

ONE GOD
ONE MESSAGE

Part 5



Meeting
The Savior

by P. D. Bramsen



- ☞ The Seed of a Woman
- ☞ Who Can This Be?
- ☞ God's Eternal Plan

ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE - PART 5
MEETING THE SAVIOR

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Meeting The Savior

Dear friend,

In the previous stage of our journey, we came face to face with our greatest problem—a problem for which man has no solution: *Sin*. In this next section, we will begin to discover the solution God Himself has provided: *A Savior*.

Don't be disturbed by the word *Savior*. It is not some self-proclaimed national "savior" or founder of a new religion that we are about to meet. No, the One we are to encounter stands alone. He is completely unique. Even His enemies had to say of Him, "*No man ever spoke like this Man!*" (John 7:46)

In this next part of the journey we will discover:

- how God kept His promise to provide a Savior for sinners.
- the identity of the promised Messiah.
- God's unchanging plan to rescue lost, helpless sinners.

We pray that God might show you, with soul-thrilling clarity and freshness, the glories of His person and plan as you embark on this fifth leg of the journey through the best story ever told. Be sure to write down your answers to the questions at the end of each chapter and send them to us.

Are you ready to meet the One of whom all the prophets wrote?

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THE SEED OF A WOMAN

One frigid, foggy night two small children fell into a deep, slippery pit. Both were injured, frightened, and helpless. Neither could save the other since they were both in the same predicament. Death would soon claim them unless rescue came from outside the pit. Three men heard their desperate cries for help. With a rope, one of the men was lowered into the dark, slimy hole. The children were pulled out.

Their deliverance came from above.

The day Adam and Eve first sinned, they became like those two children. They were helpless to save themselves from the pit of sin into which they had fallen. If they were to be delivered from eternal death, rescue must come from outside the fallen human race, from above.

Make no mistake about it. The human condition is serious, with no self-remedy.

Down through the centuries, without exception, all of Adam's descendants—born of man and woman—have inherited a sin-bent nature. All are born under the curse of sin.

To deliver sinners from sin's curse and consequences, God planned to bring into the world a sinless Man who would provide deliverance for all who want to be rescued from the pit of sin.

How would God do this? How could anyone be born into the human family without inheriting Adam's sin nature? God gave the first clue on the day sin infected the human race.

The LORD forewarned “the Serpent” (Satan):

*“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and **her Seed**; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”* (Genesis 3:15)

In speaking of “*her Seed*,” the LORD was foretelling that it would be through a male child, born of a woman, that He would rescue sinners and ultimately crush Satan and put away evil. This was the first of hundreds of prophecies to follow, each pointing with increasing clarity to a moment in history when this Savior-Messiah would visit the world.

WHY “HER SEED”?

Why would the Messiah enter the human race as “*her Seed*”? Why must He be “*born of a woman*,” but not born of a man? (Galatians 4:4)

Here is the answer: While the Savior of sinners would visit Adam’s sinful race as a human being, He must come from outside the pit of sin. He would descend from above.

Long after God announced this initial prophecy about *the Seed of a woman*, the prophet Isaiah wrote:

*“The Lord Himself will give you a sign: **Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son**, and shall call His name Immanuel* [which means ‘God with us’].” (Isaiah 7:14)

The Savior would enter the human family through the womb of a young lady who never had physical relations with a man. This would be the Messiah’s way of visiting Adam’s fallen race without inheriting Adam’s sinful nature.

“But wait a minute,” someone says, “Women are also sinners. Even if the Messiah was born uniquely of a woman, would He not be contaminated by His mother’s sin nature?”

A couple of pages from now, we will hear how the Holy Spirit of God brought about this miraculous conception. However, let us first reflect on a few less obvious elements in God’s design to

bring His sinless Son into the world via a virgin's womb. How could the Messiah be born unspoiled by the sin that had spread to all of Adam's offspring?

UNTAINTED BY SIN

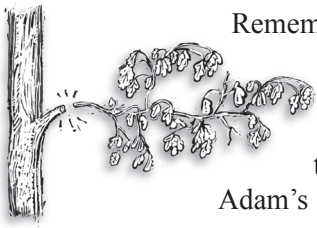
As we already learned in chapter 13, God held *Adam* responsible for leading the human race into Satan's kingdom of sin and death. Eve was deceived, Adam was not. While females are born with sinful natures just like males, the Scripture makes it clear that it is our connection with Adam that causes us to be born with a sin nature.¹³⁸

In Hebrew, *Adam* literally means "red earth." God formed his body from the earth's soil. After Adam sinned, God told him, "*Dust you are, and to dust you shall return.*" (Genesis 3:19)

Contrastingly, *Eve* means "life." This name was given to the first woman "*because she was the mother of all living.*" (Genesis 3:20) On the day sin entered the world, God announced His plan to deal with our sin-problem and provide eternal life for the world through "*her Seed.*" (Genesis 3:15)

Even though the Messiah would take on a body of flesh and blood, He would not originate from Adam's sin-infected bloodline. He would be untainted by sin.

Interestingly, from a purely biological standpoint, today we know that the gender of a child is determined by its father's "seed" (sperm), and not by its mother's "seed" (egg). We also know that, from conception, a baby in the womb has a circulatory system distinct from its mother's. Medical science tells us: "The placenta forms a unique barrier that keeps the mother's blood separate while allowing food and oxygen to pass through to the embryo."¹³⁹ Even before God created the first human, He had planned every detail of the Messiah's coming to earth.



Remember the illustration of the broken branch.

Like that separated, dead branch, the human family is spiritually dead, cut off from the Source of Life. Although the Savior of sinners would live among Adam's spiritually dead and sin-defiled family,

He would not originate from it. He Himself would be “*the true vine*” (John 15:1), the very Source of Life.

He would be *perfect*.

“Perfect” does not mean that He would never have a pimple, bruise, or scratch on His body. It means that He would be perfect in character. He would possess a sinless nature. He would never violate God’s Law. He would be “*holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.*” (Hebrews 7:26 NIV)

Is it any surprise the sinless Messiah is called “*the second Man*” and “*the last Adam*”?

THE SECOND MAN

*“It is written, ‘The **first man Adam** became a living being.’ The **last Adam** became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The **first man** was of the earth, made of dust; the **second Man** is the Lord from heaven.*” (1 Corinthians 15:45-47)

Even as “*the first man*” led the entire human population into Satan’s dark kingdom of defilement and death, so “*the second Man*” would lead many people out of Satan’s kingdom and into God’s glorious kingdom of righteousness and life. That is why, on the same day sin contaminated the human race, the LORD served notice to Satan that the Seed of a woman would one day come to earth to bruise and ultimately crush him.

The prophet Micah wrote this about the promised Savior:

*“**Bethlehem** Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, **Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting**...He shall be great to the ends of the earth; And this One shall be peace.”* (Micah 5:2, 4-5)

Micah not only foretold the Messiah’s birth in the town of “*Bethlehem*”¹⁴⁰, but also declared the Savior’s pre-existence as being “*from of old, from everlasting.*”

The Everlasting One would step from eternity into time.

FORETOLD BY THE PROPHETS

The prophets, who declared that the Messiah would be conceived of a virgin and born in Bethlehem, also prophesied that He would be preceded by a forerunner who would announce His arrival. They wrote that God's Chosen One would bear the titles *Son of God* and *Son of Man*. They foretold that He would make the blind see, the deaf hear and the lame walk. He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey and be rejected by His own people. He would be mocked, spit upon, flogged and crucified. He would have no sin of His own, but would die for the sins of others. He would be buried in the tomb of a rich man, but His dead body would not decompose. Instead, He would conquer death, show Himself alive, and return to heaven from where He had come.¹⁴¹

What person in history filled this profile penned by the prophets?

It's the same Person who split world history in two.

His name is ***Jesus***.

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISE

Down through the centuries, God promised to send the Savior into the world through the family of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David, and Solomon. Thus, the Gospel (Arabic: *Injil*) of Matthew, the first book in the New Testament, begins with these words:

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah..."

What follows is a long list of genealogies which includes "David the king begot Solomon," and closes with "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." (Matthew 1:1-2,16) *Christ* is the Greek word for the *Hebrew* word *Messiah* which means "*the Anointed [Chosen] One*."¹⁴² Such genealogies document Jesus' legal right to the throne of King David and show that Jesus was a direct descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through whom God had promised to offer His blessings to all people on earth.

The time had come for God to put into action His rescue plan, the plan “*which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son....*” (Romans 1:2-3)

THE SON OF THE HIGHEST

Luke, chapter one, records the captivating story of the angel Gabriel’s visit to Zacharias, whose job was to offer up sacrifices and prayers at the temple in Jerusalem. Even though Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were too old to have children, Gabriel informed him that his wife would have a son, whom they would name John. This John would become the Messiah’s forerunner.

The drama then continues with Gabriel’s visit to a godly young woman named Mary.

“The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

And having come in, the angel said to her, ‘Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!’ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

*Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, **you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS.** He will be great, and will be called **the Son of the Highest**; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David... and of His kingdom there will be no end.’*

*Then Mary said to the angel, ‘**How can this be, since I do not know a man?**’*

*And the angel answered and said to her, ‘**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.... For with God nothing will be impossible.**’” (Luke 1:26-37)*

SAVIOR OF SINNERS

Some months later, Joseph learned that Mary, his betrothed wife, was pregnant. He mistakenly assumed the obvious: that Mary had been unfaithful. He decided to annul their approaching marriage.

“Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose [Mary] to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

*But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is **from the Holy Spirit**. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name **Jesus**, because **he will save his people from their sins**.’”* (Matthew 1:19-21 NIV)

As revealed in the first chapter of Genesis, the *Holy Spirit* is God Himself.¹⁴³ *God* is the One who had supernaturally placed His eternal *Word* in Mary’s womb.

The name **JESUS** is the English transliteration from the Greek word *IESOUS*, which comes from the Hebrew word *YEHOSHUA*, or its shortened form *YESHUA*.

This name means: “**The LORD saves.**”

*“All this took place **to fulfill** what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means, ‘**God with us.**’*

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son.

*And he gave him the name **Jesus.**”*

(Matthew 1:22-25 NIV)

THE WORD OF GOD FULFILLED

God was implementing the plan He began to reveal the day sin entered the world. “*Her Seed*” was about to be born!

A few pages ago we read Micah’s prophecy about where the Messiah was to be born. The LORD foretold that He would be born in *Bethlehem*—King David’s home town.

But there was a problem.

Mary and Joseph lived in *Nazareth*, several days’ journey from Bethlehem.

How would Micah’s prediction be fulfilled?

No problem.

God would mobilize the Roman Empire to help fulfill this prophecy.

“And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place when Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

*So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And **she brought forth her firstborn Son**, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”* (Luke 2:1-7)

The promised Messiah did not make His entrance in a comfortable and pompous palace. Rather, He was born in a lowly shed and laid in a manger, a feeding trough for livestock. He came into the world in such a way that even the poorest and most common people might come to Him and not be afraid.

THE ANGEL'S PROCLAMATION

"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid."

Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.'

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!'" (Luke 2:8-14)

It was a momentous night in world history.
The long wait was over.

*"And she brought forth **her** firstborn Son...."* (Luke 2:7)

The Seed of the woman had arrived.

Everything was happening just as the prophets had foretold, in God's way and at God's time.¹⁴⁵

Not only did God send angels to announce and celebrate Jesus' birth, He also honored this joyous event by positioning a special star in the night sky. A group of astronomers and wealthy wise men from the East observed and followed that star. They knew that it marked the promised Messiah's arrival. After completing a grueling journey from far-away Persia, these distinguished men went to King Herod in Jerusalem. They had one question:

*"Where is **He** who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen **His star** in the East and have come to worship **Him**."* (Matthew 2:2)¹⁴⁶

THE PERSON IN THE BABY

So who was this baby boy who was born in a shed, laid in a feeding trough, foretold by prophets, heralded by angels, visited by shepherds, honored with a star, and worshiped by wise men?

Let's listen again to what the angel told the shepherds:

*"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is **Christ the Lord.**"*

(Luke 2:10-11)



The Person in that
tiny body was
the Lord.



CHAPTER 16 REVIEW

THE SEED OF A WOMAN

1. Why was it necessary that the Messiah be born of woman, but not of a man?
2. Explain why Scripture refers to the Messiah as “the last Adam” and “the second Man.”
3. Name at least five things the prophets foretold about the coming Messiah.
4. Gabriel told Mary that her newborn child would be called “the Son of God.” Reread Luke 1:26-37 and then give your own brief explanation as to why Jesus is called the Son of God.
5. What does the name “Jesus” literally mean?
6. In your own words, explain Luke 2:10-11. *“Then the angel said to them [the shepherds], ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’”*

17

WHO CAN THIS BE?

*“Bounding gazelles do **not** beget burrowing offspring.”*

— Wolof Proverb

Just as gazelles produce offspring with gazelle-like characteristics, so sinners produce offspring with sinful characteristics. Left to himself, man has no way to break out of the sin cycle. And it shows.

THE SINFUL ONES

Consider the motion picture industry in the United States. Each year, Hollywood produces and exports blockbuster movies featuring heroes and heroines who exhibit selfishness, immorality, perversion, filthy language, violence, revenge, and deceit. Why do screenwriters intentionally include sinful characteristics in the “good guys” portrayed in their films? Why not make movies that portray the “hero” as righteous, kind, selfless, forgiving and honest? It is because the human race is infected by sin. Even man’s best imaginary characters are contaminated. And such contamination is not limited to Hollywood.

Man’s sin-bent nature reveals itself in countless subtle ways. For instance, if you are from the Arab world, you are probably familiar with a centuries-old literary figure named Juha. The folk tales of Juha and his donkey make us smile. Hundreds of

anecdotes have been written about this clever character whose words and ways are characterized by wit and humor—and, more often than not, by self-centeredness, an insulting spirit, impure thoughts, revenge, deceit, and broken promises. Think of it! Even our favorite invented characters are contaminated! Here is one simple example from a short anecdote of Juha:

A friend came to him.

“You promised,” the friend said, “to lend me some money. I’ve come to take you up on it.”

Juha told him, “My friend, I don’t lend my money to anyone, but I’ll give you my promises to your heart’s content!”¹⁴⁷

We can relate to the fictional Juha because we too have made promises we never intended to keep. In our fallen human nature, we are just like *Juha*.

There is, however, one Person in history¹⁴⁸ who kept all His promises. He always spoke the truth. He never deceived, insulted, threatened or sought revenge.

His name is **Jesus**.

*“He committed **no sin**, and **no deceit** was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, **he did not retaliate**; when he suffered, he made **no threats**.”*

(1 Peter 2:22-23 NIV)

THE SINLESS ONE

The life of Jesus stands in powerful contrast to the sin-dominated cultures of the world. He was the only sinless person ever to be born. He was “*in all points tempted as we are, yet **without sin***.” (Hebrews 4:15) No impure thought ever crossed His mind. No unkind word ever formed on His lips. As Jesus grew up with His half-brothers and sisters in a lowly home in Nazareth,¹⁴⁹ He *naturally* obeyed the Ten Commandments and every other law of God—outwardly and inwardly. Though Jesus had a physical body like ours, He did not have our sin-bent nature.

*“He was manifested to take away our sins, and **in Him there is no sin.**”* (1 John 3:5)

At age thirty, Jesus began his official work on earth.¹⁵⁰ The war between God and Satan was about to escalate. Satan knew that the Son of God had come to crush him, but he did not know *how* Jesus planned to do it.

Just as Satan had tempted the first perfect man to disobey God’s Law, so now he would try to tempt the second Perfect Man to act contrary to God’s Laws.

*“Then Jesus...was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being **tempted for forty days by the devil.** And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.*

*And the devil said to Him, ‘**If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.**’*

*But Jesus answered him, saying, ‘**It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.**”’”*

(Luke 4:1-4)

Notice that Satan was not trying to get Jesus to do anything “evil.” The devil merely wanted this sinless Man (who had invaded “his” territory) to act independently of God the Father in heaven, since, as we observed back in chapter 11, *to think or act independently of God is **sin.***

The point is this: If the Messiah had committed a single sin He could not have fulfilled His mission to rescue Adam’s cursed race from the law of sin and death.

Just as a man who is deep in debt is not qualified to pay the debt of another, neither is a sinner able to pay for the sins of another sinner. However, *the Son of God*, who had become *the Son of Man*,¹⁵¹ had no sin-debt of His own. He could have by-passed death altogether since He was free from sin, but, as we shall soon discover, that was not God’s plan.

Meanwhile, Satan repeatedly attempted to entice Jesus to sin by getting Him to act independently of God’s perfect plan. Each time Jesus answered the devil by quoting the Scriptures.¹⁵²

“Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, ‘All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.’

*And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! **For it is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.”**’”* (Luke 4:5-8)

Just as God had given Adam dominion over creation, so now Satan was offering to Jesus “the dominion” which he, Satan, had usurped when Adam chose to follow him.¹⁵³

In contrast to Adam, Jesus did **not** obey Satan.

The Word of God had become flesh.

JESUS’ FOLLOWERS

Shortly after Jesus began His official mission, He chose twelve men to accompany Him wherever He went. Many women also followed Jesus. These men and women became eyewitnesses of all that Jesus said and did.

*“He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And **the twelve** were with Him, and **certain women** who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities...and many others who provided for Him from their substance.”* (Luke 8:1-3)

Jesus showed equal respect to men, women and children. The Gospel Scriptures abound with narratives in which we read of Jesus treating women with a dignity and kindness that transcended the Jewish and Roman culture of that day.

Jesus viewed every person on earth as infinitely valuable, but He never coerced anyone to listen to Him, believe Him, or follow Him. He loved spending time with people whose minds and hearts were inclined to hear and embrace the truth, no matter how much it cost them.

A KEY QUESTION

While many of the common people followed Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders did not.

One day Jesus asked them a crucial question:

“What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” (Matthew 22:42)

They responded by saying that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David. Jesus reminded them that David had prophesied that the promised Savior would be both *the earthly son of David* and *the heavenly Son of God*.¹⁵⁴

Earlier, Jesus had asked His disciples a similar question:

“‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’
So they said, ‘Some say...one of the prophets.’
He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’
Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ,
the Son of the living God.’
Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you,
Simon... for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you,
but My Father who is in heaven.’” (Matthew 16:13-17)

Sooner or later, we must all answer this same question:
 What do you think about Jesus? Whose Son is He?

WHAT SOME SAY

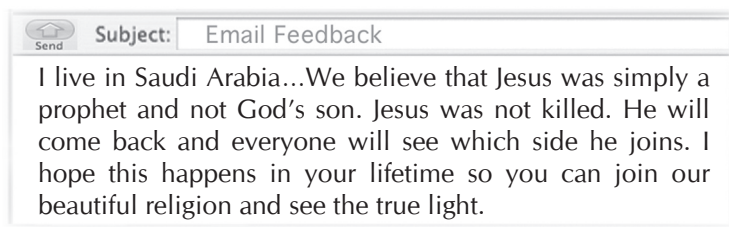
For many Westerners, *Jesus* is no more than a familiar curse word.

Others say He was a great moral teacher, but nothing more.

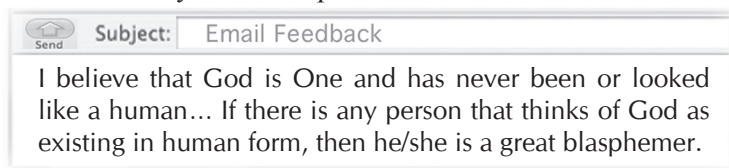
Orthodox Jews avoid even pronouncing Jesus’ name, referring to him only as “that man.”

Hindus view Jesus as one of many divine self-embodiments among their multitude of gods and goddesses.

My Muslim neighbors tell me: “We honor Jesus as a great prophet, but he is not the Son of God.” One correspondent stated it like this:



And a Malaysian correspondent wrote:



These viewpoints flow from what the Qur'an (or *Koran*) declares about Jesus.

WHAT THE QUR'AN SAYS

The Qur'an repeatedly states that Jesus was "*no more than a prophet*." (Sura 4:171-173; 5:75; 2:136) Nevertheless, the book revered by Muslims also declares Jesus to be unique among the prophets in that He had no biological father, calling Him *Isa ibn Maryam*, "*Jesus son of Mary*." (Sura 19:34) The Qur'an refers to the sins of the prophets, but never attributes sin to Jesus. He is called the "*holy Son*."¹⁵⁵ The Qur'an also presents Jesus as the only prophet with the power to create life, open the eyes of the blind, cleanse the lepers, and raise the dead.¹⁵⁶ And it is to Jesus alone the Qur'an attributes the lofty titles of *Al Masih* (the Messiah), *Ruh Allah* (Soul/Spirit of God) and *Kalimat Allah* (the Word of God).¹⁵⁷

Having noted these Qur'anic affirmations of Jesus' uniqueness, it must be pointed out that the Qur'anic portrayal of "*the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary*" is radically different from that of the Bible. For example, the same Qur'anic verse that ascribes to Jesus the above-mentioned titles, states: "*The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was **only a messenger of Allah**, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not 'Three.'* **Cease!** it is better for you! Allah

is only One Allah. Far is it removed from His Transcendent Majesty that He should have a son.” (Sura 4:171 Pickthall)

In Senegal, children and adults alike are not only quick to say: “Jesus is not the Son of God! God has no son!” but with equal conviction declare: “Jesus was not crucified!”

Where did they get the idea that Jesus was not crucified?

This idea also comes from the Qur’an, which declares: “[The Jews] uttered against Mary a grave false charge; that they said in boast, ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah’; **but they killed him not, nor crucified him**, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no certain knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, **for of a surety they killed him not**. Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.” (Sura 4:156-158)

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Centuries before the Qur’an was written, the forty prophets and apostles who wrote the Old and New Testament Scriptures painted a different portrait of the Messiah and His mission.

Concerning Jesus’ title as “the Son of God,” John, who walked and talked with Jesus for more than three years, testified of Him:

*“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**, and that by believing you may have **life in his name**.”* (John 20:30-31 NIV)

The apostle John also wrote:

*“In the beginning was **the Word**, and **the Word was with God**, and **the Word was God**. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... **The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us**. We have seen his glory, the glory of **the One and Only, who came from the Father**, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:1-3, 14 NIV)



Years ago, a Muslim friend confided to me, “The Qur’an gives Jesus the title of **Kalimat Allah** (Word of God) and **Ruh Allah** (Soul of God). If Jesus is *God’s Word* and *Soul*, then He is God!”

Later, some accused my friend of blasphemy and *shirk* (Arabic: *associating partners with God*¹⁵⁸). At least he was in good company! Jesus was accused by the Jewish religious leaders in a similar fashion.

Jesus said:

“I and My Father are one.”

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?’

*The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but **for blasphemy**, and because **You, being a Man, make Yourself God.**’” (John 10:30-33)*

The Jews accused Jesus of doing the same thing Lucifer had tried to do: usurp the unique, exalted position that belongs to God alone. They accused Jesus of *making Himself God*.

But they had it backwards.

INCARNATION, NOT DEIFICATION

Neither Jesus nor the prophets taught that *a man would become God*, rather, the Scriptures made it clear that *God would become man*.

For example, 700 years before the Messiah was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote:

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. ...For unto us **a Child is born**, unto us **a Son is given**, and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, **Mighty God**, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:2,6)¹⁵⁹*



Isaiah also wrote these words about the coming Messiah:

“You who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’” (Isaiah 40:9)

From the beginning, God’s plan included *incarnation* (God taking on human flesh), not *deification* (a human making himself into a god). To suggest that *a man became God* is to blaspheme, but to recognize that *the eternal Word became man* is to embrace God’s age-old plan.

ON PAPER AND IN PERSON

If you want to know someone well, which method is best?

- Limit your communication to written letters.
- Or, after exchanging letters for a certain period of time, meet the person face to face and spend time together.

As wonderful as the Scriptures are, God, who once walked and talked with Adam and Eve and planned for their descendants to know Him personally, never intended to limit His communication to *paper*. From the beginning, He planned to communicate with us in *person*. The LORD, who for centuries had His prophets record His Word on papyrus scrolls and *animal skins*, promised to reveal Himself to mankind in *human skin*. God not only planned to provide us with His words in *a book*, He would also provide His Word in *a body*.

*“When **He** came into the world, He said: ‘... **A body** You have prepared for Me.’”* (Hebrews 10:5)¹⁶⁰

*“Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: **He** appeared in **a body**.”* (1 Timothy 3:16 NIV)

BENEATH HIS MAJESTY?

Despite God’s repetitive declarations about His plan to dwell with man, I hear people say: “Far be it from God’s transcendent majesty that He should become man!”

While the concept of the incarnation is mind-boggling, is it really below God's majesty? Or is it an integral part of God's nature and plan to reestablish a close relationship with the people He created for Himself?

In life, we often feel closest to those who have experienced what we have experienced. The ones most qualified to comfort and help are those who have gone through similar struggles and sorrows. Our Creator is the Ultimate Comforter.

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same... For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. ... For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was **in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.**”

(Hebrews 2:14, 18; 4:15)

From the beginning, it was God's plan to take on the limitations and discomforts of a body of flesh, get dirt under His fingernails, hunger, hurt, and experience what we experience. Those who teach otherwise are not only rejecting God's prophets and plan; they are rejecting God's nature and attributes. Instead of accepting God's revelation of Himself as the faithful and loving Creator who wants people to know Him in a personal way, they are declaring Him to be unpredictable and unknowable.

There is nothing “majestic” about being unwilling to come down to another's level to serve them and bless them. Never in history has our Creator despised the thought of coming down to our level. It was His design and His delight to do so.¹⁶¹

“Though **He was rich**, yet for your sakes **He became poor**, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

(2 Corinthians 8:9)

It is for your sake and mine that the Eternal Word visited our planet—in person. The Creator of the universe who “*was rich*” in glory and honor, “*became poor*,” taking the place of a servant,

so that we might become rich, not with money and material possessions, but with all spiritual blessings such as forgiveness, righteousness, eternal life, and a heart filled with His love, joy, peace, and holy desires.

GREATNESS DEFINED

Many think God is *too great* to come to earth in a body of flesh and blood. Could it be they think this way because their definition of *great* differs from God's definition of *great*?

Jesus defined true greatness when He told his disciples:

*“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become **great** among you must be your **servant**, and whoever wants to be **first** must be **slave of all**. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Mark 10:42-45 NIV)

The greatest person is the one who humbles himself the most and serves others the best.¹⁶²

That is what our Creator did for us.

MASTER OF WIND AND WAVES

One day Jesus was with His disciples in their fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee.

*“Suddenly **a great tempest** arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But [Jesus] was asleep.*

Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’

*But He said to them, ‘Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?’ Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was **a great calm**.*

*So the men marveled, saying, ‘**Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?**’” (Matthew 8:24-27)*

How would *you* answer the disciples’ question?

“WHO CAN THIS BE?”

Clearly, Jesus was a man. He was asleep in the boat; He knew what it was to be tired, hungry and thirsty. But then He stood up and rebuked the storm. Instantly the violent wind ceased and the raging sea became calm.

No wonder the disciples asked:

“Who can this be?”

A millennium earlier, the Psalmist had written:

*“Who is mighty like You **O LORD?** ...**You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them.**”* (Psalm 89:8-9)

“Who can this be?” The Gospel also tells of Jesus walking on the sea.¹⁶³ Once again, Jesus’ disciples *“were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.”* (Mark 6:51) But Jesus didn’t tread on the waves of the sea to make men marvel; He did it to help them understand who He is.

Two millennia earlier, the prophet Job said this about God:

*“**He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea.**”* (Job 9:8)

“Who can this be?” God invites us to connect the dots and understand who Jesus was and is.

Tragically, most never do.

*“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, **the world did not recognize him.**”* (John 1:10 NIV)

“Who can this be?” Jesus Himself answered this question one day as He was speaking with a hostile religious crowd.

“I AM”

*“Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘**I am the light of the world.** He who follows **Me** shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life... **Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.**’*

*Then the Jews said to Him, ‘...You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. **Whom do You make Yourself out to be?**’*

Jesus answered, ‘...Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.’

Then the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’

*Jesus said to them, ‘**Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.**’*

Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.” (John 8:12,51-53,56-59)

Why did the Jews attempt to stone Jesus? Because He said: “*If anyone keeps **My word** he shall **never see death**,*” and: “***Before Abraham was, I AM.***” Not only had Jesus asserted His authority over death and His seniority over Abraham (who had died 1900 years earlier), He also used God’s personal name, “**I AM.**”¹⁶⁴

Jesus’ hearers understood what He meant. That is why they accused Him of blasphemy and picked up stones to throw at Him.

WORSHIP GOD ALONE

Jesus consistently taught that God alone is worthy to be the Object of our worship. That is why Jesus said, “***You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.***” (Matthew 4:10) Yet the Gospel records no fewer than ten occasions when people bowed down before Jesus and worshiped Him.

One day, “*a leper came and **worshiped Him**,*¹⁶⁵ *saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus put out*

His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed." (Matthew 8:2-3) Did Jesus scold the leper for worshipping Him?

No, He simply touched him and cured him.

After Jesus rose from the dead, a disciple named Thomas fell down before Him and said, "*My Lord and **my God!***" Did Jesus rebuke him for blasphemy?

No, Jesus simply said, "*Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" (John 20:28-29)

What does this teach us about who Jesus is?

YOU DECIDE

What each of us decides to believe about Jesus is our personal choice, but let none embrace a self-contradictory estimation of Him. If Jesus was "a great prophet," as my neighbors tell me, then He was also who He claimed to be: *the eternal Word and Son of God*. To declare Jesus to be "no more than a prophet," is to deny both the testimony of Jesus and the message of the prophets.¹⁶⁶

C.S. Lewis, a former skeptic and one of the great intellectuals of the twentieth century, wrote this about Jesus:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."¹⁶⁷

“TELL US PLAINLY”

Every so often, someone says to me: “Show me in the Bible where Jesus said, ‘I am God!’” The religious leaders of Jesus’ day tried to coerce Him to make similar statements.

*Jesus said, “‘I am **the door**. If anyone enters by **Me**, he will be saved’...the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, ‘How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, **tell us plainly**.’*

*Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me.... **I and My Father are one**.’*

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.

Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?’

*The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘**For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.**’” (John 10:9,24-25,30-33)*

Why did the religious crowd want to stone Him?

It was because Jesus had said, “*I and My Father are **one**.*” In their thinking, Jesus’ claim of oneness with God was blasphemy. Nonetheless, these same Jews regularly declared their faith in God by saying, “*Adonai Eloheynu Adonai **echad**,*” meaning: “*The Lord our God, the Lord is **one*** [a plural oneness].” Jesus was declaring Himself to be the Son of God who has always been one with God.¹⁶⁸ That is why the Jews accused Him of blasphemy.

Jesus never flaunted His eternal existence as the Word and Son of God. He did not go around saying, “I am God! I am God!” Instead, He lived on earth as He intends for all of mankind to live—in perfect humility and willing submission to God.

Jesus is the only Person who could say: “*I have come down from heaven, **not to do My own will, but the will of Him** who sent Me.*” (John 6:38) The glory of Jesus’ life was that He, the exalted Son of **God**, had humbled Himself to become the Son of **Man**.

The Lord Jesus chose to communicate who He was in humble yet powerful ways.

Once, a wealthy young man came to Jesus and addressed Him with the title “**Good Teacher.**” So Jesus asked the man, “*Why do you call **Me** good? No one is good but One, that is, **God.***” (Luke 18:19)¹⁶⁹ This rich man did not believe Jesus was God, but Jesus—the personification of divine goodness—was inviting him to put the pieces of the puzzle together and understand who He is.

He wants us to understand too.¹⁷⁰

BACKING WORDS WITH WORKS

The countless mighty miracles Jesus performed displayed His authority and power over every element of a fallen, sin-cursed creation. He knew the thoughts of men, forgave sin, multiplied bread and fish for thousands, calmed storms, and commanded evil spirits to depart. With a word or a touch, He healed the sick and made the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dead to be raised to life. Just as the prophets had foretold, the Messiah was “*the Arm of the LORD*” on earth.¹⁷¹

For those who had eyes to see, Jesus’ transcendent majesty shone through every fiber of His Being. His works validated His words. For example, as we just read, Jesus claimed to be “*the Life.*” And how did He authenticate this claim? He proved it by commanding the dead to live again.

On one occasion, the Lord Jesus was at the graveside of Lazarus, a man who had died four days earlier. Lazarus’ corpse had been buried in a cave-tomb. Jesus told the weeping sister of the deceased not to cry; that her brother would live again.

The sister told Jesus, “*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*”

Jesus replied, “***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.***” (John 11:24-25)

Then to authenticate His claim, Jesus “*cried with a loud voice, ‘**Lazarus, come forth!**’ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth.*”

Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go.'

*Then many of the Jews who had...seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. ... Then, **from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death**... The chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews...believed in Jesus.' (John 11:43-46,53; 12:10-11)¹⁷²*

How hard the human heart!

HARD HEARTS

In light of Jesus' claims and growing popularity, the envious religious and political leaders of the Jews became united by a growing passion: Jesus must be silenced! They were desperate to find a reason, any reason, to accuse Him so they might have Him put to death. But how do you accuse the only perfect man ever to be born?

One Sabbath, as Jesus was teaching in the synagogue...

"A man was there who had a withered hand. So [the religious leaders] watched [Jesus] closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Step forward.' Then He said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?'

But they kept silent.

*And when He had looked around at them with anger, **being grieved by the hardness of their hearts**, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.'*

And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

Then the Pharisees** [religious party] **went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians** [political party] **against Him, how they might destroy Him.

But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude...came to Him. ...He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him.

*And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, ‘**You are the Son of God!**’”* (Mark 3:1-11)

DEMONIC INSIGHT

The demons knew who this Healer was, which is why they addressed Him by His proper title, yelling out, “*You are the Son of God!*” These fallen angels were all too familiar with Jesus’ previous history. Millennia earlier, they had witnessed His awesome power and unfathomable wisdom as He spoke the heavens and earth into existence. They shuddered as they recalled the day when He, in His righteous wrath, had cast them out of heaven after they chose to follow Satan in his rebellion.¹⁷³ And now here He was on earth living among men!

The writing was on the wall.


Their master’s authority was crumbling.

The curse of sin was beginning to be reversed.

The Eternal Son Himself, as the Seed of a woman, had invaded their domain. Thus, the demons “*fell down before Him and cried out, saying, ‘**You are the Son of God!**’”* Meanwhile, the religious leaders “*plotted...against Him, how they might **destroy Him.**”*

Once, after I told this story to some guests, one of the men commented, “Incredible! The demons had more respect for Jesus than did the religious leaders!”

Incredible, but true.



CHAPTER 17 REVIEW

WHO CAN THIS BE?

1. How was the Messiah utterly different from all other humans?
2. Why did the Jewish religious leaders attempt to stone Jesus?
3. Do you agree with those who say that Jesus was “no more than a prophet”? Why or why not?
4. In what way did Jesus’ works validate His words?
5. Do you agree that the demons showed greater respect for Jesus than did the religious leaders? Defend your position.
6. In your own words, answer Jesus’ question in Matthew 22:42.
“What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?”

18



GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN

*“Known to God **from eternity** are all His works.”*
(Acts 15:18)

Before time began, God had a clear plan in mind for people. The same day sin contaminated the human family, the LORD began to announce that plan, but in an encoded kind of way. The Scripture refers to this plan as “*the **mystery of God.***” (Revelation 10:7)

To this day, God’s plan and purpose for humanity remains a mystery to most people, but needlessly so, since “*the **mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations...now has been revealed.***” (Colossians 1:26)

MORE PRIVILEGED THAN THE PROPHETS

Here is an amazing thought. When it comes to understanding God’s story and message, you and I are more privileged than the prophets who wrote the Scriptures.

We have God’s full revelation; they did not.

We can read the end of God’s Book; they could not.

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently

*and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. **It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.***” (1 Peter 1:10-12 NIV)

WHY GOD ENCODED HIS PLAN

Some have asked, “Why didn’t God immediately tell fallen mankind exactly what He planned to do? Why did He enshroud His message in mystery?”

Despite the fact that the Sovereign God of the universe owes us no explanation, in His kindness He has given us some insights as to why He encoded His plan for man. Here are **three reasons** God chose to unfold His program progressively and prudently.

First, as explained in chapters five and six, by gradually revealing His plan, God provided humanity with countless **confirming prophecies and symbols**, as well as multiple *confirming witnesses*, so that later generations could know with certainty the message of the one true God.

Second, God revealed His truth in such a way that only those who care enough to *search it out diligently* will discover it. “*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*” (Proverbs 25:2) Many people can’t find truth for the same reason a thief can’t find a police officer; they don’t want to.¹⁷⁴

Third, God encoded His plan in order to **conceal it** from Satan and his followers.

“We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Corinthians 2:7-8)

If Satan and those who sided with him had understood God's integral plan to defeat them, they would not have done what they did. God designed His plan in such a way that the very ones who plotted to thwart it would fulfill it!

And just what was that plan?

REDEMPTION!

God promised to send a sinless Savior into the world—as *the Seed of a woman*—to deliver Adam's wayward, law-breaking descendents from eternal damnation. At the right moment in human history, God fulfilled His promise.

*“When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **to redeem** those who were under the law.”* (Galatians 4:4-5)

To redeem means to buy back by paying the required price.

As a boy growing up in California, I had a small dog. I would feed her, care for her, and play with her. She would follow me around and get excited when I returned home from school. But she had a fault. Sometimes she would wander into the neighborhood, though she always came back. Until one day.

I came home from school, but my dog wasn't there to greet me. At bedtime, she was still nowhere to be found. The next day, my father suggested I call the local animal shelter, a place that holds stray cats and dogs for a limited time. Unclaimed animals are euthanized.

I called the shelter. Yes, they had a small dog that met my description. The city's “dog catcher” had picked her up. My dog was helpless to save herself. If someone didn't come to her rescue, she would be put to death.

I went to the shelter. I was about to get my dog back! But the official at the front desk told me that if I wanted her back I must pay a penalty. It was against the law for a dog to be running loose on the street. I paid the required ransom and my dog was released. How glad she was to be out of that awful cage and back with the one who cared for her! She had been *redeemed*.

My boyhood experience in buying back my wayward dog gives us a faint idea of our own situation. As rebellious, condemned sinners, we have no way to rescue ourselves. God sent His Son into the world to redeem us by paying the necessary ransom price. It was more than any of us could pay.

*“None of them can by any means **redeem** his brother; nor give to God a **ransom** for him— **For the redemption of their souls is costly...** But God will **redeem** my soul from the power of the grave....”* (Psalm 49:7,15)

And just what was the price of our redemption?

THE PROPHETS ANNOUNCED IT

In Genesis chapter 3, we encountered God’s encoded, embryonic prophecy about His plan to redeem sinners from Satan’s grasp. Let’s listen again to what God said to Satan.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

With these words, God set forth a mysterious and methodical outline of His plan to deal with Satan and sin in a way consistent with His righteous nature. The LORD was announcing that He would provide mankind with a Redeemer-Messiah who would defeat Satan by bruising his “*head*.” The prophecy also foretold that Satan would bruise the Messiah’s “*heel*.”

*“He [Messiah] shall bruise your [Satan’s] **head**, and you [Satan] shall bruise His [Messiah’s] **heel**.”*

How would the Seed of the woman “*bruise*” Satan’s head? The Hebrew word translated “bruise” means “to bruise, break, wound, or crush.” According to this initial prophecy, both Satan and the Messiah would be “crushed,” but only one of the wounds would be irreversibly fatal. A crushed head is fatal; a crushed heel is not.



God was foretelling that, despite the fact that the promised Redeemer would be “wounded” by Satan and his followers, He would ultimately be victorious over Satan.

Later, God inspired the prophet David to write these words of the Messiah:

“They pierced My hands and My feet.” (Psalm 22:16)

David also predicted that, though the Messiah would be killed, His corpse would not decay in the grave. The promised Deliverer would overcome death.

“You will not...allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”

(Psalm 16:10)

The prophet Isaiah foretold the purpose of the Messiah’s sufferings, death, and resurrection:

“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities... Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.” (Isaiah 53:5,10)¹⁷⁵

Though Satan would persuade people to torture and murder the Messiah sent by God, all would take place according to the plan announced by the prophets. The final outcome would be total triumph for the LORD and His Anointed One.

WORDS OF WISDOM AND WARNING

A thousand years before Christ was born, David wrote:

“Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed [Messiah]...He who sits in the heavens shall laugh...Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and



*distress them in His deep displeasure. Yet I have set **My King** on My holy hill... Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. **Kiss** [honor] **the Son**, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. **Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.**” (Psalm 2:1-2, 4-6, 10-12)*

In Senegal, where wrestling is the national traditional sport, the people have this proverb:

“An egg should not wrestle with a rock.”

Why shouldn’t an egg fight with a rock? Because the egg has no chance of winning the contest! Likewise, all who “*set themselves against the LORD and against His Anointed*” will not succeed. To resist God’s plan is to “*plot a vain thing.*”¹⁷⁶

The Senegalese also have this proverb:

“A woodcutter doesn’t intentionally cut down the meeting-place tree.”

In this arid region of the world, most villages have a large, centrally located shade tree. This “meeting-place tree” provides a place of refuge from the intense midday heat; a place where people can relax, talk and sip tea. How would the villagers react if a woodcutter started chopping at the “meeting-place tree”? With displays of great indignation, they would put a stop to his chopping—immediately!

All who set themselves against God’s plan of redemption are like a woodcutter who chops at the villagers’ favorite tree.

They will not succeed.

“Be wise O kings... Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”
(Psalm 2:10, 12)

BLIND TO GOD'S PLAN

In the final weeks of His ministry on earth, Jesus began to inform His disciples that, instead of receiving Him as their King, the political and spiritual leaders would demand that He be executed. Those who plotted Jesus' death had no idea that they would actually be taking part in fulfilling what the prophets had foretold: that the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced as part of God's plan to redeem Adam's wayward, helpless descendants from Satan's grasp.

*"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that He **must** go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He **must** be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*

Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'

*Jesus turned and said to Peter, '**Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.**'"*

(Matthew 16:21-23)

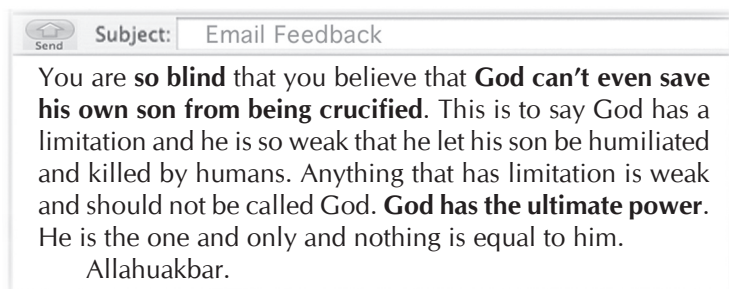
Peter's thinking was similar to that of a celebrated debater I heard declare, "A crucified Messiah is like a married bachelor!"

Like the debater, Peter had not yet understood God's plan. He thought that the Messiah should immediately establish His promised worldwide government, not submit to the horror and humiliation of being nailed to a cross!

Peter was right in thinking that God planned to install Jesus as the Sovereign Ruler over all the earth, but he was wrong in thinking that the Messiah could bypass the suffering and shame of the cross. Later Peter would understand God's plan and proclaim with boldness: "*The prophets... predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow!*" (1 Peter 1:10-11 NIV)¹⁷⁷

The Messiah's crucifixion would not be an accident. God anticipated and planned it "*from eternity.*" The prophets foretold it. *The Seed of the woman* came to fulfill it.

Some time ago this e-mail came to my box:



Like Peter at the first, this e-mail correspondent had not yet understood why the Messiah “***must** be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*”

Why was such a dreadful plan necessary? Since, as our e-mail correspondent rightly stated, “God has the ultimate power,” why did God not simply cast Satan into hell and declare Adam’s sinful descendants forgiven? The LORD created the world by just speaking, so why didn’t He redeem the world by just speaking?

Why was it necessary that the Creator-Word become man? Why did God’s plan include a suffering, bleeding, dying Messiah?

The next stage of our journey provides the answer.



CHAPTER 18 REVIEW

GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN

1. In what way are you more privileged than the prophets?
2. How would you explain to a child what it means to “redeem” something or someone?
3. Name two major events the prophet David foretold about the Messiah.
4. What important lesson can we learn from the Wolof proverb, “An egg should not wrestle with a rock”?
5. What part of God’s plan of redemption had Peter failed to understand?
6. In your own words, explain Galatians 4:4-5. *“When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.”*

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 16: THE SEED OF A WOMAN

¹³⁸ “*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*” (1 Corinthians 15:22); read also Romans chapter 5; Galatians 4:4-5.

¹³⁹ Neobirth Pregnancy Care Center: www.neobirth.org.za/development.html

¹⁴⁰ “*Bethlehem Ephrathah*” was an older name for Bethlehem, the town south of Jerusalem (Genesis 35:16-19; 48:7). King David was born in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:1,18-19; 17:12), as was his Greater Descendant (Matthew 2:1-6; Luke 2:1-12). Jews who lived in Jesus’ day were confused since He grew up in Nazareth, Galilee (John 7:41-42).

¹⁴¹ For biblical references, see the list of prophecies in chapter 5.

¹⁴² For more on the meaning of “Messiah” see chapter 14, under subheading: THE TWO “SEEDS.”

¹⁴³ Genesis 1:2; The Holy Spirit of God is not to be confused with Gabriel. The angel Gabriel was a created being. The Holy Spirit is the uncreated, ever-active Spirit of God Himself. See chapters 9 and 28.

¹⁴⁴ After Jesus was born, Mary lived with her husband Joseph as any normal couple would, and together they had sons and daughters (Matthew 13:55-56; Luke 8:19; John 7:3-10).

¹⁴⁵ The prophets foretold that the Messiah would be conceived of a virgin: Isaiah 7:14; He would be a descendent of the family line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah: Genesis 17:18-21; 26:3-4; 28:13-14; 49:8-10; He would be of the royal line of King David: 2 Samuel 7:16; He would be born in Bethlehem: Micah. 5:2.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 2. King Herod was jealous at the thought of another “king” being born and attempted to destroy Jesus by ordering the execution of all male children in and around Bethlehem, from two years old and under. Satan was behind it all. His goal was to destroy *the Seed of the woman* who had invaded “his territory!” However, God preempted Satan’s attempts to kill Jesus by warning Joseph and directing him to take Mary and the young child to Egypt for refuge. These events had also been foretold by the prophets (Matthew chapter 2; Micah 5:2; Hosea 11:1; Jeremiah 31:15). After King Herod died, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to Nazareth where the boy Jesus grew into manhood.

CHAPTER 17: WHO CAN THIS BE?

¹⁴⁷ Adapted from Jayyusi, Salma Khadra. *Tales of Juha*. Interlink Books. Northampton, MA, 2007, p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ Here are some of the ancient, non-biblical historical writers who made reference to Jesus of Nazareth: Tacitus, Roman historian (AD 55-120) [*Tacitus* 15:44]; Josephus, Jewish historian (AD 37-101) [*Antiquities* 18:3]; the Talmud, rabbinical commentary on the Torah [*The Babylonian Talmud*. Sanhedrin, 43a]; a Greek named Lucian [*The Death of Peregrine*, p. 11-13 in *The Works of Samasota*, translated by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, 4 volumes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949; Suetonius (AD 69-122), the chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian [*Claudias*, 25]. **Note:** J. Oswald Sanders wrote: “To contend that the Christ of the Bible is the offspring of mere human imagination and had no historical reality, would make the gospels as great a miracle in the realm of literature as the living Christ in the realm of history. Ernest Renan remarked that it would take a Jesus to invent a Jesus. J.J. Rousseau contended that it is more inconceivable that a number of persons should agree to write such a history, than that one should form the subject of it.” (Sanders, J. Oswald. *The Incomparable Christ*. Moody Press. Chicago, 1971, p. 57.)

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 13:55-56. Jesus grew up in Nazareth (Matthew 2:22-23; Luke 2:51-52), working as a carpenter alongside His legal father, Joseph (Mark 6:3). Jesus’ lowliness offended those who wanted a conquering hero, not a humble Servant.

¹⁵⁰ “Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph....” (Luke 3:23)

¹⁵¹ Jesus frequently referred to Himself as “*the Son of Man*,” a Messianic title meaning, “Son of Mankind/Humanity” (Greek: *Anthropos*). What a title! Whether we like it or not, we are all “sons (kin) of mankind.” But in the case of the exalted Son of God, He *chose* to become *the Son of Man* and identify Himself with the human race. Thus, this title emphasizes Jesus’ divinity as much as it does His humanity, since it points to God’s personal intervention in humanity. Read Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 8:20; Luke 5:24; 22:69-70; John 5:27; 13:31; Revelation 1:13-18; 14:14.

¹⁵² For example, this Old Testament verse Jesus quoted (in Luke 4:4) is from the Torah of Moses: Deuteronomy 8:3.

¹⁵³ Because of man’s sin, Satan had indeed become “*the ruler of this world*” and “*the prince of the power of the air; the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.*” (John 12:31; Ephesians 2:2) The Son of God had come to restore man’s lost dominion due to sin, but He did not do it Satan’s way. He did it God’s way.

¹⁵⁴ Psalm 110 and Psalm 2; Matthew 21:41-46

¹⁵⁵ Qur'an 19:19; Contrast this with 48:2; 47:19

¹⁵⁶ Qur'an 19:19; 3:45-51; 5:110-112; 19:19

¹⁵⁷ Qur'an 4:171

¹⁵⁸ The ultimate sin in Islam is "*shirk*" (Arabic for *association*). *Shirk* is the sin of regarding anything or anyone as equal to God.

¹⁵⁹ Notice the titles ascribed to the promised Messiah:

Wonderful = A title used for God alone. It means "*Out of the ordinary*."

Counselor = The Messiah would be the *Personification of Wisdom*.

Mighty God = *God Himself* would take on a human body.

Everlasting Father = He would be the *Possessor of Eternity*.

Prince of Peace = He would provide for all who trust in Him: *peace with God* (Romans 5:1), *peace with others* (Ephesians 2:14-18), *inner peace* (Philippians 4:7), and ultimately, *universal peace* (see chapter 29).

¹⁶⁰ The prophet David foretold the LORD's coming to earth in Person: "*Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of Me.*" (Psalm 40:7) Malachi prophesied that God would send a forerunner to prepare people for the arrival of "*the LORD.*" (Malachi 3:1)

¹⁶¹ Is it below God's majesty to come down to our level? Imagine you and your friend talking about two respected spiritual leaders, whom we'll call Omar and Aaron. Your friend says, "Aaron plays with toy cars, but Omar does not." As one who has great respect for Aaron, you respond, "Never! Far be it from Aaron that he should play with toy cars!" Initially such a reaction sounds reasonable and right. Then the story unfolds that both Omar and Aaron have young sons who love for their fathers to get down on the floor and join them in playing with their toys. Now what if we learned that Aaron was happy to spend time with his sons in this way, while Omar refused to do so because he thought it below his dignity? Who would be the better father, man and leader, Omar or Aaron? Similarly, when people say, "It is below the majesty of the Almighty that He should appear on earth as a man," their intentions may be good, but instead of magnifying God's majesty, they are marring it.

¹⁶² John 13 tells of Jesus washing His disciples' feet – the job of a servant! To read the Gospels is to meet the ultimate Servant: the Lord Himself.

¹⁶³ Matthew 14; Mark 6; John 6

¹⁶⁴ Jesus the Messiah was declaring His *eternal* existence. If He had wanted only to say that He existed before Abraham, He would have said, "Before Abraham was, *I was*," instead of "*Before Abraham was, I am.*" See chapter 9 about YHWH (Exodus 3:14).

¹⁶⁵ The word used for “worship” regarding those who worshiped Jesus is the same word used for those who worship God. (Compare Matthew 8:2 with Revelation 7:11. In both cases, “worshiped” is the Greek word *proskneo* meaning “to prostrate oneself in adoration, worship.”)

¹⁶⁶ If you still cling to the unsubstantiated notion that the Scriptures of the Bible have been tampered with, reread chapter 3, which is entitled: “Corrupted or Preserved?”

¹⁶⁷ Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. NY: Macmillan-Collier, 1960, pp. 55-56.

¹⁶⁸ For a review on God’s complex oneness, reread chapter 9.

¹⁶⁹ Many stumble over another aspect of this story of Jesus and the rich young ruler. The man came running to Jesus and asked, “*Good Teacher; what **good thing** shall I do that I may inherit **eternal life**?*” (Matthew 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 10:25) To the crowd, the young man’s question seemed good, but not to the Lord. Jesus knew that this religious man had not yet grasped the foundational truths about God’s infinite holiness and man’s utter sinfulness. This self-righteous man imagined that he could earn his way into paradise; that he could somehow be good enough. He was like a child holding out a grimy fistful of copper coins to the world’s wealthiest man and asking him, “How many shall I give you that I may inherit your estate?” How did Jesus answer the man? He directed him back to the Torah and the Ten Commandments to show him that he could never, in his own strength, satisfy God’s standard of perfect righteousness. There is *no “eternal life”* for those who think they can merit it by doing some “*good thing*.”

¹⁷⁰ Jesus also said: “*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in **God**, believe also in **Me**. ... **I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. ... He who has seen Me has seen the Father**; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that **I am in the Father, and the Father in Me**? ... Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else **believe Me for the sake of the works themselves**.*” (John 14:1,6,9-11)

¹⁷¹ Isaiah 53:1; John 12:28; Luke 1:51; See also: Isaiah 40:10-11; 51:5; 52:10; 59:16; 63:5; Jeremiah 32:17.

¹⁷² While God empowered two prophets (Elijah and Elisha) to raise a dead person back to life, no prophet ever claimed to be *the Source of Life*. Jesus alone could say, “***I am the resurrection and the life.***”

¹⁷³ Before the Messiah came to earth, He was in heaven. He was there when Lucifer was cast out. Thus, Jesus said to His disciples: “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*” (Luke 10:18)

CHAPTER 18: GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN

¹⁷⁴ Hebrews 11:6; Jeremiah 29:13; Isaiah 29:11; Matthew 11:25; 13:13-14; Luke 8:4-15; John 6. Many of God's truths are revealed with a certain intentional indefiniteness—so that only those who search for His truth will find it. God will not force people to listen, understand, and believe. Those who are *willing* will discover His truth. Those who are *willfully blind* will not.

¹⁷⁵ Did you notice that many prophecies were written in the past tense even though they were written hundreds of years before the event? God's plans cannot be thwarted. When the Creator says something will happen, it is as good as done. That is also why the Messiah is called "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*" (Revelation 13:8)

¹⁷⁶ Read Psalm 2, written 1000 years before the Messiah's first coming to earth. Elsewhere in Scripture, the Messiah, at His second coming (described in chapter 29 of ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE), is likened to a massive stone falling from heaven. That "*stone*" will "*grind to powder*" all who have refused to submit to Him (Daniel 2:34-35; Matthew 21:33-44).

¹⁷⁷ For more words of Peter, read Acts chapters 2–5; Acts 10; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2:21-25; 3:18; etc. Also consider these words written by the apostle Paul: "***The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ...the weakness of God is stronger than men ...God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.***" (1 Corinthians 1:18,25,27)