

From Saeid's Heart

A Case for the Deity of Jesus

Crossing My Rubicon of Faith

My name is Saeid Soltani. I was reared in a traditional Muslim home in Iran and became dissatisfied with the traditional cultural answers to life's important, eternal questions. I asked, "Is this life all there is? Can I expect to live beyond this life and have a heavenly existence for eternity?"

Missionaries at my school exposed me to an understanding of Christianity which was at odds with all I had been led to believe. Both Islam and Christianity say, "Follow our path to eternal life." Over the past 1400 years, their fundamental differences have caused these two faiths to clash violently inciting a state of almost perpetual warfare. Also striking are the vastly different lifestyles, values, and priorities each faith seeks to impose upon its faithful followers.

As a young man struggling with my eternal salvation, I felt compelled to know which faith was the True Path—Islam's Allah and his prophet, Muhammad, or Christianity's Jehovah and his son Jesus? They could not both be right.

The resulting spiritual quest took me deep into the Christian *Holy Bible* and the Islamic *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. I engaged in discussions with their holy men and studied the commentaries of both faiths. I was also blessed to have long, probing conversations with my wise grandfather on my father's side, Aghajun. During these discussions, each aspect of this quest was always clarified and seasoned by his sage insights.

My search quickly moved past the interesting, cosmetic differences between the two faiths. It narrowed dramatically when I realized that the Qur'an recognizes the authenticity of Jesus as a mighty prophet and of his miracles. Nonetheless, Islam denies his deity. Clearly then, *the* fundamental difference between the two faiths came down to one overriding question: Is Jesus God?

Islam says, "No."

Christianity says, "Yes."

Muhammad vs. Jesus

This article, written some years after my escape, explains the defining reasons for my choice to become a follower of Jesus and Jehovah. In so doing, I have not rejected Islam so much as moved beyond it. Setting aside the nature of Allah (which simply means “God” in Arabic), and Jehovah (which means, “the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth” in Hebrew), I focused on the central human character in each faith, Muhammad and Jesus. The contrast between the two men could not be more pronounced and became a major factor in my faith decision.

Muhammad, Allah’s Prophet: Islam elevates and follows the person and teachings of the prophet Muhammad. An examination of his life shows him to be a very flawed, brutal man when seen through the eyes of righteousness and historic standards of fundamental decency and civilized behavior. His militant life of violence led to his slaughtering hundreds of people, as well as to his authorship and advocacy of *Jihad* (Holy War.) He insisted on death for all who do not follow him, his teachings, and his “revelations,” which are central to his theology and his faith’s dogma. Those revelations include denying everyone freedom of any religion except Islam; sentencing anyone refusing to convert to Islam to torture and death, often by beheading; enslaving their enemies’ (infidels’) wives and children; and approving the rape of infidel women.

Muhammad’s revelations allowed a host of emotional and physical abuses of women: the unrestrained beating of wives; forced female genital mutilation; and the practice of “temporary wives” (for three days or more) to allow forced cohabitation and sexual abuse.

Muhammad declared that all these revelations and authorized barbaric practices were sanctioned by the god, Allah, whom he worshipped. Further, he asserted that they are a means to a grand endgame—Islam’s supreme goal of global conquest. Its methodology is to conquer by persuasion, if possible, but if unsuccessful, by force of arms, by the brutal oppression of subjugated peoples and by the suppression of individual rights and freedoms.

Seemingly obsessed with his own growing power, Muhammad’s seventh-century, militant leadership style, both as the founder of Islam and the proponent of total integration of civil government with his new faith, set the moral tone and aggressive agenda of Islam for centuries to follow.

Jesus, the Son of God: Jesus' peaceful approach to people and faith is legendary. His heretical concept of Judaism and man's relationship to both man and God were revolutionary in that time and culture. Further, the movement he started, initially called "the Way," was not built on conquest, force of arms, or threat of violent death. Rather, his entire nonviolent ministry, message and practices were to heal people, physically and spiritually; to show them the authentic God Almighty and his Kingdom by modeling compassion, kindness, grace, forgiveness and unconditional love.

He came as a teacher, prophet, and friend. He was a man of peace, not a ruthless warrior. He presented himself as the people's savior, their path—and the only true path—to eternal life in the presence of God. His ministry was built on love, not hate, on freedom, not oppressive bondage. Especially noteworthy, he told his followers to bless and pray for their enemies, not kill them. He demonstrated his power and authenticity through both his astonishing wisdom and unequalled sagacity on the one hand and his performance of many miracles on the other. His purpose in this was to help people see the Kingdom of God and to believe in him as the Son of God, the promised Jewish Messiah. He urged everyone to become his faithful followers and thereby to be reconciled to God in order to have eternal life in his presence.

My Choice: Deciding which man to follow, which man was worthy of my devotion, obedience, and love became a test of my values and commitment to be a righteous man of the True God.

The contrast between Muhammad and Jesus is stark! The evidence of Jesus' deity is so compelling that I started thinking of myself as "a follower of Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah," rather than as a Christian. The label Christian carries an enormous amount of negative baggage for so many people globally.

The Holy Qur'an vs. The Holy Bible

Both Muslims and Christians consider themselves "A People of the Book." Because of the importance of the holy books to their followers, the differences between them were important to my quest.

The Bible contains sixty-six books written over 1,600 years by forty different authors, including kings, fishermen, priests and prophets, from three continents, in three languages.

Notwithstanding this diversity, Christians believe the entire Bible to be the inerrant, infallible Holy Word of God himself. I can say without hesitation, along with many other commentators, that the Bible has an unmistakable, inspired consistency and continuity from Genesis through Revelation. That is an impossible feat absent a divine intelligence at work with each author over one and a half millennia.

The Qur'an is believed by Muslims to be a compilation of the revelations of Allah to Muhammad, through the archangel Gabriel. It is one book, produced by one man, in one language, from one country, over only twenty-three years. The Hadith is a collection of traditions based on the life of Muhammad, not revelations from Allah, and is considered to be an essential Holy Book alongside the Qur'an.

Unlike the Bible, the Qur'an and Hadith contain no realized prophecies or confirmed miracles by Muhammad and express unabashed hatred toward infidels, with no forgiveness, mercy or atonement for sin.

Weighing the question of which text is the authentic, divinely inspired Holy Word of the True God, I believed the Holy Bible to be far more convincing as God's Holy Word than the Qur'an. That conclusion was, however, far from final in my ultimate decision to become a follower of Jesus.

My Five Proofs and Deciding Factors

Five events taken individually and together comprise such a mountain of irrefutable evidence that I could not reject the obvious conclusion. It is hard for me to believe that any thinking person could deny Jesus' deity in the face of such overwhelming factual verification.

First, Jesus' Resurrection: The most convincing event is Jesus' verified physical resurrection from the dead and his atonement for all sin for all time for all his followers. His death is well documented, as are his burial and his resurrection. Of primary importance, in addition to the gospels, is the eminent historian and Jewish military leader, Flavius Josephus. Acknowledged as the definitive voice of early Jewish history, he clearly attested that Jesus was the Messiah and rose from the dead after the third day.¹ The Scripture itself gives eyewitness accounts of people who saw him for forty days after his execution and burial. They talked with him, walked with him, ate with him, touched the

¹ Josephus, Flavius *Jewish Antiquities* (18.3.3 Section 63), translation by Louis H. Feldman, *The Loeb Classical Library*.

wounds in his hands and side from the crucifixion and witnessed him rise into the air and ascend to his Father in heaven.

Muhammad died in 632 A.D. at the age of sixty-three of a violent fever. He was buried, and his bones still lie in the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, Saudi Arabia.

Jesus' tomb is empty; Muhammad's tomb is occupied—by him.

Second, Jesus' Miracles: There is ample evidence that Jesus performed miracles of all kinds—supernatural feats beyond human capability. He caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the lame to walk. He cleansed lepers and healed the sick. He fed thousands of people with only two small fish and five to seven loaves of bread, twice. He calmed the raging winds and waves on a tumultuous sea simply by his verbal command. And he walked on water in the midst of that same sea.

Especially remarkable and convincing of his power and deity is that he brought several people back from the dead to life, including his friend, Lazarus; the only son of a widow; Jairus' daughter; and possibly others mentioned in his report to John the Baptist. Of paramount importance, having demonstrated his power over death, he promised to do the same for us who believe in him.

Not only does the Holy Bible affirm these as historical facts, but so does Islam's Holy Qur'an.

In addition to these verified miracles, other events demonstrate his godly powers. Many saw him defy nature's laws before his crucifixion: by being transfigured and meeting with Moses and Elijah in the presence of Peter, James, and John; by causing a fig tree's branches to wither at his command; and by casting demons out of possessed people, most notably the demoniac in Gergesenes whose terrified demons fled to a herd of pigs which drowned themselves. After his resurrection, he miraculously appeared and vanished at will; he mysteriously entered a locked room; and he rose into the air before the apostles' eyes.

In addition, I saw and experienced his miracles. During my escape from Iran and Islam, events occurred that cannot be explained as coincidence but only as divine intervention. I was shaken to the core when I realized that God's angels were at work in my life. My only question at that time was, "Which God sent them? Allah or Jehovah?"

My conclusion: Only Jesus rose from the dead, never to die again. Only Jesus raised others from the dead, and only Jesus performed the numerous miracles that he did. Having such powers, for me, is proof positive that Jesus is God, the true Son of Jehovah. Equally important is seeing how Jesus used his power. How he helped people heal, both physically and spiritually. How he ministered with sensitivity, kindness and selfless love for others. In short, he repeatedly demonstrated that he is a just, righteous God who is wholly worthy of my praise, honor, devotion, obedience and worship.

Third, The Reaction of Jesus' Apostles: The third proof for me was his apostles' actions after his crucifixion and resurrection. They lived with him, witnessed his entire ministry and were present during his ascension. After that, they did what no men would ever do unless they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that he, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Son of God and was God himself.

After being empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostles divided up the known world, uprooted their lives and families and traveled to different, faraway places to do as Jesus commanded: to tell people about him and his deity; to convert them from their pagan ways to the Jesus Way, to baptize and teach them about the good news of his gospel; to make disciples and to convince them to obey his commandments.

They did. The word of Jesus spread like a grass fire. Tragically, all but one of the apostles, John, were martyred in hideous, painful ways for what they said and taught about Jesus. John fared little better. He was exiled by Rome to the small, rocky, isolated Greek island of Patmos (in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Turkey) to live in a cave where he wrote the Bible's last book, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ."

No person, much less twelve ordinary men, would dedicate his life to such a cause—and risk his own horrendous martyrdom—if he didn't know absolutely that he had walked, talked, studied under, lived with, and been loved by God himself. None of these eyewitnesses would have ever left his home on such a quest if he doubted that Jesus was who he said he was, the Son of God Almighty, Jehovah. Yet, they all did.

Fourth, Jesus the Son of God and the Messiah: Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. At his baptism by John the Baptist and again during the transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, Jehovah God himself spoke in an audible

voice declaring that Jesus was and is his Holy Son. All during his ministry, Jesus referred to himself as “the Son of Man,” a term used by the prophet Daniel in his messianic texts. It is a form of address which distinguishes between a human being and a heavenly being, i.e. God and the angels. Of critical importance, the term “the Son of Man” is synonymous with the coming Messiah, the Son of God. On various occasions, Jesus confessed to Peter and others that he was the Messiah and the Son of God. In so saying, he was admitting to his holy nature as not only God’s Son, but as part of the trinitarian Godhead, along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Further, Jesus repeatedly referred to Jehovah God as his Father.

Jesus is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, the Holy One from God, prophesied to come to redeem his people, Israel. He is also the one who is to preside over God’s coming final judgment of humanity. I do not make this claim lightly and am aware that centuries of Rabbinical scholars have denied him that status even though there were hundreds of Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah that were fulfilled by Jesus.

Many scholars, including Messianic Jews and Gentiles, have compared these prophecies to Jesus. The number of times Jesus fulfilled such predictions is staggering. By one scholar’s account (J. Barton Payne), Jesus fulfilled 574 prophecies; another (Alfred Edersheim), counted 456; others vary, but they all seem to be in the hundreds.

Mathematicians have calculated that for one man to have fulfilled only 48 prophecies, the statistical probability of his being the prophesied Messiah is astronomically high. If expressed in terms of electrons, mathematician Peter Stoner, author of *Science Speaks*, calculates that the odds affirming that Jesus is the Messiah are beyond the number of electrons in the known universe.

Bottom line: Even a scientific view of Jesus concludes that he was the Jewish Messiah.

Fifth, The Love of Jesus’ Followers: The overwhelming, generous love of Jesus’ followers that I experienced stands in sharp contrast to the hatred of Muslims toward me and my family.

When I came to the Grand Prairie Community Church in Texas as a stranger and a Muslim, I learned that the congregation had been praying earnestly for me for two years—without knowing me! They prayed constantly to Jehovah and his son Jesus for my escape from Iran, my safety all along the way

and my successful immigration to America. When I arrived at their church, instead of rejecting or reviling me as a Muslim, they accepted me with open arms and overwhelming love and support. Instead of condemning me for my Islamic roots, they applauded my personal search for Truth² and my quest to know which God was authentic and worthy of following.

That tolerant, generous love has never abated but has grown steadily since those early days with the church and their pastor.

In contrast, my own people, supposedly good Muslims all, viciously attacked our family over political issues and imprisoned and tortured my Baba and grandfather Aghajun—eventually killing them. They spewed hatred and vendettas against us, forced me to flee for my life, my Maman and sister to abandon their homeland, and our protector, my school principal, to be cruelly murdered.

Where the followers of Jesus showered us with love, acceptance, respect and encouragement, the followers of Allah and Muhammad threatened our lives and freedom at every turn, drove us from our home, forced us into hiding and made us strangers and enemies in our own country.

Is it any wonder that when faced with two faiths of such marked differences, I would align myself with the positive, wholesome view of life rather than the callous, negative, violent alternative?

In addition to the five proofs that I have detailed above, there is one other point that must be mentioned. Having answered the question about the deity of Jesus for myself, there was an action step I, as a new believer, had to take in light of that Reality.

My Choice: The realization hit me hard. *Knowing Jesus is God is not enough.* Even the demons know who he is. If the fact of his deity is Reality, then my quest for Truth and salvation required one more step. I had to make a

² By saying Truth, using a capital “T,” I mean that absolute, universal, objective statement of fact. Truth is objective, immutable, and fixed for all times in all eras. By contrast, truth with a small “t” refers to more individual, subjective, or limited views of something. For example, my sincere personal belief that the world is flat is my personal truth, but it is not Truth. Or, in this discussion, I assume that God does exist. That is a capital “T” Truth. My quest is to examine Islam and Christianity, Muhammad and Jesus, to determine which is only a subjective small “t” truth for a limited number of people; and which, if either, is really God, i.e. capital “T” universal Truth and capital “R” objective Reality.

choice—the most important choice in my life—whether I would follow Jesus or not.

It didn't escape me that the stakes in this decision were exceptionally high. I would choose at my eternal peril!

If I didn't follow him, I would be damned for all time. After my earthly death, I would be sent to whatever fiery hell awaits most of us.

If I believed in him and elected to follow him, I would spend eternity in fellowship with him, wrapped in perpetual love, peace, and safety.

I have studied the New Testament about Jesus and the church, and have studied the Old Testament. I've found the OT fascinating on several different levels, but you can imagine my shock when I came to 1 Kings 18:20-40, where the prophet Elijah, on Mt. Carmel, confronted the people with the same choice that I had.

Representing the God of Abraham, Jehovah, Elijah faced serious, lethal opposition from Jezebel, the supremely evil queen of Israel and her four-hundred-fifty prophets of the popular god, Baal.

On that occasion, Elijah taunted the prophets of Baal into a duel between these two Gods. They gladly accepted the challenge and went first. But after hours of exhorting Baal, his prophets failed to elicit any response, much less fire from heaven to burn their sacrificed bull and the pile of wood on which it lay.

When Elijah's turn came, he had the wood soaked with water three times, then said and did something profound:

And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "*How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him. ...*

"Answer me, O Lord, answer me so these people will know that you O Lord are God ..."

Then the fire of the Lord fell [from heaven] and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

When all the people saw this, they fell on their faces; and they said, "*The Lord he is God; the Lord, he is God.*"

(Emphasis added; NIV).

Like the people on Mt. Carmel, upon arriving in America as a questioning Muslim, I faced the same dilemma they had. These Bible verses forced me to ask, “How long will I hesitate between two opinions? If Jesus the Lord is God, follow him; but if Allah’s Prophet, Muhammad, follow him.” And like the people on Mt. Carmel, I saw the miracles of God, not just the one miracle that Elijah evoked, but the many, many miracles from the hands of Jesus. I saw them and I knew the answer to my impasse.

To save myself from God’s wrathful judgment, I had only to acknowledge Jesus as my Lord and Savior. So simple, but Scripture made it clear that I was without excuse if I delayed or didn’t take that step of faith. I made that commitment at the Grand Prairie church in Texas and never turned back. After my confession of faith, my pastor led the congregation in an anointing prayer of thanks and support for my decision. I now knew to which God I prayed. I not only asked for strength, clarity of mind and reason but also for the Lord to guide me all the days of my life into a deeper, more intimate relationship with Him, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

I believed that my Baba and Aghajun would have reacted to this bold step with pride. I had made my own decision while staying, as they taught me, a true Son of Persia. The desert sands of Persia are in my blood, and I can feel them in every cell in my body: Persia, that ancient and seemingly eternal civilization that once dominated the Middle East. Even in the Bible, Isaiah and Ezra speak of the great founders of the Persian Empire, Cyrus and Darius, and how they became Jehovah’s instruments.

May it be so with me and my life.

The End Result

Many ask, “Years after your escape from Iran and from Khomeini’s Islam, are you still convinced that your choice to become a follower of Jesus was the right one?”

“More than ever!”

“Why?”

“I now know something that I didn’t know as a young man on the run or when I professed my loyalty to Him: the Power—of the Love—of Jesus.”

As I grew in my faith, Jesus and his Holy Spirit met me where I was and led me step-by-step into a profoundly deeper, more intimate understanding of who he is and of my relationship with him. I learned that his Holy Spirit dwells within me; that he, Jesus, the King of the Universe, actually walks with me daily in every aspect of my life. Every decision. Every victory. Every defeat. Every difficulty. Every relationship. Every mistake.

In addition, and of incalculable importance, I have learned that he watches over me, hears my every prayer, and speaks to me personally. I can't explain it, but the evidence of such shepherding has left me completely convinced of his continual presence with me.

Further, I learned from experience that he loves me completely and unconditionally. And, in the process of loving me, he gave me something I had never experienced before: forgiveness. Forgiveness, not condemnation, when I fail him and come woefully short of his commandments and his expectations of me. He forgives my transgressions against him and the Word, but equally important, he gives me the ability to forgive myself for the terrible guilt I feel when I disappoint him.

And always, I've found that his forgiveness is followed by, as Scripture says, "a peace that surpasses all understanding." In those moments of peace, I sense that He and I are okay in our relationship. As the song says, "It is well with my soul," and with my life, even in the midst of turmoil.

As alien as it would have sounded to me when I began my quest, I now have an intimate, personal relationship with the living Lord Jesus. He, the creator of the universe, knows me personally, with all my flaws. And despite that, he loves me unconditionally, forgives me completely and leads me daily into a richer, more fulfilling, more purpose-driven, more joy-filled life than would have ever been remotely possible without Him. I am a committed follower of Jesus and, thankfully, always will be.

I also earnestly pray to the living God to use my story, my journey from Iran to America, from Islam to becoming a follower of Jesus, to help other Muslims escape to physical and spiritual freedom as I have.

If you are a questioning Muslim as I was, or another nonbeliever in Jesus' deity, I encourage you to study the various aspects of this article, delve deeply into the Bible and the Qur'an, and launch your own journey to discover the true

path of faith. There is a world of freedom and joy awaiting you if you have the courage to find and claim the Jesus Way as your own Way.

If you are ready to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and to invite him into your heart. I have enclosed a sample prayer which you can use. The typical pieces of such a prayer include acknowledgement, repentance, belief and commitment.

- **Acknowledgment:** Recognize that you are a sinner and you need God.
- **Repentance:** Desire to turn away from sin.
- **Belief:** Trusting that Jesus is the son of God, died for your sins and was raised from the dead.
- **Commitment:** Inviting Jesus into your life as Savior and Lord.

Please note: The words of the sample prayer are neither sacred nor magical! Jesus knows your innermost thoughts and will know if you are sincere.

If you earnestly pray the following prayer, or one which is similar, you will become his follower. This is not a road you travel alone. There are many followers of Jesus who want to help you, pray for you, and guide you along your path.

A Sample Prayer

Lord Jesus, I need You. I recognize that I am a sinner, separated from You because of my sinful nature. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins and being raised back to life for me. I acknowledge that You are the Son of the one and only true living God, creator of the universe. I ask You to forgive me completely, cleanse me, and make me one of Your true servants. I open the door of my heart and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving me and giving me eternal life. Help me to follow You and obey You from this day forward. Amen.