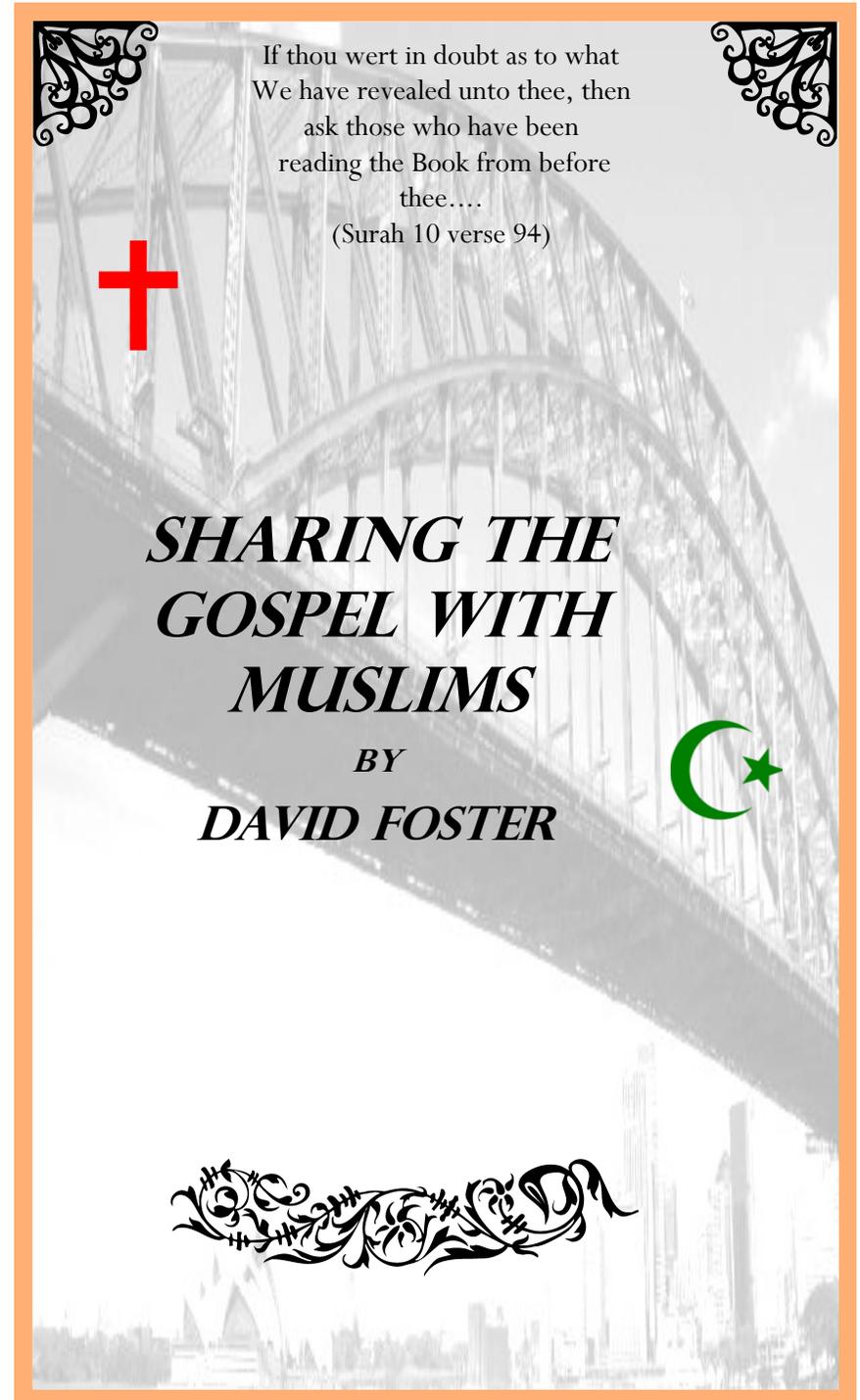


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SHARING THE GOSPEL

JESUS' NAME - BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

by David Foster

Summary

Acts 4:12 summarizes the gospel, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." This summary is a simple seed that can help us witness to Muslims in a friendly way. According to the Qur'an, the name Jesus was given by God. Not only so, the Muslim scripture echoes two Biblical clues confirming that Jesus' name means 'God is salvation'. Through Jesus, God worked two kinds of miracles showing his power to save. He healed people who were stricken with incurable and terminal illness. These people were saved them from the brink of death. Those who went over the 'brink of death' into the grave were also saved i.e. raised to life. These miraculous signs not only confirm the meaning of Jesus name, they are sign-posts pointing to the supreme sign of Messiah's resurrection.

Muslims don't accept Christ's death and resurrection because they are blinded by the god of this world. Their Qur'an emphatically denies that Christ died on the cross. Furthermore, they expect he will burn crosses when he returns to earth in the last days. Therefore, it is appropriate to picture Muslim resistance to the gospel as turbulent water in a chasm that separates Muslims and Christians.

The prospect of crossing this deep divide can be daunting. However, "God has not given us a spirit of timidity but of power, love and a sound mind". (2 Tim 1:7) This paper will help us develop a sound mind and loving heart as we consider how to share "a reason for our hope with gentleness and respect".

from all faces ... The Lord has spoken. In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.' (Isaiah 25:7-9)

Jewish people who are familiar with scripture, know that the Messiah will bring God's salvation. This is reminiscent of what the angel said, "I bring you good news of great joy ... a Saviour has been born".

*But how, exactly, would the Messiah **save** people? The Qur'an and the Bible give us a clue when they describe his miracles of healing, which **saved** people's lives. People who were critically sick or terminally ill were miraculously healed and **saved** from dying. There were some people who even went over the brink of death - so to speak - into the grave. They, too, were **saved** by God's Messiah.*

When we consider how the Messiah saved lives we must think, not just in terms of saving people from physical sickness, but also saving people whose lives have been devastated and ruined by sin. The angel Gabriel explained why God chose the name Jesus, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." An example of saving people from sin is seen in Luke 19 where we read of a notorious sinner, named Zaccheus, who was dramatically transformed by an encounter with Jesus. The concluding words of this story show Christ was deeply conscious of his name and the purpose for which God had chosen him, "Today salvation has come to this house", Jesus said, "because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

May I ask whether you know the meaning of this special name? If not, you're probably not able to appreciate the joyous announcement of the angel, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you" (Luke 2:10)

In the same way we consider it important to give people meaningful names, so also God was careful to choose a fitting name for the Messiah. It is difficult for us to imagine God choosing a name randomly, as in a lottery draw. It is more reasonable to believe that God chose the name purposely and with foresight. Having full knowledge of the future, we can be sure that God chose a name perfectly fitted to Messiah's character traits and accomplishments. As one writer observed, "The name is the real introduction of a man's personality ... the real representation of a man's actions." (p.4, 'Names for Muslim Children', M.A. Siddiqui). This prompts us to ask, "What actions of the Messiah correspond with the name Jesus?"

The early prophets foretold what God's servant the Messiah would do. They summarize his accomplishments saying that he would "bring His salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6) Messiah's accomplishments can be summarized even further, down to two words -- 'God's salvation'. Not surprisingly, we learn that this is exactly what the name Jesus means, i.e. Yeshua in Hebrew. This meaning is also acknowledged by Muhammad I.A. Usman, a respected Mufti and author of many books. (page 77 in "Islamic Names" - revised edition).

Salvation might be understood in a vague way but thankfully we are not left to guess what the prophets had in mind when they said Messiah would 'bring God's salvation'. The prophet Isaiah explained that God's salvation would mean the defeat of death. And when this happens, he said, there will be great joy. Notice how the last two words of the prophecy correspond with the meaning of Jesus' name. The last sentence reads, "Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."

(Isaiah 25:9)

Now that we've seen how this prophecy correlates with Jesus name, let us read the whole prophecy. God says, "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; He will swallow up death forever and ... wipe away the tears

We will explore various insights stemming from a simple seed truth. As a seed germinates and gradually grows, so too, we will develop this kernel of truth through a series of steps. We will examine 1) how God gave the name, 2) what it means, 3) how it is confirmed by Christ's actions and words, and finally, 4) how they climax in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. But first we need to consider some preliminary matters.

Names are an Important Aspect of Islam

Every culture places importance on naming children, and Muslims are no exception. They are urged to "take care while giving names to our children. We should give them meaningful names" (p.4 'Sacred Names of Muslims' and 'Names for Muslim Children' by M.A. Siddiqui and M.A.M. Hathurani). Siddiqui also says, "The name is the real introduction of a man's personality ... the real representation of a man's actions".

Muslims believe names are meaningful – not only in terms of choosing names for their children - but also from God's perspective. The importance of names is confirmed in scripture: notice how God named Hagar's son Ishmael and how he revealed the name John (Yahya, in the Quran) to Zachariah and Elizabeth. In other cases, God changed people's names e.g. Abram to Abraham. Unfortunately many Muslims are not familiar with these Bible stories. We need to bear in mind the potential in these stories for stimulating a Muslim's interest in names (leading eventually to Jesus' name)

Conversational Transitions to the Story of Jesus Birth

It is not advisable to start talking about Jesus name by abruptly introducing the topic. Our witness needs to be natural, conversational and gracious as Jesus himself demonstrated when he brought the good news to the Samaritan woman in

John 4. We need to combine grace and truth in our approach, using common sense to make our conversation flow in a natural rhythm. What are some conversation topics that can help us flow gracefully into talking about Jesus name?

Why not start by simply talking about names, in particular your friend's name? Ask what his name means and even the names of his family members. Ask your friend to explain how his name was chosen. Sometimes you can lead from this to share about your own name and what it means. You might want to mention the promise in the Bible where God says He will give believers a new name. Perhaps your friend (or a member of his family) is named Ismail or Maryam. These particular names are specially suited as door openers to talking about Jesus name. Consider the name Ismail – a name that has always been popular among Muslims.

Ismail This name means 'God hears' as recorded in Genesis 16 & 21. We ought to familiarize ourselves with this story. Discussing the meaning of the name Ismail, as recorded in the Bible, can be a heart-warming discovery for your friend since this story is not in the Qur'an. Whether he already knows the meaning of his name, telling this story will give him another reminder of God's love. It will show him that you love him too.

As a further step of witness you might comment, "It is so amazing to think that God would use an angel to reveal a name, isn't it?" ... "There's another name that was revealed through an angel?" ... "It is mentioned in the Qur'an and the Bible, can you recall that story?" ... "Yes it's the birth of Jesus Christ." Perhaps this similarity between his name and Jesus' name will interest your Muslim friend. Then you can start looking at the story of Jesus' birth as detailed below.

Maryam Here is another name that is popular among

have had the name Jesus so he is not unique (Joshua, etc)?

7. Muslims can see that saving a sick person from dying might be linked to 'salvation', and thus to Jesus name but it is sometimes helpful to reinforce this connection. How do you think the story of Jonah could help in this regard? If you were to read Jonah 2:10 to a Muslim would he likely agree or disagree with it? Why or why not? The following question may shed further light on Jonah's experience, 'How many other examples are found in both the O.T. and the Qur'an of people whom God saved physically from dying?' (Noah? ... Moses? ... cf. Psalm 68:19,20; surah 2.49,50; 7.83,84; 26.169-172; 29.31-33; 21.87,88)

8. An encounter with Jesus powerfully affected Zachaeus and the prostitute (Luke 7 & 19 respectively). The words used to describe their experience are 'salvation' or being 'saved' which again reinforce the meaning of Jesus name. Is there anything in these two stories that is likely to make the **average** Muslim disagree with you? In what way is surah 3.135 relevant to this question? (cf. Lk. 7:49; Mk. 2:5-10)

Appendix - a Christmas meditation which can be formatted to fit onto one page – then copied on coloured paper and laminated.

Christmas means different things to different people. Most people enjoy the sparkling lights and spirit of goodwill. It's wonderful to see some poor people benefiting from the spirit of generosity. Shopkeepers, of course, are glad for the opportunity to make extra money. On the other hand, God-fearing people remember that, the heart of Christmas is the Messiah's birth. If we overlook Christ's birth all the laughter and parties become an excuse for finding physical pleasure rather than experiencing genuine joy through appreciating God's goodness in sending a Saviour.

Many people join in the happy festivities of Christmas but, unfortunately, few people see the spiritual meaning in it. They don't appreciate the real reason for rejoicing. God-fearing people, including Muslims and Christians, have spiritual reasons to rejoice. It is amazing to see how much of this story we believe in common. The Qur'an and the Bible teach that the Messiah was born miraculously from a virgin. These revered writings also record that God chose the name Jesus, revealing it through the angel Gabriel. (Luke 1:31; surah 3.45)

made with retroactive effect. It is not uncommon when a wage increase has been agreed between the union and management, for the new pay-rate to be retroactive. Christ's death has retroactive effect. This is clear from Hebrews 9:15 Christ "*mediates the new covenant between God and people so that all who are invited can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins committed under that first covenant.*" It is clear, therefore, that the sins of Zacchaeus or anyone else living under the Old Covenant were cleansed by the sacrificial death of Christ.

5. This theme - conquering death - is illustrated in an evangelistic booklet entitled "A Heart for Eternity". For more info. write to: starsign77@hotmail.com

6. Arab Christians insist on using the name Yasua (not Isa) so as to uphold the meaning of Jesus name – God is Salvation. But maybe it is not so difficult to convince Muslims to accept this meaning as we had thought.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (among Christians)

1. The preface lists several reasons why the average Christian is more likely to use this 'common ground' approach to witness rather than a polemical approach (We noted how it emphasizes simplicity, friendliness and a conversational style.) What other elements make it suitable to normal people? Does Matthew 5:16 have any bearing on this question?
2. Four ways of guiding a conversation into the story of Christ's birth were mentioned. Which of these do you think you will probably use first? With whom would you like to initiate this witness?
3. Where do you anticipate having the most difficulty in using this approach?
4. Using similar beliefs as a bridge for witness has been much debated. Are there any reasons why you might feel uncomfortable using the approach suggested in this paper?
5. Suppose a studiously inclined Muslim were to reject your premise that the names Isa and Jesus are the same. How could you overcome this obstacle?
6. How would you answer someone who tries to undermine your understanding of Jesus name if they argue that there are many others who

Muslims. (The Semitic equivalent is Mary). I'm sure you will be able to see how this name provides a natural transition for talking about Jesus' birth. Some insights that might help you make conversation in this situation are provided in the footnotes.¹ Another friendly way of bridging to a conversation about Jesus' name is to discuss the meaning of Christmas.

Christmas season Christmas has become commercialized so that many people pay little attention to the event it is supposed to commemorate. Nevertheless, it is fairly easy to give your neighbour a home baked treat as a gesture of good will and to start a meaningful discussion about Christ's birth (see appendix - Christmas meditation)

Sickness Another conversational bridge to talking about Jesus name can be found in Acts chapters 3, 4. The story is told of a lame man who is healed in Jesus' name. The apostle Peter concludes this story declaring that Jesus name is the cornerstone "for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:11,12) Ponder this in light of the earlier events and you will notice how often 'the name' is mentioned. Praying to God "in Jesus name" – with all that, that means - is still important today. Indeed, it is not uncommon for Muslims to ask Christians to pray for them. In such situations it is natural to pray in 'Jesus name' and to discuss with our friend why we do this.

One Facet of a Collage In the course of general religious discussion with Muslims it often happens that they mention various things they believe, such as, the miraculous birth of Jesus, the miracles he performed and his return in the end times. One gets the impression that they say this to assure us that they really do believe in Jesus. Among the commonly known similarities between their faith and ours, they often mention the virgin birth of Christ. It is not difficult to pick up on this point

and to explore it a little more – even if you have to do this the next time you see him/her. You might say, “I’d like to hear a little more of what you believe about the story of Jesus’ birth.”

Preparatory Steps to Examining the Name

The miraculous circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus inspire wonder. Being a sign from God this event is meant to stimulate our curiosity so that we will ponder its significance. The earlier parts of the story provide important background - setting the stage as it were - for unveiling the name. I recommend asking questions to stimulate your friend’s curiosity. This is a much more interesting way for him to learn why God chose to give this particular name. Asking questions not only stimulates thinking, it promotes dialogue, fosters mutual respect and helps you gradually build a friendship. As the discussion proceeds you must avoid the temptation to take large steps. Be patient and take small steps. This approach is in keeping with principles of learning and also scriptural instruction, which says - “line upon line, precept upon precept”.

After you have asked your friend to explain what he knows about the birth of Jesus, you might continue as follows, “I was surprised to see how similar the story of Jesus birth is in the Qur’an compared to our Bible!” This friendly comment may come as a pleasant surprise, considering the many centuries of debates that have raged between Muslim and Christian leaders.

First Question

You might follow up your friend’s comments about Christ’s birth by asking him, “**Does the Qur’an mention that Mary was a virgin?**” This may prompt him to recall some other parts of the story. This exceptional and awe inspiring story is not unfamiliar to most Muslims. They are proud to acknowledge that it is in their Holy Book. We ought to feel

ENDNOTES

1 Imagine that you’re having a cup of tea with someone called Maryam and you make a sincere, positive remark about her name. There is something heart-warming about this because a person’s name is very intimate and precious to them. You might be further encouraged to use this approach when you realize that Maryam is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur’an (surah 3.42). Furthermore, the Qur’an ranks Mary “*above the women of all nations*” – which clearly reflects the Biblical portrait of Mary, “*You are blessed by God above all other women.*” (New Living Translation Luke 1:42) Mary’s name means bitter. It may have something to do with the deep pain she experienced standing in front of the cross, as she saw her son brutally killed by evil men for no fault of his own. It is interesting to see how Simeon told Mary, “*a sword will pierce your very soul*” (Luke 2:35) This prophecy reflects a supreme irony. She who was “*blessed above all other women*” would one day feel deep pain. Can you think of a way to use this insight to point your friend to the cross?

2. We will eventually discuss our differences – perhaps even debate them, but how heated the discussion gets will depend on a variety of factors (see Prov. 26:4,5; 2Tim. 2:23-26; Titus 1:9-13).

3. Some of us are inclined to compress a lot of verbal witness into a short time. We would do well to notice how God communicates through signs. According to the Bible and the Qur’an the virgin birth is said to be a miraculous sign (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 2:12; surah 19.19-21; 21.91). The dictionary defines a sign as a mark, gesture or symbol which conveys meaning indirectly. This kind of communication requires the recipient to ponder and turn things over in his mind. The Qur’an instructs its followers that the signs of God are “*for those who reflect ... who hearken ... who are wise*” (surah 30.21-24) This advise corresponds exactly with how Mary responded. Having seen and experienced the sign of a miracle birth she “*treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*” (Luke 2:19) If your witnessing style is like mine - driven by a desire to get the message out - perhaps you need to remind yourself of that signs symbols, parables and stories play a vital part in witness. Do you allow your friends time to ponder these signs?

4. The answer to this question hinges on the fact that transactions can be

piece of additional evidence that confirms our conclusion is found in a recent book by Muhammad Imraan Ashraf Usmani, a highly respected mufti from Pakistan. He acknowledges that Isa⁶ (Jesus) means ‘God is Salvation’ (p. 77, Islamic Names – revised and enlarged edition, 2000)

The paper concludes by showing how Jesus brings **salvation** through his death and resurrection. His death takes away sin. His resurrection destroys death and gives us confident hope of eternal life, thus bringing to a glorious climax God’s plan of **salvation**.

The steps spelled out in this paper are not meant to be mechanically or slavishly followed. Let the Spirit help you creatively apply them to the various situations you may encounter.

confident and relaxed about discussing this story, knowing that these similarities between the Qur’anic and Biblical accounts will not likely provoke arguments – at least not at the beginning.²

However, I have seen that some Muslims are defensive when discussing the virgin birth of Christ. They seem to assume that the absence of a human father reinforces our Christian belief in Jesus as the begotten Son of God (even though you have been sensitive not to mention this touchy subject). When I’ve encountered this kind of resistance I’ve been able to postpone this issue by saying, “This subject you’ve raised is important ... Can we discuss it later.”

Muslim preachers are highly selective about what details of the story they expound on. As a result many Muslims are unfamiliar with the important details and their implications. It is helpful to ask questions but don’t apply too much pressure, thus making your friend feel ignorant and humiliated. Probably the most you can expect from him/her is one or two general comments. On the other hand, he may tell you some surprising details from the Qur’an that are irrelevant to the theme of the story. For example, he may explain the apocryphal story about baby Jesus breathing life into a clay bird. Don’t let this derail your line of discussion. Redirect the conversation to the main purpose - keep your focus on the name.

This name, like a priceless pearl, waits to be discovered. The name is the very ‘cornerstone’ of our salvation and besides this, “there is no other name whereby we can be saved”. Please be sensitive - quoting Acts 4:12 early in your discussion is not advisable, as it will probably evoke a defensive response.

A helpful way of turning your friend’s attention to the name ‘Jesus’ is to simply read surah 3.45. “Behold the angels

said: “O Mary God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Christ *Jesus*...” Then you can compare it with Luke 1:31 “*You will become pregnant and have a son and you are to name him Jesus.*”

Second Question

You will notice that the Qur’an says an angel revealed the name, but “***Who actually chose it?***” “***Did the angel choose the name himself?***” If we reflect for a moment, we will conclude it must have been God who chose the name. This is not difficult for a Muslim to accept since he believes angels are messengers who only do Allah’s bidding. You might want to compare how most of us choose the names for our babies and then emphasize how different Mary’s situation was – her baby was named by God.

If you have not already done so, it may be appropriate to share how you named your children. One of the things parents consider when choosing names for their children is the meaning. Books from various cultures list names and their meanings. Planting these seeds early in the conversation can stimulate a person’s curiosity³ to know the meaning of Jesus name.

Third Question

Another way to prompt your neighbour to think about the meaning of Jesus name is to ask, “**How did God choose the name?**” “**Did he make a random choice, as in a lottery draw, or was it a wise and purposeful choice?**” It is illogical to imagine that God would make a random choice. God is wise and he knows the future. He has at his disposal all the facts needed to make a fitting choice. God knew what Jesus would accomplish as an adult so he could choose a name that was perfectly suited to this special baby.

portant framework. These O.T. insights include foreshadowings and predictions (Ex. 11ff, Lev. 5, Gen. 22, Is. 53).

I urge you to familiarize yourself with these scriptures so you can explore a particular theme and show how it is fulfilled in Christ’s death. You might want to focus on the ‘lamb’ theme or perhaps ‘sin offerings’. It is important to show how O.T. sin offerings are fulfilled by Christ, but we also need to go beyond the sin issue and explain how Christ’s resurrection fits into God’s plan of salvation.

God’s **salvation** involves conquering death, as we see in Isaiah 25:7-9. “*On this mountain, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples ... he will swallow up death forever ... The Lord has spoken. In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God, we trusted in him, and he saved us ... let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.’*” We have already noticed how Christ raised the dead which implied that he **saved** lives. Now we will see God’s victory over death coming into clearer focus. We see that the Messiah did not just resist the threat of death against others, he personally faced death and overcame it by rising from the dead.

One fascinating detail of Isaiah’s prophecy is that death would be defeated on Mt. Zion, that is, Jerusalem (Is. 24:32 through 25:7). This location is precisely where Jesus the Messiah foretold he would be killed and raised to life again (Lk. 18:31-33).⁵ Christ conquered death, therefore “*he is able, once and forever, to save everyone who comes to God through him.*” (Heb. 7:25)

Conclusion

This paper explains a simple way of witnessing to your Muslim neighbour based on our common belief that Jesus’ name came from God. We considered a series of clues that gradually revealed the meaning of Jesus’ name. A fascinating

One Muslim asked me, “How could Jesus ‘save’ the prostitute [or Zaccheus] from their sins by dying for them when he had not been nailed on the cross yet?” “Why did Jesus not tell her that she must believe he was going to die?” An answer to these questions is provided in the footnotes ⁴ - based on Hebrews 9,10. These two chapters open a way to naturally explain O.T. animal sin offerings as a foundation for understanding how the Lamb of God takes away our sin.

On the other hand, there are many Muslims who are not so aggressive or bold. They may not be as perceptive or perhaps they are simply reluctant to raise a sensitive topic that might jeopardize a pleasant friendship. In such cases, we have the freedom to choose how we will explain Christ’s death. Of course we will want to ask our friend if he has any questions. In this way we can more effectively meet his particular needs.

You will try to explain Christ’s death in a way that will be most meaningful to him. One way of doing this is by showing him a similarity between the story of Zaccheus and Christ’s birth. Jesus said, “*I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those, like [Zaccheus], who are lost.*” Similarly, at Christ’s birth, the angel said, “*you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.*” (Matt. 1:21 NIV) Of course, it is appropriate to draw this parallel between these stories because our earlier discussion focused so much on Christ’s birth.

The Widening Panorama of Salvation

In the early part of Christ’s ministry there is another prophecy that explains his death in terms of **saving** sinners. We read in John 1:29, “*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” Many who read this verse recognize that it points to the cross. At the same time, however, it is rooted in Old Testament teachings about sacrifice which provide an im-

Fourth Question

Having established that God chose the name purposely we need to consider, “**Why did God choose this particular name – not one of the other thousands of possible names?**” In order to answer this question we need to consider, “What was God’s purpose for sending the Messiah“. The prophets foretold the Messiah would come and do great things. Isaiah 49:6 gives a brief description of what he would do. You might ask your friend if he believes the prophets. Then after he agrees, ask, “May I read a prophecy about the Messiah?” Encourage him to pay careful attention because it contains a clue to the meaning of Jesus name.

The prophet Isaiah revealed God’s plan for his Servant the Messiah, saying, “*It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob . . . I will also make you a light to the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*” (Isa. 49:6) Remember, your friend is probably hearing this prophecy for the first time so it won’t be easy for him to put the puzzle pieces together. You might help him figure out the meaning of the name by asking, “What word in this prophecy seems to be a key word, or perhaps summarizes it best?” Give your friend time to ponder this question. Reread it a couple times or even let him read it.

One word that stands out is ‘**salvation**’ but notice whose **salvation** it is. The personal pronoun, ‘my’, indicates it is God’s **salvation**. These two words – ‘God’s **salvation**’ - are a good summary of Isaiah’s prophecy, and, as you might expect, this is precisely what Jesus name means (Yeshua in Hebrew).

Showing How Jesus Name Matches With His Life

It makes sense that God would imprint this purpose in a name, even as M.A. Siddiqi says - a person’s name is “the real

introduction of his personality and the real representation of his actions.”. God foreknew the Messiah’s accomplishments and how they would match his name. Jesus brought **salvation** by **saving** lives. He cured various sicknesses by God’s power, including terminal illnesses such as leprosy (Matt. 11:3-5 surah 5.113).

We read in Luke chapter 7 how Jesus **saved** someone who was about to die. These miraculous signs provide a glimpse, confirming the meaning of Jesus name. But Jesus performed even greater signs that give further confirmation - he **saved** lives of those who went beyond the brink of death -- into the grave. Yes, indeed, he raised the dead. In this, we share another common belief with our friend because this is also the teaching of the Qur’an (Matt.11:3-5; cf. surah 5.113)

Salvation with a Spiritual Nuance

It is one thing to **save** lives of those who are in peril physically, but Jesus also **saved** people in a spiritual sense. We see this in the story of a sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50. As you read, pay special attention to the last three verses, “Then Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The men at the table said among themselves, ‘Who does this man think he is, going around forgiving sins.’ And Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has **saved** you go in peace.’”

The story of Zacchaeus also shows how Jesus brought **salvation** in a spiritual sense. When Zacchaeus met Jesus he felt deeply convicted of sin and decided to make restitution to those he had defrauded. “Jesus responded, ‘**Salvation** has come to this home today ... and I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and **save** those like him who are lost.’” (Luke 19:9,10) This story provides another clue confirming the meaning of Jesus’ name. Christ **saved** a sinner whose life was spiritually ruined.

The perilous situation Zaccheus was in, might not seem so obvious - or so impending - as the immediate threat posed by terminal illness. However, Zaccheus knew he was in real danger. He was deeply aware of his sin and the fact that he deserved punishment from God. Jesus was instrumental in turning his life around and **saving** him spiritually.

All of us, like Zaccheus, stand in peril of God’s wrath, even as the psalmist admitted, “If you, O Lord kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared.” (Psalm 130:3) The Qur’an similarly says, “If God were to punish men for their wrongdoing He would not leave (on the Earth) a single living creature: but He shows respite...” (surah 16.61)

This spiritual aspect of **salvation** is hard for Muslims to grasp because their teachers do not admit that “the wages of sin is death”. This is a stumbling block, especially for well read Muslims. However, ordinary Muslims tend to accept this story at face value. It has a certain ring of truth about it because Zaccheus was willing to make restitution for what he stole.

You will notice that, so far, we have not mentioned anything that contradicts core Muslim beliefs - but this can’t continue indefinitely. Eventually we will have to come to terms with our differences - especially in relation to the cross. Our friend must weigh up the evidence and decide which is true – the Bible or the Qur’an. Naturally we prefer not to deal with this matter in a head on confrontation but sometimes we have no choice – the Muslim may spontaneously ask a question that opens up the whole issue! Muslims are conditioned from childhood to deny the cross so a Muslim can easily anticipate where the discussion is going.