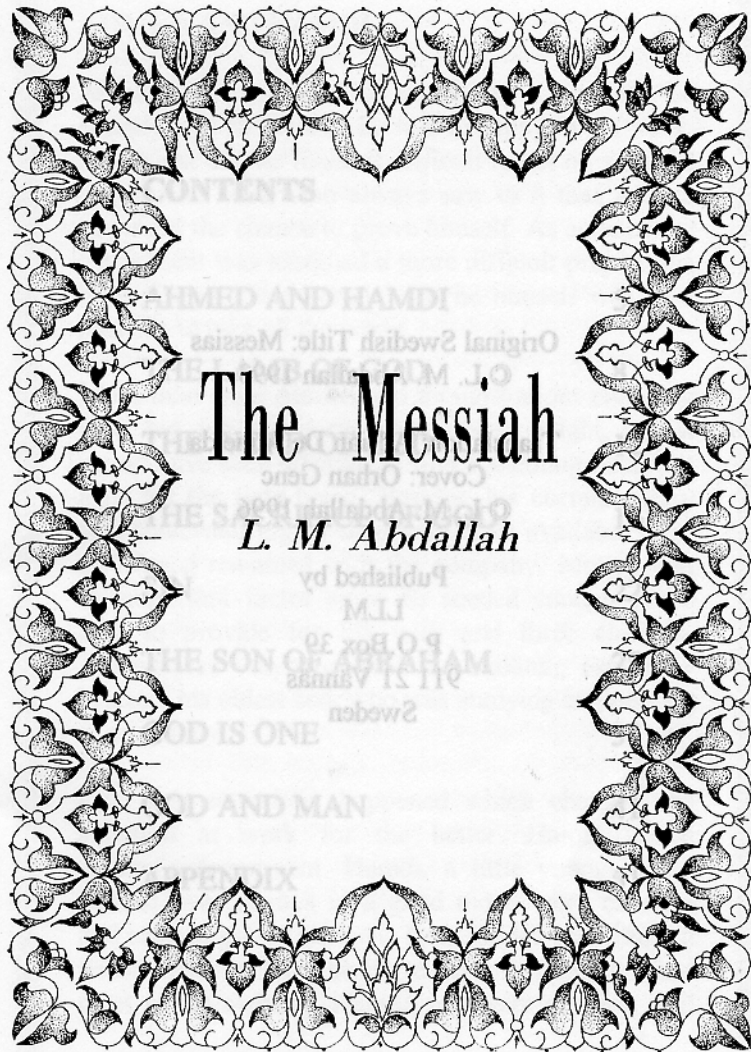




The Messiah

L. M. Abdallah



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Original Swedish Title: Messias
C. L. M. O. S. P. A. S. J. O.
The Messiah

Cover: Orian Gane
C. L. M. O. S. P. A. S. J. O.
L. M. Abdallah
Published by
L. M.
P. O. Box 39
MADRID 10 NOS 81
911 21 Vannes
Sweden
AND IS ONE
AND MAN
APPENDIX

Original Swedish Title: Messias

© L. M. Abdallah 1993

Translation: Adrian De Almeida

Cover: Orhan Genc

© L. M. Abdallah 1996

Published by

LLM

P.O.Box 39

911 21 Vännäs

Sweden

AHMED AND HAMDI

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AHMED AND HAMDI

Ahmed was employed at an office. It wouldn't be entirely true to say that he was unhappy in his work, it was just that he found it difficult to get on with the department head, who always saw to it that Ahmed never got the chance to prove himself. As soon as the department was assigned a more difficult project, his boss always made certain that he himself was in a position to take all the credit.

More than once Ahmed had thought about changing jobs, but job prospects weren't very bright, and it would have been difficult to find something better, at least for the time being. Besides, his current salary was somewhat higher than with most available jobs, so Ahmed remained with the company. Money was an important factor since he needed enough to be able to provide for his wife and three children. Ahmed was very proud of his children, especially Hassan, his oldest son, who was studying engineering at university.

One day, something happened which changed the situation at work for the better. Hamdi joined Ahmed's department. Hamdi, a little younger than Ahmed, was always in a good mood, very cheerful and easy to get on with. At last, Ahmed had found a friend at work. They began to eat lunch together and meet in the evening. Hamdi, too, was married, and

God had blessed him with four wonderful children, two boys and two girls.

Ahmed and Hamdi became good friends and they often visited each other at home. They loved to sit down over a cup of tea and just talk. The hours used to fly by, and they could talk about almost anything.

At first they mainly talked about work at the office but as time went on they began to discuss some of life's important questions. Both Ahmed and Hamdi were deeply religious but they did not share the same faith. Ahmed was a Muslim, while his best friend, Hamdi, read the Bible regularly and was a follower of the Messiah (*Al-Masih*).

What surprised Ahmed most was that the more he got to know Hamdi, the more he came to respect his faith and his life with God. Ahmed realised that his friend enjoyed a close relationship with God, something which he himself had never experienced, and this made him curious. Hamdi's life with God, Ahmed thought, must have had something to do with the Messiah. In one sense, Ahmed also believed in the Messiah, although not in the same way. He believed in everything written in the Qur'an about Jesus, the son of Mary (*Aisa Abn Mariam*) and had a deep respect for the Messiah. He knew that the Messiah had been born of the Virgin Mary (*Mariam Al-Athra*), that he had performed many miracles with God's permission and that he had received the Gospel

(*Al-Injil*) from God. At the same time Ahmed realised that he only knew about a few details in the life of the Messiah, and his desire grew to find out more about this great apostle (*rasol*), who had been given so many names, even in the Qur'an.

One day, Ahmed, finally overcome by curiosity, decided to ask his good friend Hamdi about the Messiah. That decision led to many interesting conversations.



THE LAMB OF GOD

"Tell me about Jesus, the son of Mary," Ahmed requested earnestly. "I would really like to know more about him."

Hamdi thought for a moment and then said, "If you want to understand why the Messiah came into the world you will need to understand the meaning of sacrifice."

"Sacrifice? What do you mean?" wondered Ahmed.

Hamdi continued, "We see the meaning of sacrifice in *Id Al-Athha* (The Feast of Sacrifice). You know, when God asked Abraham (*Sayedna Ibrahim*) to sacrifice his son. What would have happened to Abraham's son if God (*Allah*) hadn't provided a sacrifice as a ransom (*fida*) for him?"

"Ishmael would have died," said Ahmed.

"That is the meaning of sacrifice," replied Hamdi.

"Someone dies instead of someone else. God sent a ram, which was sacrificed in his place. I am in the same position as Abraham's son. I am under the power of death," said Hamdi.

"What do you mean?" said Ahmed, a little perplexed.

Hamdi answered in a serious voice, "It is written in the Bible (The Holy Book):

'For the wages of sin is death.' (1)

"The wages for my sin is death. I am a sinner. Yes, it's true that others see me as a deeply religious man. I pray to God every day, I study his book and I serve him. But before God I am a sinner. Is there anyone perfect apart from God?" asked Hamdi.

"No!" answered Ahmed. "No-one but God."

"So before God we are all sinners, aren't we?" asked Hamdi.

Ahmed agreed, "Yes, that is true."

"I am then in the same position as Abraham's son, under the power of death. But where is the sacrifice for my sins? Hasn't God sent a sacrifice as a ransom for me?" asked Hamdi. Ahmed didn't really know what to say. Hamdi continued, "John the Baptist (*Yahya Abn Zakaria*) lived at the time of the Messiah. The first time he saw the Messiah, he said:

'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (2)

"The Messiah was not the lamb of man. He came from God. He came from above. God's Spirit (*Roh Allah*) covered the Virgin Mary (*Mariam*). She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. As you know, he is called 'Jesus, the son of Mary', 'the Word of God (*Kalimat Allah*)' and 'the Spirit of God (*Roh Allah*)'. He was pure. He came from heaven as the Lamb of God. The Messiah proved that he was the Lamb of God by living a perfect life before God. There was never a time when he needed to say 'I ask

God the Great for forgiveness (*astaghfer Allah Al-Azim*)' since he was the perfect Lamb of God. But since he came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world, he had to be sacrificed. This happened when, of his own free will, he gave his life in death. He rose from the dead and he ascended alive into heaven. And one day he will return to the world."

Hamdi was quiet for a moment, looked at Ahmed and said, "I am in the same position as Abraham's son. I am under the power of death. But there is a sacrifice for my sins through the Messiah, the pure Lamb of God. Now, through his Lamb, God offers forgiveness for all our sins and eternal life in paradise (*janna*). The Messiah bore the sin of all mankind, including yours, Ahmed."

Ahmed sat silently for a long time, thinking. Then he said, "If the Messiah took away the sin of the whole world, then I don't need to die...in which case I already have eternal life."

"Ahmed," said Hamdi, "suppose it's your birthday and the Messiah comes with a present and knocks on your door. He says to you, 'Ahmed, I would like to give you a present - forgiveness for all your sins, eternal life and a living, personal relationship with God starting today. But there are some conditions. You must turn from your sin, confessing it, and receive forgiveness through my sacrifice for you. If you receive the gift, it's yours, not otherwise.' "

Ahmed sat, pondering. He felt confused and didn't really know what to say.

"Maybe you think that was an extreme example," said Hamdi, "but every time a servant of the Lord explains the way to God through the Messiah, it's as if the living and risen Jesus, the son of Mary is actually knocking on our door. He says in the Bible:

'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.' " (3)

Hamdi added, "Opening my door to the Messiah and inviting him into my life to break my bread and have fellowship with me, that is exactly the same as receiving God's gift, a gift God wants to give everyone."

"I want you to know, Hamdi, that what you've just told me about the Messiah has touched me deeply. I'll need time to think about our conversation. But I want to hear more about the Messiah the next time we meet."

"*Al-salamo aleykom* (may peace be upon you)."

"*Aleykom al-salam* (and upon you be peace)."

THE WORD OF GOD

"What you told me last time about Jesus, the son of Mary gave me a lot to think about," began Ahmed, a little tentatively. "I hope you don't mind, but I have a lot of questions I'd like answers to before going on with our conversation about the Messiah."

"Of course, please go ahead," Hamdi replied, half knowing what Ahmed was going to say.

Again, Ahmed began tentatively, "You know that we, as Muslims, believe in the heavenly books - *Al-Tawrah* (the Pentateuch of Moses), *Al-Zabor* (the Psalms of David), *Al-Injil* (the Gospel of Jesus) and the Holy Qur'an. But I've also been taught that all the books apart from the Qur'an have been falsified by Jews and Christians, so that you can no longer believe what's written in them. So the Holy Book (the Bible) you believe in is corrupted (*moharrafa*) and a mixture of truth and lies."

"Can you offer any historical evidence to support that?" asked Hamdi.

Ahmed thought for a while but to his amazement realised that he had never heard anything but unfounded allegations.

Hamdi continued, "Can you tell me when this alleged corruption took place or how it was even possible for it to be achieved?"

"No, I can't," said Ahmed a little shocked. "No-one's ever given me the answers to such basic questions."

After a moment Hamdi asked, "Do you think it would be possible for the Qur'an to be corrupted?"

"*Astaghfer Allah* (I ask God for forgiveness)!" exclaimed Ahmed. "That would be utterly impossible. Believers would never allow anyone to even try to corrupt it."

Hamdi answered, "Why do you think we see the Bible differently? How could you even think that the true believers would have allowed someone to change the Holy Scriptures and produce a corrupted Bible? I believe in the God who created heaven and earth, the God who is omniscient and almighty. He who has given mankind his own Word also has the power to keep his Word from corruption."

With his eyes firmly on Ahmed, Hamdi asked, "Ahmed, do you believe that everything that happens is in accordance with the will of God?"

"Yes, I believe that," answered Ahmed.

Hamdi continued, "Do you really believe that God would first give his Word to the world and then decide that it should be corrupted, or does not the Almighty have the power to keep his Word from corruption?"

"Yes, God certainly does have the power to keep his Word from corruption," agreed Ahmed.

"Do you know, Ahmed, that the Bible is a wonderful book? It was written over a period of approximately 1,400 years. It contains *Al-Tawrah* (the Pentateuch), *Al-Zabor* (the Psalms), *Al-Injil* (the Gospel) and many other books which were written by God's apostles (*rosol*) and prophets (*anbia*). The Bible is divided into two parts: The Old Testament, which covers the time before the Messiah's birth, and The New Testament, which begins with the arrival of the Messiah in the world. The Bible was written in three different languages."

"Which languages were those?" wondered Ahmed.

"It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek," replied Hamdi. "God used many different types of people when he gave us his Word. Some were kings or statesmen, others were shepherds or fishermen. The Bible is a miracle from God, because in spite of the immense timespan and the many different people involved in its writing, the entire book holds together as a wonderful whole. There is a common theme throughout the whole Bible, and that theme, Ahmed, is the Messiah (*Al-Masih*)."

"Can it be true that God spoke about the Messiah for 1,400 years?" said Ahmed astonished.

"Ahmed," said Hamdi with a smile, "God has spoken about the Messiah throughout all history right up to the present day."

"Is that really possible?" said Ahmed, full of doubt.

"Yes, of course it is, because with God everything is possible," answered Hamdi, "but we can talk about that the next time we meet."

"I'm really looking forward to it," said Ahmed.

"*Al-salamo aleykom*."

"*Aleykom al-salam*."



THE SACRIFICE OF GOD

"I'm really curious about how the Messiah could be the theme running through the whole Bible," said Ahmed.

"Do you remember when we talked about the Messiah as the Lamb of God which bore our sin?" asked Hamdi.

"Of course I do," replied Ahmed. "How could I ever forget that?"

"God has been teaching mankind about sacrifice throughout all history right up to Jesus, the son of Mary," said Hamdi.

"In what way?" asked Ahmed.

"How many people were on earth at the time of Cain (*Qabil*) and Abel (*Habil*)?" asked Hamdi.

Ahmed thought for a little while and then replied, "Four - Adam, Eve (*Hawa*), Cain and Abel."

"Only four people," said Hamdi, "and yet they understood that it was necessary to worship God with a sacrifice. How could they have known that?" asked Hamdi and continued, "Because God is holy and pure, but man is a sinner and in need of a ransom for his sin. Noah (*Sayedna Noh*) worshipped God with a sacrifice. Abraham (*Sayedna Ibrahim*) worshipped God with a sacrifice. Moses (*Sayedna Mosa*), David (*Sayedna Dawoud*) and all the apostles and prophets have worshipped God with a sacrifice." Hamdi added, "I worship God in the same way as the apostles and prophets."

"No, now you are joking. You don't go down to the market to buy a sheep to sacrifice to God," said Ahmed, smiling with his whole face.

"I worship God through the Messiah, the Lamb of God, who bore my sin when he was sacrificed," answered Hamdi. "It is written in the Holy Book (The Bible):

'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.' (1)

"There is only one God and there is only one mediator between God and us, the Messiah, who offered himself as a ransom (*fida*) for all, for you too, Ahmed. Throughout all history right up to the present day, people have worshipped the living God with a sacrifice."

"I think I'm beginning to understand what you mean, but you'll need to explain a little more so that I can understand the whole picture," said Ahmed thoughtfully.

A moment later Hamdi replied, "God revealed the meaning and purpose of sacrifice in history, especially through Moses in the Tawrah (Pentateuch). The collective teaching of the law (*Al-Sharia*) on the meaning of sacrifice as a ransom for sin is clear from the following words of Scripture:

'In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.' " (2)

"But what has all this teaching about sacrifice got to do with Jesus, the son of Mary?" wondered Ahmed.

"Well," said Hamdi, "parallel to the teaching about the meaning of sacrifice are many prophecies about the Messiah. Among these prophecies were predictions that when the Messiah came into the world he would be sacrificed as a ransom for our sin. Hamdi picked up a Bible and opened it. Showing the passage to Ahmed he said, "See for yourself what an exact description of the Messiah's sacrifice the prophet Isaiah wrote around 700 years before the Messiah came:

'Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the

slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.' " (3)

Ahmed, deeply touched by the prophetic words, said in amazement, "Are you saying that this was actually written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, the son of Mary?"

"Yes," said Hamdi. "According to the prophets, the Messiah was to come from the family of the prophet David (*Nabi Dawoud*). David, who lived around a thousand years before the Messiah, gives a very accurate description of his future son, the Messiah's, crucifixion. Crucifixion was a very slow and painful method of execution. After a while, the bones of the crucified person would go out of joint, and besides this, he would suffer from severe thirst. The prophet David writes:

'I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.

Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.

They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.' (4)

"David wrote this even though crucifixion wasn't even used as a method of execution in his day. It was invented much later and was used by the Romans during the time of the Messiah."

"So you're saying that all these predictions have been fulfilled in Jesus, the son of Mary?" asked Ahmed.

"Yes, and not only these, but many other prophecies have been fulfilled to the letter in the Messiah," answered Hamdi. "The Messiah himself confirmed on a number of occasions that he came to give his life as a ransom (*fida*). He said about himself:

'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many.' (5)

"Ahmed, do you understand now how God's teaching on sacrifice for the sin of mankind runs all the way through the Bible and how it has all been fulfilled through the Messiah?"

"Hamdi," said Ahmed, "I have never heard this before. It is very interesting. I need more time to think. But don't worry, I'll soon be back with more questions."

"Please, receive this Bible as a gift from me," said Hamdi. "Begin with the New Testament, where you can read about the life of the Messiah and about his amazing miracles and teaching."

"Thank you," said Ahmed. "I have heard a lot about the 'People of the Book' (*ahl al-kitab*), but I've never

read the book itself before. I'm really looking forward to reading about the teaching and miracles of Jesus, the son of Mary."

"*Al-salamo aleykom.*"

"*Aleykom al-salam.*"



SIN

"Hamdi, " began Ahmed a little tentatively, "since we met last time, I've been thinking about the Messiah and how he gave his life as a ransom for the sin of mankind. But there is one thing I want to know. Where does sin (*al-khatiya*) come from, and how is it that all mankind has problems with sin? Can you explain that?" asked Ahmed in a serious voice.

"Yes, I think so, " Hamdi answered thoughtfully, "but we'll have to go back to the beginning to understand where sin comes from. In the Tawrah (Pentateuch) we read that after God had created the world and mankind, he placed man in paradise (*janna*). There in paradise, man was completely pure and lived in a perfect relationship with God. But as you know, something happened which destroyed life in paradise. Ahmed, what happened?"

"Satan came and destroyed everything, " said Ahmed. "Exactly!" Hamdi replied. "God forbade man to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when he said to Adam:

'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.' (1)

"But Satan came as a snake and tempted Adam and Eve. They were disobedient towards God and ate of

the fruit. The result was devastating for mankind. Since sin entered the life of mankind, everyone became a sinner."

"Did everyone really become a sinner?" asked Ahmed sceptically. "I find it difficult to accept that. If it's true, in what way did everyone become a sinner?"

"Mankind became just like the fruit he ate, " said Hamdi. "He became a strange mixture of good and evil. Sometimes a person can perform some of the most noble and distinguished acts and then, the next minute, be involved in some the worst acts of treachery, perhaps even deceiving and defrauding his own neighbour. One minute, a person can be very loving and considerate, and the next minute, be filled with envy, selfishness, lust or some other characteristic related to sin. As you said, Ahmed, all mankind wrestles with this problem. Every religion deals with this problem. Every nation creates laws to control sin in its various outworkings. The worst of it is that people are not sinners because they sin, but they sin because they are sinners. It's as if there's a little factory inside people which produces sin and evil, isn't it?" said Hamdi and gave Ahmed a searching look.

"I'm sorry to say that your description of mankind corresponds to reality pretty well. People really are a strange mixture of good and evil, " answered Ahmed. "But where does Satan fit into the picture?"

"Well, it was through sin that Satan obtained power in human lives and societies, " answered Hamdi. "He

who once tempted Adam and Eve continues to do the same thing today. He still tempts people so that we will continue to live in sin. It is through sin that Satan obtains power in people's lives because it is sin that separates us from God. It is because of sin that the world is like it is today. God created everything good, but mankind has brought a great deal of evil into the world, for example, through war and oppression, but also through broken relationships and many other kinds of misery which destroy people's lives."

"So you're saying that God didn't create us like this, but that the world is like it is because of Adam's sin?" Ahmed wondered.

"Exactly!" Hamdi replied. "Sin entered mankind through Adam, as it is written:

'Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.' (2)

"The worst result was death, both physical and spiritual death."

"Physical and spiritual death?" said Ahmed and looked questioningly at Hamdi. "What exactly is spiritual death?"

"Well, God told man that if he ate of the fruit he would surely die," Hamdi began. "And because God is righteous and always acts according to his Word,

death indeed came over mankind so that all people die. But man also died in a spiritual way when he sinned."

"How?" wondered Ahmed.

"Well, the result of sin was that man was driven out of paradise," answered Hamdi. "He was driven away from the place where he lived in a pure, perfect relationship with God. Man had to live outside paradise. Man died in a spiritual way when he became separated from the living and holy God through his sin. So it is sin and evil that separate mankind from God. It's because of sin that we don't automatically live in a close relationship with God. Since God is pure and holy, he cannot have any relationship with sin. That is why we need a Saviour (*Monajy*) to save us from the consequences of all our sin. Ahmed, do you believe that all your sins are recorded somewhere?"

Ahmed, looking a little worried, said, "I know that they are written down by the two angels following every one of us."

"God knows everything about us," said Hamdi. "Every good deed and every bad deed. Every word, every thought, every intention (*neya*). God has everything written down. Do you know which way the scales will tip on the day of judgement (*yom al-hisab*)?"

"No, only God knows that," said Ahmed quietly.

"God loves you, Ahmed. Don't forget that the Lamb of God, Jesus, the son of Mary has taken all our

sin upon himself. Forgiveness is available for everything," said Hamdi calmly.

Ahmed thought for a while and asked, "If the Messiah is so important why didn't Adam and Eve get to hear about him?"

"Would you believe me if I said that they did get to hear about the Messiah?" asked Hamdi.

"No, I don't think it's possible for them to have heard about him," Ahmed replied.

"God loves man and wants to have a relationship with him," began Hamdi. "That's why he spoke about the Messiah from the very beginning. Right in the midst of the tragedy surrounding them, Adam and Eve nevertheless received a promise of a deliverer who would one day crush Satan's power over man. God spoke to Satan in Adam and Eve's hearing:

'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.' (3)

"Throughout the whole Bible sons are named after their fathers, the son of Abraham, the son of Jacob, and so on. But here the Bible speaks of the woman's offspring, not the man's. Someone was to come who did not have a father, but was instead the son of the woman. This son would crush Satan's power over man, while Satan like a snake would try to kill the woman's son by striking his heel. This is exactly

what happened when Jesus, the son of Mary offered his life as a ransom for the sin of mankind."

"Remarkable," said Ahmed. "It's amazing that God already began to speak about the Messiah to the very first people on earth. It shows once more that the main theme of the Bible really is the Messiah. You've given me a lot to think about before next time, Hamdi."

"Al-salamo aleykom."

"Aleykom al-salam."



THE SON OF ABRAHAM

"I'm very curious, " said Hamdi. "I'd like to know what you think of *Al-Injil* (the Gospel)."

"It truly is a wonderful book, " replied Ahmed sincerely. "I have never read anything like it. It's fascinating to read about the Messiah's amazing miracles in detail. And his teaching up on the mountain (The Sermon on the Mount) is extraordinary. There is clarity and depth in what he says. He turns many concepts upside down when he tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. And his teaching on prayer is so different from anything I have heard before. I have to admit that the book has made a deep impression on me, but at the same time it seems like I've got as many new questions as answers."

"Sounds interesting, " said Hamdi smiling. "Let's start with your first question."

"All right, " said Ahmed, "why does the Gospel begin with a genealogy from Abraham through David to the Messiah?"

After thinking for a while Hamdi asked, "Do you remember what we've talked about before, that the Bible holds together as a unit and that there is a theme running through the whole book?"

"Yes, I remember, " answered Ahmed.

"Do you remember what the theme was?"

"*Al-Masih*, " replied Ahmed.

"The answer to your question is related to that theme, " said Hamdi. "According to the prophets, the Messiah had to be the son of David and the son of Abraham."

Ahmed thought about what Hamdi had told him and said, "What you've said is interesting, but could you explain a little more about the different prophecies?"

After quite a long pause Hamdi began, "One day, about four thousand years ago, God spoke to Abraham, who is known as the friend of God (*khalil Allah*). When Abraham was still called Abram, God gave him a promise which would be of great significance for all mankind. In the Tawrah (Pentateuch) we read:

'The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ' (1)

"God called a man who had no children in spite of many years of marriage. God promised him a land. God would make him into a great nation. His name would be great and well-known. All this God fulfilled in detail. But the most remarkable of all the promises

was that the Lord God would bless all the peoples on earth through Abraham. In this promise lies the promise of the Messiah. So the Messiah had to be a son of Abraham, and through him God would bless the whole world."

"But how do you know that the promise is about the Messiah and not someone else?" wondered Ahmed.

"We can say that it gradually becomes clearer as we read further in the Tawrah," answered Hamdi. "In time Abraham got two sons, one with his wife Sarah, called Isaac (*Ishaq*), and one with Sarah's maidservant Hagar (*Hajar*), called Ishmael (*Ismail*). Even though God blessed Ishmael, he made it clear to Abraham, even before Isaac's birth, that the promise regarding the Messiah would be fulfilled through Isaac when he said:

'...Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac...' " (2)

"Yes, Ishmael, who God blessed, became the father of us Arabs," said Ahmed, "but we Muslims know

that God sent many of his apostles and prophets through Isaac's descendants."

Hamdi continued, "Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob (*Yaqob*). God showed that the promised Messiah would come from Jacob when he revealed himself in a dream to him and said,

'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south.

All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.' " (3)

"It is remarkable that when God spoke with Jacob, he repeated many parts of the original promise to Abraham," said Ahmed.

"That's because it's actually the same promise being passed on from one generation to the next," Hamdi said, "but as you can see, Ahmed, it was through a son of Jacob that God was to bless all the peoples of the earth."

"Yes, and I begin to suspect that the Messiah will once more prove to be the main theme of the Bible," replied Ahmed with a smile.

"That's correct," said Hamdi. "Among the children of Israel (*bani Isra'il*) were many families. The question is whether God also revealed the family

from which the Messiah would come. God chose David (*Sayedna Dawoud*) and made a covenant with him. In many prophecies God shows that the Messiah would come from the family of the prophet David. The prophet Isaiah, who lived more than two hundred years after David, likens the family of Jesse to the stump of a tree. David's father was called Jesse. From that family would come one on whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest. He would bring justice to the poor of the earth. He would create a kingdom like paradise itself, and everyone in that kingdom would know the Lord. Isaiah writes:

'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him... with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth...

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious...' (4)

"Let's see if I've got this right," said Ahmed. "God revealed that the Messiah was to be a son of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David."

"Precisely!" answered Hamdi with a broad smile. "And when we read the Gospel we can see that the Messiah is born in accordance with the prophecies. That's why the Gospel begins with a genealogy. It

proves that the Messiah is indeed the son of Abraham and David."

"Once more the main theme of the Bible has proved to be Jesus, the son of Mary," said Ahmed. "But, Hamdi, I'm sure you're aware that I have some much more difficult questions in store. But I'll save them for next time."

"*Al-salamo aleykom.*"

"*Aleykom al-salam.*"



GOD IS ONE

"What do you see?" asked Ahmed, holding up three fingers in the air.

"I see three fingers on one hand," said Hamdi with a smile, knowing what Ahmed was thinking of.

"Hamdi," Ahmed continued, "do you believe God is one or three?"

"You maybe don't fully understand in what way I believe," said Hamdi, "but you must understand that I believe in the one true God, the God who created heaven and earth, who can do anything, knows everything and is present everywhere. You know that my faith is based on the Bible, and God's Word teaches that God is one. This truth is written in many places throughout the Bible."

"But God cannot be three and one at the same time," insisted Ahmed. He again held up three fingers and said, "One plus one plus one equals three and not one."

"How many Ahmed's are you?" asked Hamdi. "Are you one or two?"

"One, of course," answered Ahmed.

"God has created you with a body and a spirit," said Hamdi. "Is your body Ahmed?" asked Hamdi.

"Yes."

"But what about your spirit?" asked Hamdi. "Is that Ahmed?"

"Well, yes it is," said Ahmed, realising what Hamdi was going to say.

Hamdi continued, "Why is it impossible for God to be three in one when he has created us as two in one?" After a short pause Hamdi said, "We can say that God is a complex unity who reveals himself in three persons. After all, what is one times one times one, Ahmed?"

"One," said Ahmed quietly. "But Jesus, the son of Mary is only man and not the Son of God." Ahmed was looking intently at Hamdi. "Do you believe that the Messiah is the Son of God, Hamdi?"

"What do you think I believe?" asked Hamdi.

"I'm not sure exactly," said Ahmed, "but I suppose you believe that God had a physical relationship with the Virgin Mary, and they had a son together."

"*Astaghfer Allah!* (I ask God for forgiveness)," exclaimed Hamdi. "That is absolutely not what I believe, and I do not know any follower of the Messiah who believes that either."

Ahmed, surprised, asked, "Then what do you believe?"

"I believe God is eternal, that he existed in eternity before anything was created," Hamdi began. "When the Gospel explains who the Messiah is, it does not begin with his birth into the world, but it begins in eternity, before God created the world. It is written in the Gospel:

'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. In him was life...' (1)

"God created the world through his Word, didn't he?"

"Yes, that's right. God said, 'Be!' And it is!' (*Kon fa yakon*), " answered Ahmed.

"So God created the world through his Word, " said Hamdi. "And this Word, which proceeded from God, was a part of God and was filled with God's creative power and all his attributes. There was life in the Word of God, and wherever the Word became present, life was created in all its different forms."

"Yes, I agree with that, but what exactly does the expression 'and the Word was God' mean?" asked Ahmed.

"If I were to testify in a court of law, you would not be able to separate me from my words, " said Hamdi.

"My words would represent me and would be a part of me. When we sit here and talk, our words are a part of us so that we are represented by our words. When God created the universe, the Word he spoke was one with him. We cannot separate God from his Word. This eternal Word of God, who is one with him and contains all his attributes, was revealed in Jesus, the son of Mary, as it is written:

'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.' (2)

"Everything God has said about himself, all his attributes, were revealed in the Messiah. God is holy. When people saw how pure the Messiah was, they saw the holiness of God in him. God is love. When they saw how the Messiah loved people, they saw the love of God in him. God can do everything. He is omnipotent. When people saw how the Messiah walked on water, spoke to the storm, making the wind and the waves die down, created bread, healed the blind and raised the dead, they saw the power and glory of God revealed in him."

"But how can God, who is present everywhere, be limited to a human being?" persisted Ahmed. "Did God forget the universe when he was in the Messiah?"

"Ahmed, " said Hamdi, "suppose we were out on an unending ocean and we lowered a glass into it, filling it with water. If we analysed the water, we'd find it to be exactly the same as that in the ocean. It's the same with the Messiah. The eternal, almighty God is present everywhere. At the same time, he reveals himself in the Messiah with the same attributes and power. But God is not limited because he reveals himself in the Messiah. He is still infinite."

"But God cannot reveal himself in a person, " said Ahmed.

"How can we limit God?" asked Hamdi. "How can we say that the Almighty cannot? Can't he do everything?"

"Well, yes, he can do everything, " answered Ahmed, "but I can't believe that he has revealed himself in a human being."

"It's good that we agree that this can pose a problem for us but not for God, who can do anything he wants to, " said Hamdi. "If you didn't already know the story, what would you say if someone told you that God had revealed himself in a burning bush and had spoken out of that bush to Moses?"

Ahmed thought for a while and smiled to himself when he realised that it couldn't be more difficult for God to reveal himself in a human being than in a bush.

Hamdi continued, "Ahmed, think for a moment, who is the person who is actually called 'The Word of God' and 'The Spirit of God' (*Kalimat Allah wa Roh Allah*)? Even the Spirit of God is one with God. We know that the Spirit of God covered the Virgin Mary and that she became pregnant and gave birth to the Messiah, as the Angel Gabriel told her:

'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.' (3)

"The question is who it is that came into the world in this way. Ahmed, if you had been a doctor at the time of the Messiah and it was your task to write out his birth certificate, what would you have written? What was his name?"

"I suppose I'd have written 'Jesus, the son of Mary', " said Ahmed.

"And the name of the mother?"

"Well, that would have been 'The Virgin Mary', " said Ahmed.

"And then we come to the name of the father, " said Hamdi with a smile.

"He didn't have a father, " answered Ahmed with an even broader smile.

"We could, of course, leave that line blank since he didn't have an earthly father, " said Hamdi, "...or we could ask ourselves, 'Where does he come from? What is the origin of the one called "The Word of God" and "The Spirit of God"? What is the identity of the one who came down from heaven?' He himself said:

'For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.' (4)

"Show me, " requested Ahmed, "I'm very interested."

'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' (5)

"Ahmed, he came in order to give his flesh as a sacrifice for all mankind. He who partakes of ordinary bread receives physical life, but he who partakes of the bread of God that has come down from heaven receives spiritual life, eternal life. He who believes in the Messiah and partakes of him receives a life which satisfies man's innermost hunger and thirst for God. This is what I myself have experienced. The Messiah is an offer from God to you, Ahmed."

"I'm not ready for that yet," said Ahmed quietly. "I have many thoughts going round and round in my head. I realise now that I've completely misunderstood the way in which you believe in God. I'm slowly beginning to understand how you believe in the one true God and that he revealed himself in the Messiah. You know that I love the Messiah with all my heart, but I still have a number of questions that need answering. But we can talk about those next time, can't we, Hamdi?"

"I'm looking forward to it," answered Hamdi.

"*Al-salamo aleykom.*"

"*Aleykom al-salam.*"

GOD AND MAN

"I've been thinking almost day and night about our last discussion," said Ahmed. "First you say that Jesus, the son of Mary is man. Then you say that God revealed himself in him. I want to know who he really is. Isn't it true that you've made the Messiah out to be the Son of God when he is nothing more than the son of Mary?"

"Ahmed," Hamdi began, "the answer to that question is the key to eternal life with God, both here and now and in eternity. It would be '*shirk*' (to place someone on the same level as God) if we made a man out to be God. But the Bible teaches that God revealed himself in a man and not the other way round. We both agree that the Messiah was born as a man. In accordance with the prophets, he is the son of Abraham, the son of David and the son of Mary. But in the prophecies which were given long before the birth of the Messiah, God teaches us that he would come to us in the Messiah."

"Do you mean that the apostles and prophets before the Messiah already spoke about God himself being revealed in him?" Ahmed asked in surprise.

"The main theme of the Bible is the Messiah, so it shouldn't surprise us that God had already revealed the truth about the Messiah through the prophets," said Hamdi.

"Show me," requested Ahmed, "I'm very interested."

Hamdi thought for a while before saying, "When God, in about 700 BC, revealed to the prophet Micah that the Messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem, he also disclosed that the one who would be born existed long before he was born:

'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.' (1)

"The Messiah was indeed born in the town of Bethlehem, as it is written in the Gospel:

'So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.' (2)

"The question is of who he is who existed long before he was born into the world. We see what he himself said in a conversation with some exasperated Jews in Jerusalem (*Al-Qods*):

' "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

"You are not yet fifty years old, " the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

"I tell you the truth, " Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ' (3)

"We know that Abraham lived around 2000 BC."

"So, the Messiah himself claimed that he existed before he was born, " said Ahmed. "But where in the prophets does it say that God would reveal himself in the Messiah?"

"That is written in many places, " said Hamdi. "The prophet Isaiah speaks about one who would come from the small area where Jesus, the son of Mary grew up. He would create an eternal kingdom, which would be characterised by the peace of God. He himself, who would also be a son of David, would reign in this kingdom for ever. The prophet describes the characteristics of the Messiah with the different names he is given:

'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing

and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever.' (4)

"We know that the names God gives someone describe that person's characteristics. So, who is he, Ahmed, who is given the names 'Wonderful Counsellor', 'Mighty God', 'Everlasting Father' and 'Prince of Peace'?"

"This picture of the Messiah the prophets painted before he was born is beginning to take shape for me," said Ahmed, "but does it really say that God would come to the world he himself created?"

"John the Baptist (*Yahya Abn Zakaria*) lived at the same time as the Messiah," said Hamdi. "He was sent by God to prepare the way for the Messiah, so that people would repent and come to faith in him. When John was asked who he himself was and why God had sent him, he replied with a quote from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 40, where it is written:

'A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it."' (5)

"The picture from the prophet Isaiah portrays the visit of a great king. People were to build a new and straight highway for him through the wilderness. But who is this visiting king, Ahmed?"

"Well, according to the prophet, he is the Lord, our God," said Ahmed quietly.

"The picture becomes even clearer," continued Hamdi, "when we read further in the same passage, where it is written:

'You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.' (6)

"The Messiah did indeed come as a shepherd for all believers. He himself said,

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.' (7)

"But, Ahmed, who is it, according to the prophet, that will come as a shepherd?"

"I have to admit that it's shown to be the Lord God himself," answered Ahmed, now quite shaken by the prophet's words.

Hamdi continued, "As you understand, Ahmed, all these prophecies concerning the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus, the son of Mary. Before the Messiah was born, the Angel Gabriel came to Zechariah, the future father of John the Baptist. The angel explained to Zechariah that he would have a son and told him what a special task his son would have. The Angel Gabriel said:

'...he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' (8)

"Who is it, according to the Gospel, that John the Baptist will go before, Ahmed?"

"The Lord their God," answered Ahmed.

"When John the Baptist was still newly born," continued Hamdi, "Zechariah prophesied over him, his new-born son:

'And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven.' (9)

"Do you see, Ahmed, that *Yahya Abn Zakaria*, according to the words of the prophet Isaiah, the Angel Gabriel and his father Zechariah, was to go before the Lord, and that the one to come was God himself?"

"Yes, I can see that and I can suppose that all this was confirmed when the Messiah actually came," said Ahmed seriously.

"Yes, in detail," said Hamdi. "When the Virgin Mary gave birth to the Messiah in Bethlehem, the town of David, the Angel of the Lord appeared to some shepherds outside the town and said to them:

'Do not be afraid. 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; he is Christ the Lord.' (10)

"The fact that the Messiah is the Lord himself is confirmed again and again in the Gospel. He himself said:

'I and the Father are one.' " (11)

"I already had a great love and respect for Jesus, the son of Mary, " said Ahmed, "but now for the first time, I think I can see the full picture of who the Messiah really is and why he was born into the world. I am truly grateful that you took the time and effort to explain this to me, Hamdi."

"Ahmed, " said Hamdi seriously, "by faith in the Messiah, God offers forgiveness for everything and eternal life. The Messiah, who himself conquered death and raised the dead, says:

'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.' (12)

"Ahmed, do you want to receive the gift of God to you by faith in the Messiah?"

"Yes, I feel as if he is standing and knocking on my door right now, " said Ahmed with tears in his eyes.

"How can I receive God's gift?"

"It isn't difficult, " said Hamdi. "Pray to God in your own words. Confess everything. God knows all about us anyway. Receive forgiveness through the Messiah's sacrifice for you. Pray that God will come into your life by his Spirit and give you strength to follow the Messiah as his disciple. Pray this prayer in the name of the Messiah. He, by his sacrifice, is the mediator between you and God the Father. When you receive the Messiah in this way, by faith, as God's gift to you, a miracle takes place in your life. The Bible says that you are born again. You receive a new life from God. You enter into a new, personal relationship with God through the Messiah. So God becomes your father and you his child, as it is written in the Gospel concerning all those who received the Messiah:

'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.' " (13)

When they had prayed together and thanked the Lord, Hamdi said with a big smile, "Welcome to the family! Now, through the Messiah, we are brothers in God's great family."

"How can I ever thank you, " said Ahmed full of joy.

"Thank God, and do it every day, " answered Hamdi.

"Seek the fellowship of others who follow the

Messiah in the same way as you. Now you can really pray the prayer the Messiah taught his disciples to pray:

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen.' " (14)



APPENDIX

BIBLE QUOTATIONS

New International Version (NIV)

THE LAMB OF GOD

- 1) Romans 6:23
- 2) John 1:29
- 3) Revelation 3:20

THE SACRIFICE OF GOD

- 1) 1 Timothy 2:5-6
- 2) Hebrews 9:22
- 3) Isaiah 53:4-7
- 4) Psalm 22:14-18
- 5) Mark 10:45

SIN

- 1) Genesis 2:16-17
- 2) Romans 5:12
- 3) Genesis 3:15

THE SON OF ABRAHAM

- 1) Genesis 12:1-3
- 2) Genesis 17:19-21
- 3) Genesis 28:13-14
- 4) Isaiah 11:1,2,4,10

Messiah in the same way as you. Now you can really pray the prayer the Messiah taught his disciples to pray:

GOD IS ONE

- 1) John 1:1-4
- 2) John 1:14
- 3) Luke 1:35
- 4) John 6:33,35
- 5) John 6:51

GOD AND MAN

- 1) Micah 5:2
- 2) Luke 2:4-7
- 3) John 8:56-58
- 4) Isaiah 9:6-7
- 5) Isaiah 40:3-5
- 6) Isaiah 40:9-11
- 7) John 10:11
- 8) Luke 1:15-17
- 9) Luke 1:76-78
- 10) Luke 2:10-11
- 11) John 10:30
- 12) John 11:25-26
- 13) John 1:12
- 14) Matthew 6:9-13