'Issa' of the Qur'an vs. 'Jesus' of the Bible

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1. Introduction

- Muslims honour Jesus, and consider him a great prophet.
- He is mentioned in 15 suras and 93 verses.
- Some Muslim scholars follow the ideas of the ‘Jesus Seminar’ that there is discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Jesus that some Christians believe in, but then realise the danger in such criticism once they are aware of the pre-suppositional base used by the group.
- Others take on Hyam Maccabys criticism, that the gospel of Jesus is a creation of Paul.
- Muhammad ‘Ata ur Rahim, believes Jesus was a member of the Essene brotherhood.

2. The Names for Jesus:

The Qur’an gives more honourable titles (eleven) to Jesus than to any other figure:
- Statement of truth (Sura 17:24) vs. ‘Way the truth and the life’ (John 14:6)
- Word (Sura 10:19) vs. the ‘Word’ (John 1:1)
- Apostle (Sura 19:31) vs. apostle (Hebrews 3:1)
- Servant (Sura 4:172; 19:31) vs. Servant (Isaiah 42, 49, 50 & 53)
- (Sign, Witness, Example, Messiah, Son of Mary, Messenger, and Spirit of God)
- ‘ISSA - It appears 25 times in the Qur’an.

The origin of the word is not clear:
- Did it come from the Syriac ‘Iesous’?
- Or from the ‘Isaniya’, followers of Issa, from a group in Syria in 571 AD?
- Is it Esau: from Arabian Jews who believed Esas soul transferred onto Jesus?
- Today Christian Arabs use ‘Yesuah’ which more grammatically correct.

But the Qur’anic name is not simply ‘Issa’, by itself:
- Issa ibn Maryam / Issa son of Mary, occurs 23 times.
  a. Possibly chosen in contradistinction to son of God, to show he was human.
  b. Found only once in the Bible.
  c. Used by Syriac sources, influencing 70% of all Qur’anic religious terms.
  d. (S.19:28-29; 66:12; 20:25-30) How was Mary, Jesus’ mother, Aaron’s sister and Imran’ daughter (Numbers 26), as she lived 1,570 years later?
- Issa al masihu / Isa the messiah (11 times).
  a. JESUS: Ἰησοῦς = Joshua - ‘The Lord our Salvation’
  b. Yesua or Yeshua (Arabic / Heb.)
  c. MESSIAH: (known in Arabic as al Masihu) found 11 times in the Qur’an, all in the later Medinan suras, but never defined. Thus a puzzle for Muslims, while a great bridge for us.
  d. The meaning has been declared to be unclear by some Muslim scholars, but is used in Morocco for the king (referred to as the “anointed one”).


The Qur’an gives two accounts of the annunciation and birth of Jesus, & refers to his teachings, healings, death and exaltation.

Sura 3: 33 ff, and Sura 19 (Maryam), give the details of his birth.
- The Spirit (ruh) is active in his birth (blowing into Mary’s sleeve = Tabari)
- Sura 3:42 and 19:21, he is conceived by Allah saying “Be”, much like Adam’s birth.
- Born of a virgin (Sura 19:20), so new creation, as no male to give ‘Y’ chromosome.
- Confusion about Mary’s family, the family of Imran (S.66:12; 19:29 vs. Num 26).
- Difficulty of a biological birth from God (Suras 4:169; 25:2; 112)
- Imran/Zachariah (Mary’s Father & patron) (S.3:35-37) vs. Proto-Evangelion’s James the Lesser (2nd C.)
- Jesus speaks from the cradle (3:41; 5:109; 19:29-33) vs. ‘First Gospel of Infancy of J.C.’ (2nd C.)
- Jesus & Mary being fed by the Palm tree (S.19:22-26) vs. ‘Lost book of the Bible’ (2nd C.)
- Jesus creating birds from clay (S.3:49; 5:11) vs. ‘Thomas’ Gospel of the Infancy of J.C.’ (2nd C.)
4. **Life** of Jesus in the Qur'an:

- **Miracles**:
  - As a baby: 19:27-32 (Palm tree)
  - As a child: 3:49; 5:110, 113 (birds)
  - In adulthood: 3:49 & 5:113-114, (table, healing blind, lepers, and raising dead)

- **Words**:
  - Jesus denies his deity & predicts Muhammad’s coming: 5:17, 72, 116; 43:63-64; 61:6
  - Sura 61:6 = ‘Ahmad’ as the messenger to come; why not Muhammad? Translated in the 750s as a noun, instead of an adjective, due to paraclete promise in Jn.14 & 16. Could be ‘whose name is worthy of more praise’.
  - The Qur’an also denies the trinity 4:171-172

5. **Crucifixion** of Jesus in the Qur’an:

[A] **Primary Verses to be considered**:
- Baidawi (1286 AD) changed 19:15, & 33 to the future, to 2nd coming (40 yrs.) because of the need to reconcile it with 4:157-159, thus internal contradiction.
- Jesus will be taken up is promised in 3:55, 5:120
- A possibility to suffer, or die... in 5:19
- The main passage, however is: 4:157-159
  1) The Jews believe that they had killed Jesus.
  2) God reveals that they definitely did not. Jesus was not killed nor crucified.
  3) There was someone (not named) who looked like Jesus who died in his place.
  4) God instead took up Jesus, like an ascension.

[B] **Various Explanations by Muslim scholars**:
- Al Baidawi... God took Jesus to heaven. The likeness was on someone else who died.
  (Taken from Mani, a Persian in 276AD)
- God took Jesus to heaven in his sleep (Taken from ‘Gospel of Peter’, 2nd C. Docetic)
- Al-Zamakhshari... They imagined Jesus was crucified. But Jesus is alive in heaven.
- The substitution of a person for Jesus... Judas, another Jew, or Simon of Cyrene (Taken from Basilides, a Gnostic writer)
- There is no resurrection as there was no death.
- Ahmadiyya view = Swoon Theory, Jesus swooned, died later & was buried in Kashmir (Taken from the ‘Gospel of John’, 2nd C. Docetic heresy).

**Sources for these stories:**
- Most are taken from 2nd cent. Docetic (Jesus only seemed physical) & Gnostic writings.
- Ignatius writes against them quoting them when they say, “Jesus suffered in semblance”
- The Apocryphal Gospel of Peter: “Jesus was taken up”
- The Apocryphal Gospel of John: Jesus appeared to John in a cave, saying the sufferings did not happen to him.
- Basilides (Gnostic writer): “Jesus changed forms with Simon of Cyrene, a substitution”
- Mani (Persian, 276AD): “The widow of Nain’s son was substituted for Jesus”

[C] **Misunderstandings concerning Christ’s death:**
- The sovereignty of God: that Allah would not allow his prophets to suffer (3:183)
- Islamic understanding of salvation - that no atonement is needed (S.6:164; 53:38)

6. **Eschatology** & Jesus:

- **Verses**: 3:55; 4:157; 19:33; 43:61
- Traditional ideas: Bukhari- Jesus will return, break crosses, kill swine, suppress poll-tax, bring about wealth, kill anti-Christ, go to Jerusalem and reign 40 years, and then die in Medina.
- Thus an empty place next to Muhammad’s tomb is reserved for Jesus.

7. **Controversial References** to Jesus:

1. **SON OF GOD**:
• Suras 39:4; 43:81 =God can have a son, which would be worshipped.
• Sura 2:177 ‘Ibn ul-sabeeli’ means ‘son of the road’ = traveller
• S. 6:101; 5:17 = biological vs. inheritance birth
• Lk.2:49= ‘begotten’ = monogenes = one & only (unique), not ‘genao’ = birth
• Not man becoming God, but God becoming man (Phil.2:6-8) Can God become a man? Yes! So not how, but why! Erradicate SIN
• Must remind them of the theophanies (burning bush, Angel with Abraham etc...)

2. GOD = JESUS = DIED: Sura 5:17, 72 = “God [Father] is the Messiah...is one [or the third] of three”
   -Patripassianism = God the father died on cross.
   -Noetus in 200 AD and Praxeas felt Jesus = God, & both lived and died on earth.

3. MARY=TRINITY: Sura 5:116 = “Take me and my mother as two Gods apart from God”
   -Collyridians = 4th century Arabian female sect saw her as great earth mother.

4. TRINITY: Sura 4:171 = “Do not say three gods...far from his acquiring a son” (anti - trinity)
   -primarily against Arab polytheism, not trinity, but many other verses take on this same theme: (5:72; 7:190; 9:31; 16:51; 17:22, 111; 19:35; 23:91; 25:2), denying Christian heresies of Adoption, Patripassianism, and Mariolatry.
   -Need to ask Muslims to look at the trinity not as a violation of Unity, but as a form of its expression, not as a mathematical formula, but as an organic, composite unity (highly complex with many component parts).
   -many mysteries we can’t explain (i.e. God’s omnipresence, eternity, virgin birth, or electricity etc..., yet we accept them)
   -Tri-unity (Tertullian 125 A.D.). Not mathematical (1+1+1, or 1x1x1, or 4x4x4) but organic: (i.e.: son, father, husband, brother, pen, water, sun, author, egg, body mind and spirit); not Sabellian (3 consecutive ‘gods’) nor Arian (‘man becomes God’)
   -Explains love (requiring an object), not found in a one-dimensional monad Allah! Islamic trinity = Allah, Ruh, & Eternal Qur'anic tablets
   -i.e. Baptism of Christ (Luke 3:22)=voice of God the father, dove as spirit of God, and Son as Jesus. (Matt.6:11-13 = Lord’s Prayer)

8. Sectarian Influences (Source Criticism):
   Monarchists: God has no children (sura 4:171; 19:34)
   Docetists (1st C.): Jesus didn’t die (sura 4:156-158)
   Monophysites - Choloridian (4th C.) Maryolatry: Mary in the Trinity (sura 5:116)
      • Imran & Zachariah (Mary’s Father & patron) (S.3:35-37) vs. Proto-Evangelion’s James the Lesser
      • Jesus speaks from the cradle (3:41; 5:109; 19:29-33) vs. ‘First Gospel of Infancy of J.C.’
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   Almost all are written in Syriac, f rom 2nd – 5th C., in Eastern Syria
   Progression Of Mary: 1st C. = Minor role: mother of Jesus
      5th C. = Major Role: Eternal Virgin, Mediator, Holy Woman, Pious, greater than Jesus
      7th C. = Major Role: (S.3 & 19): Eternal Virgin, Lives in Temple, above all women, Pious
   Digestion Of Joseph: 1st C. = Mentioned often, 5th C. = Few times, 7th C. = Non-Existent
      Suggests Qur’anic material borrowed from Syriac sources, after 5th C., and not 1st C.
   1st - 2nd C. Extra Biblical Documentation on Jesus:
   -Thallus Greek historian (52AD): mentions crucifixion, and that the day suddenly turned dark.
   -Tacitus Roman historian (80-84AD): death of Jesus, during reign of Tiberius, by Pontius Pilate of Judea (Lk.3:1)
   -Josephus Hebrew historian - Rome (90-95AD): death of Jesus & brother James, & John the Baptist, (+resurrection?)
   -Suetonius historian, The 12 Caesars: Christians (Chrestus’ followers) expelled from Rome by Claudius = Acts 18:2
   -Pliny the Younger Roman author & administrator (112AD): Christian community sang to Christ as to ”God”

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Summary:
The Jesus of the Qur’an is seen as one in the succession of prophets, who brings the same message, brought a book, the ‘injil, and the final perfect prophet is Muhammad. The comparison should be Jesus and the Qur’an, and not Jesus and Muhammad. The Qur’an gives a high view, esteeming Jesus in a favourable manner and accepts certain of the Biblical claims. Christians need to be aware of not reading their own views into the Qur’anic proofs of the Deity of Jesus Christ. Many of the ideas concerning Jesus have their precedence in 2nd cent. Apocryphal writings.

What sets Jesus apart from all others - why is Jesus Unique?:
1. The New Testament makes this claim, and also the N.T. (whose documents are reliable..this issue needs to be stated too)
2. The term SON is not used in a biological or sexual manner. The belief which Muslims attribute to Christians that God married Mary and had a child, a son, is blasphemy to Christians. The word Son is used to describe a relationship.
3. Jesus speaks of himself as the ‘I Am’ and the Jews understood the reference to mean that He was calling Himself Jehovah”, or “Jahweh”.. Exodus..3:14, John 8:58. The name is never used of men. Also the other ‘I Am’ references.
4. Jesus forgave sins.
5. Jesus will raise from the dead on the day of resurrection, and gives life.. John 5:29
6. Miracles... especially the ones over physical nature (the storm) and over the power of evil, only Jesus could do.
7. Jesus accepted worship reserved for God.
8. He put his words on par with Gods, ”You have heard... I say.”
9. Prayer is in His name..
10. He was Sinless (Sura 19:19)

Proofs of the death.
1. The many predictions in the Old Testament. Isa 53.
2. Jesus said He would suffer and die Mt 17: 22,23
3. He gave his life, John 10:11,17-18
4. Predictions of resurrection are foolish if there was not any death. Ps 16:10
-Misunderstanding: that Jesus’ death was expected, the purpose of his coming; that victory demands that God rescue Jesus.
5. The nature of the injuries and manner of crucifixion would mean Jesus would be dead. (The Swoon theory is not possible)
6. Pilate would check that his soldiers killed the right person, and that he was dead.
7. There is evidence from other historians... Julius Africanus 221, Tacitus 55-117.
8. The witness of the disciples and Polycarp,