

The Mission of Prophet Jesus

For us to understand the mission of Prophet Jesus it is essential to be acquainted with the period during which Jesus was living.

Christianity has emerged from Judaism. As most of the first Christians were Jews, the rest being converts, their history is deeply rooted in Judaism. The roots of Christianity are most directly traced to the period of Hellenistic Judaism (4th century BC to the 2nd century) of the ancient Greek culture.

This period was introduced with Alexander the Great's conquest of Palestine in 332 BC. When Alexander the Great conquered Palestine, it became a Greek state. During this period the Israelites had been inflicted with various caste and tribal differences. The Roman kings had subjugated them and their main city of Jerusalem was under the reign of the Roman government.

Hellenistic influences on Jewish culture and religion were evident by the early 2nd century BC, when Hellenizing Jews took control of the high priesthood. During this time the Syrian King Antiochus IV Epiphanes gave an edict against the practice of the Jewish religion. Hellenistic Judaism continued and reached its climax during the reign of Herod I of Judea (37 BC–AD4). The idolatrous Roman rulers had built many temples in Palestine and created various idols.

The Israelites on the other hand, after several centuries had passed from the time of Moses, were afflicted with various superstitions, theological divisions and deviations. As gradually the spell of Hellenistic influences fell upon the priesthood, the lay scribes found themselves more and more the only guardians and exponents of the Law.

The scribes and teachers of Scripture gained the title of Rabbi (*'My lord'* in Hebrew) which was meant to be a title of respect. Rabbis proved by the Law (Ex. 34:37) that oral traditions (The Mishna and the Talmud which was its commentary) should be preferred to the written Law (Torah). The Rabbis had perverted the Jewish scriptures and religion had become a means of their earning. Abuse of power by Rabbinical figures had reached the extreme.

According with William Durant in his Story of Civilization, the Jewish merchants dissimulated in their transactions. They then assumed that by merely offering a sacrifice or prayer, their vices were compensated. In short, the Jewish community was politically, socially and religiously in decline.

The holy Quran in various Ayaat condemns the Rabbinic perversion of the Mosaic Law. In Surah, al-Baqarah the Almighty God reveals:

“Then Woe to those who write the Book with their own hands and then say this is from Allah, to purchase with it a little price! Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for that they earn.” (2:79)

It was under such circumstances that the Almighty Allah sent Prophet Jesus to the Children of Israel to confirm the Torah and to bring the lost sheep of Israel to the Right Path.

“And when Jesus, son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! I am the Messenger of Allah unto you, confirming the Torah which came before me...” (61:6)

The following are the main themes of Jesus` mission as described in the holy Quran.

1. Monotheism

Like all other prophets, Jesus began his mission by preaching the unity of God. His first address to the Israelites was,

“Truly Allah is my Lord and your Lord so worship Him alone. This is the straight path.” (3:51)

Neither Jesus nor any other Messenger of God had ever called to the worship of other than Almighty Allah. Jesus never called himself "God" or "Son of God". As already noted, the first Christians were Jews, so they worshipped only God. The time that Jesus lived with his community he made sure no one ever believed in his deity. The holy Quran quoting from Jesus states:

“Never did I say to them aught except what You (Allah) did command me to say: Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them, but when You took me up, You were the Watcher over them; and You are a Witness to all things.” (5: 117)

2. Acknowledging the Torah

Jesus in his teachings confirmed the Torah of Moses. The holy Quran quoting from Jesus states:

“I am the Messenger of Allah unto you, confirming the Torah which came before me...” (61:6)

Prophet Jesus did not come to abolish the Torah, in all his teachings he acknowledged it although he did correct the perversions being taught by the rabbis. Nonetheless he made some minor abrogation to the

law of Torah and accomplished some of its teachings.

St. Paul; The author of several Epistles in the New Testament, allegedly claimed in his letter to Ephesians (2: 14–15) that Jesus had abolished the Law with all its commandments and regulations.

Matthew in his Gospel narrated from Jesus quite the contrary: *“Do not suppose that I came to annul the Law of the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to complete them; for I assure you, while heaven and earth endure not one iota or one projection of a letter will be dropped from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever, therefore, abolishes the least significant of these commands and so teaches the people, he shall be of least significance in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall observe and teach them shall be prominent in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteous surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not at all enter into the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matt. 5: 17–20)

It is worth mentioning that Paul, although a high-ranking Jew who referred to himself as *“Hebrew of the Hebrews”* from the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11: 1,2; 2 Corinthians 11:22; Phil.3:5) became greatly influenced by Greek teachings and his work appears to have been largely among the Ephesians and other peoples who were Greek, whereas Matthew and those for whom he had written his Gospel were Jewish Christians.

Contrary to the Jews, the Greeks were not committed to the Jewish Law. Thus, it is quite possible that each one of the authors have compiled their works according with the interests of their readers. Thus, there are elements of exaggeration in both the records. Jesus did not thoroughly abolish the Law nor did he say that even one letter should not be dropped from it.

Religion is a set of divine guidelines for prosperity of mankind both in here and in hereafter. A religion without do`s and don`ts is no more than a deceit and in practice leads to atheism. Ironically the analogy of Paul for abolishing the Law was *“To break down the barrier that separated Jews and Gentiles.”* (Ephesians 2: 14)

He further argues that in doing so, Jesus had united the two sects! Imagine how cool it sounded to a community with an atheist background that a Prophet invites them to a religion where there are no obligations. Uniting the Jews and the Gentiles (Non-Jews) by abolishing the Law was an invitation to unite all under atheism!

The mission of every Prophet was to accomplish the teachings of the previous prophets on the one hand, and to abrogate some of the laws that the Almighty God had temporarily decreed on the other. Thus, Matthew also has exaggerated by claiming that Jesus did not even change a letter of the Law. As we shall read in the next paragraph, whilst Jesus confirmed the Torah in general, he also abrogated some of the Jewish law.

3. Removing some of the forbidden acts

One of the missions of Prophet Jesus was to remove some of the difficult statutes that the Almighty God had temporarily made obligatory upon the Israelites. Those obligations had been put upon the Israelites due to their oppression and sinful deeds. When the right time arrived, the Merciful God dispatched Jesus to remove those difficult obligations. According with the holy Quran, Jesus declared

“And to make lawful to you part of (not all of) what was forbidden to you.” (3:50)

One of the missions of the law-making prophets was to abrogate some of the temporary laws as decreed by the Almighty God. For instance, at the time of Moses God had forbidden the consumption of some foods. The holy Quran regarding this states,

“And unto those who are Jews, we forbade every (animal) with undivided hooves, and We forbade them the fat of the ox and the sheep except what adheres to their back or their entrails, or is mixed up with the bone.” (6: 146)

A similar rule is mentioned in chapter 11 of the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament. Thus, eating the flesh of horse and camel was forbidden for the Jews. This rule was rather a punishment for their sins. The Quran says,

“We recompense them for their rebellion and verily We are truthful.” (6: 146)

Unfortunately, at present the erroneous Christian dogma, which follows the perverted teachings of St Paul, assumes that the main reason why Jesus came was to free his believers from all religious law. Jesus, they claim, gave his life as a ransom for many (Matt.20:28–Mark 10:45) and has thus *“Fulfilled”* the law.

It is with this justification that Christians do not commit themselves to any jurisprudential rules of the Old Testament. They called their Scripture *‘New Testament’* to indicate that it is a new version of the Old Testament.

And we note that although consumption of the flesh of swine is clearly forbidden in the Old Testament (Leviticus 11:7–8, Isaiah 65:2–4), the Christians relentlessly consume it. They further argue that these are civil laws and mere rituals and the ministry of Jesus was not on earth.

Therefore, Mark allegedly quotes from Jesus that he declared all food clean for returning the emphasis of the true holiness to the heart. (Mark 7: 18–23) Another reason they give is that the Mosaic Law was for the children of Israel and most Christians are not descendants of Israel hence they are not subjected to the civil laws!

Contrary to the above claim the Gospels narrate that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day of his

birth, he was a faithful and committed Jew abiding by the Mosaic Law. If Jesus had come to abolish the Law, then why did Peter the chief disciple of Jesus say, *"I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."* (Acts 10:14) We should also bear in mind that the human consumption of the flesh of swine is still a medical health issue.

Undoubtedly Jesus prayed and fasted. Historically, during the period of the Christian Church there was a period of forty days prior to Easter called Lent which was a fasting period for Christians. According with the Catholic Encyclopaedia modern scholars are almost unanimous in rejecting the view of fasting forty days before Easter.

The obligation of fasting is rarely observed in its integrity nowadays. Yes, Jesus said when you fast or pray do not do it to make a show of it, like hypocrites do. But he never said to stop praying or fasting.

The truth is that it was Paul and not Jesus who abolished the law. Paul in his letter to the Romans (14:20) said that all food is clean. In his letter to Ephesians (2: 14–15) he alleges that Jesus had abolished the law with all its commandments and regulations. As stated above, Matthew in his Gospel states the contrary.

It is worth mentioning that in its earliest years, the Christian religion was divided into three main religious movements: The Gnostics, Jewish Christians, and Pauline Christian. The first almost disappeared. The second did disappear. Almost all current Christian groups trace their lineage back to the Pauline Christian movement. Thus, what we have today is the religion of Paul, not Prophet Jesus.

4. Follow me, not worship me

Like all other prophets, Jesus had also come to teach the sublime ethical issues. With his lifestyle, he set a role model for his followers inviting them to guard themselves against evil and to obey his commands. He said to his people:

"Fear Allah (be pious) and obey me." (3:50)

From the day, he miraculously spoke in his crib, he declared, ***"Verily I am the servant of God"***, and until the time that he lived among people he invited them to follow him not to worship him. He always invited people to praying, fasting and worshipping God much. He lived a very simple life and always shared his words of wisdom with people. The holy Quran quoting from Jesus stating:

"And when Jesus came with clear Proofs, he said: I have come to you with Wisdom, and to make clear to you some of the points in which you differ. Therefore, fear Allah and obey me. Verily, Allah He is my Lord (God) and your Lord(God). So, worship Him alone. This is the only Straight Path." (43:63–64)

Imam Ali (a.s) in Nahjul Balaghah in description of the simple life of Prophet Jesus says, *"If you desire I*

will tell you about Jesus; Son of Mary (p). He used a stone for his pillow, put on coarse clothes and ate rough food. His condiment was hunger. His lamp at night was the moon. His shade during the winter was just the expanse of earth eastward and westward. His fruits and flowers were only what grew from the earth for the cattle.” (Sermon No. 160)

How far indeed the lifestyle of the Popes is from Prophet Jesus!

5. Resolving religious disputes

Another mission of Prophet Jesus was to clarify the religious issues which different Jewish sects were disputing over. The holy Quran quoting from Jesus states:

“I have come to you with Wisdom, and to make clear to you some of the points in which you differ.” (43:63)

During the period of Hellenistic Judaism two major groups of Jewish religious leaders appeared on the scene, i.e. Sadducees and Pharisees. The conservative and aristocratic Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch (Five books of Moses) while at the same time denying the existence of angels, spirits, and the resurrection of the body.

Pharisees were the popular Jewish group at the time of Jesus. The strict Pharisees accepted texts outside the Pentateuch and embraced doctrines of angels and resurrection. They emphasized on both the oral and written form of the Mosaic Law. Although clarification and unification of religious issues was one of the missions of Jesus, Christianity today suffers the most major of religious divisions.

There are hundreds of lists of recognised Christian denominations in existence– all different. In the North America, itself over 1000 Christian faith groups are recognised all of whom regard themselves to be the only ‘True’ Christianity. The holy Quran regarding the divisions occurred in Christianity after Jesus states:

“Then the sects differed amongst themselves. So, woe unto the disbelievers from the Meeting of a great Day (of Judgment).” (19:37)

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