

Andreas Maurer

**ILLUSTRATIONS
PARABLES
STORIES**

for Muslims and people
of other religions

Impressum

ILLUSTRATIONS, PARABLES, STORIES

for Muslims and people of other religions

by Andreas Maurer

www.aymf.net

Originally published in English

under the same title

Published by MERCSA,

Mondeor 2110, South Africa

ISBN 0-620-18482-5

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ISBN 978-3-9524070-9-7

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Page design, artwork and cover design:

AVC Switzerland

Cover picture and other illustrations:

Taco Hammacher

This is a production of AVC Switzerland

(Action on behalf of persecuted Christians and people in need)

www.avc-ch.org

Biblical quotations are taken from the New International Version. The numbering of the Qur'anic references and quotations are based on the Yusuf Ali edition (1946).

Acknowledgments

I have heard and collected these illustrations, stories and parables from various sources. The first edition has been published in 1994 in South Africa and for this I'd like to give credit to people like Martin Goldsmith, John Gilchrist and Gerhard Nehls who have contributed. Further, I'd like to thank my co-workers in CCM (Christian Concern for Muslims) for their assistance, also to John Berry and Phillip Parsons for their final proof reading.

For this new edition many more people, such as David Foster, have contributed. I would like to express my deep appreciation and thanks for their able assistance and willingness to allow me to publish these stories. Special thanks go to Greg Kernaghan who did a wonderful job with editing. Many thanks go also to my coworkers of AVC for their help: Graziella Rogers, Andreas Rossel and Régis Roulet.

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Introduction

The Gospel must be, at least, partially understood before it can be accepted. The communicators of the Gospel should bear in mind that the words he uses to convey spiritual truth of the Gospel are borrowed from a normal human context, which differs from people to people, culture to culture and, more so, from religion to religion. We may well think that a religious word like God, prayer, salvation or sacrifice, to name just some, may have the same meaning in other contexts – but in reality this is not so. What better way of expression is there than an illustration?

In this publication I present a collection of illustrations which have been found useful in Muslim evangelism. As Jesus used parables to explain spiritual truths, so Christians should also apply wisdom and use such at the right time and in the right way. It is good that Christians know about the Muslim religion and be familiar with its teaching and practice. This knowledge will help for better communication.

Jesus used parables to stimulate the thinking of the hearers. Why should we

not learn these to challenge Muslims to find their own answers and begin to question their own position before God? I'd like to add a note of caution; parables are to make one or two points and should not be carried too far or misunderstandings might result. May God be glorified through your witness! »Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.« (Matthew 13:34)

I encourage your response to this material and would greatly appreciate any suggestions which you have to offer. If you have other parables, metaphors or allegories which you find illustrative please let me look at them. They should be incorporated in a future edition.

Andreas Maurer

1.

Illustrations that convey a glimpse of God

Master and servant or Father and son?

Imagine an oriental ruler who is satisfied with his very honest and diligent servant. One day, the master offered his beloved servant the right of adoption – to become his son. The servant gratefully accepted such honour and privilege. Would you have chosen differently?

The relationship between a master and his servant is entirely different than the relationship between a father and his son. A son belongs to the family, lives with his parents in their home, benefits from their wealth, enjoys their protection and expects an inheritance. Further, the son needs not to work as a labourer, merit his wages, or covet his master's favour.



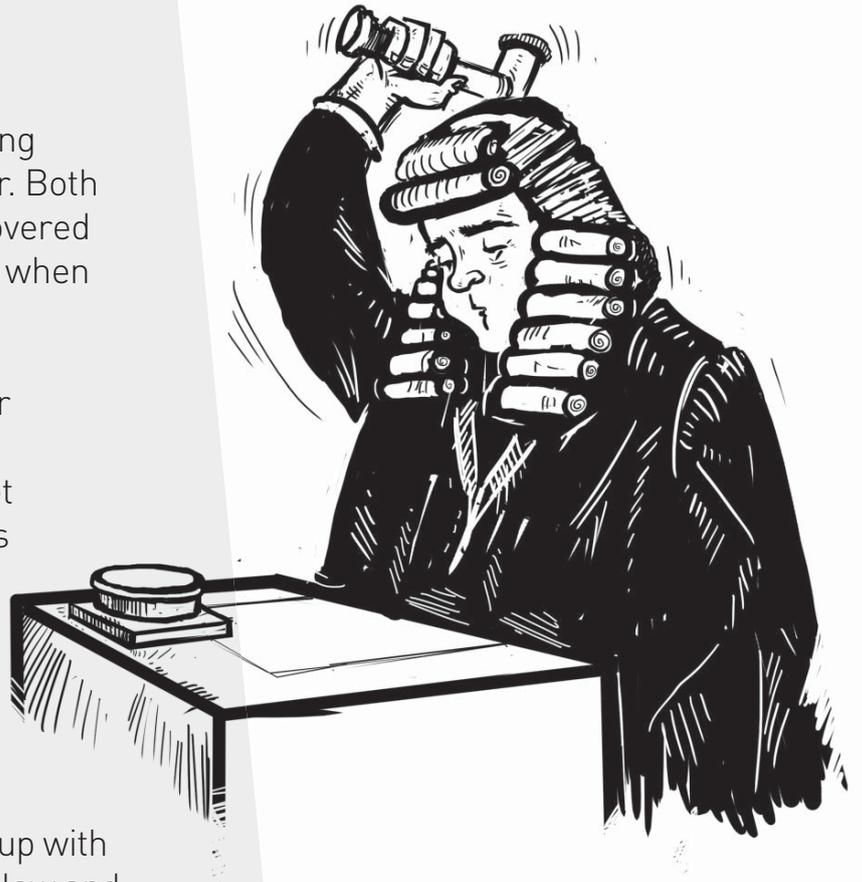
Conclusion This illustration contrasts the different relationships between the Creator and people portrayed in Islam (master to servant) and in Christianity (father to child). In the Qur'an, Allah maintains a relationship based predominantly on works, whereas in the Bible God seeks a love relationship (Galatians 4:7; 1 John 3:1).

The judge and his friend

Someone was charged for having stolen money from his employer. Both the judge and the accused discovered that they had been good friends when they were classmates.

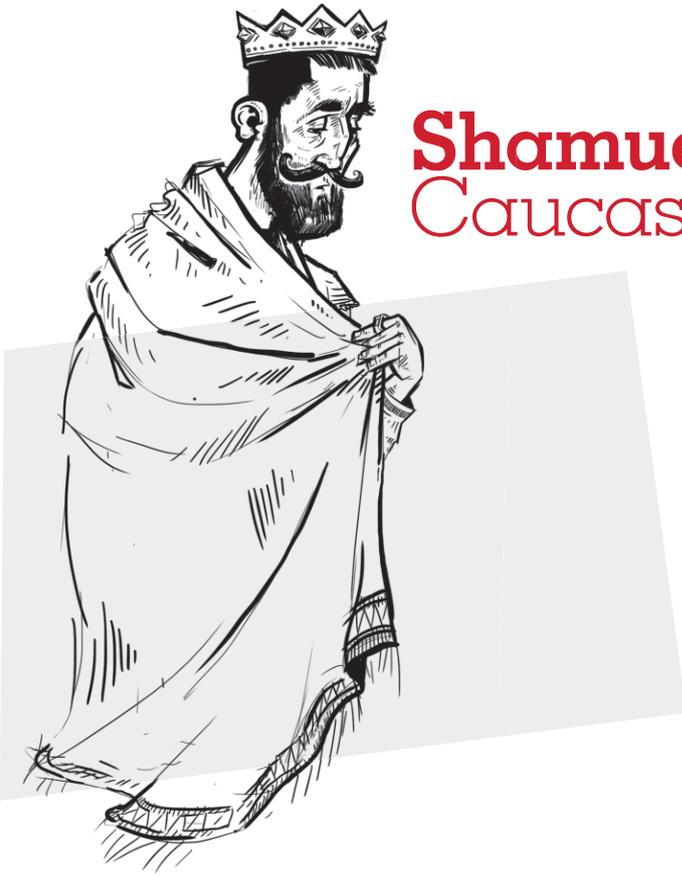
This proved to be a dilemma for the judge. The man before him was an accused criminal and yet was his friend. It was his duty as a judge to establish the truth of the case and pass just judgment. He could not proclaim him innocent, if indeed he was a thief.

Considering the case, he came up with a solution that satisfied both the law and his conscience. He condemned his friend to pay a heavy penalty. However, perceiving that his friend had no means to pay the fine, he paid it out of his own pocket, allowing his friend to go away free. Imagine the gratitude of his friend!



Conclusion Such an event depicts what God did when He ransomed us from our sinful life through Christ's sacrifice on the cross (John 3:16; 5:24; Romans 5:8; 6:23). That raises the question whether we have accepted His Gift and are eternally grateful to Him.

Shamuel the Caucasian prince



Shamuel was a Caucasian prince who lived a few hundred years ago. Constantly at war with the Turks, he and his army once besieged a Turkish city. As it was their custom, his mother accompanied him on his pursuit. One night he planned a surprise attack, but the enemy was ready - his secret plans had been betrayed and the battle was lost. In anger, Shamuel announced that the traitor would be punished with one hundred lashes of the whip. In great secrecy another surprise attack was planned, but again the operation brought the same result.

This time, however, the traitor was caught: Shamuel's mother!

For three days he withdrew to his tent. What was the right thing to do? If he spared his mother, all would rightly say that he was unjust. If he punished her, all would say, »Shamuel has no pity, not even for his mother!« At last

he appeared and his army gathered around in expectation. Gravely, he addressed his people: »Caused by betrayal we lost two battles, and some of our men were killed. There can be no excuse; treason was committed and the due punishment shall be executed in the measure I already determined: one hundred lashes! Righteous judgement must be maintained.«

His mother, pale and terrorised by fear, was led into a circle, surrounded by soldiers. As the executioner lifted his whip, Shamuel jumped forward and cried out, »Wait! She is my mother; I am of her flesh and blood. I will suffer the punishment for her!« Removing his garment he commanded, »Executioner, you dare not strike me more lightly than you would have whipped the true victim. Do your duty, strike on.« Lash after lash ripped open his bare back until he fell down, unconscious.

Against all expectation, he survived.

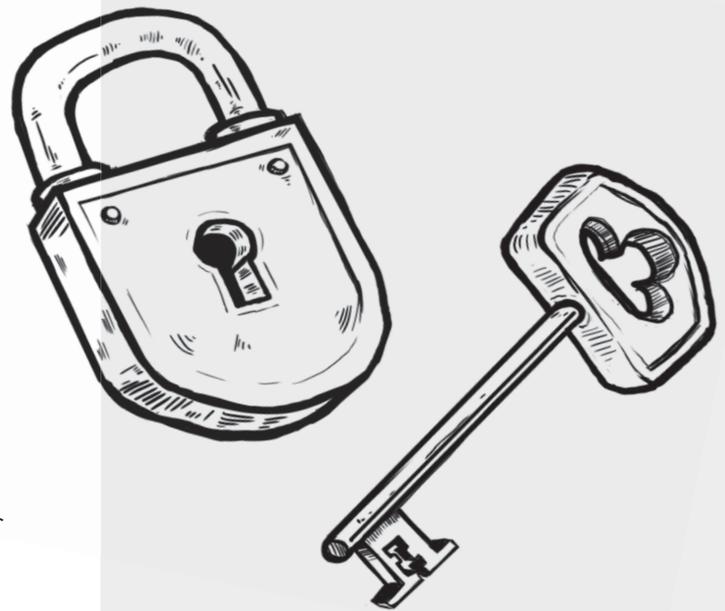
Conclusion This event reflects the picture of Christ very well. He was God in a human form, as we can read in the Bible (New Testament: John 1:10-12; 10:28-30; 14:6; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3,8-9; Romans 9:5; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:20; 2 Peter 1:1; Titus 2:13. Old Testament: Isaiah 7:14; 9:6). Being God, He executes righteous judgement but, in His perfect love, He took on Himself our sin - mine and yours - and suffered the cruel but just consequences on the cross. He endured not only cruel physical suffering, bad as that was but, with it, all the shame and ugliness of our sin.

Illustrations that convey an understanding of Jesus Christ

The lock and its key

No true Christian or Muslim will entertain the blasphemous idea that Jesus was born as a result of a physical union between God and Mary. It is abhorrent to both. An illustration may help to clear the misconception a Muslim may have when hearing the term »Son of God«.

Kutshi in the Malay language is a lock. A key is called *Ana kutshi* which literally means, »Son of a lock«. No Malay believes that a Kutshi mated with another *Kutshi* would bring about the birth of an *Ana kutshi*.



The words indicate that there is a relationship between a key and the lock. Both are complementary to each other and belong together. A lock without a key is incomplete and useless!

Similarly, in the Arabic language a traveller is called a »*Son of the road*«, a local idiom understood by everyone. Likewise, Christians use the term »*Son of God*« when referring to Jesus (Matthew 3:16-17; 11:27; 14:33; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:35; John 1:34; Acts 9:20).

How can Jesus be God?

Once upon a time, a young ruler was well known for his power and wealth. Everybody in his kingdom respected his wisdom and justice.

One day a pretty, but obviously poor, girl came to his notice. It was love at first sight. No one was aware of his feelings – not even the girl. There would of course be no obstacle for the ruler to marry this girl and make her his queen. But he wanted to make sure that she would not marry him because of his wealth, fame or power but rather because of her love for him.

This could only be established if he would live in her environment and be poor like her. If she then would consent to become his wife, he would know that she would marry him without any ulterior motive. He therefore left his palace, put on shabby clothes and walked on foot to her village. Of course, he ran the risk that the girl would refuse him, but the young ruler knew that this was the only way to know if the girl really loved him.



Conclusion God, so to say, courts us. He seeks our love. To help us understand Him, He »took on Himself human nature« (Philippians 2:6). When He manifested Himself on Earth He was born in a stable, hiding his riches, power and authority in order to win our love, as Jesus, Immanuel, which means »God with us« (Matthew 1:23). Though the ruler of our story chose to become like one of his subjects, he was still the ruler and had lost nothing of his power and wealth. So God, too, when He became man to solicit our love, was still the almighty Creator, ruling the universe.

Illustrations that convey an understanding of the Trinity

Questions Muslims ask about the Trinity are difficult to answer satisfactorily. The Trinity is a theological term not found in the Bible, like the words eternity or infinity. Based on revealed truth, it transcends the power of human reason. Christians must therefore be careful not to give the impression that they can explain the inexplicable. The Trinity, or better the »three-naturedness of God« (there is no such word in the Bible, but it directs our understanding somewhat) in the New Testament is evident only in the formula »Father, Son and Holy Spirit«, which reveals very little of its meaning.

The Old Testament (OT) yields more indicative information. The names of God used in the Hebrew text are 'El (410 times in OT), 'Elah (426 times), or 'Eloah (45 times), while *Elohim* – the plural form of God – is used about 2600 times. The very first words of the Old Testament are: »In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth« (Genesis 1:1). The Trinity is also portrayed when Elohim said »Let **us** make man...« (Genesis 1:26), and later at the building of the Tower of Babel, »... let **us** go down and confuse their language« (Genesis 11:7).

We find an explanation in the New Testament (Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3, 8-9), where we read, »... by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him,« and »... in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son... through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.« In this context, the plural form of God is more than justified. In addition, Genesis 1:2 emphasizes: »... the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.«

Still more light is shed on the mystery of the Trinity through Isaiah 63:7-10: »I will tell of the kindnesses of the **Lord**... according to all the LORD has done for us... He said, »Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me«; and so he became their **Saviour** (Yeshua)... In his love and mercy he redeemed them... Yet they rebelled and grieved his **Holy Spirit**«. In Matthew 1:21-23, the Lord ordered, »... you are to give him the name Jesus (Yeshua), because he will save his people from their sins... they will call him Immanuel, which means **»God with us«**.

Analogies that describe **the Trinity**



A chemist's analysis of a drop of water will declare that it is H_2O . A physicist will examine the same drop and declare it a liquid. The chemist will look at ice and maintain that it is H_2O , but the physicist will say it is a solid. With a test tube full of steam, the chemist will give the same analysis as before, but the physicist will now reply that it is a gas!

There are some parallels between this analogy and the Trinity. As water, ice or steam are consistently H_2O , in spite of their physical differences, so God in His diverse forms or manifestations is always God. One could liken water, the sustainer of life, to the Creator Father; the ice, which can be grasped with our hands, to Jesus the Son of God who became the Saviour, and the steam, often unseen and yet powerful, to the Holy Spirit who reveals God to all who seek Him and who gives the power to the

believer to live righteously. Yet all three share the same essential nature: that of God himself!

Mathematical formula Some Muslims say that one being three and three being one is illogical and inconceivable. They use the mathematical formula $1+1+1 = 3$. However, one may suggest that this formula is inappropriate. By what logic is the nature of God being defined by addition rather than by some other formula? We may argue that a multiplication formula would be more appropriate to define God's nature than addition. We then write $1 \times 1 \times 1$ and ask what the answer is. They can immediately see that it is 1. By this, we merely highlight an unjustifiably rigid narrowness, which Muslims have often used toward the doctrine of the Trinity. This may remove the argumentative barrier, which closes the mind to further reception of truth.

Further analogies which implicate three in one

- Humans consist of body, soul and spirit, yet each of us is just one person.
- Sunshine contains of light, heat and material.
- A fire consists of wood, heat and light.

Conclusion Although these analogies may bring us closer to understanding God, our limited human minds cannot fully explain and understand Him. But we may well ponder on God and His creation, which often manifests itself in triune form.

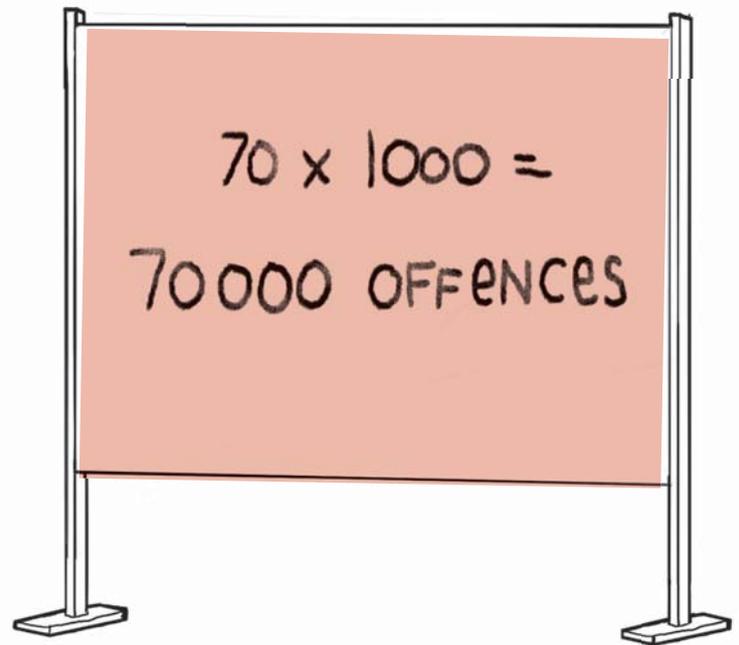
Illustrations and allegories that convey God's view of man

The Bible teaches that no person has kept God's commandments (Romans 3:23). We have all violated them in deed, thought or word. We have not lived by the Golden Rule (see Matthew 7:12 and 22:37-40) at all times. We have fallen short of God's standard. We are told that sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). What do we think of that?

Three sins a day

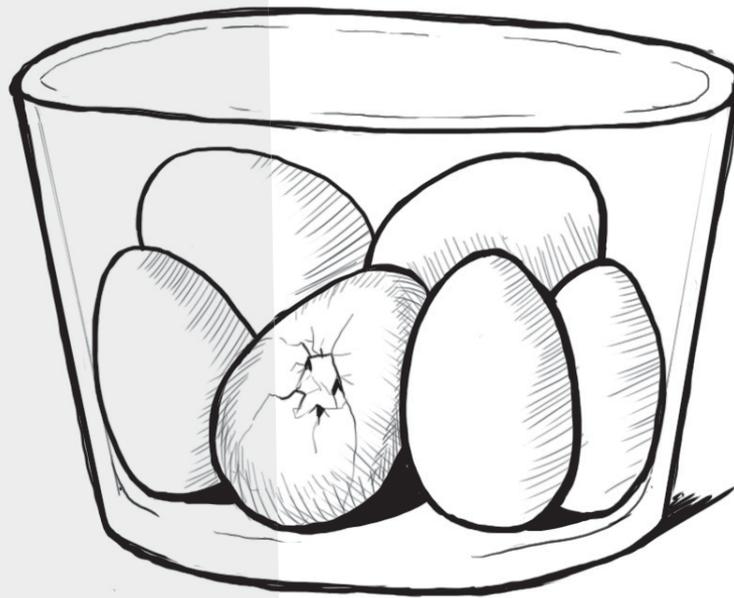
Sins are not only transgressions in word, thought and deed. There are also sins of omission, what we should have done, but did not do, such as truly loving our neighbour!

How many times a day do we sin? How many times a day do we conveniently forget to act in the way God intends us to? Would it be fifty or a hundred times, or even more? Psychologists will tell us that we forget 99% of all the things we have ever done wrong. We suppress them because they are embarrassing and unpleasant.



Suppose you sin only ten times a day, or five, or just three times! You would almost be like an angel! Imagine: you thought nothing unkind, or lost your temper, or failed to do or be what you ought to toward God and your fellow man. Would you really like to be like that? Even if you were this good, you would have wronged God over a thousand times in one year! If you lived to the (average) age of 70, you would have sinned 70,000 times. Just think what would happen to an offender in a criminal court with 70,000 offences on his record!

A rotten egg spoils the dish



The general perception of sin is that 'little' sins do not really matter. Yet whatever offends God in His holiness is never a small matter. Listen to Jesus: »For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'« (Mark 7:21-23).

Sin includes so much more than murder or robbery, and it condemns the very fabric of our human make-up. It is a grave error to speculate that our good deeds, whatever they are, can compensate for the wrongs we have done. No one is 'good enough' to earn the right to live in God's presence in eternity.

Consider this If we scrambled ten good eggs and only one rotten one, we would not serve it to anyone, would we? Nor can we offer a life stained with sins to a holy and righteous God.

Just one wrong step leads to disaster

Muslims believe that they can erase their sins with good deeds. Yet they have no assurance that they will be able to erase even one sin. The following object lesson demonstrates that just one sin is enough to separate man from God. Romans 3:23 says: »...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.«

Ask the Muslim for a glass of water to illustrate a point. While nobody would hesitate to drink it, we would not do so after a drop of poison had been added. True, just one drop in a glass seems insignificant – but it spoils it all.



Likewise, just one sin makes a person unfit for paradise. »Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life« (Revelation 21:27). Jesus is called »the Lamb of God« (by John the Baptist, John 1:29). He died as a sacrifice for our sins. He will let only those into His presence who have accepted Him by faith, asking Him for forgiveness and turning to Him for a new life.

Repentance means to turn around

The Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)



In the parable of the lost son, Jesus spoke of a man who had two sons. One left home with his portion of the inheritance, wasting it in far away places. When nothing was left, he took a hard look at the situation. He »came to himself«, and decided to return to his father in shame. The Bible calls this 'repentance'.

How did this come about? The young man had made a resolution, »I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I am no more worthy to be called your son'« (Lk 15:18). His only hope was to become a servant to his father, a fate far better than starving in a pigsty. Many people make resolutions on New Year's Day but never keep them. Fortunately, the young man did carry out his resolution: »So he got up and went to his father...« (Lk 15:20).

Much to his surprise, his father had never ceased waiting for his return. More surprising, the lost son was recognised by his father in spite of his total depravity. Earlier, he had ridden away confidently, but his expectations of a successful, happy and fulfilled life did not materialize. Now he returned as a filthy, stinking vagabond. Even so, his father ran to meet him, embraced him and kissed him!

The son could hardly stammer out his confession, as immediately his father clothed him in the best robes (covering his filth), put a ring on his finger (accepting him as a son again), and shoes on his feet (only free men were allowed to wear them). The father then ordered a feast to be prepared, »For this son of mine was dead and he is alive again; he was lost and is found...« (Lk 15:24).



Conclusion The parable has no real ending. We are not told whether the older brother accepted his father's invitation. God gives us the option to accept or reject his invitation to live as sons who recognise and love Him as Father. Our heavenly Father, knowing our circumstances, expects nothing more than our return to Him with a broken heart over our sinfulness.



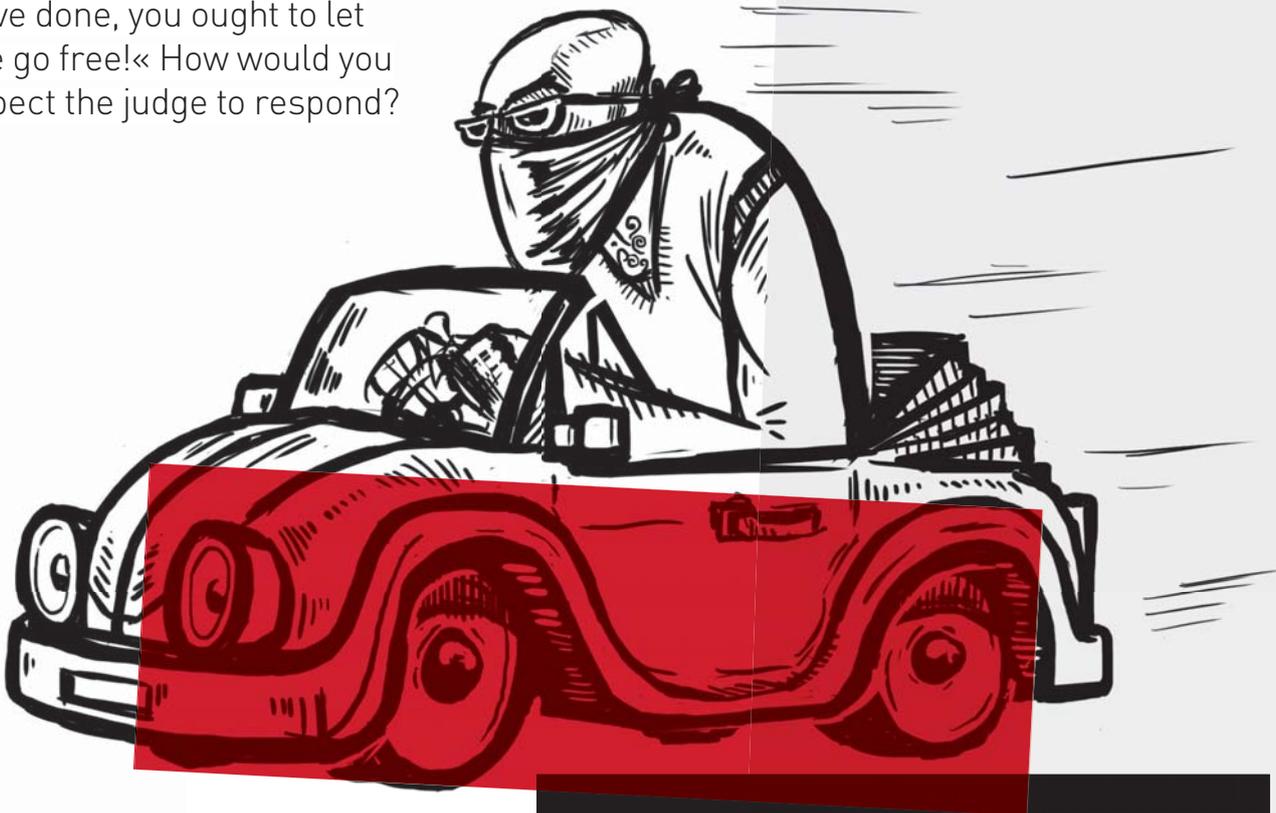
No man can jump over his shadow

A civil war rages somewhere in East Africa. One side prevails, determined to wipe out the other. As they reach the shore of the Indian Ocean, only two options await the pursued: death by machetes or swimming. But to where? India would be the first land across the ocean. Most ran into the sea and began to swim. Some drowned after fifty metres, others swam a kilometre, others made five kilometres... but none reached India.

Conclusion This illustration shows the likelihood of getting to heaven on one's own merits. Try as you like, you may achieve merit by being good, but no one is sinless enough for heaven. All we may do is indeed good, but it does not conform to God's standard: perfection! (Matthew 5:48). But there is, surprisingly, one option open: even if our enemies would attack mercilessly with machetes, God is always open to pardon us in grace.

How good is good enough

Let us assume a man stands in court for car theft. He tries to impress the judge about the many crimes he could have committed, but did not. »Surely, considering what I could have done, you ought to let me go free!« How would you expect the judge to respond?



Conclusion One inevitable day when you stand before God, the Highest Judge, you cannot count on such reasoning. God's holiness and righteousness compel divine justice to deal with our sins. Our only hope is the pardon possible by the atonement of Christ on our behalf.

»Halal« or »haram«, clean or dirty?

Every Muslim knows the concepts of *Halal* (lawful, clean) and *Haram* (unlawful, unclean). This knowledge can be used to explain the Biblical meaning of sin. In Islamic theology, 'sin' is divided into 'mistakes', 'small sins', 'big sins' and 'deadly sins'. To forsake Islam or commit apostasy (*irtidad*), placing anyone else as equal to Allah (*shirk*), and unbelief (*kufr*) are unforgivable sins. All others can be compensated by 'good deeds' such as keeping the fast during *Ramadan*, the five daily prayers and so on.

Ask your Muslim friend what he would do if, going to the supermarket, he found four different types of sausages to choose from:

- The first type has 50% beef and 50% pork.
- The next two have 75% or respectively 90% beef, and the rest pork.
- The last is 100% beef; only the outer skin is from a pig.

Would he not choose to buy the last one with the least amount of pork? A faithful Muslim would immediately answer that all four types were *Haram*. It makes no difference what percentage of pork it contains, or whether it is only stuffed into a pig's intestine. All the sausages contain pork and are therefore *Haram*!

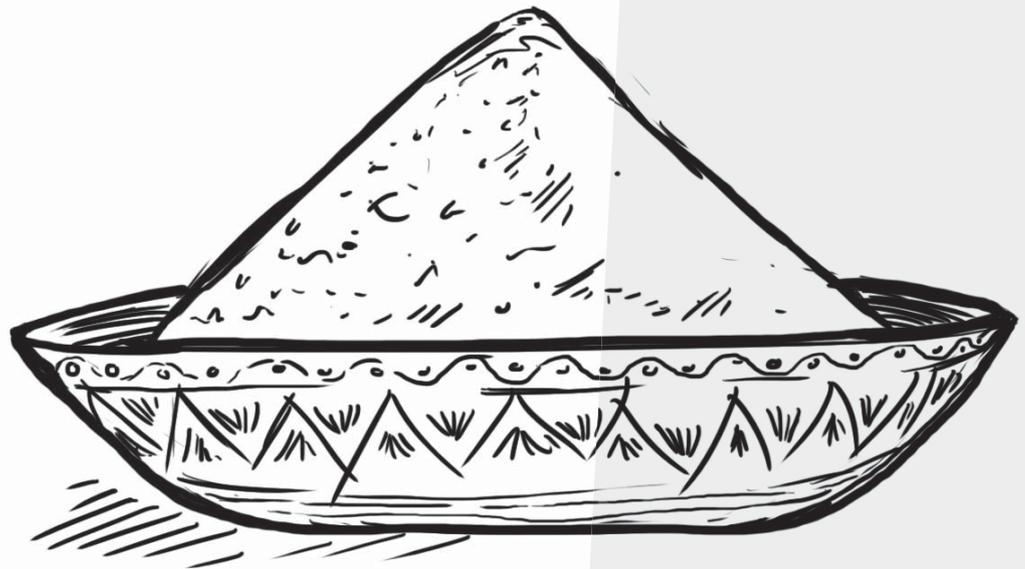


Conclusion The same applies to sin! God says that all sin is *Haram* and makes us impure before God! He will not allow anything impure to enter heaven or paradise (Revelation 21:27). The Bible teaches that we are all sinners. We all have a tendency to do wrong often. Therefore, we all need redemption from our sins (Romans 3:23-24).

Can good deeds cancel bad deeds?

Most Muslims believe that good deeds can cleanse or cancel out bad deeds, but the Bible disagrees (Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:8-9). The following illustration highlights this principle:

Suppose you prepare a pot of *breyani* (strongly spiced curry) and then find out that a malicious person spoiled it by adding some repulsive ingredient. Would you be able to make the contaminated food acceptable by adding more rice and *halal* chicken?



Conclusion In the same way, we cannot become clean by adding good deeds to our lives. Just as we react negatively to contamination, God absolutely hates and rejects the filth that contaminates us (sin). Only by God's grace we can be purified.

5.

Illustrations and allegories that help our understanding of atonement

Sacrifice and Qurban

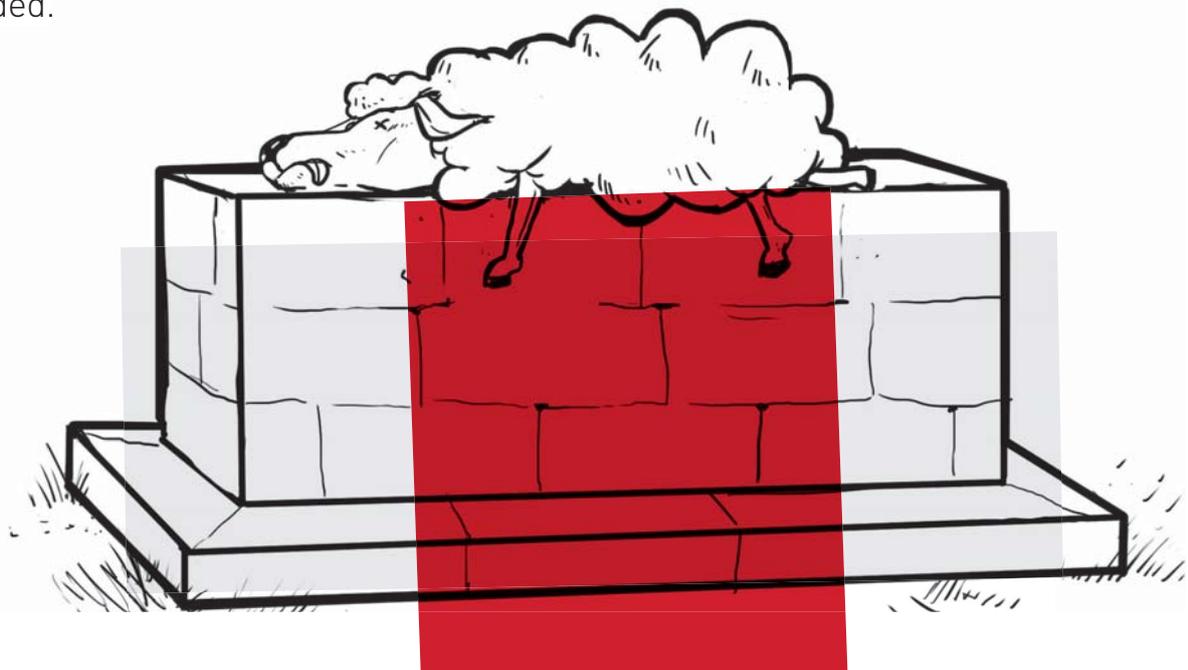
SACRIFICE After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God in His love and mercy provided a way for the sins of people to be forgiven: animal sacrifices would act as substitutes; the animal died in the place of the sinner. These sacrifices were intended as symbols of the »perfect sacrifice« to come, sent by God. It was the mission of the prophet Jesus to die on the cross as the final and perfect sacrifice once for all (Hebrews 7:27, 9:28, 10:14, 10:18).

As a cheque is of no value until it is cashed, and then again is useless, so were the animal sacrifices appointed in the Old Testament. After Christ died on behalf of us sinners (as the New Testament plainly tells), further sacrifice was no longer needed.

David, in the Psalms, prophesied concerning Christ, »Burnt offerings and sin offerings you (God) did not require... Here I am, I have come... to do your will« (see Psalm 40:6-8).

Isaiah said concerning Christ, »We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all« (Isaiah 53:6). The New Testament tells us »For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.« (1 Peter 3:18).

Through faith in His sacrifice, we can be saved from sin and its penalty. Instead, the sacrifices God now expects from believers are thank offerings of praise (Hebrews 13:15,16).



QURBAN In the Dictionary of Islam by Thomas Patrick Hughes, it is explained as follows: »Lit. ‚Approaching near‘. A term used in the Qur’an and the traditions for a sacrifice or offering. Surah 5:30: »Truly when they (Cain and Abel) offered an offering«. It is related to the Hebrew word corban, meaning something set apart for God (Mark 7:11).«

From the time Muhammad had contact with the Jews of Medina, he reinterpreted the pagan sacrifices in the light of Jewish scriptures. This explains why Muslims offer Qurban sacrifices annually at the same time as Jewish people celebrate the Day of Atonement. Even so, when Muhammad had later distanced himself from the Jews, another meaning was attached to sacrifices (see Surah 22:37).

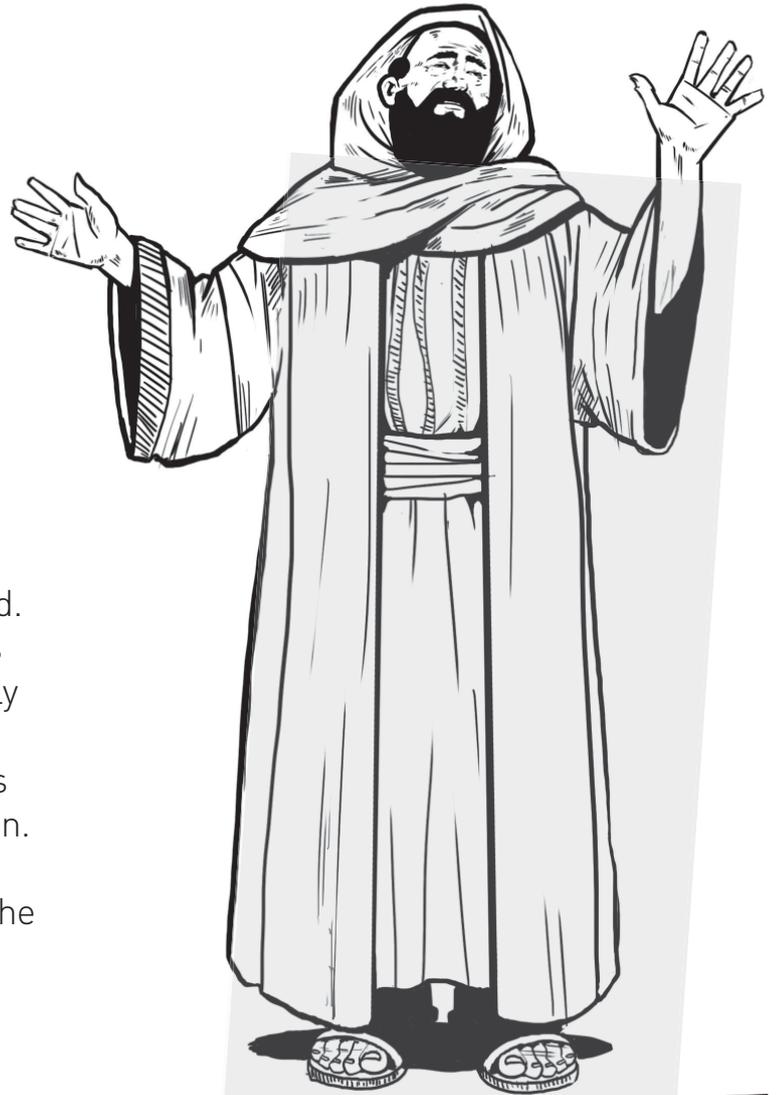
A Muslim may ask, »Why should Jesus die on the cross for others? A prophet is supposed to have died for sinners?« Muslims find it difficult to accept that Jesus’ mission was to come to Earth and eventually die as a sacrifice on the cross. It does not make sense to them that God should punish somebody else in our place.

We may ask Muslims: »Do you sometimes offer a Qurban sacrifice? What exactly does it mean to you?« The Muslim is likely to reply, »It is a feast in commemoration of Ibrahim as he, in obedience to God’s command, was willing to sacrifice his son!« Is there any other meaning in sacrificing the Qurban?



Conclusion God himself provided Abraham with a ram as a substitute for his own son. Abraham’s son was delivered from death; in his place the ram died. This is exactly why Jesus came into the world! (Genesis 22:1-19). God took the form of man for a grand and noble purpose. He left His home in glory and was born in the filth of a stable. He lived a perfect and sinless life. He taught the world’s greatest teachings. He worked the mightiest deeds. Finally, He came to the end of His life to that hour for which He had come: to die as a sacrifice on the cross for our sins (John 12:23-28; 19).

Abraham accepted the sacrifice of God



At the time of the Muslim feast of Eid al Adha, they remember the sacrifice Abraham had to make of his son to God. Muslims must be reminded that it was important for Abraham to be absolutely obedient. This included eventually not sacrificing his son, but accepting God's sacrifice of a ram in the place of his son. We can be so thankful that Abraham and his son were faithful to submit to the command of God. May each of us have faith like Abraham and accept only the sacrifice given by God.

Also, we can be very thankful that God provided the great ransom for Abraham's son. They completely trusted God before he raised the knife to slay his own son. At that moment Abraham was interrupted by God, and the great ransom was revealed to his eyes. Abraham trusted that the ransom was appropriate and was acceptable to God, because God provided it.

Conclusion None of us is greater than Abraham. Each of us should be certain that, if God has provided a great ransom for us already, then He has opened our eyes to what this is. If uncertain, we should ask God to open our eyes to show us the right sacrifice given by God, since only this sacrifice is acceptable to God. May the God of Abraham guide and bless us all!

The house of a thousand terrors

Phillip II (King of Spain, 1527-1598) sent the Duke of Alba to break the will of the stubborn Dutch nation, and bring it under his control. Ordered by the Duke to take Rotterdam, the Count de Bossu attempted to use cunning to capture it.

He summoned the mayor and councilors of Rotterdam to assure them that he had no intention of conquering the city. All he expected as proof of the citizen's loyalty was that they should open the South Gate and permit a small detachment of soldiers to march through the city and exit at the North Gate. He could then send a dispatch to the King assuring him of Rotterdam's loyalty and obedience. Despite the suspicion of some, the South Gate was opened and a small detachment of Spanish troops entered.

However, out of sight lay a much larger force which rushed through the gate and began setting fire to buildings, indiscriminately killing any citizens in its path. Amid screams of terror, the desperate citizens sought shelter. Many crowded into one particularly large house and secured the wooden doors of its cobbled courtyard. With its many rooms packed, word spread to maintain absolute silence. Babies were hushed to sleep; older children were forbidden to utter a sound. The terror-stricken people within waited for impending death or for God's answer to their prayers.

A cunning idea came to one man. He took a lamb from the courtyard, slaughtered it and let its blood trickle underneath the huge doors into the marketplace outside. Silence reigned as they waited. The shouts and screams drew nearer, and soon savage blows hit the wooden doors which creaked and groaned. Just then the Captain came up, »*Don't waste your time – the work has already been done! Look at the blood! Move on!*« When, an hour or so later, the Spaniards withdrew from the blackened remains of Rotterdam, a thousand men, women and children came out of that house (renamed the *House of a Thousand Terrors*) – saved by the blood of the lamb!



Conclusion Stories like this which illustrate the Gospel may be inadequate to reveal its momentous message. However, most of us will realise how this true incident throws light upon the death of Jesus Christ when he became our substitute and Saviour. The lamb in Rotterdam had no choice or will regarding its fate. The Lord Jesus had both, but said (before He suffered), »*Not my will, but Yours be done.*« (Luke 22:42). He voluntarily took sinners' place and died that we might live.

The pearl diver



An aged pearl diver on the East Coast of India decided to use the rest of his life to prepare for reincarnation (in accordance with the Hindu doctrine). He planned to walk on his knees to the holy city of Benares, on the banks of the holy River Ganges. He had been befriended by a Christian, whom he invited for a final meal. As his closest friend, he wanted to spend the evening alone with him. After the meal, the diver disclosed his pilgrimage plans to the Christian, who tried to dissuade him. *»Your knees will be torn and you will die from infection,«* he pleaded. *»If I will die on my way to the holy Ganges,«* the diver replied, *»my soul will be justly rewarded.«*

Later, before the friend departed, the diver moved a chest of drawers and rolled up a small mat underneath, revealing a secret hiding place. He brought out a tiny parcel and opened it in the dim light of an oil lamp revealing a pearl of exceptional size and lustre! *»You are the only person dear to me,«* he

said, *»I want you to have this pearl.«* – *»But it is worth a fortune!«* exclaimed the friend, *»I cannot accept such a gift.«*

The pearl diver's eyes became distant, *»I had a son,«* he related, *»who was the best diver along this coast. He could dive deeper and longer than any of us. One day, we were diving under perfect conditions. I was in the boat while my son submerged, loosening the shells and bringing them to the surface, which I would then open with my knife. Then it happened! He had spotted a very large shell much deeper down. As it was fastened to the corals, he tried to lever it loose. Time ran out, but he persisted. After what seemed hours to the anxious father, the son surfaced, blood pouring from his mouth. His lungs must have burst; he died in my arms. »I found this pearl inside that shell. I could never sell it. It is too dear to me!«* – *»But it is worth a fortune, can I not buy it from you? Let me give you at least something for it, like a hundred pounds,«* pleaded the friend.

The old diver became indignant. *»You want to pay me a lousy hundred pounds for something my son died for? No, it is not for sale! But I meant for you to have it as a gift.«* – *»You see?«* the Christian replied, *»You try to pay God for what His Son gave his life – your sins. Don't you think you offend God by trying to pay for something which is priceless?«*

Conclusion The pearl diver understood the point. He did not undertake his walk to Benares on his knees, instead he accepted the Gift of God: pardon for his sins!

6.

The Bible: word of God, truth

Three fingerprints of God on the text of the Bible

GEOGRAPHY Most events took place in known locations found on maps even today. Specific cities, mountains, valleys, and rivers are often mentioned in the Bible.

HISTORY Most events took place in known time periods with definite connections to known events and people for which there is much information from secular sources. Most events are reported in chronological order, making it easy to follow the actions of God and the people involved. This allows an accurate understanding of God's attitude and specific actions in various circumstances.

PROPHECY Most prophecies have already been fulfilled and are tied to specific known events. Precise prophecies are accurate regarding future blessings and punishments yet to come throughout eternity.

Conclusion Therefore we have rational proof that we can rely on the trustworthiness of the Bible. Read what has been foretold of Jesus between BC 1000-700 in the Old Testament and how it was fulfilled in Jesus as the New Testament reports. In addition, let us look at the life of Jesus in the New Testament itself.



Events about Jesus and when predicted



Events about Jesus and when predicted

Prophecy

old testament

Fulfillment

new testament

The Messiah's birthplace and pre-existence (700 BC)

Mic 5:2

Lk 2:4-7

His virgin birth (700 BC)

Is 7:14

Mt 1:18-23

His divinity (700 BC)

Is 9:6

Mt 1:23

The time of his coming (500 BC)

Da 9:24

Gal 4:4

He would come to save and to heal (700 BC)

Is 53:3-6

Mt 1:21;
Lk 18:40-43; 19:10

The name of the Messiah (700 BC)

Is 49:1-8

Mt 1:21

His suffering and crucifixion

Is 53;
Ps 22:1-18

Mat 27:33-50;
Jn 18:36-19:37

His burial

Is 53:9

Mt 27:60

His resurrection

Ps 16:8-11

Ac 2:25-32

His ascension

Ps 110:1

Ac 1:6-11;
Heb 1:13

Jesus the prophet

(Deuteronomy 18:15-22)

Jesus was more than a prophet, but is also referred to as 'the prophet' (Jn 1:45; 6:14-15; Acts 3:18-27; 7:37, 52) whose coming had been foretold 1500 years before (Deuteronomy 18:15-22). Let us examine how a prophet of God can be detected:

You may say to yourselves, »How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?« If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:21-22).

A prophet is someone who correctly prophesies (Isaiah 41:21-23; 44:7; 45:21; 46:10; 48:3,5-6). Some prophecies foretell events that may be fulfilled centuries later. The death penalty for a false prophet would be meaningless if, by the time people figured out that a particular prophet was false, he had already died of old age! Consequently, he also had to foretell events that could be verified in his lifetime.

Jesus made short-term prophecies that came true

- A fig tree was cursed (Mt 21:18-22; Mk 11:12-21) and died soon after
- Peter's denial (Mt 26:31-35; 69-75)
- Jairus' daughter to be raised from dead (Mk 5:21-43)
- A centurion's servant to be healed (Mt 8:5-13)
- Fish on the other side of a boat (Jn 21:6)
- A fish with a correct coin in its mouth (Mt 17:27)

- Lazarus to be raised; just »fallen asleep« (Jn 11:1-14)
- »...you will find a donkey...« (Mt 21:2)
- Jesus to be dead for three days and then resurrected (Mt 12:38-40)
- »another Helper« would be sent (Jn 14:16-17)
- »...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit« (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4)
- »...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you« (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4)

Medium-term prophecies which came true

- Jesus would be rejected by religious leaders, suffer many things, be put into hands of men and be killed – and after three days rise again (Mk 9:31; Mk 15-16)
- »...I will make you fishers of men« (Mt 4:19-20)
- The Jerusalem Temple would be left desolate and destroyed (Mt 23:38; Mt 24:2);
- Woe coming upon unrepentant cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Korazin (Mt 11:20-24)
- Jesus would be remembered by a new memorial sacrament (Lk 22:19, Lord's supper)
- The Church would grow rapidly and become large, similar to the mustard plant (Mt 13:31-32)

Prophecies of the then-distant future:

- Jesus told of many future events and judgments, especially in Mt 23-25.

The true word of God



Why are there four Gospel records? Sometimes Muslims wonder why there are four Gospel records. These illustrations may help to clarify the issue:

1. WITNESSES IN A COURT CASE

In one court case, a judge heard four different witnesses so he could establish the truth about the case in hand. Let us assume that there are two different examples:

Example 1 The first witness tells his story taking fifteen minutes. The second witness tells the same story, word for word, also taking fifteen minutes. The third and fourth witnesses also tell the identical story.

Example 2 The judge interrogates four witnesses but the first one takes only ten minutes; the second takes twenty minutes with extra detail; the third only takes five minutes and the fourth version takes fourteen minutes. Each described the same incident in his own words.

Conclusion How would you react if you were the judge in these two examples? Surely you would be suspicious concerning the trustworthiness of the reports of the witnesses in the first example. In the second example, we have four witnesses describing the truth in their own words from different angles. In the Bible, God has given us four Gospel records – each account with its own emphasis. In each Gospel, we see the truth presented from a different angle.

2. WITNESSES IN A CAR ACCIDENT

A pedestrian is killed in a car accident. In court, four witnesses are called to testify. One was actually in the car when the accident occurred. Another one was standing on the street corner and saw the incident. A third looked from a window above when saw the accident, while the fourth was a police officer who investigated the case. When all testify truthfully to the exact event, although witnessed it from different angles, the truth will be convincingly established.

Conclusion In the Law of God (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6) and the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 18:16) it states that that every (legal) matter should be »established by the testimony of two or three witnesses«. In the case of the Gospel, God deemed it still better to provide four witnesses: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Who dares to doubt the trustworthiness of these accounts?



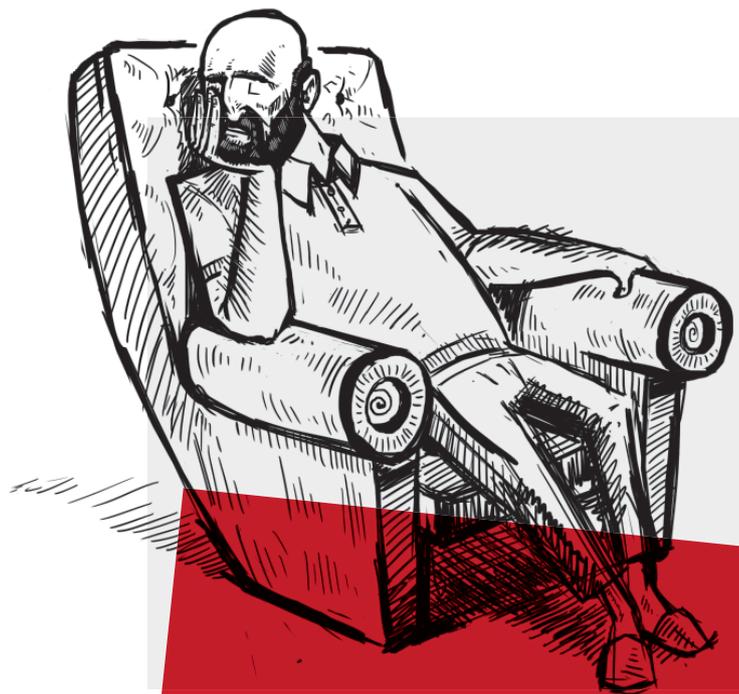
An argument against the corruption of the Bible

Muslims claim that the Bible has been changed over a period of hundreds of years. Only at the coming of the Qur'an (c.  AD 655) did God finally intervene and stop the corruption. Why did God wait so long?

Parable: Did the houseowner finally wake up?

A rich farmer sat in the pitch darkness of his house. A poor, dubious figure passed the house and noticed the incredible darkness within. Thinking that no one was at home, he decided to enter and steal whatever he could. Very carefully, he entered the house and switched on the light. Immediately he spotted the owner sitting in a corner, watching him, but not uttering a word! The thief was taken by surprise but, because the owner made no sound, nor hindered the thief from taking anything, the thief started to collect the precious articles in the room.

The next evening, the thief passed the house again to find there was still no light. As he carefully entered through the window, he saw the owner still sitting and apparently unmoved by this invasion. The thief decided to go into the next room and empty it. So it was on the third day. On the fourth evening, as the thief entered the house, the owner suddenly jumped up, shouted loudly and attacked the thief. The police came immediately and threw the criminal into prison.



Conclusion Why did the landlord or houseowner take so long to become wise? In the same way we can ask: Did God watch from a distance as the five books of Moses, the Psalms and the New Testament were falsified and corrupted? Did He only awaken as the Qur'an came 600 years after Christ to protect it? This makes no sense. God has always protected His eternal Word and this is what we hold in our hands: the Bible being authentic and unchanged!

The final revelation from God

Imagine you stand on the shore and see a boy struggling in the sea, crying for help. What would you do? Would you go into the local bookstore, buy a book on basic swimming, rush back to the shore and throw the book to him, expecting him to read his way to safety? Or would you, as a good swimmer, dash out to his rescue?

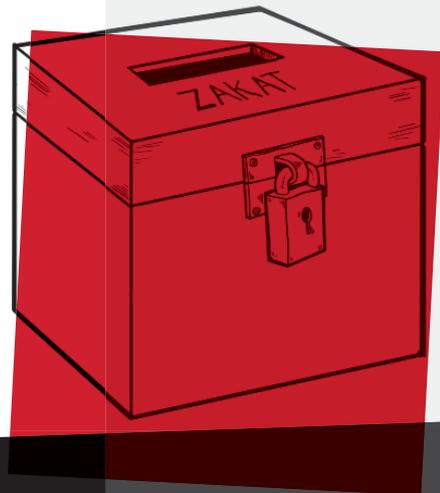
In Islam, the only help Muslims have is in their book, the Qur'an, supposedly the final perfect revelation to solve mankind's problems and their eternal destiny. In Christianity, however, God came personally to Earth in Jesus Christ and offers His help for mankind to be saved. Jesus was the final perfect revelation of God on Earth. God is with us through His Living Spirit. Christians need never feel alone. The Qur'an is merely a book, whereas Christ is a living person.

Sign & seal

While sitting on the floor in a mosque, one man mentioned to me that their prophet is the »Sign & Seal« of all the prophets. There was a donation box near us. I pointed to it and asked, »I see a sign that says 'Zakat' and I see a small padlock on the latch of the box. Which is more important: the money which is in the box, or the sign and the seal?« The men said that the money in the box was more important.



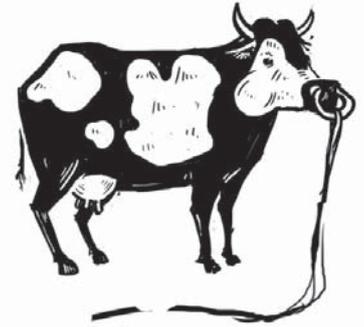
Conclusion If you were in trouble, would you prefer to be given a book to read or be helped by someone who can assist you greatly in your time of need? God did not just give us a book as His final revelation. He Himself came in person as Jesus Christ to rescue us! This is the difference between Islam and Christianity.



Conclusion I said that they should study the messages of the prophets who came before Muhammad, because surely if he was a sign identifying the prophets as being authentic and important, and if he was a seal attesting to their great value, then Muslims should study the writings and messages of those prophets. These writings and messages are found in the Bible.

True doctrine

When we want to go somewhere, do we ask for the most beautiful route or do we ask for the right road which leads to our destination? The question is not whether a doctrine is beautiful or conceived in sincerity – it is whether it is TRUE!



Partial truth is misleading

A farmer confessed under oath, without flinching, that he had stolen a rope. He was not lying, but neither was he telling the whole truth, for on the end of that rope was a cow that he was also accused of stealing!



Conclusion To know only part of the truth can be misleading, even dangerous. Many things we hear, particularly with respect to religion, are only a small portion of the whole story, even though they may sound complete and substantial. Therefore, everyone should make the effort to discover the whole truth, especially in spiritual matters. Although the Qur'an gives hints to many biblical stories, we should encourage Muslims to read the Bible to get to the whole truth.

Sincerely wrong!



During a great fire in the city, a woman was seen frantically waving for help from a balcony high up in the blazing inferno. The fire brigade arrived just in time to reach her. »But my baby daughter is still inside!« she cried. With a heroic effort the fireman fought his way through the blaze and soon placed a tiny bundle into the arms of the relieved mother. But when she uncovered the face, there was

a scream of despair: it was not her daughter, but a doll which had been retrieved. It was now too late to correct the error. Her baby perished in the fire.

Conclusion Do you think that the fireman had intentionally rescued the wrong baby? Certainly not! Did the mother give the wrong information to the fireman? Of course not! They were both absolutely sincere toward each other but sincerely mistaken! Sincerity, as important as it is, is not enough to establish truth. In our search for eternal life, we must seek full assurance that we are on the right path and **KNOW** the truth, for it is a matter of life or death!

Sincerity is not enough!

When carbon dioxide was administered to a patient instead of oxygen, death resulted almost immediately. The tragedy occurred while the patient was being prepared for a very minor operation. A trained anaesthetist was administering the normal controlled mixture of gas and oxygen when the latter ran out. A new tank marked *Oxygen* was substituted. The autopsy revealed CO₂ poisoning and the new tank was found to contain the deadly gas. It had been incorrectly labelled before reaching the hospital! The manufacturer was sincere; the hospital was sincere; the anaesthetist was sincere; the surgeon was sincere and certainly, the patient was sincere! No one wanted the tragedy to happen. All were sincerely mistaken.



Most of us want to be certain of truth regarding our health, but all of us must be even more confident regarding eternity. Too many things are incorrectly labelled *salvation, forgiveness, life, peace, security* and *satisfaction*. How can one be absolutely sure in such important

matters? Only by taking God at His Word. It is in this life that the right decisions must be made not by relying on what friends, family or religious people tell us, but by understanding what God Himself has told us in His Holy Word, the Bible.

Conclusion This incident demonstrates that sincerity is NOT enough; it must be coupled with CERTAINTY. A saying goes: »The mistakes of doctors are buried«. This is indeed very tragic. Every life comes to an end sooner or later – except eternal life! There is a verse which says »There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death« (Proverbs 14:12). Too many people are saying »As long as I am sincere, I'll be all right in the end« ... but they might be SINCERELY mistaken!

7

Salvation, eternal life and the way of escape

Redemptive analogies: a man-made boat contrasted to a ship made by God

A man owned a small boat he had made himself. One day, he undertook a long trip on the vast sea. Soon he encountered a storm which quickly destroyed the small boat – it had not been made for rough weather. Despairing for life and seeking rescue, the man was overjoyed to see a large ship come to his rescue, where he was given a blanket, a hot drink and plenty to eat. Most of all, he was secure, no matter whatever future storm would arise.

Supposing, however, that moments after the large ship's arrival, a small, fragile boat came along and also offered to rescue the man. Would the now-rescued man leave the large ship for the small, fragile boat? Surely not; he has no further need for rescue, and the even weaker hope of safety of the smaller craft would be a foolish option.



Conclusion This story compares Jesus' offer of certainty with man-made plans for rescue. As the perfect and only Saviour, Jesus provides mankind sufficiently with the way to heaven (paradise). Jesus represents the stable, large, secure ship which withstands every storm, against which all man-made efforts will ultimately fail. Those who trust in them will perish. Jesus is the only true, secure and eternal rescue for mankind.

Salvation: a gift



Imagine a poor country with starving people. A poor woman greatly desired a bunch of grapes from the king's garden for her sick child. She took fifty cents and went to the king's gardener trying to buy the fruit, but was rudely refused. A second effort with more money met with the same result.

It happened that the king's daughter heard the angry words from the gardener and the pleading of the woman. When the poor woman told her story, the princess said, *»My dear woman you are mistaken. My father is not a merchant but a king. His business is not to sell, but to give!«* She picked a bunch from the vine and gently dropped it into the woman's apron. The woman thus received as a gift what the labour of many days had proved impossible to obtain.

Conclusion In the same way, God offers salvation only as a gift. We cannot obtain it by money or good works. *»For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.«* [Ephesians 2:8-9]

Kindness beyond measure

The following story is taken from a conversation between Dr. Ussher, a Christian, and Sir Ahmed, a nobleman who lived in Constantinople, Turkey and who was appointed Vali of the province of Van after Abdul Hamid.



»Will you kindly tell me what you think I must do to enter Paradise?« Sir Ahmed asked. »Your Excellency,« the Christian replied, »I believe that God, for Jesus Christ's sake, pardons my sins and will receive me into Paradise.«

»No Sir, I cannot accept that,« replied Sir Ahmed, »I might, for your sake, pardon one of your friends who was in prison for debt (Turkish law imprisoned a debtor until his debt was paid in full) but, if I did so, I would not be upholding true justice in this state. If God could do that kind of thing, He would be no more righteous than I am. I cannot believe that of Him. What do you say now, Dr. Ussher?«

»Your Excellency,« Dr. Ussher replied, »I will use an illustration. Assume that I am in prison for a large debt to the government which I cannot repay. You are the king and have a son. You both love me, but must uphold true justice. Together, you agree to pay my debt and your son comes in person, pays and is given a receipt. All that is needed now is my acceptance of your gracious provision. Sending for me in the prison, your prince says to me, 'Rise, friend, you are free. I have paid your debt.'



I may do one of three things :

1. Out of pride, I may refuse to accept your kindness and so insult the one who loves me.
2. I might say that I cannot believe it, and fear to discover the truth. If I were compelled to leave the prison not believing in my freedom, I would live in fear of the police and hide in my home. Without faith or belief within my heart, I have no liberty!
3. I could believe it, be grateful and fall at your son's feet saying, 'Thank you. I have nothing to give in return (since my pennies to your pounds would be an insult) so I will endeavour to show my gratitude for the rest of my life'.

»But this is not all,« Dr. Ussher continued, »The prince takes and gives me the Hammam (Turkish bath; the most thorough cleansing known). My prison clothes, with all their filth, are thrown into the fire, and that is that: the end of my past life. Your son then clothes me as a prince and brings me before you, the king. This is the way I understand Christianity. God is the King and Jesus Christ, His Son, paid the sinner's debt by willingly dying upon the cross and, by the power of God, rising from the dead on the third day. I believe it and I know that I am free. If you will believe it also, it will mean as much to you as it does to me. What will be my attitude toward the prince now?«

The doctor continued, »I see him, for example, coming on horseback down a narrow alley, but someone has dumped firewood in the street to block his way. What shall I do? Should I wait till he arrives and say 'What will you give me to remove this for you?' Or should I quickly remove the obstruction before he comes and then proudly and joyfully salute him as he passes, willingly showing my gratitude for all that he has done for me?«

One day a group of friends went to a river with many crocodiles where, in the distance, they could see a man paddling a boat to reach the other side. *»If we could do that,«* said Sheik Omar, *»we too could cross the river and visit the other side.«* – *»Then let's build a boat,«* Achmed suggested. *»But what shall we build it with?«* Suleiman inquired. *»Ask Sheik Omar,«* Achmed replied.

The way to heaven / paradise

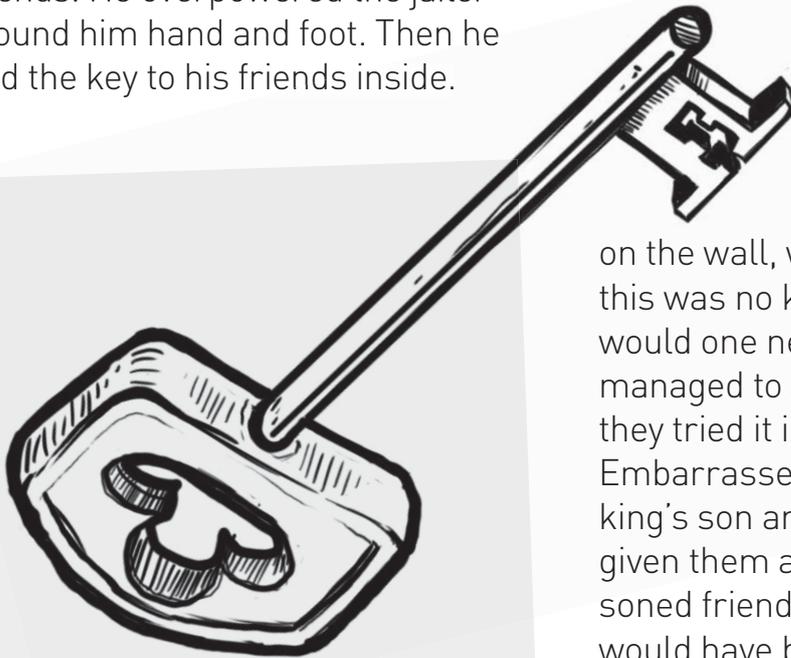


Sheik Omar thought for a while. *»That man's boat looks as if it is made of mud,«* he retorted *»Shall we try that?«* So they worked hard and made their boat, leaving it to bake in the sun. When they returned a few days later, it was dry and extremely hard. *»Looks good to me!«* Omar observed. They got in and began to paddle to the other side, but the mud became softer and softer, until it fell apart and dissolved. Some were immediately eaten by the crocodiles; others drowned. No one survived. However, Abdul had not trusted the idea in the first place and had stayed behind. He had seen the tragic fate of his friends, sad that he'd never see them again.

Conclusion Different people have put their trust in things they thought would bring them to heaven (paradise) but God gives us only one way through Jesus Christ. If we try our own way, we will surely fail. Jesus said *»I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father (in heaven) except through me.«* (John 14:6)

The key to freedom

Friends of a king of old had fallen into disfavour in a neighbouring land and were imprisoned. The king was not prepared to leave them in their misery, and decided to free them. The prisoners had been incarcerated in a strong tower whose door could only be opened from the inside. The king sent his son to free his friends. He overpowered the jailer and bound him hand and foot. Then he passed the key to his friends inside.



on the wall, while another suggested that this was no key at all. Besides, for what would one need a key anyway? They even managed to add pieces. Finally, when they tried it in the lock, it no longer fit! Embarrassed, they started to mock the king's son arguing that he had never given them a key at all. Had the imprisoned friends trusted their rescuer, they would have been set free.

The friends looked at the key and discussed what they should do with it. The king's son urged that time was limited and they should unlock the gate, but instead they consulted with each other rather than open the gate. One of them suggested that some parts of the key should be removed by grinding it away

Conclusion This story illustrates how many people who hear the truth of God (the Gospel of Jesus Christ) misuse it, often distorting it beyond recognition. God sent his son, Jesus, to rescue all people. He gives us the key to freedom. However, unless we use this key as it is, it will be of no use; people will not be freed but eternally stay in prison.

8.

More parables of the Lord Jesus

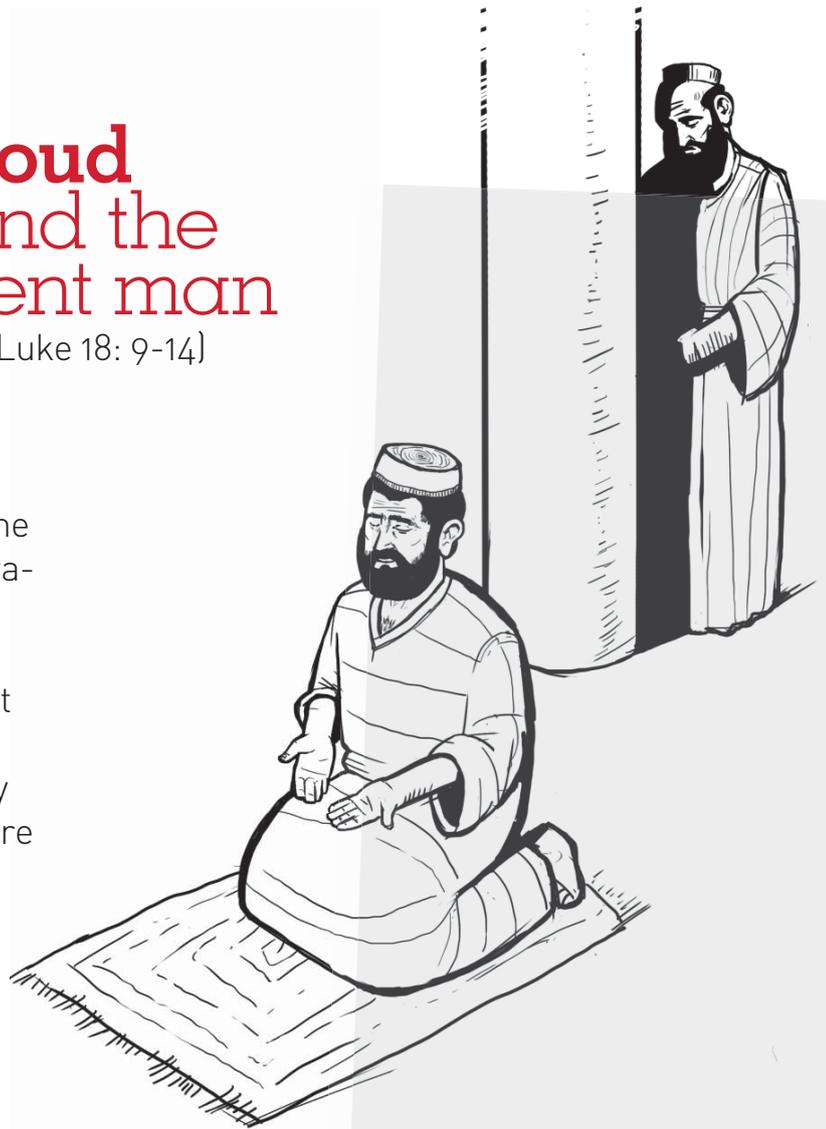
These should only be used in the right context. Suggested parables:

The proud man and the repentant man

(Compare with Luke 18: 9-14)

Two men went to pray in the mosque. One was a good Muslim who knew all the right actions for his religious life. His Arabic was perfect and he was accomplished in the words and movements of the Salat (liturgical form of prayer). He went confidently to the centre of the mosque, prostrated himself and prayed correctly and precisely – even as his thoughts were on the pretty girl next door.

The second man was a down and out sinner who had led a corrupt life and hadn't prayed for a very long time. He couldn't remember how to perform the Salat and felt shy as he entered the mosque. He quickly slipped behind a large pillar where he whispered his own prayer: *»O God, forgive me. I have made a complete mess of my life, but I long now to follow and serve you.«*



Conclusion Whose devotion is more acceptable to God? God looks to the heart and its intentions, rather than outward ritual.



The offering

(Luke 21:1-4)

Two Muslim men went to pay Zakat (alms giving). One was very rich and gave a large amount. The other was very poor, but was keen to give something of himself to God and therefore gave his last cent!

Conclusion Who gave more to God, the rich man or the poor? In God's sight, the poor man gave more than the rich man, for he gave everything he had! The rich man only gave a small portion of his wealth.

List of other parables and their Bible references

Real defilement
 The sower and the seed
 The wise and foolish builders
 The good neighbour
 The rich fool (covetousness)
 The lost sheep
 The lost coin
 The barren fruit tree
 Fasting
 The unforgiving servant
 The ten bridesmaids
 The great banquet
 The wedding garment
 The wicked tenants
 The fishing net
 The landowner
 The wheat and weeds, the King's judgement
 The rich man and Lazarus
 The judgement: sheep and goats

Mk 7:1-23
 Lk 8:5-8, 11-15; Mt 13:1-23
 Lk 6:46-49
 Lk 10:25-37
 Lk 12:13-21
 Lk 15:1-7
 Lk 15:8-10
 Lk 13:6-9
 Mt 6:16-18
 Mt 18:21-35
 Mt 25:1-13
 Lk 14:15-24
 Mt 22:1-14
 Mt 21:33-41
 Mt 13:47-50
 Mt 20:1-16
 Mt 13:24-30, 36-43
 Lk 16:19-31
 Mt 25:31-46



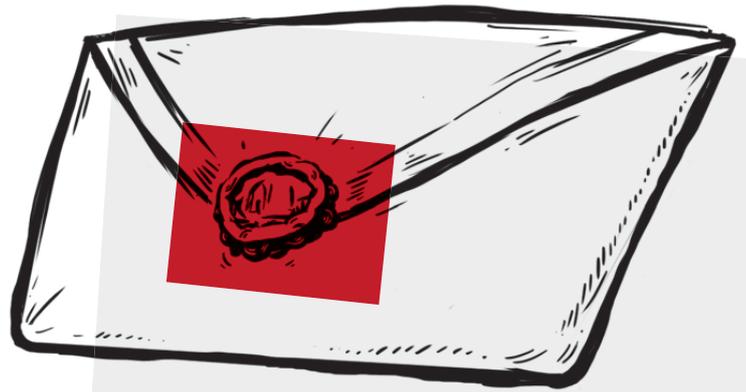
9.

Miscellaneous topics

The important letter

When Yusuf was two years old, his parents died in an accident. They left a large property as an inheritance. His uncle Hasan was appointed guardian. However, Hasan was an evil man; he sent young Yusuf far away to another relative and spread the message that the boy was dead. He then sold the land and spent the money on himself. Yusuf grew up under the impression that he was a poor orphan, forced to work hard in the fields with very little education. He could hardly read or write.

However, one day he received a curious letter from another uncle, Omar, who told him the whole sad story of how Hasan had robbed him of his inheritance. Uncle Omar was extremely sorry for Yusuf and wanted to rectify the matter. He had worked extra hard for some time and had managed to buy back the property in Yusuf's name and needed him to personally claim it. What should Yusuf do? Amazed, he was not sure if he could trust the letter. He discussed it with his master and other elders, but they only tried to dissuade him. What if he were to travel so far only to discover it was a



trick? Yusuf was also filled with doubt. Finally, against the will of his master, he left with his letter, which gave him specific directions. Every time he reread it, he was filled with hope and confidence.

Upon arrival, he went straight to the judge, who was able to confirm that the letter was true and he was, in fact, the wealthy owner of a large property. There is no need to tell how happy young Yusuf was and how he marvelled at the beauty of all he now possessed! He promised to take special care of it and looked forward to thanking his uncle Omar.

Conclusion This story can be compared to the message of the Bible. It tells you about the inheritance God has prepared for you, but the enemy, Satan, will try everything to distract you. What will your decision be and whom will you trust?

Rejecting the Son and His gift

Ali was a poor man who operated a little shop, barely able to support his family. One day, told of better jobs in a far away country, he sold his property. Leaving sufficient means for his family, he took the rest of his money and set off. Finding mediocre dwellings, he began searching for work, but to no avail. Rapidly, his funds depleted. At the end of the month, his landlord came for his rent, but Ali had to ask for an extension. The landlord was a kind man and agreed.

Still Ali could not find work by the end of the second month, when the landlord came again. *»I hear that you are a generous and merciful man,«* Ali pleaded. *»Could you not write off the past two month's rental?«* – *»It is true what you have heard about my generosity and mercy, but I am also just. You will have to pay your debt. I will give you one more month,«* the landlord replied.

In vain, Ali sought work. He couldn't borrow from his friends who were also poor. Then, one night, there was a knock on his door. It was the landlord's son. Ali



was annoyed and tried to send him away. But the son said, *»My father and I have seen your misery and I am here to help you. My father has encouraged me to sell a portion of my inheritance for you. Here is the money, take it and use it to pay off your debt. When my father comes tomorrow, give it to him!«*

Surprisingly, instead of being grateful, Ali was proud and refused the gift. The landlord's son left, deeply hurt. The next day, when the landlord arrived, Ali threw himself at his feet again pleading for mercy and forgiveness. *»Last night, I sent you both mercy and forgiveness in the person of my son and you accepted neither him nor his gifts. Your opportunity is now gone. I can no longer show*

you compassion,« said the disappointed landlord. Ali was immediately turned out into the street and the door was locked behind him. He never found work and died shortly afterwards.

Conclusion This story illustrates how many people are filled with pride and reject the gift of God: forgiveness of all their sins through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. As the landlord sent his son to Ali, so God has sent His spiritual Son, Jesus. It shows that God loves us all and wants us to be free. However, we need to accept God's way of forgiveness, not our own. God is merciful but also just; therefore punishment has to be carried out. God sent His perfect Son who could pay for our transgressions. Will you accept God's way of forgiveness?

True greatness

Let's assume that we had two great Muslim leaders such as Caliph Omar and Salah' ad-Din (Saladin), among the most admired leaders of Muslims of all time. Suppose that someone claimed that both great men played with little girls' dolls. Initially, any self-respecting Muslim would say, »Never! Far be it from Omar or Salah ad-Din that they should play with little girls' dolls! Great Muslim men would never do such a thing! It is not befitting that Omar or Salah' ad-Din would play with dolls!«

At first, this might sound quite reasonable. But what if the story unfolded that both Omar and Saladin each had three daughters for whom nothing pleased them more than when their Daddy got down on the floor and played with them and their dolls? What if we learned that, because of a father's great love for his daughters, one of these men humbled himself in this way on a regular basis? Would this man be a better leader, a better man, for doing this or would he be lesser man, less great? Surely he would be a better man.

Now, what if we learned that Saladin did in fact play with his daughters while Omar refused to do so, considering himself far above such practice? Which leader would be more appealing? Personally I would see Saladin as being a far better father, man, and a better and more admirable leader. True greatness needs no defense. True greatness is self-evident, needs no elaboration or protection.



Conclusion Islam constantly claims that God would never become a man, regardless of the reason. »Far be it from God that He should have a son! It is not befitting of the Almighty that He should do such a thing!« But in this attempt to make God greater, he has simply become distant, like Omar in the story above. The Christian concept of God is more like Saladin, the loving father. Because God is good in the purest sense, He desires to share Himself with us, to reveal Himself. He wants us to have a knowledge of Him as well as to personally know Him. Jesus revealed God to us when he said, »I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.« (John 14:6-7)

Fasting – redemptive analogies: the wife and Ramadan

The following story was told to a Muslim who was boasting about the glories of the fast during Ramadan.

»**Once there was a man** who was engaged to be married. His fiancée told him, 'Let's get one thing clear. For one month every year, I will be the perfect wife. I'll cook your food, do the dishes, wash your clothes, never leave the house, and never even look at another man. However, for the other eleven months, I want to do whatever I feel like. If I don't want to cook or clean, I don't have to. If I feel like going out with my friends or with another man, I will, because I think this is fair.'« The Muslim was asked, what he thinks about a woman who would say these things. – »She should have her throat cut!« he declared vehemently.



Conclusion That's exactly what so many people are doing to God! They tell him, »Before and during Ramadan, I'll do everything you want, but don't expect me to behave all year long.« What do you think God will do to people who live like that?

A gracious way of sharing the hope of eternal life

There are many different approaches using Scripture to unwrap biblical truth. Every Christian is encouraged to search the Bible for stories and illustrations which may help to discern spiritual truth. Of course, it needs prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, while carefully studying the Bible in order to develop and effectively share the story with Muslims. The following example, told by Dave Foster, may stimulate your thinking and encourage you to develop your own stories from other biblical passages, to be shared with Muslims.

Introduction Many have been prompted to consider the claims of Jesus Christ through a heart-searching question: »Suppose that you would die and stand before God. If he asked, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' what would you say?« As good as this question is, there are

many situations where this approach may be too abrupt and unwise. There is, however, a gentler way in discussing the hereafter and eternity, especially when speaking to people easily offended or put off by Christian witness e.g. Muslims.

I recommend using Ecclesiastes 3:1,2,11, *»For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die... Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.«* This wise saying of Solomon can be a gentle opening to talk about eternity. I have used these verses to nudge people into a discussion about the innate longing within all of us to live beyond the grave. Most cultures and creeds have a vague hope of a better afterlife. Verse 11b observes how uncertain and elusive this hope is: *»but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.«*

Now let's us look at Ecclesiastes 7:1, »*A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. And the day you die is better than the day you are born*« which implies an afterlife. Not only so, the word »better« anticipates immortality (eternal life). The elusive nature of immortality, hinted at in 3:11, is reinforced in 7:1. A sense of elusiveness is conveyed through what is in effect a cryptic riddle, and a very perplexing one at that. It is not easy to discern the correlation between a good reputation, perfume, death and birth.

Solomon tells us in Proverbs 1:5,6 why he composed riddles: »*Let the wise listen to these proverbs [and] receive guidance by exploring the meaning in these... riddles.*« His intention is to evoke a sense of intrigue to stimulate us to explore truth, that is, »*to concentrate on understanding... Search for them as you would for hidden treasure.*« (Proverbs 2:4 NLT)

There are other places in the Bible where riddles effectively teach truth. The Sons of Korah spoke in riddles to explain the meaning of death and resurrection in Psalm 49. In John 4, we see Jesus speaking a riddle to the woman at the well to evoke her curiosity about eternal life. The apostle Paul says that our conversation towards outsiders should be »gracious and seasoned with salt« (Colossians 4:4-6). The word, 'seasoned' denotes stimulating and interesting.

It is wonderful to stimulate people's curiosity to lead them in a search for understanding how to attain eternal fulfillment.

Starting the conversation

Stimulating people to ponder intriguing sayings is a positive starting point in conversation. After we have aroused their appetite, we can share a fuller explanation of man's longing for immortality. However, intermediate steps are often required. Here are questions that can help to engage people in conversational witness:

1. May I ask your opinion about a wise saying written 3,000 years ago? (Give a small card containing Eccl. 3:1,2,11; 7:1)
2. Do you think this proverb is meaningful in our modern world?
3. Comparing expensive perfume to a good reputation is puzzling. What do you think it means?

After some thought, a person might reply: »Putting on expensive perfume can make a good impression on others for a short while, but it won't last. However, a good reputation lasts a long time.« (compare Prov. 10:7)

On the other hand, someone might respond with a comment like, »If you live a good life, you will die in peace and go to a good hereafter. But those who live a sinful life will not end up in a better place.« To Christians, these answers are moving

in the right direction but may carry wrong implications. For the time being, however, we can give the 'benefit of the doubt' – doing good is important. Any misguided implications about what true goodness means can be clarified and corrected in due course.

Continuing the conversation

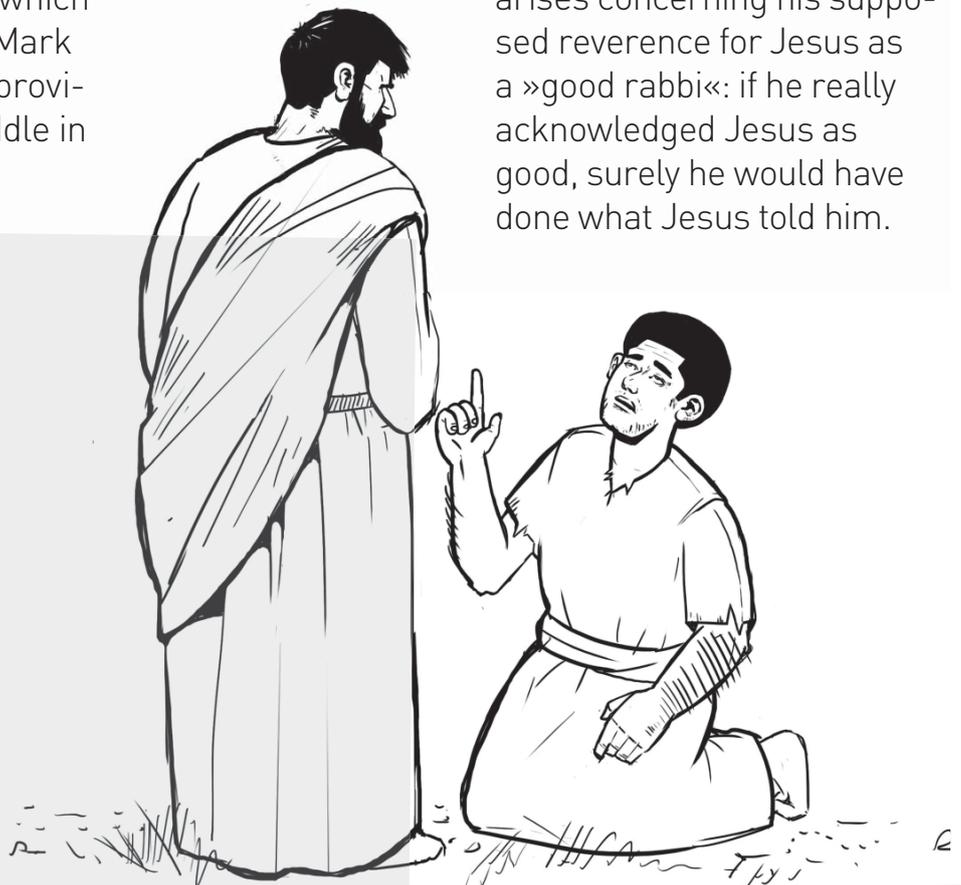
Here is a preliminary step to establish a good rapport which paves the way to discuss other scriptures pertaining to eternity. Read the three verses that immediately follow Eccl. 7:1 which throw light on it and serve as a stepping stone to three other scriptures which we will shortly consider. Mark 10, Psalm 49 and John 4 provide helpful clues to the riddle in Ecclesiastes 7:1.

Mark 10:17-30

The two sayings in Ecclesiastes contain two key ideas: *eternal life* and *goodness*. Interestingly, both are highlighted in the story of a young man who comes to Jesus on his knees and asks, »*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*« (Mark 10:17). Not only so, he showed special deference to Jesus by calling him, »*Good teacher*«.

This man had divided loyalties. He was not as devoted to God as he originally thought. His attachment to wealth proved that money was actually his main concern (Matthew 6:24). In effect he was breaking the first commandment, never mind the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th (which Jesus had specifically cited). He had an exaggerated idea of his own goodness and observance of all the commandments. A question

arises concerning his supposed reverence for Jesus as a »good rabbi«: if he really acknowledged Jesus as good, surely he would have done what Jesus told him.



Psalm 49

This same thread of eternal life is woven into Psalm 49. The exact words 'eternal life' are not found here but it is alluded to through a deep human desire to live beyond the grave, which all humans will face. The emphasis on the inevitability of death resonates strongly with monotheistic thinking. But this Psalm also carries a positive message that inspires hope. We unwrap the meaning of Psalm 49 with two simple questions that link its two basic themes:

1. What is the riddle that perplexes the Psalmist? What is the dilemma he wants to resolve?
2. How does the Psalmist solve this riddle?

The Psalmist testifies, *»I know that God will redeem my life from the grave«* (v. 15). Another key word for the meaning of this riddle is found in the last verse: *»understand«*. The mention of wealth in the last verse (20) is very significant, calling to mind the rich young ruler so attached to his wealth that it clouded his perception of reality. By substituting money for God, he didn't realize that he was breaking the first commandment!

John 4

Eccl. 3 & 7 and Psalm 49 contain a perplexing riddle about eternity. So does John 4. Unlike the rich young ruler, highly esteemed in the eyes of the Jewish community, the Samaritan woman was despised as a follower of a religious sect that warped the faith of their forefathers and corrupted the Torah (at a few strategic points). This woman ranked very low on the social ladder within her own religious community. She was sexually promiscuous – having had relations with five different men – and the man she was now living with was not her husband (vv. 17,18). Despite this outward dissimilarity, she was thirsty for living water – eternal life. Deep within her was a longing for the same eternal life sought by the respectable young ruler.

Simply read the story. Let the living and powerful words of God speak to the heart of your Muslim neighbour (Hebrews 4:12). If you want to pause occasionally to explain background information, be brief. Don't break the flow of the story with too many comments. Encourage your friend to ask questions after you've finished the story.

The connection between living water/ eternal life/salvation is important to discuss. Thoughts on this can be found in the article Timeless Truth Encrypted in Ancient Wisdom available at www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/timeless_truth.html. The article Timeless Truth is a useful sequel to share with someone who has read the short meditation, Homeward Bound available at www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/homeward.html.



Talking with women about perfume

Obviously, there will be opportunities to discuss Ecclesiastes 7:1 with a woman. Normally, it makes sense to follow the above guideline: take time to discuss recommended scripture passages as preliminary steps to talking about Christ's death and resurrection. However, it may be possible to take a single step from Ecclesiastes 7 to Mark 14, a passage where perfume, *death and a woman* are featured prominently. The Holy Spirit

transcends our guidelines; He can lead us (unexpectedly) to move quickly to talking about the death and burial of Christ.

Proverbs 10:7 touches on the topic of death, in particular the after-effects of a good person's life. We can see how this proverb correlates with »a good reputation« (in Eccl. 7:1). Furthermore, we see it illustrated in the story of a woman who »anointed Jesus' body for burial« with expensive perfume (perhaps unwittingly). Jesus commended her good deed, saying, *»wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and discussed« (Mark 14:9).*

We know that Muslims tend to view good deeds as meritorious in God's eyes. However, from our reading of the NT, we know that one cannot attain salvation through good works. For this reason, we may have misgivings about using Eccl. 7:1 (or the story of the woman's good deed in Mark 14). The fact of the matter is that the Bible has much to say in terms of linking doing good and eternal life. We saw this in Mark 10:17. Ponder John 5:29,30; Romans 2:7; Proverbs 11:19; 12:28; 14:32; Matthew 7:21-23.

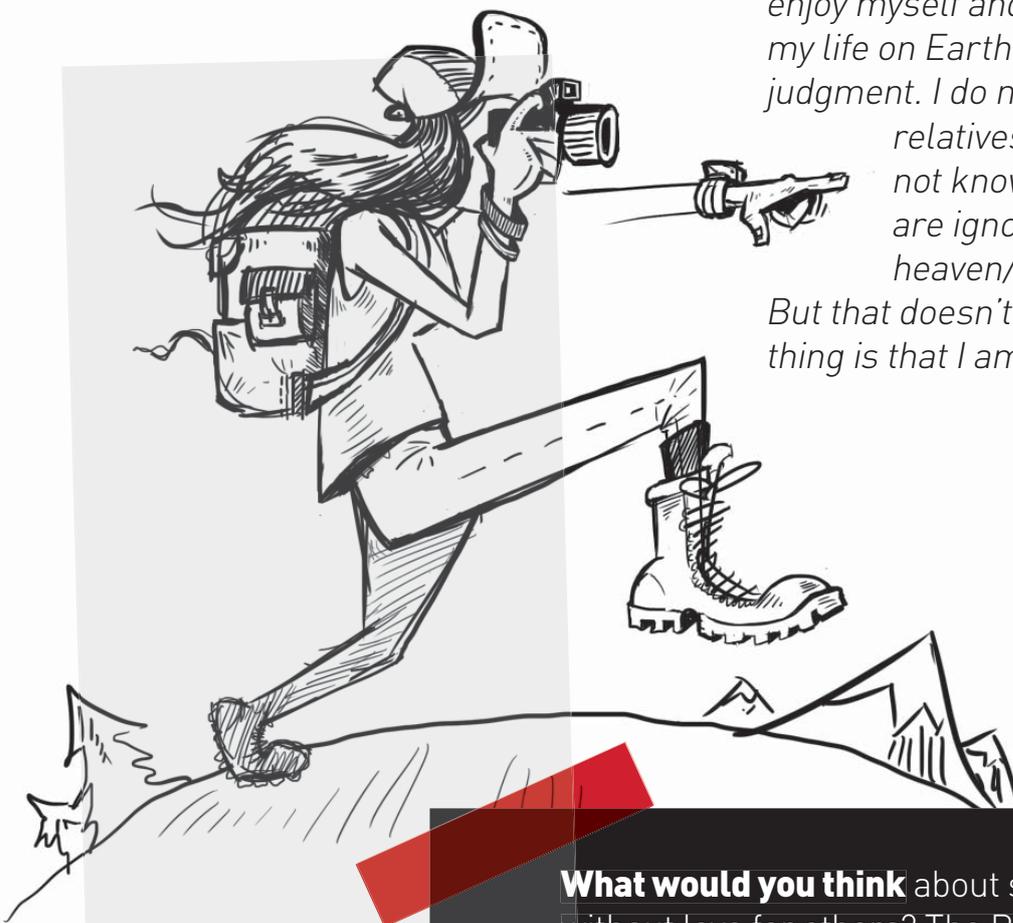


Conclusion When discussing the story of the rich young ruler with Muslims, they often misconstrue Jesus' comment, »Only God is good«. They perceive this statement as proof that Jesus denied his deity. An excellent short article answering this is available on line at http://www.answering-islam.org/Shamoun/q_only_god_good.htm. The article *Homeward Bound* is available online at www.answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/homeward.html.

Finale

Many people wonder why Christians go to such lengths to befriend them and tell them about their faith in Jesus Christ – often to the point of irritation. The following story might help to understand the efforts Christians make in their endeavour to explain their faith to people of other faiths, such as Muslims:

Imagine a young person who travels the whole world, visiting people of all different cultures and religions. After 30 years of hard travelling and study, he finally finds the truth (that there is only one true God and one truth, and that God does not contradict himself). Imagine that this person travels back into his hometown and says to himself: *»It is so wonderful that I have been able to find the truth. Now I know the only and true God, I know the whole truth and I know the way to heaven (paradise). Now I can enjoy myself and be happy for the rest of my life on Earth. I do not fear the day of judgment. I do not care about my family, relatives and friends. They do not know the true God; they are ignorant about the way to heaven/paradies and will be lost. But that doesn't worry me. The main thing is that I am safe.«*



What would you think about such a person – selfish and without love for others? The Bible tells us to go and spread the Good News (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). It is my prayer that this booklet will help you to do it.

Appendices

Information about the book by Andreas Maurer

»ASK YOUR MUSLIM FRIEND«

An introduction to Islam and a Christian's guide for interaction with Muslims

How did Islam start and what does it teach? Which are its groups and movements? What are the biblical answers to Muslim objections? How can Christians interact with Muslims?

These are just a few questions on which Dr. Andreas Maurer, theologian and expert on Christian-Muslim encounters, gives clear answers. Maurer sees the spread of Islam throughout the world not as a threat but as a challenge to the Christian church. He presents a compact and easily understood survey on the history of Islam, its teaching and religious background. Different groups and movements within Islam are also described. Readers will receive answers to Muslim objections and practical guidelines for interacting with Muslims.

Website links

- AVC website:
www.avc-ch.org
- Informations on seminars and events:
www.britomu.org
- Information about the book and further literature:
www.aymf.net
- General information on Christianity and Islam:
www.answerislam.org

