their

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<sup>21</sup> Moucarry, Chawkat, *Faith to Faith, Christianity & Islam in dialogue* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press) 2001, p.241-251.

experience, also know the Holy Spirit?

(b). What limits our understanding and appreciation of God?

(c). From John 14-16, what can we be sure God the Holy Spirit will do?

Give chapter and verse reference for each one.