JESUS, SON OF MARY (PART 5 OF 5): PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Rating: **4.3**

Description: An overview of some of the terms the Quran use for Jesus and his followers from before the advent of Muhammad: the “Bani Israeel”, “Eissa” and the “People of the Book”.

Category: Articles Comparative Religion Jesus

Category: Articles Beliefs of Islam Stories of the Prophets

By: Aisha Stacey (© 2008 IslamReligion.com)
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After reading and understanding what Muslims believe about Jesus, son of Mary, there may be some questions that come to mind, or issues that need clarification. You may have read the term “People of the Book” and not been completely clear about what this meant. Likewise, while exploring the literature available about Jesus you could have come across the name *Eissa* and wondered if Jesus and *Eissa* were the same person. If you are considering investigating a little further or perhaps reading the Quran, the following points may be of interest.

Who is Eissa?

Eissa is Jesus. Perhaps because of the difference in pronunciation, many people may not be aware that when they hear a Muslim talking about *Eissa*, he is actually talking about Prophet Jesus. The spelling of *Eissa* may take many forms – Isa, Esa, Essa, and Eissa. The Arabic language is written in Arabic characters, thus any transliteration system tries to reproduce the phonetic sound. No matter what the spelling, all indicate Jesus, the Messenger of God.

Jesus and his people spoke Aramaic, a language from the Semitic family. Spoken by more than 300 million people throughout the Middle East, North Africa and the Horn of Africa, Semitic languages include, among others, Arabic and Hebrew. The use of the word Eissa is actually a closer translation of the Aramaic word for Jesus – Eeshu. In Hebrew this translates to Yeshua.

Translating the name Jesus into non Semitic languages complicated things. There was no “J” in any language until the fourteenth century[1], so consequently, when the name Jesus was translated into Greek, it became Iesous, and in Latin, Iesus[2]. Later, the “I” and “J” were used interchangeably, and finally the name transitioned into English as Jesus. The final “S” on the end is indicative of the Greek language where all male names end in “S”.

Aramaic	Arabic	Hebrew	Greek	Latin	English
Eeshu	Eisa	Yeshua	Iesous	Iesus	Jesus

Who are the People of the Book?

When God refers to the People of the Book, He is talking mainly about the Jews and the Christians. In the Quran, the Jewish people are called *Bani Israeel*, literally *the Children of Israel*, or commonly *the Israelites.* These distinctive groups follow, or followed, the revelation of God as it was revealed in the Torah and the Injeel. You may also hear the Jews and Christians referred to as "the People of the Scripture".

Muslims believe the divinely revealed books before the Quran have either been lost in antiquity, or changed and distorted, but they also recognize that the true followers of Moses and Jesus were Muslims who worshiped One God with true submission. Jesus, son of Mary, came to confirm the message of Moses and to guide the Children of Israel back to the straight path. Muslim's believe the Jews (Children of Israel) denied Jesus' mission and message, and the Christians incorrectly raised him to the status of a god.

"O people of the Scripture! Exceed not the limits in your religion other than the truth, and do not follow the vain desires of people who went astray in times gone by, and who misled many, and strayed from the Right Path." (Quran 5:77)

We have already discussed in previous parts how the Quran deals extensively with Prophet Jesus and his mother Mary. However, the Quran also includes many verses where God speaks directly to the People of the Book, particularly those who call themselves Christians.

The Christians and Jews are told not to criticise the Muslims for no reason other than believing in One God, but God also draws attention to the fact that Christians (those who follow Christ's teaching) and Muslims have much in common, including their love and respect for Jesus and all of the Prophets.

".. and you will find the nearest in love to the believers those who say: 'We are Christians.' That is because amongst them are priests and monks, and they are not proud. And when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of the truth they have recognised. They say: Our Lord! We believe; so write us down among the witnesses." (Quran 5:83)

Like Jesus son of Mary, the Prophet Muhammad came to confirm the message of all the Prophets before him; he called the people to worship the One God. His mission, however, was different from the earlier Prophets, (Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others) in one respect. Prophet Muhammad came for **all of mankind** while the

Prophets before him came specifically for their own time and people. The advent of Prophet Muhammad and the revelation of the Quran completed the religion that had been revealed to the People of the Book.

And God spoke to Prophet Muhammad in the Quran and beseeched him to call to the People of the Book by saying:

"Say O Muhammad 'O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians): Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but God (Alone), and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides God.'" (Quran 3:64)

Prophet Muhammad said to his companions, and thus to all of mankind:

"I am the nearest of all the people to the son of Mary, and all the Prophets are brothers and there is none between me and him."

And also:

"If a man believes in Jesus and then believes in me he will get double reward." (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

Islam is a religion of peace, respect and tolerance, and it applies a just and compassionate attitude towards other religions, particularly in respect to the People of the Book.

Footnotes:

[1] The Encyclopaedia Americana.

[2] The Oxford English dictionary.

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