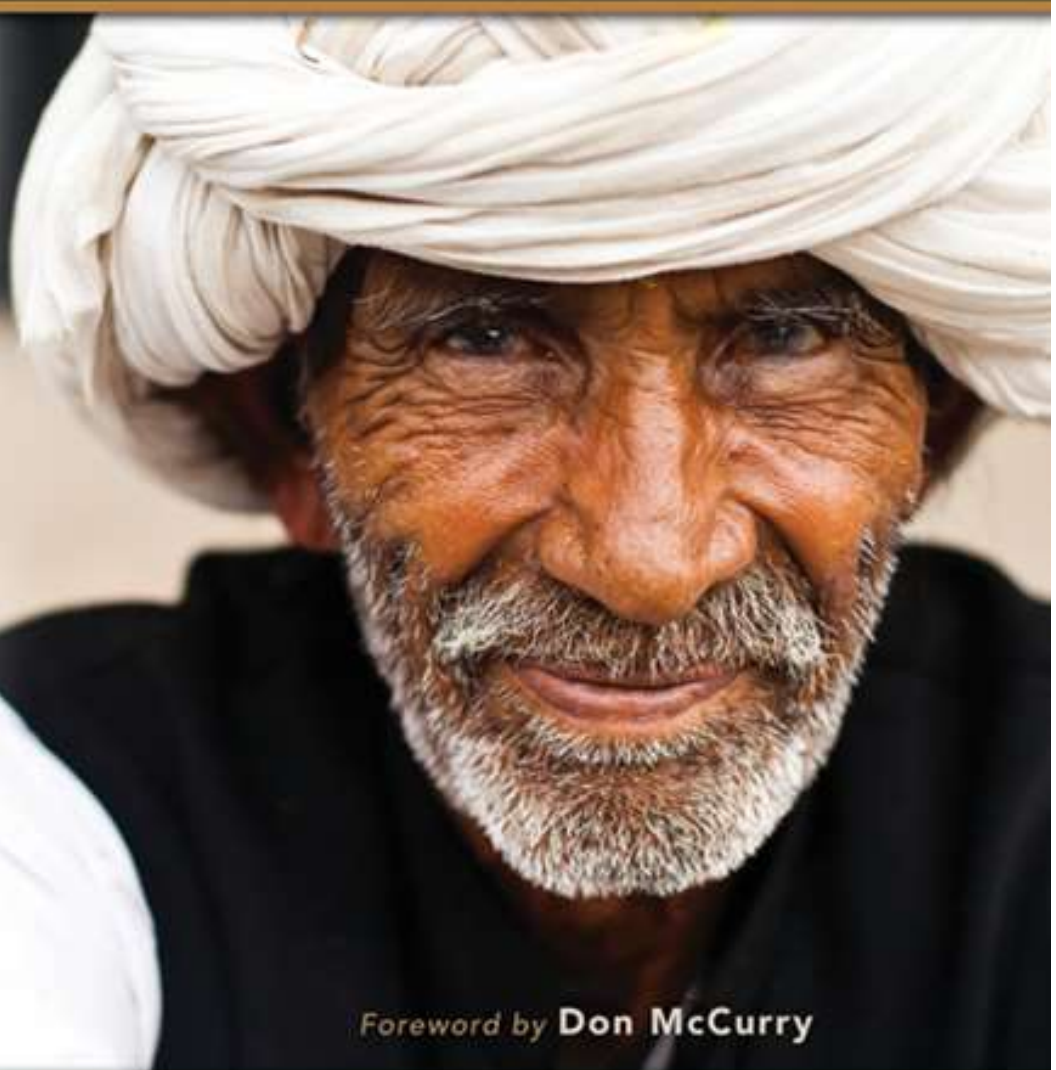




INTERCEDE



Foreword by **Don McCurry**

**Understanding Islam and
Ministering to Muslim People**



**UNDERSTANDING ISLAM
AND MINISTERING TO
MUSLIM PEOPLE**



GLOBAL INITIATIVE
REACHING MUSLIM PEOPLES

Intercede: Understanding Islam and Ministering to Muslim People

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FOREWORD

Intercession takes you into the very heart of God. Jesus, the Son of God, at the cost of His life, shed His blood on the cross for the sins of the whole world. His propitiatory sacrifice opened the door for us to go into the Father's presence in intercession for our Muslim neighbors.

The twenty-seven *Intercede* articles in this book honor our beloved brother, Dr. Jim Bennett, who for the last seventeen years, faithfully, and may I add, brilliantly, edited the *Intercede* magazine.

Intercede, a bi-monthly magazine, includes a section entitled "*Jumaa* (Friday) Prayer Fellowship," which provides readers three specific requests to pray every Friday. Over time, intercessors take many individuals and issues into the heart of God for answers that He, in His loving concern, will answer. A profile of a Muslim people group is included along with prayer points for intercession.

Intercede also includes a section on "Muslim World News." This section informs the reader of developments in the Muslim world regarding political, religious, and sociological issues. Furthermore, the *Intercede* features articles that keep us up to date on what is going on at the cutting edge of the Kingdom of God. It addresses current issues between Islam and Christianity, biblical issues that cover vital subjects, such as conflicting theological viewpoints, and issues of cultural contextualization. Articles include relevant topics on the history of Islam and Christianity that may impact their unfolding relationship today. Other articles focus on crucial missiological practices that affect effectiveness in a wide variety of situations facing the Lord's servants, including Christian women working

with Muslim women, the practice of religious celebrations, specific cultural groups, and discipleship.

This book will help you understand Islam as well as the various aspects of ministry to Muslims. It will also take you into the heart of God in informed intercession for our Muslim neighbors.

Dr. Don McCurry

Ministries to Muslims, President (retired)



DEDICATION

If we truly understood and could witness, on a regular basis, what is released from heaven when we intercede for others, I believe we would be in intercessory prayer every day. I dedicate this book as a tribute to my dear friend, Dr. Jim Bennett, for his fifty years of ministry to Muslims and seventeen years as editor for the *Intercede* magazine. This book is a priceless treasure that every missions-minded believer ought to read and ponder.

Few people in the Assemblies of God have the history, knowledge, and experience in the Muslim world and understanding of Islamic teachings than Jim Bennett. He and his wife, Theda, have been a gift to Assemblies of God World missions. Jim has poured himself into reaching the Muslim world for Christ and inspired the Church to intercede on its behalf. Over the years that Jim Bennett edited the *Intercede*, he built up the worldwide *Jumaa Prayer Fellowship* for the express purpose of interceding before God for the world's Muslims. Because of his foundational missionary leadership and vision, *Global Initiative: Reaching Muslims Peoples* (formerly *Center for Ministry to Muslims*) is penetrating Muslim strongholds with the gospel—and it all started with a commitment to intercession.

As an evangelist, pastor, and national church leader for more than fifty-five years, I simply cannot put into words the incalculable value of spiritual intercession. It is one way we, as the Church, can stir up the might and power of the Holy Spirit to move upon the hearts and minds of Muslims so they can hear about and believe on Jesus as their Savior.

This book is a timely resource because the world's 1.9 billion Muslims are not found only in distant lands. They are

now beside us in our neighborhoods, in the workplace, on our social media feeds, in our stadiums, schools, and our churches. Many of these Muslims are searching for the truth about Jesus because they have been taught a lie, and many of them sense it. By understanding the missiological challenge and opportunity presented by Islam, Christians will equip themselves to be used of God in powerful ways to reach and save this spiritually lost multitude.

Through this compilation of *Intercede* articles, the authors help us understand Islam, befriend Muslims, and minister to any Muslim from any culture or country with compassion and genuine Christian love. As you read this book, allow it to transform you, your prayer life, and your perspectives on ministry to Muslims.

Alton Garrison

Former Assistant General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God
Acts 2 Journey Initiative, Executive Director



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INTRODUCTION

“Lord, what is the key for reaching Muslims?” asked David Irwin, who was overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. The Lord spoke into his heart a simple phrase that became the foundation of this ministry: “Fast and pray for Muslims on Friday.”

In 1982, leaders from the Assemblies of God World Missions met to discuss the lack of focus and evangelism among the world’s 700 million Muslims. The result was a new entity aptly named the Center for Ministry to Muslims (CMM). David Irwin, who had previously served as a missionary in Egypt and Malawi, was asked to lead this newly formed ministry.

Obedying the word that the Lord Jesus had spoken to his heart, David Irwin encouraged Christians around the world to fast and pray for Muslims on Friday (*Jumaa* in Arabic)—their “holy day”. Thus, the *Jumaa* Prayer Fellowship was born. Sadly, David Irwin died in a tragic car accident in 1984 before he could see this vision become a reality.

How would people know what to pray? In October 1985, the next director, Del Kingsriter, started a news and prayer letter called *Intercede* for the growing prayer movement explaining that it would be a “vital link between the planters, and harvesters and you, our intercessors ... to bring specific, focused prayer needs to your attention.” He believed that *Intercede* would be a tool to bring new life to hundreds and thousands of Muslims. He was right. Today, over 60,000

intercessors gather all around the world every Friday to intercede using these focused prayer requests.

Intercede, a bimonthly magazine includes a feature article to educate people about Islam and Muslims, as well as a section on Muslim World News, and three focused prayer requests each Friday for the Jumaa Prayer Fellowship.

This book, divided into two parts, is a compilation of twenty-seven feature articles originally printed in *Intercede* on a variety of subjects. Written by different authors who lived and served among Muslim people for many years, these selected articles span the seventeen years Dr. Jim Bennett has served as editor.

Part One addresses important topics such as the nature of God, theological differences between Islam and Christianity, the teachings of the Quran and Hadith, religious celebrations, ISIS, honor killings, and the historical origins of Islam. Part Two inspires the reader to intercede for Muslims by addressing the topics of supernatural encounters, such as dreams, signs, and wonders, discipleship of Muslims who have decided to follow Jesus, ministry to Muslim women, and preparation of Christians to reach out to Muslim neighbors. As you read this book, you will learn more about Islam and Muslim people, recognize their need to know Jesus Christ, and develop a desire to intercede for them—until all have heard.



PART 1

UNDERSTANDING
ISLAM



“SAME GOD QUESTION”: WHY MUSLIMS ARE NOT MOVING TOWARD CHRISTIANS

Fred Farrokh
2019

Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? Increasing numbers of Christians and Christian missiologists are now responding in the affirmative, especially as they seek amicable relations with Muslims. This article looks at this age-old question from the Islamic point of view, noting that Muslim scholars have not mirrored their Christian counterparts in moving toward theological reconciliation. Indeed, the foundational teachings and example of Muhammad restrict them from doing so, thus creating a dynamic of “one hand clapping” in interfaith discourse.

Two interfaith efforts initiated by Muslims themselves—the 2007 “A Common Word between Us and You,” and the 2016 “Marrakesh Declaration”—provide excellent data points for assessing Muslim sentiments regarding contemporary interfaith dialogue, in general, and the “Same God Question” (SGQ), in particular. These data points indicate that Muhammad’s non-inclusive, non-tolerant view toward other religions continues to influence his followers today.

Theological Reconciliation to Relational Reconciliation?

The theological movement of Christian scholars toward the Muslim position may not be fully and consciously based in

theology, but on a desire for improved relations. Due to the centuries of hostility between Christians and Muslims, many peace-loving Christians would gladly trade much for peaceful coexistence—that elusive biblical *shalom*. This desire is not wrong. Yet, this desire, even if it is subconscious, cannot be realized through theological acquiescence.

The SGQ itself is most often rendered in a manner that elevates the human element and tends to produce a human-centered response. Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? This often tends to breed more questions: Which Muslims? Which Christians? What is meant by worship? Perhaps a better question should have a more theological framework: Is the God presented in the Quran the same as the God presented in the Bible? I would suggest that another important question underlies the SGQ, and ultimately requires a negative answer. This underlying question posits: “Since the Bible teaches that Jesus is God and since Islam teaches that Jesus is not God, how, then, is it possible that Christians and Muslims worship the same God?”

Evidence that Muslims are Not Moving toward Christians on the SGQ

Muslims are not moving toward Christians on the SGQ, because to do so would require them to abandon the foundational tenet of Islam—*Tawhid* (Divine Unity). Further, any expansion of the Islamic view of the Godhead toward biblical Trinitarianism would undercut the prophethood of Muhammad and collapse the entire Islamic theological edifice. Muslims, in recognition of this reality, have refrained from theological reconciliation with Christians as it relates to the Godhead.

As a rule, Muslim scholars (the *Ulama*) take theology seriously. Their ranks include many prolific writers. While a wide-ranging theological survey exceeds the scope and space allowed by this format, several interfaith initiatives by teams of prominent Muslim scholars provide a good basis for analysis. These included the aforementioned “A Common Word between

Us and You” initiative of 2007 and the “Marrakesh Declaration” of 2016.

“A Common Word between Us and You” (2007)

On October 13, 2007, 138 Muslim scholars presented the document, “A Common Word,” to the Christian world. The full document begins with an immediate affirmation of the non-negotiable prominence of Muhammad as the basis for belief in God:

The central creed of Islam consists of the testimonies of faith or *Shahadahs*, which state that: *There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of God.* These two Testimonies are the *sine qua non* (indispensable characteristics) of Islam. He or she who testifies to them is a Muslim; or he or she who denies them is not a Muslim.

The Common Word document purports to highlight values cherished by Muslims and Christians alike, such as love of God and love of neighbor. However, the Muslim scholars fail to even hold out an olive branch to their Christian counterparts regarding the SGQ. Instead, they immediately follow their initial insistence on acceptance of Muhammad with one of his *hadith* statements that Allah “has no associate,” a clear admonition against the belief in the Sonship of Christ and the Trinity. (These statements, which emphasize that Allah has no partner, serve a polemic purpose and, therefore, do not create an environment of mutual respect. A reciprocal introduction from Christians would be to preface an inter-faith document for Muslims with multiple verses regarding “false prophets.”)

The authors of “A Common Word” frame their appeal around the key quranic verse, Al-Imran, 3:64, from which the document gets its name:

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah,

and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him; and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

With the command “Come!” this verse clearly commands Christians to move away from their cherished and long-standing belief in the Trinity. The verse reiterates that Christians must ascribe no partners or associates to Allah. The word used in 3:64 for ascribing partners with Allah is a literal cognate of *shirk*, the unpardonable sin in Islam, according to Sura 4:116. “A Common Word” finishes by again quoting Sura 3:64 and admonishing Christians not to attribute partners with Allah. The Muslim scholars conclude invitingly: “Let this common ground be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us.”

Throughout “A Common Word,” the Muslim scholars quote Bible verses that they reinterpret in a Unitarian fashion. Nowhere in the document do they affirm that the Trinitarian understanding of God is acceptable. In fact, they continually use the Islamic honorific, *alaihi as-salaam* (in Arabic script) after the name of Jesus Christ, to emphasize they are referring to the Islamic Jesus, who is neither Lord, God nor Savior. Therefore, “A Common Word” serves primarily as a theological thumb in the eye to Christians.

Interestingly, “A Common Word” received immediate acclamation by a large number of Christian leaders, who responded with heartfelt appreciation the next month with the “Yale Response.” The “Yale Response” was ultimately signed by over 300 prominent Christian leaders, representing an embarrassing level of one-sided, self-abasement on the part of the Christian scholars. Their Preamble declares:

Muslims and Christians have not always shaken hands in friendship; their relations have sometimes been tense, even characterized by outright hostility. Since Jesus Christ says “first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will

see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye” (Matthew 7:5), we want to begin by acknowledging that in the past (e.g. in the Crusades) and in the present (e.g. in excesses of the “war on terror”) many Christians have been guilty of sinning against our Muslim neighbors. Before we “shake your hand” in responding to your letter, we ask forgiveness of the All-Merciful One and of the Muslim community around the world.

Based on this beginning, the Christian respondents indicate they seek amicable relations between Muslims and Christians. This conciliatory statement appears to overlook the fact that the Muslim authors of “A Common Word” had just taken Christians to the theological woodshed. The “Yale Response” makes no insistence that Muslims tolerate or co-exist with the Christian belief in biblical theology, including the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the Muslim scholars utilized quranic material and co-opted biblical material to excoriate the biblical position, it is surprising the Christian scholars, who should know the Bible even if they may not be familiar with the Quran, failed to raise this objection.

Furthermore, neither “A Common Word” nor the “Yale Response” ever mentions the atrocities inflicted on Christians by Muslims over fourteen centuries. This reality cannot be overlooked if Christians and Muslims are indeed to proceed into an era of open and honest communication.

In summary, the “Yale Response” to “A Common Word” was written not in the spirit of Christian humility—but rather in the spirit of Islamically-ordained humiliation—known as *Dhimmitude*.

The “Marrakesh Declaration” on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Countries

The Muslim contributors to the 2016 “Marrakesh Declaration” obviously wanted to set themselves and their religion

apart from the modern Jihadists who have carried the news headlines for years. They clearly wished to gain international goodwill by trying to project a more benevolent position toward non-Muslim minorities.

Importantly, however, the “Marrakesh Declaration” fails to ascribe any legitimacy to the worship of the biblical Triune God. This would seem to be a minimum standard of affirmation in protecting the rights of non-Muslim minorities. Furthermore, the Declaration makes no statement asserting that Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

Instead, the “Marrakesh Declaration” celebrates the example of Muhammad and the Charter of Medina, which he implemented during his rule over that city from A.D. 622-632. Use of the Charter of Medina as a paradigm proves problematic because this covenant was between the Muslims and only those who “followed them and joined them, and labored with them.” The text of the Charter comes from Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirat Rasul Allah* [The Life of the Prophet of Allah], which is the basis for all later biographies of Muhammad. Though Alfred Guillaume translates the final clause above into English as “and labored with them,” the Arabic original is “*wa jaahad ma’hum*,” based on the verbal form of the noun “*jihad*.” W. M. Watt translates this Arabic clause “and who crusade along with them.” The Charter of Medina, therefore, establishes the political-military-religious Islamic state, upon which the now mostly defunct Islamic State in Iraq and Syria based its legitimacy. Ironically, Muslim scholars have historically advanced this same charter as a template for religious tolerance and co-existence.

The Charter did not ensure the rights of those who chose not to follow Muhammad and the Muslims. There were no Christians in Medina, but there were Jews. None of the three Jewish tribes in Medina ultimately chose to follow Muhammad—and thus accept Islam. According to Sura 33:21, Muhammad, the example for all Muslims, banished two of the Jewish tribes and exterminated the final one. Presently, no Jews live in Medina.

The Charter of Medina created the paradigm for the *Dhimmi* system of *Sharia* law, in which non-Muslim monotheists are systematically humiliated and strictly forbidden from sharing their faith with Muslims. The *Dhimmi* system fails to provide a reliable, protective umbrella for Christians or other religious minorities. Indeed, the *Dhimmi* system oversaw the slow asphyxiation of many Christian and Jewish communities living under Islam—some of which have been extinguished.

Despite this sobering picture, several Christians present at the 2016 Marrakesh proceedings responded with irrepressible exultation. Nevertheless, the “Marrakesh Declaration” does nothing to move Muslim religious scholars toward their Christian counterparts on the SGQ. Neither does it affirm the right of Christian minorities to share their faith among their Muslim neighbors, nor does it safeguard former Muslims who have converted to Christ. Even the statements purporting to protect religious minorities from Islamic violence must be read with caution. This Declaration will not be followed by millions of Jihadists, since *Sharia* law does not unequivocally guarantee this protection.

In the case of both “A Common Word” and the “Marrakesh Declaration,” the Muslim scholars could not have substantially moved toward their Christian counterparts on the SGQ without being considered by other *ulama* as apostates—and threatened with expulsion from the faith of Islam. This same threat of excommunication, *takfir*, will haunt any Muslim scholar from making substantive theological overtures toward biblical Trinitarianism. Indeed, Muhammad established the religion of Islam within these strictures.

The Quran gives God-fearing Christians the status of *Ahl ul-Kitab* [People of the Book] since they have believed in God and a bona fide prophet, Jesus. Islamic law sets the *Ahl ul-Kitab* above the atheists and idol-worshippers as those who must be killed if they resist Muslims by not submitting to Islam. This seeming conciliatory position of Islam toward Christians may engender hopes for eventual theological reconciliation. In its

full context, however, this paradigm established by Muhammad should be considered as the co-opting of Jesus into the Islamic theological edifice and an invitation to Christians to embrace Islam and become Muslims.

Muhammad Curses the Najrani Christians

The encounter in Medina of the Najrani Christians with Muhammad provides a clear picture of Muhammad's interaction with, and policy toward, Christians. As Muhammad and the Muslims gained political hegemony over Arabia, various tribes came to seek terms of peace with the Prophet of Islam. The town of Najran sent a Christian delegation to seek such a peace agreement. The Najranis, accompanied by their bishop, spent three days in theological discourse with Muhammad in Medina. This episode is referred to in Sura 3 (*al-Imran*). The Najrani Christians offered to pledge their political allegiance to Muhammad if he would embrace their belief in the divinity of Jesus. This Sura recounts their testimony to the Annunciation (3:42-44), the Virgin Birth (3:47), and Jesus' miracles (3:49, including some apocryphal miracles).

The quranic narrative then markedly pivots to an anti-biblical Christology in which Jesus denies his own Lordship (3:51). Jesus' disciples then shockingly declare: "We have believed in Allah and testify we are Muslims" (3:52). Sura 3:57 establishes salvation by works, and also states that "Allah does not love those who do wrong," another drastic departure from biblical theology. The Najrani episode concludes with Muhammad declaring that Jesus was no more the Son of God than was Adam, who also was created without a human father (3:59).

Because of this theological impasse, Muhammad insisted on a mutual cursing ceremony with the Najranis. The Najranis declined to curse Muhammad, but he gathered his daughter, Fatima, son-in-law, Ali, and two grandsons under his cloak, and cursed the Najranis. The incident is known in Islamic history as

“The Cursing” (*al-Mubahala*) with Muhammad’s indictment stated in Sura 3:61: “May God’s curse be upon those who lie!” The quranic narrative ends here with: “This is the true account. There is no god but Allah ... If they turn back, Allah has full knowledge of those who do mischief” (3:62-63).

The next verse, Surah 3:64, is the “common word” verse in which Christians are called to repent of associating partners with Allah (i.e., worshipping Jesus) and return to *Tawhid*. Thus, Muhammad’s single notable encounter with a Christian community ended with him cursing that community because of their biblical beliefs regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the historical context surrounding the “common word” verse summons a narrative of Christians rejected by Muhammad and the early Muslims, rather than one of inter-communal harmony and mutual respect.

The Primacy of the *Shahada* Confession

Any person who wants to become a Muslim must declare the *Shahada* confession: “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his apostle.” The Muslim authors of “A Common Word” featured the *Shahada* in their document. Inherent in *Shahada* is a denial (Arabic, *nafy*) as an affirmation (*ithbat*). The *nafy* denial is that “there is *no* god...”

Early Muslims could have originally simplified the *Shahada* to something like “The Supreme Being is Allah...” The fact that the followers of Muhammad felt the need to include a negating statement in the *Shahada* meant they specifically wanted to exclude from their faith community those who embrace the biblical teaching of plurality in the Godhead.

Confronting Muslim Scholars Regarding the “SGQ”

The above material indicates that Muhammad saw as a central part of this mission the demolition of the biblical belief

regarding the Incarnation of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to advance the Islamic theological narrative, Muhammad shamefully transformed the real Jesus into a fictional character. First, in Sura 61:6, Jesus supposedly announces the coming of Muhammad. Then, in Suras 5:72 and 5:116, Muhammad relates that Jesus assured all who would listen that he (Jesus) never accepted worship from anyone.

Muslim scholars have long since been painted into a corner by Muhammad, who created a watertight monotheistic theology with no freedom to consider a plurality in the Godhead. Any deviation from absolute *Tawhid* can only trigger the echoing of Muhammad's cursing of the Najranis through the *fatwas* (edicts) of his disciples today. Furthermore, Muslim scholars cannot directly contradict the prophet's teaching, especially on such a foundational doctrine as the divine nature. Therefore, Muslim scholars cannot move theologically toward their Christian counterparts.

Even the moderate and conciliatory Muslim scholar Mahmoud Ayoub of Hartford Seminary resigns himself to this conclusion: "Muslims could not, in the Quran or later, understand or accept the idea that God could reveal himself in a human person, that is to say, Jesus Christ."

Muslim scholars understand these things, yet their Christian counterparts seem largely unaware of the historical and theological boundaries within which scholars of Islam—regardless of sectarian affiliation—must operate. Should Muslims cross these boundaries, they become part of the growing population of ex-Muslims. Muhammad's theological position closes the door on reconciling Islamic Unitarianism with biblical Trinitarianism. It is no surprise that Muslims are not moving toward Christians on the SGQ. The mutually exclusive positions of the Bible and the Quran on the identity of Jesus Christ rule out any coming together on the SGQ.

**Conclusion: How the Triune God
of the Bible is Drawing Muslims to Himself**

The commonality between Muslims and Christians lies in their humanity, not their theology. In other words, all people are created equal, but not all religions are created equal. Muslims, like Christians and others, are sinners whom God loves equally and unconditionally. Muslims are not worse sinners than others. Neither are they under any curse that the blood of Christ is unable to cancel. While the Quran states in the “common word” passage, “Allah does not love those who do wrong” (Sura 3:57), the Bible states, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NASB).

Tragically, Muslims are taught from birth that God is not Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet, the loving God of the Bible is even now wooing countless Muslims to himself. God’s activity is, thus, resulting in many of these precious souls leaving behind Islam, the affirmation of Muhammad as a prophet, and the deity he promoted. Duane Miller and Patrick Johnstone recently published a country-by-country report of believers in Christ from a Muslim background. They estimate there are 10.2 million of these believers. Truly, these are astounding times for Christian missions! Christians can encourage the ongoing process of Muslims coming to Christ by minding well the guiding light of biblical orthodoxy.

*This article is an abridged version and originally appeared in *Themelios*, December 2016, and is used with permission.



MUHAMMAD'S ATTEMPT TO SUPERSEDE JESUS

Ken Ferguson
2021

Muhammad holds the most honored place of all humans in Islam. The Islamic confession of faith states: “There is no deity except Allah, and Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah.” This statement boldly names Muhammad in the same breath with Allah. Upon entering a mosque, a worshipper will usually see the names of Allah and Muhammad written together on the left and right walls in beautiful Arabic calligraphy, emphasizing the importance of both names to all Muslims.

The Prophet of Islam

Most Muslims have six tenets in their classical list of beliefs. The first and most important is the belief in Allah—who alone is deity. The list then includes beliefs in angels, prophets, sacred books, the last days, and final destiny or predestination. This article will emphasize the third belief—the prophets of Allah, with special emphasis on Muhammad. Muslims believe Allah gave revelations to other prophets but that the Quran, given to Muhammad, is the final revelation, and it supersedes all other revelations. In other words, the Quran was the final revelation and Muhammad was the final prophet. The Quran says, “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he

is) the Apostle of Allah, and the Seal of the Prophets: and Allah has full knowledge of all things” (Q 33:40). For Muslims, no one since Muhammad can claim to be a prophet. Some have tried, but they and their followers were eventually declared to be non-Muslim.

For generations, people orally passed down information concerning the life of Muhammad. More than 170 years *after* the prophet’s death, Ibn Ishaq (b. 768) compiled the first biography of Muhammad. Subsequent biographers wrote details regarding Muhammad’s appearance, his daily life, and habits, and provided a record of some of his military exploits. Others added genealogical and biographical material about the prophet and his contemporaries. Through the eyes of modern scholarship, most biographies of Muhammad are considered unreliable. Modern researchers have raised serious questions about the historicity of the accounts of Muhammad, including his place of origin and the authenticity of the direction in which Muslims are supposed to pray. Scholars even question the very existence of a historical Muhammad. For academic scholars, religious historians, and apologists, these issues serve as valid queries regarding verifiable accounts in reference to Muhammad and Islam.

This article seeks to provide clarity concerning what Muslims actually believe in order that we might share with them the truth about Christ. Thus, this article will address how present-day Muslims perceive the history of their prophet and how we, as Christians, can compare their perception of Muhammad with the biblical witness of Jesus Christ. While attempting to look at the prophet through the eyes of Muslims, we will carefully evaluate him in the light of Jesus and the truth of the Scripture.

A Brief Historical Sketch of the Life of Muhammad

According to Islamic historians, Muhammad was born in A.D. 570 in Mecca. His father, Abdullah, was a respected member of the Quraysh tribe, one of many Arab tribes in Arabia. As residents of Mecca, the Quraysh were the custodians of the *Kaaba*, the cube-like structure that contained representations of the various gods and goddesses of the polytheistic Arab tribes. Muhammad's mother, Amina, was told in a dream to name her child Muhammad, meaning "one greatly praised."

Muslims point to several extraordinary incidents during Muhammad's early life that indicate prophethood. In *Answering Islam*, Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb refer to some of the extraordinary legends about Muhammad's birth and early life:

Ancient legends report that as soon as he was born, he fell to the ground, took a handful of dust, and looking up toward heaven proclaimed, "God is Great." He was born clean, circumcised, with his navel cord already cut. Another encounter took place when he was about five years old and under the care of his nurse, Halima. Muhammad fell to the ground due to a seizure or stroke, and when he recovered, his face shone with a look of extreme surprise. Sahih Bukhari, a noted *Hadith* (Traditions) compiler, suggests that this incident was in reality a visitation of two angels. Two men clothed in white and carrying a bowl of snow grabbed Muhammad and opened his chest. They took out his heart, removed a black lump, and washed it with snow. Muhammad, in a *Hadith* compiled by Sahih Muslim, states that it was the angel Gabriel (*Jibril*) who opened and washed his heart, not in snow but in holy water from the well of ZamZam. Others point out that this event took place

later in life, just prior to his “night journey” to Jerusalem and Heaven.¹

The popular Islamic belief is that the angels did cleanse his heart of all impurities and then placed it back in his body. Some Islamic scholars believe that this incident not only affirmed Muhammad’s prophethood, but also confirms the belief that Muhammad never sinned, nor was he ever touched by sin. Some point out that any sin that he may have had prior to this event was cleansed with the washing of the heart, and that he was sinless from that point in his life, thus allowing for the possibility that he was not always sinless. Interestingly, as already stated, other Islamic scholars place this event later in Muhammad’s life, just before his “night journey” to Jerusalem and heaven.

When Muhammad was about six years old, Amina became sick and died while on a journey to Medina. Muhammad was then placed under the care of his eighty-year-old grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, who passed away two years later. Muhammad’s uncle, Abu Talib, then raised Muhammad.

At the age of twelve, Abu Talib took Muhammad on a business trip to Syria. On the return journey to Mecca, they passed through the Syrian city of Bosra, where a Christian monk named Bahira perceived something special about the boy. Because of a mark between his shoulder blades, Bahira predicted that Muhammad would be the prophet of the Arabs to lead them from idolatry. In A.D. 610, Muhammad reportedly saw visions and had extraordinary experiences while meditating in a cave at Mount Hira outside Mecca. In this cave, he received his first revelation from Allah via the angel Gabriel. Muslims point to these events as proofs of his calling to be a prophet.

The *kaaba* housed about 365 idols and icons of the polytheistic Arabs. The various Arab tribes would travel to Mecca each year for festivities, to conduct business, and to

¹ Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 70.

honor and worship their particular deity. The Quraysh earned their living by the business that the many pilgrims brought to Mecca each year. When Muhammad began to receive revelations, his chief message was not that there was a new deity, but that there was only one god, and his name was Allah. Muhammad preached against the polytheism of the Arabs by which his relatives earned their living. Persecution from his own tribe ensued, and eventually Muhammad, along with about 200 of his followers, withdrew to Medina in A.D. 622. This migration, known as the *hijra*, marked the beginning of the Muslim lunar calendar and also the beginning of the Islamic community known as *umma*. Theology replaced familial relationships as the glue that held the *umma* together. In Medina, Muhammad became more than the “prophet.” He became the political and military leader of the community.

Muhammad Seeks Honor from His Followers

Muslims love to name their children after the prophets, family members of the prophets, and associates of the prophets, especially Muhammad. In Islamic countries—and now even some European countries—the name Muhammad and forms of that name like Ahmad and Mahmoud, are the most prominent names given to boys.

Muslims pray, “Guide us on the straight path,” a prayer found in the opening chapter of the Quran. Muslims seek guidance so they can know what pleases and displeases Allah. Muslims want to avoid the judgment of Allah, and believe that, by the mercy of Allah, they can find guidance in the Quran. How do Muslims receive this mercy? Allah sends his mercy via the prophets, and Muhammad is believed to be the seal of the prophets. That crucial role gives Muhammad the highest respect among all Muslims.

Muslims also love and respect Muhammad because of the perceived quality of his character. The very name Muhammad means “praised one.” Muslims show love and respect for him in the following ways: by remembering the Traditions (*Hadith*)

that record what he said and did, by celebrating his birthday (*milad al-nabi*), by reciting the stories about his exploits, and by frequent “calling down of blessings” upon the Prophet and his family (*tasliya*). When someone speaking in English says the name of Muhammad, or any prophet, they add, “Peace be upon him.” When his name appears printed in English, *pbuh* is added in parenthesis behind his name. For Muslims, Muhammad is seen as the ideal example for all people. In some Muslim countries, blasphemy laws prohibit the slightest desecration of his name.

Tradition and legend reveal the mystique surrounding the birth of Muhammad, emphasizing that the prophet was specially chosen by Allah and that his character developed in a special way. Most Muslims believe that his birth was the fulfillment of a Quranic prophecy: “And remember Jesus, the son of Mary, said: “O Children of Israel! I am the Apostle of Allah (sent) to you, confirming the law (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of an Apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad” (Q 61:6). Ahmad is translated in some English versions as “The Praised One.” Muhammad attempted to supersede Christ in several ways. Here, he put prophetic words into the mouth of Jesus. Muslim apologists insist that this is a misinterpretation of the Greek word translated “Comforter,” “Advocate,” or “Helper” in passages of Scripture like John 14:16, 15:26, and 16:7. Muslim apologists claim the word “Comforter” should be translated “Praised One”—and thus it refers to Ahmad, a derivative form of the name Muhammad. It quickly becomes apparent that this twisted attempt to identify a scriptural prediction about Ahmad (Muhammad) is a logical absurdity. Jesus clearly identifies the “Helper” in John 14:17 as the Holy Spirit.

Muslims all over the world celebrate the birthday of Muhammad. Many will celebrate quietly by reciting portions from the Quran while others will celebrate with parties, festivals, and extreme veneration of the most highly revered person in all of Islam. Orthodox Muslims do not celebrate

excessively because they do not want to risk blasphemy by taking emphasis away from Allah. However, Muhammad himself encouraged such veneration. The phenomenon of the Muslim community patterning its behavior after that of their prophet was something Muhammad himself cultivated. In fact, Muhammad asked all Muslims to follow him: “Ye have indeed in the Apostle of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah” (Q 33:21).

Since Muslims believe that Muhammad was the receiver of revelation, they also believe that he is the interpreter of that revelation. Stories or traditions of what Muhammad said and did were passed down orally from generation to generation and eventually written and collected into volumes known as *Hadith* (Traditions). While Muslims understand the Quran as the word of Allah, they look to the *Hadith* to understand how to interpret the Quran and live it out. Since Muhammad made himself the sole interpreter of the meaning of the Quran, it was only natural that the *Hadith* should be rooted in the sayings and actions of Muhammad. He assumed for himself a position that made his word final on all issues by associating his name with Allah’s: “Fear the fire, which is prepared for those who reject faith: And obey Allah and the Apostle; that ye may obtain mercy” (Q 3:131-132). “He who obeys the Apostle, obeys Allah: but if any turn away, we have not sent thee to watch over their (evil deeds)” (Q 4:80). So, even forgiveness of sins depends upon following or rejecting Muhammad as well as following or rejecting Allah. Therefore, faith is equated with obeying Muhammad.

Muhammad Seeks to Strip Jesus of the Honor Due to Him

Muhammad emphasized that Jesus was not the Son of God and that He was no more than a prophet: “Christ the son of Mary was no more than an apostle; many were the apostles that

passed away before him (Q 5:75). “Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him” (Q 112:1-4).

Even Islam’s *Hadith* literature affirms Jesus as just one of the prophets. The two most reliable *Hadith* collections agree on what happened when Muhammad ascended into and through the seven heavens. Muhammad met Jesus in the second heaven, and while there, he met other prophets in higher heavens (Sahih al Bukhari, 324; Sahih Muslim, 164). Clearly, this implies that Jesus was confined to a lesser or lower heaven.

Muhammad gave constant reminders that Jesus was only a prophet. By Muhammad’s continual encouragement for people to venerate him, Muhammad became the focal point of Islamic devotion. With so much emphasis placed upon his speech and character, it was only a matter of time until many Muslims came to believe in his infallibility and sinless character. From this, it was only a short leap for many Muslims to actually worship Muhammad with devotional music. Orthodox Muslims abhor such actions, but this is the direction Muhammad led them, all the while insisting that he himself was not divine. In actuality, Muhammad attempted to dethrone Jesus as the King, and replace Jesus with himself as the preeminent one. Missionary Samuel Zwemer, regarded as the Apostle to Muslims, wrote: “The sin and guilt of the *Mohammedan* world is that they give Christ’s glory to another.”²

Conclusion

Is Muhammad a true prophet? Chief proofs offered by Islamic apologists include:

² Samuel Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ: An Essay on the Life Character, and Teachings of Jesus Christ According to the Koran and Orthodox Tradition* (London, England: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1912), 157.

1. The Old Testament and New Testament contain clear prophecies about him.
2. The language and teaching of the Quran are without parallel.
3. Muhammad's miracle(s) is (are) a seal by Allah Most High on his claims.
4. His life and character prove him to have been the last and the greatest prophet.
5. The rapid spread of Islam.

The Bible makes absolutely no reference to Muhammad. The teachings of the Quran pale in comparison to the Bible. While Jesus was the ultimate miracle worker, Muhammad never performed a single miracle. His character was questionable, and the rapid spread of Islam proves nothing. While Muslims rely on legendary events in the life of Muhammad to consider him a prophet, the Bible goes beyond extraordinary events for such consideration. For example, Deuteronomy 18 clarifies that when a true prophet speaks a word in the Lord's name, it will be true, and it will come to pass.

The Quran uses the Arabic word *Isa* to refer to Jesus. A brief comparison of the biblical Jesus with *Isa* of the Quran and Muhammad quickly reveals the superior nature of Jesus:

- *Isa* healed by Allah's permission (Q 5:110); Jesus healed by His own will (Matt. 8:2-3), and Muhammad healed no one. Jesus healed the withered hands on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:10-13), but Muhammad cut off hands of the enemies of Allah (Q 5:33). *Isa* healed the blind (Q 3:49). Jesus healed the blind (Lk. 18:35-43), and Muhammad blinded the seeing (Bukhari V7. Bk.76 h.5686).

- Jesus performed miracles over creation (Mark 4:35-41), disease (Luke 6:19), demons (Mark 5:1-13) and death (John 11:1-44). Jesus died for sinners (John 1:29); *Isa* did not die (Q 4:157), and Muhammad killed sinners (Q 4:89; 8:12; 9:29; 47:4).
- Jesus forgives sins (Matt. 9:1-8) and assures salvation to all who believe (John 3:14-17), while Muhammad was unsure of his own salvation (Q 46:9).
- Muhammad was not worshipped, but he believed that he should be obeyed alongside Allah (Q 3:32; 24:56; 33:36). *Isa* worships a god called Allah, and says that neither he nor his mother are God (Q 3:51; 5:116). In the Bible, Jesus receives worship and is worshipped (Matt. 2:11; 14:33; 28:9, 17; John 9:35-38; Rev. 5).
- The Quran says that *Isa* was righteous (Q 19:19). The Bible teaches us that Jesus not only was righteous and holy (Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:15-16), but was without sin (Heb. 4:15).

Muhammad does not begin to measure up to the Bible's standards for a prophet, much less is he worthy to be compared to Jesus. While there are some admirable things said about *Isa* in the Quran, he does not measure up to the glorious nature of Jesus Christ in the Bible. Muhammad sought to be exalted by man, but God exalted Jesus. Muhammad was undeniably wrong at every crucial point, including his implication that Jesus was confined to "the second level of heaven." The Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God (Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1)! In Philippians 2:9-11, Paul states: "Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." To Him be honor, praise, and glory forevermore.



ISLAM'S OPPOSITION TO THE CROSS

Adam Simnowitz
2017

Charles Doughty, the Englishman who traveled throughout parts of the Arabian Peninsula in the latter part of the eighteenth-century, gives the following account in his book *Arabia Deserta* under the subtitle, 'Fanaticism':

In an evening I had wandered to the oasis side: there a flock of the village children soon assembling with swords and bats followed my heels, hooting, 'Nasrany! Nasrany!' [Christian, Christian] and braving about the *kafir* [unbeliever, a non-Muslim] and cutting crosses in the sand before me, they spitefully denied them, shouting such a villanous [sic] carol, 'We have eaten rice with *halib* (milk) and have made water upon the *salib* (cross) [i.e. they urinated on the signs of the cross they had drawn in the sand].³

The behavior of these youths, though in a sense extreme, is consistent with the attitude that most Muslims have toward the cross. In multiple conversations with Muslims from varying backgrounds, I have experienced similar hostility. Some of my Christian friends from Muslim backgrounds regularly face threats from family and friends when sincerely defending their belief in the crucifixion. For those who regularly interact with

³ Charles Doughty, *Arabia Deserta*, vol. 1: 155-156.

Muslims, it is no secret that Islam exhibits overt contempt for the cross.

Muslim hostility toward the cross is rooted in the core Islamic belief that Jesus was not crucified. That position is primarily based on interpretations of the following quranic passage by their most authoritative commentators:

And for their saying, “We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah”—yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty—no indeed; Allah raised him up to Him; Allah is All-mighty, All-wise. (Sura 4:157-158)

For both major branches of Islam, Sunni and Shia, the standard interpretation of this passage can be summarized as follows: as Jesus was on His way to the cross, Allah supernaturally “lifted Him up to heaven” while simultaneously someone else was made to look like Jesus. The crowd then crucified the substituted person—thinking they were crucifying Jesus. Some Muslims suggest that the actual crucified person was Simon of Cyrene; others someone else. Most Muslims, however, believe the substitute was Judas Iscariot. The standard Muslim explanation for the “miraculous ascension” of Jesus is that Allah would not allow any of his prophets to die such an ignominious death. For Muslims, Jesus’ ascension to heaven, and *thus His avoidance of crucifixion*, was Allah’s way of honoring Him.

Opposition to the cross, which is at the same time a polemical attack against Jesus’ atoning death for sin and a denial of history, permeates the teachings and practices of Islam. The following two examples illustrate this concept.

First, in a saying attributed to Muhammad, Jesus will return to the earth during the last days. His first action will be to “break the cross”:

Allah’s Apostle said, “The Hour will not be established until the son [Jesus] of Mary descends amongst you as a just ruler, he will break the cross, kill the pigs, and abolish the *jizya* tax. Money will be in abundance so that nobody will accept it [as charitable gifts].” (Sahih Bukhari, Book 43, Number 656)

Second is the matter of precedent as set by the ill-named “Pact of Umar.” According to the Islamic narrative during the seventh century expansion of Islam, Umar, the third Muslim caliph, imposed on Christians precise conditions by which they were to abide under Islamic rule, including: “We shall not display our crosses or our books in the roads or markets of the Muslims.”⁴ Militant Islamic groups that include crucifixion as punishment for “Christian pact-breakers” cite this condition. On recent occasions, even otherwise “ordinary” Muslims—incited partially by provisions in the Pact of Umar—have destroyed crosses on church buildings and attacked those who wear them in public.

Muslim opposition to the cross is so strong that in spite of the fact that the Quran mentions Jesus’ death (Q 3:55; 5:117; 19:33), these passages are torturously interpreted in order to make them agree with the orthodox Islamic interpretation of Q 4:157-158. A few Muslim commentators have questioned this interpretation, but their views have done virtually nothing to change the minds of professing Muslims.

Jesus told us that we would know false prophets by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20). Wherever Islam goes, it produces in its adherent’s implacable opposition to the cross, a reflection of Satan’s opposition to the cross—as revealed in the Scriptures:

And He [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and

⁴ Jewish History Sourcebook: Islam and the Jews: The Pact of Umar, 9th Century CE, accessed May 2, 2023. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/jewish/jews-umar.asp>.

the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” (Mark 8:31-33)

From a human standpoint, what Peter said to Jesus was quite reasonable, even compassionate. Peter no doubt felt that Jesus was speaking of the most common form of capital punishment—crucifixion. Crucifixion is a cruel way for anyone to die. Crucifixion is meant to humiliate the person being crucified; thus, Peter might be seen as seeking to uphold Jesus’ honor. An important lesson we can recognize from this passage is that Satan opposed Jesus’ death on the cross.

The cross was the very reason why Jesus came (Matthew 20:28; John 12:23-33). Satan does not want people to be forgiven of their sin and reconciled to God. He is opposed to all that is good. His very name means “adversary” or “opponent” (Zechariah 3:1; 1 Peter 5:8).

As the ultimate thief, Satan’s only plan for humankind is to “kill, steal, and destroy.” Jesus’ plan, however, is to give us abundant life (John 10:10). Immediately after mentioning abundant life, Jesus spoke about His own death:

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ... For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. (John 10:11, 17)

The abundant life that Jesus gives, as opposed to the killing, stealing, and destruction of Satan, only comes through His voluntary death. In keeping with this theme, Jesus later stated that to die willingly for another is the greatest possible expression of love:

This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. (John 15:12-14)

As the sinless Lamb of God, Jesus fulfilled His own words by dying on the cross for the sin of the world (John 1:29). Jesus' death on the cross is God's greatest expression of love for humankind. The following passages state this:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:6-10)

It is one thing to willingly offer to die for another, but quite another thing to willingly offer up your one-of-a-kind son. Similarly, it is one thing to die for someone deserving of such sacrifice, but quite another thing to die for someone who is undeserving. Further, it is one thing to die for a friend or a stranger, but quite another thing to die for an enemy. At best,

human love, as powerful as it can be, is still limited. God's love, however, far surpasses even the best expressions of human love. Such love was displayed when Jesus died on the cross for our sins—unlimited, unconditional, and unfailing. The cross is indeed God's greatest expression of love for humankind.

If Jesus' death on the cross represents God's greatest expression of love for humankind, opposition to it constitutes Satan's greatest expression of hatred. To reject the cross is to reject the only way possible for sinners to be reconciled to God. Without Jesus' crucifixion, everyone would perish in sin—without hope of forgiveness. Acceptance by God and access to His presence would be impossible if Jesus, the eternal Son of God who became the Son of Man, had not died on the cross for the sins of the world.

The belief that Jesus did not die on the cross undermines the entire teaching of the Bible. Such a notion contradicts the following essential biblical truths, truths necessary to be saved from sin through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ:

- Prophecies in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah's death (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:12)
- Jesus' own teaching that His mission on earth was to fulfill Old Testament prophecies regarding His crucifixion (Matthew 16:21; 20:17-19; John 3:14-17; 8:28; 12:23-33), and
- God's plan of redemption being the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament sacrificial system for sin (Genesis 3:21; 22:1-19; Exodus 12; Leviticus 17:11; Zechariah 9:11).

Further, if Jesus did not die on the cross, then it follows that He did not rise from the dead! Once again, God's Word provides profound clarity about Christ's resurrection:

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:12-19)

There is no mystery as to who is animating the Islamic rejection of the cross. It is Satan himself, the father of lies and the source of murder (John 8:44).

In the aforementioned exchange between Jesus and Simon Peter, as recorded in Mark 8:31-33, Jesus forcefully rebuked Peter's suggestion that He should not be killed [crucified]. However, it is encouraging to see that after rebuking Peter, Jesus continued to disciple him. He did not remove Peter from being the leader of the apostles. Jesus did not expel Peter as a false disciple. Our Lord continued to love him by being patient with him and forgiving him. In principle, in this passage Jesus shows us how to deal with any circumstance that opposes the primary reason He came to the earth: to die on the cross for the sins of humanity. Jesus affirmed the importance of "setting our minds on God's interests, not man's." God's interest, obviously, was to offer His Son as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity, and that included the cross. Knowing that it would be an offence, Jesus offered nothing less than the truth, while exercising patience and lovingkindness toward the offended. In the case of Muslims, we understand that they continue to be offended by the cross. Nevertheless, unprecedented numbers

are being saved, but not one apart from acknowledging the essential truth of Jesus' death on the cross.

In conclusion, the cross to which Muslims are opposed is the only thing that can save them from their sins. Thus, even in the face of Islam's continuing opposition to the cross, we reaffirm our task as captured in Acts 26:17b-18:

I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me [Jesus].



IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS

Mark Brink
2019

Regarding Jesus, the typical Muslim will say, “Our holy book affirms his virgin birth, his prophethood, his power to work miracles, and his soon return.” This statement sounds like something every Christian could easily affirm. However, the reality is that in most Islamic contexts the best thing a Muslim could do—embrace Jesus as Savior—is seen by the Islamic community as *the worst thing* he or she could ever do. The topic of Jesus is one of the most theologically charged conversations you will have with Muslims, and yet it is the most important one. We must always be aware of the Islamic redefinition of the person and work of Christ. Our loving witness to Muslims must be firmly grounded in the biblical facts of Jesus’ incarnation and crucifixion.

Comparing the Quranic Isa with the Biblical Jesus

In reading the Muslim holy book, the Quran, you will discover that Jesus is called Isa. Eleven times the Quran refers to Isa as Messiah. Other Quranic titles for Isa are: servant or slave of Allah, a prophet for the Jews, a messenger (*rasul*) with a book (the *Injil*) from Allah, a spirit from Allah, and a sign to the people. As you interact with Muslims you will discover that the Quranic titles of Isa carry entirely different meanings than those of the Bible. There may be some superficial

commonalities, but ongoing investigation reveals irreconcilable differences. The Quran bears its own special message about Jesus—meant to correct, reinterpret, and replace the earlier biblical revelation. When sharing the good news of Jesus with Muslims, it is important to understand that the two most important irreconcilable differences about Jesus are His incarnation and crucifixion. Let's investigate the Isa of the Quran and the Jesus of the Bible.

The Quranic Isa Has a Special Birth— as a Creation of Allah

The Quran is filled with incomplete narratives, especially regarding Jesus' life, works, and purpose. While attempting to redefine the person and mission of Jesus, the Quran exalts the person and mission of Muhammad. Of the ninety-three places where the Quran speaks of Isa, the majority are references to his nativity. It is clear that the Quran wants to refute and reframe the former Scriptures (the Bible) regarding the incarnation.

The two main passages in the Quran that deal with the birth of Isa are Quran 3:33-49 and Quran 19:16-34. The Quran and Bible agree that an angel was sent to the Virgin Mary to announce the birth of a son. In the Quran, Mary is told to name her son "Isa al-Messiah." In the Bible, He is to be called "Jesus the Messiah." The Quranic Isa is merely a creation of Allah's power (Q 3:47) and a physical offspring of Mary (Q 19:35). The Quran mentions Isa as the "Son of Mary" twenty-three times—emphasizing his natural birth and deemphasizing his eternal existence.

Quranic Miracles Attributed to Isa

As a baby, Isa speaks from the cradle (Q 3:46)—obviously derived from apocryphal fables. In Quran 19:30-33, Isa again speaks from the cradle and claims to be a servant of Allah. The baby Isa goes on to claim that he was given a book (the *Injil*) and was appointed as a prophet. While yet an infant, Isa then creates a bird from clay and breathes life into it by Allah's

permission (Q 3:49). In adulthood, Isa heals the blind and lepers, and raises the dead (Q 3:49). Quran 2:87 states that the miracles attributed to Isa are clear proofs that he was sent as a sign from Allah to the people. It is important to note that Isa does these things by the “leave of Allah” (with Allah’s permission)—and only as a created being. Ironically, the famous Muslim commentator Yusuf Ali affirms Isa’s ability to do these things in the Quran but rejects similar accounts from the Bible. The redefined Isa of the Quran is a prophet with a unique birth narrative, a created being who is a slave of Allah, and a sign to the people. The Quran carefully, but clearly, denies the truth of the incarnation.

The Quran Denies the Death of Isa

For Christians, Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, became flesh in order that He might atone for the sins of mankind. Muslims consider it unthinkable that Allah would allow the revered prophet Isa to suffer the humiliation of dying on the cross. This helps Christians understand why the Quran configures a way for Isa to escape the cross. Before he could be crucified, Allah rescued Isa by “taking him up” (Q 3:55).

In Islamic theology, there is no need for the atonement. Everyone is born pure and when a person sins it is just a mistake. Man’s real sin is forgetfulness and forgetfulness is not considered “an egregious sin against Allah.” In Islam, there is no need or place for a substitutionary sacrifice for sin. In order to pay for his or her own sins, each person must fulfill Allah’s requirements, including doing enough good works. Quran 19:33 speaks of Isa referring to “the day I die,” and in Quran 4:157, the Jews boast that “we have killed Christ Jesus.” Nevertheless, the Quran emphatically states, “They killed him not nor crucified him. But so it was made to appear to them” (Q 4:157).

Various interpretations of Quran 4:157 include the following:

1. Allah caused the likeness of Isa to be upon another, whom they crucified. When they saw the dead man they said, “The face is the face of Isa but the body is not his body” (Al-Jalalain).
2. Allah told Isa he would take him to heaven. He said to his friends, “Who is ready to take my likeness upon him and be crucified and enter paradise?” One of them responded and Allah cast the likeness of Isa upon him and he was killed and crucified (Al-Baidawi).
3. The words, “It appeared so to them” mean they imagined it to be so, or they presumed that they killed and crucified him. But he is still alive because Allah took him to himself (Al-Zamakhshari).
4. He was on the cross, but then taken down from the cross alive, recovered, traveled to Asia, and died a natural death many years later in Kashmir (Ahmadiyya).

Keep in mind that in the early centuries, the Docetists, heretical Christians, disagreed with the truth of Scripture and taught that the Messiah could transform himself from one image to another. The Docetists said that when Jesus’ enemies came to arrest Him, He cast His likeness on to another man who was crucified instead of Him, but He himself was lifted up to the one who sent Him. They did not believe God would let the Messiah be crucified. A few Docetists lived in the Arabian Peninsula. There were suggestions that Simon of Cyrene, the widow of Nain’s son, or even the devil took Jesus’ place. The Gospel of Barnabas (a discredited fifteenth century document) tells of angels who rescued Jesus and cast His likeness on Judas.

Again, while Islamic interpretations of Quran 4:157 vary, all mainstream Muslim scholars agree that Isa was not divine and that he did not die on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The issue Muslims raise seems similar to that which troubled the Jews—it was too difficult to believe that God would allow the Messiah to die such a death. They refused to accept a suffering servant Messiah instead of a kingly Messiah ruling triumphantly. Yet several verses in the Quran clearly state that when messengers have been sent to people with an unwelcome message, some have been abused and even killed (Q 2:87; 3:183). So, what was different about Jesus? Jesus’ divinity and atoning death on the cross as a sacrifice for sin simply did not fit the Islamic theological framework; thus, Islam felt the need to “invent” a way to have Jesus evade the episode of crucifixion.

Sharing the Jesus of the Bible

In his book, *Jesus in the Quran*, Geoffrey Parrinder speaks of the Quranic description of Allah. He paints a vivid picture of how Muslims must live with a god who does not reveal himself. Instead, Muslims live with a mysterious, unknowable, and capricious deity:

As in no other book, the [Quran] portrays an absolutely overwhelming being who proclaims himself to a people that had not known him. Not even in the Old Testament do you have such an extreme omnipotence and transcendence. And in no other place is God revealed as so utterly inscrutable, so tremendous and so mysterious.⁵

What a contrast from the Bible where God creates man for fellowship, seeks man even when he sins, and offers redemption from his state of sin. From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, our loving Father is always seeking relationship with His creation. What a story we have to share with our Muslim friends! We have the wonderful privilege of telling

⁵ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Quran* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 1995).

them how Jesus is foretold in the Old Testament and is fully revealed in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ: Immanuel and the Lamb of God

So, where do you start in your attempt to share the Jesus of the Bible with Muslims? The two names that illustrate His incarnation and atonement are a good place to start. Jesus is Immanuel, the Almighty God who has come in the flesh. He is also the sinless Lamb of God, who alone takes away the sins of the world.

In *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, former Muslim, Nabeel Qureshi, tells of his struggle in understanding the biblical Jesus:

I could not believe it. It simply could not be true. Jesus could not be God. There had to be some other explanation, or else my family and everyone I loved was caught in a lie. If Jesus truly did claim to be God, then the Quran is wrong and Islam is a false religion⁶.

Qureshi had a Christian friend who faithfully read the Scriptures to him and patiently presented Jesus as the answer to all his questions. Slowly, but surely, the powerful light of the gospel opened Qureshi's mind and heart. He surrendered to Jesus as Immanuel and Lamb of God! I pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you to share the Jesus of the Scriptures with your Muslim friends.

⁶ Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).



BONES, STONES, AND THE HEARTS OF MEN: COMPILING THE QURAN

CMM Affiliate
2007

His fame as a novelist came attached with a hefty price tag. More accurately, his fame came manacled to virulent strains of fundamental Islam. Until 1988, Salman Rushdie, with his heavy-lidded pedestrian features, was an unlikely candidate for fame outside of literary circles. However, with the 1988 U.K. publication of *The Satanic Verses*, containing two controversial chapters relating to the Quran and Muhammad, Rushdie's name became a conduit of Islamic rage. The resulting tempest still resonates and served as a precursor to deadly Islamic riots in 2005-2006: the *Newsweek* Quranic desecration furor, the Danish cartoon violence, and the Pope Benedict uproar.

The Rushdie affair began with a series of ominous tremors. Stirred on by ranting exhortations from the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University, a succession of Muslim countries banned *The Satanic Verses*. By January of 1989, the tremors gave way to torrents of violence that spilled across the globe. The descent was dizzying:

- In England, public book-burnings were held.
- In Pakistan/India, dozens died in anti-Rushdie riots.
- All Muslim nations (excluding Turkey) outlawed the novel.

- Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini decreed the death penalty for all involved in the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.
- Rushdie was forced into hiding.
- In England/U.S., several bookstores were firebombed.
- The Japanese translator was assassinated—stabbed to death.
- The Italian translator and Norwegian publisher were both wounded in assassination attempts.
- In Turkey, 37 people died after riots over translation.
- In Iran, a \$2.8 million dollar bounty was issued for the death of Rushdie.

The response was staggering in its scope. *The Satanic Verses* had been the catalyst to a conflagration that could scarcely be comprehended. The affair was almost farcical, too preposterous for fiction. Rushdie had defiled the Quran, stumbling onto a stage from which there was no exit. The Muslim response was clear; the Quran would not be mocked or questioned. With two satirical chapters, Rushdie had ripped open a view into the brittle world of Quranic blasphemy.

Yet, for a book that elicits such passions, the origins of the Quran are often overlooked. The Quran has traditionally been free from genuine scholarly analysis, and remained remote from the unfettered flow of higher criticism aimed at the Bible. Critical examination of the Quran is usually done by lone scholars, and published in obscure journals, far from the gaze of mainstream academia. Even in the halls of Western universities, where religion is fodder for derision of all stripes, higher criticism of the Quran is rare.

The Historical Quran

The basic tenets of Islam profess that Muhammad received the Quran in increments from the angel Gabriel over a 22-year period, A.D. 610-632. These revelations were purported to be

the literal Word of God—absolute perfection. For Muslims, the Quran of today is the precise and exact transmission that Muhammad received through Gabriel, a facsimile of the uncreated, eternal, and heavenly original. In Islam, the Quran is a book for reverence and adoration—but not academic assessment.

But a question looms for the “lone scholar” and layman alike. Does the Quran have a history? This is not a disparaging question, but a genuine inquiry into how the written Quran was compiled, or codified, and how the oral transmissions of Gabriel were stamped onto the written page that Muslims read today.

Abu Bakr

In A.D. 632, at age 62, Muhammad died in Medina. His successor, the first caliph, Abu Bakr, quickly found himself in a precarious position. Muhammad had never compiled the recitations of the Quran or left instructions on how to do so. Over the wide expanse of twenty-two years, Muhammad had not been uniform in recording the Quranic revelations. Sometimes his companions memorized Muhammad’s recitations by heart and other times wrote them down on whatever physical objects were at hand. He left behind a fragmented Quran. It must be emphasized that these fragments, taken to be the unblemished, immutable, exact words of God, were literally written on flat stones, pieces of animal bone, sections of palm leaf—and the memories of men.

Oddly enough, the impetus for codification came through warfare. In the chaos following Muhammad’s death, several tribes had apostacized and renounced Islam in open rebellion, resulting in the Battle of Yamama in A.D. 632. During the fighting, hundreds of Muhammad’s contemporaries were killed. Many of the fallen were men who had committed sections of Quranic verse to memory and their loss was immense. Beyond the fog of battle, Abu Bakr recognized the

dilemma: the Quran could not find permanent shelter in the breasts of men.

Compelled by the necessity of the moment, Abu Bakr ordered Zaid Ibn Thabit, a renowned scholar and companion of Muhammad, to begin codification of the Quran into a single text. Zaid's task was monumental. The compilation was not a matter of sifting through the sources; there was no mother lode of sources in existence. With no well of material to draw from, Zaid conducted a widespread search for primary sources. He gleaned verses of memorization from men deemed credible, and collected physical scraps of verse from parchment, bits of leather, and camel bones. There should be no doubt that Zaid attempted to be diligent and thorough. There should also be no doubt that Zaid was laboring under the burden of an awkward predicament—he was vulnerable to subjectivity and intuition. By dire necessity, Zaid was forced into the role of Quranic arbiter and compelled to make decisions regarding inclusion. *Ultimately, there could be no absolute voice of affirmation or negation of Zaid's compilation—Muhammad was dead.*

Furthermore, Abu Bakr was aware that Zaid's completed manuscript or codex was not unique in existence. Other codices were being compiled in the burgeoning Muslim territories; different provinces were gathering different Qurans. Both he and Zaid were not positive their codex contained all of Muhammad's recitations. The finished version remained privately held, never published by Abu Bakr.

Uthman

In A.D. 644, twelve years after Muhammad's death, Uthman became the third caliph of Islam. The provinces had since grown even more ardent in venerating their own versions of the Quran. Provincial murmurings undermining the caliphate's authority were filtering to Uthman's ear.

Uthman responded with a masterstroke of religious and political action. His response was draconian—but highly effective. He ordered Zaid and a body of additional scholars to

revise Abu Bakr's codex, making any necessary omissions or additions. Uthman chose the Abu Bakr codex with purpose and forethought; it had remained out of the public eye and carried no provincial bias. For a second time, Zaid was tasked with the gravity of transmitting perfection to paper.

Uthman took the utmost measure to ensure uniformity of the new codex; *he decreed that all other codices and fragments be burned*. It must be emphasized that there is no historical indication that these manuscripts were heretical—they were variant. These were texts written by men who had known Muhammad, copies deemed authentic in their given provinces—*yet Uthman consigned the entire lot to the flames*. The harsh reality of Uthman's pyre remains closeted in the Islamic world, but its irony looms across time. If today, someone destroyed a physical object or a manuscript that had the mere possibility of a first-hand connection to Muhammad, the ensuing Islamic wrath would make the Rushdie affair seem tame.

Regardless of how Uthman's actions are viewed, he had succeeded in securing uniformity of text. Islam was no longer exposed to the frailties of memory. The new codex received official blessing, and between A.D. 650-656, copies were sent to the provinces. Abu Bakr's codex was the only manuscript to escape the flames (although it too was later burnt in A.D. 667). The Abu Bakr codex had evolved into Uthman's codex, which is today's Quran.

Conclusion

There is an impenetrable Quranic gulf between sentiment and fact. When highlighted, the stark details cast long shadows of doubt against the authenticity of Quranic codification. Pious yearnings cannot change a simple truth: the Quran does have a questionable history. Please pray Muslims will discover that the key to salvation is not found in the words of the Quran, but in Jesus Christ. Pray Muslims might earnestly call upon the name

of Jesus—for it is not the Quran, but Jesus who remains unblemished and uncreated.



JESUS IN ISLAMIC TRADITION AND SCRIPTURE

Harry Morin
2008

During the Crimean War in 1854, three doctors were summoned to treat a wounded military officer. His condition was utterly hopeless, but all three doctors knew that if this man died, their lives would not be spared. The setting was an Islamic country and all three doctors were Muslims. As the officer's life was quickly fading, the doctors could only hope for a miracle. In their desperation, they did something unusual. They earnestly prayed to Prophet Jesus vowing to become his followers if He answered their prayers. Miraculously, the officer survived, and all three doctors became followers of Jesus.

These doctors had never been approached by a Christian missionary, and had never attended a church. How did they know about the healing power of Jesus? You will be surprised to know that millions of Muslims already have heard about Jesus. Though Muslims revere Muhammad as superior to all other prophets, Jesus, nevertheless, is a prominent figure both in Islamic tradition and the sacred scriptures of Islam, the Quran.

Muslims believe God revealed the verses of the Quran in Arabic in the seventh century and since that time, have been reluctant to translate their scriptures into other languages, fearing any risk of distortion from the original meaning. No

Muslim dare mistranslate or distort what he believes to be the word of God. As a result, though Muslims have distributed Qurans all over the world over the centuries, the texts have been printed and read in the original Arabic. This is important to know because most Muslims live outside the Middle East — which means Arabic is not their mother tongue. Consequently, even though non-Arabic speaking Muslims learn to read the Quran, the emphasis is to only be able to pronounce the Arabic correctly, not understand its meaning. The Muslim priests are the ones responsible for revealing the teachings of the texts. This means that most Muslims really do not know for themselves what is in the Quran. All they know is what the Muslim scholars choose to tell them. But that is beginning to change. There is a growing trend in modern times to translate the Quran into local languages.

The traditions or *Hadith* are a different matter. They are mostly viewed as a collection of sayings and deeds of Islam's prophet. Thus, for centuries, Muslims have felt free to translate this material into local languages. As a result, Muslims worldwide can read their traditions with understanding, and in most cases, are more familiar with the content of the traditions than with the content of the Quran. And so, let's first examine some of the more common traditions that shape a Muslim's belief about Jesus.

Muslims believe God first sent Jesus to be a messenger only to the community of Israelites, not to the whole world. Muslims reserve the honor of "universal messenger" for Muhammad only. Furthermore, most Muslims believe God rescued Jesus from the humiliation of the cross by lifting him into the second level of heaven. But someday, he will return.

Thus, much of what Islamic tradition says about Jesus pertains to the Last Days. Muslims also believe in a resurrection and a judgment, and that the end time will be signaled by universal signs. One of them will be the reappearance on earth of Jesus who will engage in several important activities. First of all, he will descend from heaven upon a mosque in Damascus,

wearing two red garments, and supported by the wings of angels. He will lead Muslims in their prayer in the mosque. Then he will pursue the “False Messiah” (Ad-Dajjal Al-Masih). This false messiah will be a hideous monster of a man who will lead people astray from God by performing miracles, such as raising people from the dead. He will have the power to entice people with the miracles of rain and crops, and punish them with the scourge of drought and famine.

Jesus will ultimately overtake this false messiah and slay him with his spear. Then he will justly rule the world according to the law of the Quran. The *Hadith* says Jesus will destroy all the crosses to prove that the story of the crucifixion was a hoax and that God really saved Jesus from death. He will kill all the pigs so that people can no longer violate God’s command to abstain from pork. He will defeat the forces of Gog and Magog, barbarians from the steppes of Central Asia. He will marry and have children, live for forty-five years, die a natural death, and be buried next to Islam’s prophet, whose grave is in Medina, Saudi Arabia. Then Jesus will be raised with everyone else on the Day of Judgment, and will join all the other prophets lined up behind Islam’s prophet, Muhammad, who alone will have the privilege of interceding on behalf of his followers for God’s mercy.

This is the picture that Islamic tradition paints of Jesus the Messiah. Unfortunately, it is a false and terribly distorted picture, but it reflects what most Muslims know about Jesus. Furthermore, many Muslims think this is the Quranic version of Jesus. But unbeknown to most Muslims, the Quran conveys an entirely different picture. Although the Quran likewise fails to identify Jesus as Savior of the world in whose name alone there is forgiveness of sins, it does point to a far more prominent figure. Let us look at the following examples, which are preceded by their Quranic references:

- Quran 3:45; 4:172, and 39:75: Jesus is held in honor in the hereafter as he was in the world, and is in the

company of those nearest to God. According to the Quran, those nearest to God are the angels who encircle God's throne.

- Quran 4:158: God raised Jesus up to himself where He (God) is exalted in power and wisdom. Muslims believe heaven has seven levels and that God's throne sits above these levels. Remember, the traditions place Jesus in the second level, but the Quran places Jesus where God is, exalted above the heavens (Phil. 2:9).
- Quran 19:19: Jesus is a gift and a holy son (Luke 1:35 and Acts 3:14).
- Quran 19:20: Jesus is born of a virgin (Luke. 1:34).
- Quran 19:21: He is a universal sign from God (there is no mention here of "for the Israelite community only").
- Quran 19:21: He is a mercy from God for humankind (Luke 24:47).
- Quran 19:30: He is the Servant of God (Isa. 42:1).
- Quran 23:50: Mary's miracle birth of Jesus is a sign to all of humankind.
- Quran 43:61: Jesus is the sign of the Last Days (Mark 24:30).
- Quran 4:171: He is the Word of God (Rev. 19:13).
- Quran 4:171: He is a Spirit from God (1 Cor. 15:45).
- Quran 3:49 and 5:110: He has the power of miracles to open blind eyes, cure lepers, and raise the dead. These are the only references where the Quran mentions the ministry of healing and they are associated with Jesus (Matt. 4:23-24).

- Quran 3:49 and 5:110: Jesus even has the power to create.

These verses describe Jesus taking clay, fashioning it into the shape of a bird, and breathing into it whereby the bird of clay comes to life. Though this peculiar story can be traced to the traditions of the Early Church, what is of major importance is not the origin of the story, but the fact that the Quran attributes to Jesus creative power, something which Muslims ascribe only to deity. But that is not all. Elsewhere in the Quran is a passage describing God's creation of man (Q 15:28-29). In that description, God takes clay, fashions it into shape, and breathes into it the breath of life. Notice the three elements of this creation miracle of Almighty God: the clay, the fashioning of the clay, and the breathing into the clay the breath of life. These are the same three elements the Quran uses to describe the creation miracle of Jesus.

As you can see, the Quran has many significant things to say about Jesus. In fact, it even points to Jesus' divine nature by referring to him as God's Word and a Spirit from God. Of course, Islam's religious system is careful to keep these things hidden from the Muslim masses, and attempts to dilute Jesus' exalted status by injecting its own interpretations. Nevertheless, perhaps the most helpful passage among these selections is the one that speaks about the healing power of Jesus. Now you know how the three Muslim doctors knew about Jesus' ability to perform miracles. It was their recollection of this Quranic description that prompted them to invoke Jesus' name, and it was the miracle that led them to faith in Christ.

Remember the sermon of Peter on the Day of Pentecost: "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him" (Acts 2:27). Still today, God uses miracles to convince Muslims of Jesus' uniqueness and power. In many cases, when Muslims see a demonstration of power in the name of Jesus that heals the disease of the body, their faith expands to believe that Jesus also has the power to heal the disease of

the heart—the disease of sin. We do not know how this material about Jesus found its way into the Quran, the sacred scriptures of Islam.

We do know, however, that in regard to all people of all nations, God “has not left himself without testimony” (Acts 14:17). As increasing numbers of Muslim people become literate, and as more Qurans are translated into local languages, more and more Muslims will become attracted to him whom the Quran refers to as Al-Masih Isa ibnu Maryam (The Messiah Jesus, son of Mary). And who knows? Perhaps someday, through faith and prayer, you will be the one to personally lead a Muslim friend or neighbor from the Quranic picture of Jesus the healer to the biblical revelation of “Jesus the Savior” in whose name there is forgiveness of sins and eternal life!



RAMADAN: A TIME TO PONDER AND PRAY

Pastor Michael, a Muslim Background Believer⁷
2015

“It was the month of Ramadan and the time of *Tarabi*⁸ prayers,” says Rafique.⁹ “I had been fasting for more than three weeks and tonight was the special night called *Lailatul Qadr*,¹⁰ the night of a thousand nights to seek the special blessings of Allah. I was sitting lined up and ready to begin my prayers. I looked to see the *imam* who was going to lead the prayers that night, but found that none was in front. While I was in a trance-like state of consciousness, I wondered in my mind, ‘We are all ready for prayers, but where is the *imam* who will lead us?’”

“Someone from the crowd put his hand on my shoulder and said, ‘Look behind you.’ When I turned back to look I saw a bright white light shining which almost blinded me—and a figure with dazzling clothes spoke to me saying, ‘Rafique, I am Jesus, your leader, follow Me!’ As soon as I saw Him, I knew it was the Lord and that was the turning point in my life. I left it all and followed Him.”

⁷ Pastor Michael is a shepherd to many in a Muslim nation.

⁸ *Tarabi* or *Tarawi* refers to the special prayers performed during the 27th night of Ramadan.

⁹ Rafique is a pseudonym.

¹⁰ The 27th night of Ramadan, when Muslims believe the Quran, their holy book, was bestowed upon Muhammad.

I had the privilege of teaching and baptizing Rafique—and today he is a strong disciple of the Lord Jesus, still following Him. Like Rafique, there are millions of sincere Muslims who earnestly pray and seek the special favor and blessings of Allah during the month of Ramadan. The month of Ramadan bears high significance in the life of a Muslim. Fasting is one of the pillars of Islam, and Ramadan is the dedicated month set aside to bring cleanliness and nearness to God. All Muslims believe that their Holy Book was revealed to their prophet in this holy month. The Arabic word for fasting is *sawm*, which literally means to “abstain or refrain.” During Ramadan, a good practicing Muslim not only abstains from food and drink, but also from all thoughts of evil in words and deeds. Muslims believe Allah places high importance on fasting in this month. In the Islamic collections of the sayings of their prophet, Muhammad once quoted Allah as saying, “Allah, the Mighty and Exalted said, ‘Every action of the son of Adam is for himself except fasting, for that is solely for Me. I give the reward for it.’” Therefore, Muslims observe the month of Ramadan zealously and with religious fervency because they believe they are fasting for God and that He will reward their good deed.

In the month of Ramadan, Muslims become serious about their *iman* (faith) and seek Allah with the hope of forgiveness and cleansing of their sins. Not every Muslim observes the fast for the whole month. Some may fast for a few days at a time; others are exempt from fasting due to various health problems or other valid reasons.

My early memory, as a former Muslim who was dedicated to fasting at the early age of eight or nine, is how sincerely and religiously I fasted for the whole month of Ramadan. I faithfully prayed five times a day, then did special *Tarabi* prayers, which included recitation of the whole Quran within a period of twenty-seven days. I did not fully understand the true significance of this month, but did it because Allah would be pleased and reward me, and perhaps take me to heaven. I must

admit that a wonderful part of each day was rising up early before dawn as the whole family got together to eat special food to sustain us throughout the day. The time of breaking the fast at the end of each day was even better. We got to eat choice foods with friends and family, both in our home and through invitations to *iftar* (breaking of the fast) parties. We fulfilled God's requirement and equally managed to enjoy special times with friends and family.

In many predominantly Muslim nations, much of the normal activity and official work slows down during this month. Under the burden of fasting and the heat of the day, some may lose their tempers, and some wish to impress on others the fact that they are fasting. Others pretend to be good while eating behind shutters put on in different eateries. But I also recognize that within all the pretensions and religiosity, there is a form of devotion unleashed that is unparalleled by any other time of the Muslim year. Despite all the rituals, a serious quest for something more of God is sought after during this month. Muslims are sincere in desiring to seek the favor and merits of Allah.

The Church has a tendency to look down on many Muslims during these times and consider their Ramadan practices as a false front. But I would like to challenge the Church to look within and see how much of their year is spent in fasting, coupled with prayer. I believe the Church needs to seriously pray and seek the Lord in this month for themselves, as well as for all their Muslim friends and neighbors. I believe the Church has a special God-given role to live up to in this month of Ramadan.

Whatever reasons Muslims may have for fasting, and whatever our perception may be of their fasting, the month of Ramadan reminds us that there is a sincere, God-fearing group of Muslims who are earnestly seeking to find divine mercy, grace, and a hope for their eternity. We hear of so many testimonies from former Muslims that it was in the month of Ramadan that their spiritual journey towards Jesus began. Some

received dreams and revelations, while others read something in their own scriptures only to be confirmed from the authority of the Bible. It is all happening in this month.

Sometimes the Church is like Simon Peter who had resigned himself to the fact that Gentiles were not in God's plan of salvation. But when Peter was fasting and praying on the roof God gave him a special vision (Acts 10). God revealed to him that the Gentiles were very much a part of His plan of salvation. We must also remember that at the same time as God was preparing Peter, He was also providing a revelation to a Gentile named Cornelius. Cornelius was a devout and godly man without knowing the True God. While praying, God gave him a vision to send for Peter, and it was Peter who brought to him the powerful life-changing gospel of grace. God, in His mercy, had prepared both Peter to go—and Cornelius to receive—at about the same time.

God is gracious to Muslims. I see Cornelius as a type of a good Muslim, praying, fasting, giving alms to the poor during the month of Ramadan; then God, in His mercy, breaks through and reveals the straight way to Truth. Are the 'Simon Peters' in the Church ready to accept the invitation and do something for the salvation of Muslims during this time of Ramadan? If so, what can we do? How can we serve them in this month? How can we make this month a spiritually uplifting month, both for ourselves and our churches?

First of all, set aside designated days during the month for times of prayer and fasting. Pray that the Lord will give you a love and burden for Muslims. Pray for many Muslims like Rafique, that the Lord will give them a special vision, dream, or revelation. Millions of Muslims will line up for prayers during this month. Also, ask the Lord to put on your heart specific Muslim nations—for whom you can intercede.

Second, make some friends from among them. They are desperately in need of your relationship. Sharing the gospel with Muslims is best served within the realms of a vibrant relationship.

Third, respect their celebration at this time. Do not look down on them. Be sensitive to their traditions. It is in respecting them and what they believe that we build a bridge that will allow them to open themselves up to the truth that we have to offer.

Remember that Muslims derive their lineage from Ishmael; a name that means “God hears.” In Genesis 21:17 we read, “God heard the boy crying”—and God sent an angel to guide him. In Verse 19, we are reminded that God opened the eyes of his mother to see the provision of living water that God had made for Ishmael. I believe the children of Ishmael will be crying out to the Lord during Ramadan, seeking favor from God. As the Church prays for them, our loving God will hear their cry and send a word or revelation to them in answer to our prayers. God will open their eyes and let them see the provision that He has made for them through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Muslims address Allah as *Rahman-ur-Rahim* (the Merciful and Compassionate) in every prayer they pray throughout the month of Ramadan. I believe the Merciful God will bestow His undeserved grace and mercy on them. God loves Muslims and He is more interested in revealing the truth to them than we ever will be. It is our privilege to partner with Him in reaching out to the Children of Ishmael. Let us do our part!



BLESSINGS OF THE TRUE SACRIFICE **(EID UL-ADHA)**

Harry Morin
2014

On October 4, 2014, the North American community of Muslims will celebrate the most important holiday of the Islamic calendar, The Feast of Sacrifice. As more and more Christians begin to reach out to Muslims, they will meet up with this holiday. A conversation with a Muslim acquaintance about this holiday could sound like the following conversation between Peter and his Muslim friend, Azim.

[Peter] Hey, Azim. I saw on the Internet that Muslims all over the world are getting ready to sacrifice animals. What's that all about?

[Azim] It's just something that Muslims do.

[Peter] Well, tell me more. Please. I really want to know.

[Azim] It has to do with one of our special holidays, the Feast of Sacrifice. We call it *Eid-ul Adha* or *Eid-ul Kabir*, the Great Celebration.

[Peter] So why do you sacrifice animals?

[Azim] It is our tradition. We do this to remember the story of Prophet Ibrahim and the sacrifice. According to our teachings, God commanded Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son Ismail as a test of faith and submission. Prophet Ibrahim was ready to fully obey and just as he was about to slay his son, God stopped him and provided an animal sacrifice instead. We believe God sent down from heaven a pure white ram, and

Prophet Ibrahim sacrificed the ram instead of his son. And so every year, we perform a sacrifice to remember Prophet Abraham's surrender and God's provision.

[Peter] Hey! That's like the story of Abraham in the Bible, except that according to the Bible, it was Isaac, not Ishmael. And for us, this story of the sacrifice is extremely important. Do you mind if I tell you why?

[Azim] No, go ahead.

[Peter] Well, according to our beliefs, while Abraham was preparing for the sacrifice, his son asked, "Where's the animal for the sacrifice?" Then Abraham told him that God would provide it. All the time, Abraham was planning to sacrifice his son as God commanded. But then, just as Abraham was about to carry out his intention, God called out to him to stop, and when Abraham looked up, he saw a ram caught in the bushes. True enough, God had provided a sacrifice, and clearly it was a substitute sacrifice. However, the Bible reveals that this animal sacrifice was only a symbol or a picture of the one truly great sacrifice which God would later provide to ransom or to redeem the whole world.

[Azim] Peter, you lost me. What do you mean by a sacrifice to redeem the whole world?

[Peter] Azim, think for a moment. If the only thing God wanted to do in this story was test Abraham's faith, then why didn't God simply tell him to go home after he proved his faithfulness? Why did God still require him to perform a sacrifice?

[Azim] I don't know. I never thought of that before.

[Peter] Well, here's what we believe. God is reminding us through this story that because of universal sin, every one of us, every single human being, deserves to pay the penalty of unbearable death. But because God is merciful, He chose to redeem us. He chose to free us from having to make the payment. Azim, do you know what it means to ransom or to redeem something?

[Azim] No, not really.

[Peter] Well, it means to free it, but only by giving something in exchange as sufficient payment. God decided to free us from the payment of penalty for sin by providing in exchange the life of a substitute sacrifice. But because humankind is the most valuable of all God's creation, there is nothing within earthly creation of sufficient value to redeem us. Certainly, no four-footed beast would qualify, not even a pure ram! No, nothing from Earth would do. The provision of the redeeming sacrifice would have to come down from God above. For us, that means that this animal God provided for Abraham for sacrifice was only a symbol of a far greater sacrifice that God himself would one day send down from heaven—and that sacrifice would become known as the “Lamb of God.” It turns out that this Lamb of God was not any animal, but a holy person who was sent down to earth to redeem the world.

We believe that this special person was Jesus the Messiah, miraculously born of the Virgin Mary. That's why in the Bible, He is introduced as the one who came from above, and as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). And that's why Jesus said He did not come to earth to be served, but rather to serve and give His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

[Azim] But Peter, in Islam, the sacrifice must be slaughtered. The jugular vein must be slit to ensure the flow of blood and eventual death. And the slitting of the throat must be done carefully so the animal doesn't suffer.

[Peter] Azim, we also speak about the blood of the sacrifice. In fact, the Bible says that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). The Bible says, “It was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

You see, it was Jesus who was the real sacrifice, not the ram. Maybe that's why you have to slay the animal so that it doesn't suffer. Anyway, the knife that brought about the bloodshed for Jesus was the death penalty of the crucifixion. Just as God sent

the innocent ram to die in the place of Abraham's son, so God sent Jesus, the Lamb of God, to die in the place of the human race. And so, that's why, for us, Jesus and the cross are a special sign of God's mercy. And wherever there's God's mercy, there's God's forgiveness of sins.

This brings us to the best part of the story—the part about blessings. When Abraham proved his faithfulness, God made a promise. God promised Abraham that He would bless the people of the world through one of his descendants—a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And now we know who that is. He is Jesus the Messiah, and the blessings come through Him, the substitute sacrifice. He pays the penalty for sin and opens the door to the forgiveness of sins, which is the greatest blessing one could ever ask for because it leads to eternal life with God!

Thank you, Azim, for letting me share all of this with you. I hope you and your family get to enjoy your holiday. But most of all, I pray that someday you, too, will accept God's ultimate provision of ransom and that you get to experience the blessings of the heavenly sacrifice, the pure sacrifice—Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Application

You can see from this Christian-Muslim dialogue, Peter used this Muslim holiday as a bridge to speak about the greatest sacrifice of all, the Lamb of God. As Christians mingle with Muslims, they may find a similar opportunity. Unfortunately, when we engage in this conversation, we often get bogged down over the identity of Abraham's son, Isaac vs. Ishmael. It is not uncommon for such a discussion to lead to a heated argument and a broken relationship, which is unfortunate because there is something far more significant in this story that we don't want to lose—it's the idea of divine redemption or ransom by means of a sacrifice. This idea is even embedded in the account of Abraham and the sacrifice in the Quran.

There is only one passage in the Quran that relates this story, but it is a critical one. Here it is from Quran 37:101-108:

So We [Allah] gave him [Abraham] the good news of a boy ready to suffer and forbear. Then, when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him, he said, “O my son! I see in vision that I offer thee in sacrifice. Now see what is thy view!” (The son) said, “O my father! Do as thou art commanded; thou wilt find me, if Allah so wills, one practicing patience and constancy!” So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah) and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice), We called out to him, “O Abraham! Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!” Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. For this was obviously a trial. And *We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice.* And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times. (emphasis added)

Notice that the identity of the boy is not revealed. But this is not the time to raise the issue. Save it for another day. What we really want to focus on is verse 107 where Allah is quoted as saying, “We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice.” Truly the sacrifice God provided was momentous because it pointed to the blood of the Lamb of God, which speaks of the blessings of the sacrifice:

- Atonement (payment of penalty for sin): “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood” (Rom. 3:25).
- Forgiveness (of sins): “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28).
- Purification (spiritually clean): “...the blood of Jesus, His son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).
- Reconciliation (brought back into peaceful fellowship with God): “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were

far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13).

These blessings will lead to one of the greatest celebrations of all time—the assemblage of resurrected believers from every tongue and tribe, thronging around the throne of God rejoicing and crying out, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Rev. 5:13). What a spectacular celebration that will be! God has made everything ready; He has done His part. What remains is the personal invitation to our Muslim friends. That’s our part. As we share with them the story of Abraham and the Sacrifice, let us pray that they, too, will accept God’s provision of ransom and have their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb! May they truly embrace the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.



SAINTS AND SHRINES

Dale Fagerland
2007

Popular or folk religion always claims a connection, or even loyalty, to the orthodox position—the practitioners sensing no disparity in their deviance. Thus is the paradox of our Muslim friends who petition a “saint” to intercede with Allah on their behalf or on behalf of a deceased family member. Orthodox Islam teaches there is one God, and no mediator between God and man—no one can take another’s place. Yet, when we observe the behavior of ordinary Muslims around the world, we see that the actual practices are quite different than the advertised rituals. The human spirit longs for something more than ritual and dogma. The soul yearns for the supernatural—something greater than ourselves. Seeking the supernatural connection, millions of passionate believers flock to shrines across the Muslim world.

To the outside observer, the veneration of saints in the Muslim world is almost another religion entirely growing within the realm of its host—or in spite of it. Orthodox Islam is the religion of the mosque with its prescribed times of prayer, forms of worship, and fixed rituals. The *Sharia*, the fundamental legal system on which the whole of daily Islamic life is based, focuses on the worship of Allah to the exclusion of all other supposed deities, clearly defined articles of belief, and an ordained practice of liturgical observances that leaves

little room for individual spirituality or personal religious experience.

However, within the earliest days of Islamic expansion, this obvious vacuum led to the growth of a mystical movement that absorbed elements of the faiths it displaced. *Sufism*, the mystical world of Islam, grew initially as a spiritual search for unity with Allah who was considered, not so much as a divine lawgiver, as orthodox Muslims perceive him, but as the source of the soul's longing for relationship with ultimate reality.

In time, *sufism* swelled to a popular movement among the masses who sought to obtain blessings (*baraka*) from, and spiritual identification with, leaders who were perceived to have obtained a special endowment from Allah. This divine gift gave certain religious leaders mediatory powers to bless, guide, protect, and work miracles on behalf of their adherents. These are the “saints” of Islam of whom myriads are venerated in spite of orthodox protests that such honor is contrary to the worship of the sole and absolute Lord of the Universe, Allah himself.

Since a saint's powers do not end at death, the landscape of the Muslim world—especially in predominantly *shia* regions as well as Southern and Central Asia—is brimming with tombs of departed saints, which have become sacred shrines. Symbolically, the tomb, erected over the grave of the departed guide, becomes a shrine that resumes the role of bridge between heaven and earth.

Indian Subcontinent

Hundreds of holy graves dot the landscape of the Indian subcontinent, but Ajmer is the holy city of Indian Muslims, the burial place of an illustrious saint. Many Indian Muslims will visit Ajmer first, then Mecca—expressing, unintentionally perhaps, priorities in terms of religious devotion. Many tombs are decorated with glistening tiled façades and domes. Some have a “pool of blessing.” All the tombs are perceived as places of power by passionate believers. The desecration of a saint's grave is a reprehensible crime avenged by dreadful punishment.

Mecca and Medina

Shrines and physical places possessing *baraka* are taught in Quranic passages that elevate Mecca, the Kaaba containing the black stone, and Medina. The foremost shrine of Islam is the Kaaba at Mecca (al-Haram al-Makki al-Sharif). In Islam, this is the holiest spot on earth—the center of the universe. All mosques are aligned with the Kaaba, and Muslims prostrate in prayer facing toward the Kaaba. The whole of Islam can be seen as the spokes on a wheel radiating from the Kaaba.

The second of the great Islamic shrines is the Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. This mosque was founded by Muhammad in A.D. 622, and he is buried under its floor. Millions of pilgrims to Mecca journey to Medina as well, seeking spiritual blessings by praying near the grave of their prophet.

Iraq

Iraq is home to some of the holiest shrines in Shia Islam. Najaf contains the mausoleum of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad who was also the fourth caliph. Shia Muslims do not recognize the first three caliphs, so they consider Imam Ali the first “rightly guided” caliph.

Each day, countless Shia Muslims flock to Ali’s tomb to pay their respects, offer salutations, and pray to Allah seeking his intercession. Those who cannot afford the pilgrimage there are constantly praying to Allah for help in visiting the shrine of their beloved Ali. When someone goes on a pilgrimage to Najaf, they are requested to offer salutations on behalf of family and friends to pray for a particular favor and to seek Imam Ali’s intercession. A famous prayer, known as “Nadey Ali” [Call Ali], is often recited.

Islamic tradition claims the tomb of Ali also holds the grave of Prophet Adam, the first prophet and man on earth, and the grave of Prophet Nuh (Noah).

Passionate pilgrims believe there is great material benefit and immense spiritual reward in visiting the grave of Imam

Hussein—third *caliph* or *imam* for the Shia—located in Karbala, 50 miles south of Baghdad. The Imam Hussein shrine and the adjacent shrine to his brother, Abbas, are the holiest Shia sites of Iraq.

Some 7 million to 8 million Shia Muslims perform al-Haj rituals to Karbala every year to commemorate the anniversary of Imam al-Hussein’s assassination, a pilgrimage outlawed by Saddam Hussein for 30 years. They parade, sing, and beat themselves until dripping with blood to identify with the suffering and martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad fourteen centuries ago.

Many other countries have a saint who serves as the national patron, or one of several national patrons—Mulay Idris I in Morocco and Abu Madyan in Algeria. From an Arabic word, the French created the name “*marabout*” for the cult of saints in North and West Africa. The marabout is sought after for healing, guidance, and intercession.

Opposition

The Wahabis, a super-strict orthodox sect, which originated in Saudi Arabia, categorically deny the idea of saints in Islam on the grounds that it infringes on *tawhid*, rigid Islamic monotheism—the Oneness or Uniqueness of God. The Wahabi position: If one ascribes knowledge to the soothsayer and trusts him as bestowing divine guidance, that person is guilty of *shirk*, the unpardonable sin in Islam. *Shirk* is associating anything or anyone with God. *Shirk* is idolatry, ascribing plurality to the Deity—a sin that God will never forgive.

Humans are naturally religious. Ecclesiastes says that God has put the thought of eternity upon man’s heart. But human nature cannot survive on legalistic duties and intellectual disciplines alone. The human spirit yearns to experience God at the level of the heart. We witness our Muslim friends searching for more than orthodox religion provides.

Visiting the shrine of a saint will produce no more lasting satisfaction than seeking to drink from a broken cistern that

cannot hold water. If you have drunk from the Spring of Living Water, will you share your experience with a thirsty pilgrim?



A SHIA MUSLIM FINDS TRUE BARAKA

David F. Arzouni
2007

I was about twelve years old when I first saw the saint whom the Murids of Senegal call master, savior, and even god. I was just a city block away from our house, on my way to school, when out of nowhere, a crowd of Muslims rushed toward the Murid mosque nearby. I learned later that word had gotten out that the spiritual leader of the Murid Muslims had unexpectedly come there for prayer.

Within minutes I witnessed a scene that is nearly as vivid in my mind today as it was then. Amidst shouting and shoving, people pushed past me; some even leaped over me in their attempt to get closer to an old man being hurriedly escorted to a waiting car. Everyone seemed to desperately want to touch him. Many others threw themselves down to kiss the ground he had walked upon. Others fought to pick up what they deemed to be holy sand under his feet.

Though I had never seen anything quite this extraordinary before, I needed no explanation. I knew that these men were seeking *baraka*. Islam encompasses the notions of blessing, power, grace, protection, favor, and anointing into the single concept of *baraka*. To these Muslims in Senegal, members of the *Qadiriya Sufi* order (Islamic mystics), direct contact with their spiritual leaders is the highest form of *baraka*.

In my family, *baraka* matters a lot. However, as Shia Muslims, we seek it differently. We have no living saint to

venerate, no dust to eat. Rather, we seek blessing and protection by reciting special Quranic verses or by wearing a white thread on our wrists. Even as a child, my father taught us that the *Muriddiya* form of Islam, especially the worship of a man as if he were God, was wrong.

“True Islam,” my father said, “looks only to Allah for help.”

It was not until much later that I understood that all Muslims of all sects and backgrounds sought help in many ways that are not approved by orthodox Islam. *Baraka* as “blessing” is needed to succeed in various enterprises. Sometimes the seeking of *baraka* is used in my family as an excuse for some sort of divination. My father often asked my stepmother to perform *istikhâra*, the practice of randomly opening the Quran and interpreting the contents to indicate whether Dad should undertake a journey or engage in a particular activity that week.

Baraka as “protection” is needed to offset the effects of various kinds of evil. Muslims teach that in the first month of the Islamic year not only does God decree what is to happen to men in the course of the year, but that it is also a time of great agitation in the unseen world among devils and *jinn* (spirit beings). So there was hardly a Shia Muslim family in my hometown that did not encourage their children to tie on their right wrist a white thread over which special prayers had been said for protection.

All kinds of fears permeated our lives as Muslims. Beyond the formal aspects of our religion, we practiced many things that stemmed more from personal needs and our view of the world than from our orthodox Islamic traditions. Even though we professed trust in Allah and his mercy, in reality no one could be sure that he was on our side. We could only hope that he would grant us favor.

There is nothing in the tenets of “true Islam” that is conducive to total trust in God, because Allah can decree good or evil for man at any time. Yet because we longed for real solutions to real life problems, we naturally seized upon every

opportunity to alter our divinely-set fate by any means. Paradoxically, we would do so in Allah's name.

Should the teaching of the Quran or the Hadith (the approved written Islamic tradition) suggest even implicitly that *baraka* could be obtained in a certain way, then Muslims are quick to use it—often twisting whatever is said in those teachings to justify all kinds of practices that are essentially animistic.

In our home, when each of my eleven siblings were infants, we slept on a pillow to which was attached an amulet containing special verses of the Quran. This was done to ward off what is commonly called the “evil eye” among Muslims.

One of my sisters refused to step outside of the house at certain hours of the day because of the strong possibility of being harmed by evil *jinn*.

None of these “helps” would be fully approved by orthodox Islam, but neither would objections be raised about them in most instances.

All of these practices expose the presence of some enduring felt needs of the Muslim heart. What is one to do when confronted with the crises of life? Why are one's prayers not answered? Why does Allah seem so far away, even though Muslim teachers proclaim that he is closer to man than his jugular vein? What if trouble is really brought on by the secret curses of one's enemy?

The sad fact is, Islamic *baraka* is illusive and short lived. The issues and struggles of the average Muslim are never resolved by these practices. The fears, the longing for a good conscience, the thirst for a lasting peace, the silent cry for real help in time of need—none of these can be appeased by adherence to orthodox Islam.

Neither do these things deliver a person from evil or heal a person's body and soul. If that were so, Muslims would not constantly return to *baraka* peddlers and special practices in times of crisis.

If a Muslim believer becomes aware of this, if the futility of it all finally dawns ever so slightly in his mind, it saps him of all hope and causes decay in his soul.

That is what happened to me. It led me to question everything. And it drove me to an unexplainable despair. Then came the day when someone told me that I needed to be born-again. It was only when that occurred that I found deliverance and a lasting peace with God, through the gospel of Christ. Now, so have two of my brothers and two of my sisters.

But who will tell the struggling multitudes of Muslims that the answer they are seeking is found only in Christ?

Who will take the time to *know* them and talk *with* them—not *to* them—about their needs and fears?

Who will tell them where true *baraka* is found?

Will you?



THE DEAFENING SILENCE: HONOR KILLINGS

CMM Affiliate
2008

Damascus, Syria, 2007—As 16-year old, Zahra Ezzo lay sleeping on a cold January morning, her brother, Fayyез, was making his way toward her apartment, driven by the most heinous intent. Using a stolen key, he slipped through her doorway around dawn, a knife at his side. Fayyез then crouched or knelt beside his sister, drew the blade, and stabbed her—five vicious thrusts to her head and back. Immediately exiting the house, he walked directly to the nearest police station, turned himself in, and brazenly announced his actions with a full confession.

Fayyез, acting by proxy for his extended family, had murdered his sister because of a “sexual incident” one year earlier. Zahra had shamed the family honor and sullied the family name, and this most tarnishing stain required an extreme atonement—Zahra’s blood.

Compounding the tragedy, the circumstances of the “sexual incident” for which Zahra was murdered added the cruelest, pathetic irony to her young life—she had been a rape victim. Through no fault of her own, Zahra Ezzo had become a living symbol of shame to her family and paid with her life.

Unfortunately, there is nothing unique in Zahra’s story. It’s an oft-hidden truth in Islamic societies: Honor killings and honor-related violence are not isolated in time or place. It must

be stated that honor killings are not condoned or sanctioned by the Quran or Hadith (traditional sayings of Muhammad). Yet, from its inception, Islam fostered oppression of women; and this legacy lends itself to gross violations. The West has responded to the subordination of Muslim women with deafening silence. Thousands of universities in both Europe and the United States are saturated with women's studies programs, with subject areas on almost every gender focus conceivable. However, conspicuously missing is a program on the subjugation of women in Islam. In addition, the reaction from Western feminist groups is remarkably mild. Still, the Western media, albeit slowly, is beginning to note the incongruities between words and practice about gender in Islamic societies. Recent studies from across the ideological and political spectrums are exposing the magnitude of the plight.

- The United Nations Population Fund reports 5,000 honor killings per year worldwide, with the vast majority in Muslim countries.
- In France, the High Council of Integration, a government-funded organization, estimates 70,000 French-Muslim women live under some sort of repression or denial of rights, often in forced marriages.
- The World Health Organization estimates 140,000,000 Muslim girls across the globe have undergone female circumcision.
- UNICEF reports over 50 percent of females in Afghanistan and Bangladesh are married before the age of 18.
- In the United Kingdom, the Association of Police Officers released official data showing 17,000 British-Muslim women per year are subjected to honor violence. The report came with a numbing caveat—the

unreported incidents of honor violence may be up to 35 times higher than official figures.

As bleak as the numbers are, they are only symptomatic of a far greater malady. Most data is drawn from Muslims living in the West. Statistics from Muslim countries remain elusive and the overwhelming majority of honor crimes against women go unreported.

While the West responds to the shocking numbers by organizing focus groups, creating dialogue panels, hosting conferences on cultural mores, or consigning blame to tribalism and societal pressure—the roots of Islam are entirely ignored.

Granted, Islam developed out of a tribal desert culture, and the culture brought with it a body of repressive taboos and traditions regarding women. But with the advent of subsequent Islamic literature, the ill-treatment of women was codified or at the very least, sanctioned, in the Quran, Hadith, and Sira (biographies of Muhammad). These texts, merged in the example set forth in Muhammad's life, became the foundation by which women would be relegated to secondary status.

The Hadith offer a startling indication of the position of women in Islam. Bukhari (considered to be the most reliable collection of Hadith) offers repeated instances of Muhammad's denigration of women, giving details such as why the majority of hell's inhabitants will be women, and passages describing the low intelligence of females. The other Hadith collections are replete with further references to women's inferiority, even more derogatory than Bukhari.

The Sira also paint a dismal picture, abounding with details about Muhammad's polygamy, particularly his marriage to Aisha. The vast majority of Islamic scholars concede that Muhammad's marriage to Aisha was consummated before she had reached her teens. (It was no accident of history, when in 1979, following the Iranian Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini relied on Islamic precedent and lowered the legal age of

marriage for females to nine. At age 28, Khomeini himself had married a 10-year old.)

But even if one dismisses the Hadith as unreliable, or puts no credence in the Sira, one is left staring at the Islamic colossus, the Quran. The Quran contains many verses with stark pronouncements about women:

- Sura 2:223: Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when or how ye will; but do some good act for your souls beforehand; and fear Allah. And know that ye are to meet Him (in the Hereafter), and give (these) good tidings to those who believe.
- Sura 2:282: O ye who believe! When ye deal with each other, in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing. ... If the party liable is mentally deficient, or weak, or unable Himself to dictate, Let his guardian dictate faithfully, and get two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as ye choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her.
- Sura 4:3: If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.
- Sura 4:11: Allah (thus) directs you as regards your Children's (Inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females: if only daughters, two or more, their share is two-thirds of the inheritance; if only one, her share is a half.
- Sura 4:34: Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more

(strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).

The Quran also boldly sets up Muhammad as the standard of behavior to emulate, referring to him as *uswa-hasana* (an excellent model of conduct):

- Sura 33:21: Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah.
- Sura 68:4: And thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character.

When laid bare, the Quran swallows up the arguments of Islamic apologists like a river over a rock. The oppression of women is engendered by the inferior status ascribed to women in Islamic theology, and that theology is anchored in the Quran.

It would be simple to continue referencing Quranic verses, listing sections of Hadith, detailing portions of Sira, or citing examples of *Sharia* law. However, that is quite often the path of Islamic scholars who take advantage of Islam's textual duality to tickle a skeptic's ear. The simple truth: Islamic texts offer two angles on most everything. Contradictions range from the Meccan/Medinan revelations, to the religious/political facet, to Muhammad as fighter/preacher, and even to the when/where complications of abrogation. When confronted by legitimate questions over the restrictions imposed by Islam, Muslim apologists often cloak denials in a barrage of verses

that—to the uninitiated—transform Muhammad into a champion of gender equality.

One can argue that the myriad pieces of the Islamic culture of repression can belong to any religion, but no amount of semantic-sidestepping can change the fact that Muslim women across the globe—Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iran, and even within cloistered enclaves in Europe—daily face abuse if they dare to step from the scripted role of submission mandated by Islam.

The tragic cases that periodically make the Western news (honor killings, forced marriages, and female circumcision) are not anomalies. There is a primal grain of humanity that runs contrary to these crimes, and should burn the conscience of every Christian. This article has a sole purpose: to draw attention to the difficulties faced by women in Islamic societies and, in doing so, to implore Christians to pray earnestly for Muslim women, both for protection and salvation.

Please pray fervently for the safety of Muslim women. Please pray they would have opportunity to hear the truth of Jesus Christ. Most of all, please pray they would find ultimate freedom in accepting Him as their Lord and Savior.



THE ROOTS OF MILITANT ISLAM

Fred Farrokh
2016

Militant Islam has been increasingly on the march for several decades. Their strange sounding names have become commonplace: ISIS, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Hamas, al-Shabaab, Ansar al-Sharia, Jihad al-Islamiyya, Hizbollah, and the Taliban. By listening to and watching Western media, one is left confused and unable to explain these current events: Are these terrorists lone wolves?¹¹ Are they just plain crazy? Do they represent Muslims at large? Do they follow the teachings of Muhammad? Are they fighting because of economic or political injustice? Where will all of this lead? In this article, I seek to tackle some of these questions by looking into the roots of militant Islam.

Hindrances to Understanding Militant Islam

The Western media and educational establishment provide a significant obstacle to correctly understanding militant Islam. This establishment is based on secular humanism, which sees Christianity as its primary ideological enemy. In the worldview

¹¹ Alexander Smith, "How ISIS Capitalizes on Lone Wolves to Spread Terror 'At No Cost,'" NBC News, posted May 5, 2015, accessed May 9, 2023, [nbcnews.com/news/us-news/how-isis-uses-twitter-lonewolves-carry-out-attacks-free-n353996](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/how-isis-uses-twitter-lonewolves-carry-out-attacks-free-n353996).

of secularism, all religions are essentially the same—crutches for the unenlightened and “an opiate for the masses,” as Karl Marx famously claimed. The mainstream Western media realizes that militant Islam, thus, shares a strange alliance with a common foe—Christianity. Therefore, people in America and Europe are receiving biased and unhelpful explanations about Islam, in general, and militant Islam, in particular, based on a worldview Western secularists dearly want to be true. This same worldview has greatly influenced Western political leadership, which now is ill-equipped to face the threat of militant Islam.

Not all Muslims are Militant

Though the rest of this article will discuss the roots of militant Islam, it is important to note at the outset that Islamic militants do not represent all Muslims. Many Muslims are nominal, hardly practicing their faith. Some Muslims prefer to live in Christian countries, which tend to offer a better standard of living and more freedoms. Still other Muslims are pious and observant but reject militancy. Sufis, for instance, are Islamic mystics who have a more allegorical way of interpreting their sacred texts than their militant co-religionists. In summary, many Muslims are friendly, hospitable, open-minded, and desire quality relationships with their Christian friends and neighbors. All Muslims need the gospel, whether they are militants or not.

Why the Past is the Key to Understanding the Present

Understanding contemporary militant Islam—at least at a basic level—is much simpler than many may think. The key to understanding Islamic militancy, *jihad*, and terrorism is to look back at the genesis of Islam, to the life and teachings of Muhammad. Muhammad’s life example and teachings serve both as an inspiration for the militants, as well as the justification for their actions.

Muhammad's View of Jesus: "Errorism"

"Errorism" is not a word you will find in the dictionary. I use it here because it represents the spiritual error and false teachings of Muhammad regarding Jesus—errorism that precedes terrorism. Muhammad lived from A.D. 570 to 632. He knew Christians worshipped Jesus Christ and they believed He died on the cross for the sins of humanity. Jesus Christ is mentioned many times in the Quran, which is the holy book of Muslims.

Nevertheless, Muhammad rejected the biblical Jesus. He cleverly presented a caricature of Jesus. The quranic Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, was considered a prophet, and did miracles. Yet the quranic Jesus was not God in the flesh (Q 112:3), he was not the Eternal Son (Q 4:171; 9:30), and he did not die on the cross (Q 4:157-158). Muhammad taught that in the last days Jesus will return to earth, break the sign of the cross, kill pigs, and lead Muslims in Islamic prayers (Sahih Bukhari, Volume 4, Book 55, Hadith 657). Then this Islamic Jesus will lead *jihad* (holy struggle/war) against infidels, get married, die, and be buried next to Muhammad in Medina, Saudi Arabia. In short, Muhammad converted the Lord Jesus Christ into a devoted, militant Muslim who serves the prophet of Islam and his militant agenda.

Muhammad rejected the Prince of Peace, so it is not surprising he became a man of war. As Christians we understand that "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Sadly, Muhammad did not experience this peace with God. In fact, Muhammad set up a theological system based on salvation by works (Q 101:6-11). In all these things, Muhammad missed God's plan of righteousness and sought to establish his own.

Jihad in the Cause of Allah

Muhammad was an overcomer. He was orphaned as a young boy, his parents dying by the time he was six years old. At 40, he felt the Angel Gabriel spoke to him, and he began to

preach a message which he called “Islam.” Muhammad emphasized strict monotheism. Since his kinsmen were polytheists, they mocked and rejected him. But Muhammad again persevered and eked out a small but growing following of disciples who were called “Muslims.”

Due to persecution in Mecca, Muhammad and the Muslim community emigrated to Medina in A.D. 622, in a key event known as the *Hijra*. Medina was an oasis populated by farmers. But the Meccan Muslims who emigrated to Medina were traders who were not familiar with agriculture. In considering how the Muslims would support themselves, Muhammad and his followers decided to utilize the well-accepted Arab practice of the desert raid, or *razzia*, in which one tribe would raid the caravans of another, stealing their goods.

Within a year of the *Hijra*, Muslims began raiding caravans of the Meccans who rejected Muhammad. Muhammad’s uncle led the first raid, which was a successful heist. Muhammad himself led three of the subsequent raids against the Meccans. Of course, blood was shed. The Meccans, realizing their way of business was in jeopardy, sent a fighting force to Medina, which the Muslims defeated in March A.D. 624 at the Battle of Badr.

The Muslims took Meccan prisoners at Badr. Muhammad’s lieutenant, Umar (who became the second caliph), wanted to kill them all. But Muhammad, knowing the Muslims needed money, allowed many of the POWs to be ransomed by wealthy relatives. However, two learned men who had previously ridiculed Muhammad were shown no mercy. Muhammad ordered them beheaded. One pleaded with Muhammad, “Who will look after my young sons?” Muhammad famously replied, “Hell!”¹²

In his decade at Medina, Muhammad transformed and sanctified the Arabian practice of the desert raid into *jihad* or “holy struggle.” Muhammad’s biographer W. M. Watt states: “The normal Arab practice of the *razzia* was taken over by the

¹² Maxine Rodinson, *Muhammad*. Translated by Anne Carter (NY: Pantheon Books, 1971), 167.

Islamic community. In being taken over, it was transformed. It became an activity of believers against unbelievers, and wherefore took place within a religious context. The Emigrants were described as ‘striving with goods and persons in the way of God.’”¹³

The Quran teaches Muhammad is the life example for all Muslims (Q 33:21). Muhammad practiced what he preached, giving many teachings on *jihad* and terrorism. Space permits room only for a few. The prophet of Islam stated: “The example of a *Mujahid* [holy warrior] in Allah’s Cause is like a person who fasts and prays continuously. Allah guarantees that He will admit the *Mujahid* in His Cause into Paradise if he is killed” (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4, Book 52, Hadith 46). Another teaching of Muhammad declares: “A single endeavor (of fighting) in Allah’s Cause in the forenoon or in the afternoon is better than the world and whatever is in it” (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4, Book 52, Hadith 50). These are the same statements cited by jihadists today.

Terrorism

The prospect of raids and death terrorized Muhammad’s opponents. He claimed, “I have been made victorious through terror cast in the hearts of the unbelievers” (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4, Book 52, Hadith 220). It is no surprise, then, when disciples of Muhammad today seek to emulate Muhammad by terrorizing unbelievers. They seek to intimidate so they can ultimately defeat and control. The rules of warfare practiced by Western nations were greatly impacted by Christian ethics, hence their rules regarding mandatory uniforms, and safeguarding non-combatant civilians and POWs. Yet, militant Muslims employ an “ends justify the means” policy. If burning POWs in cages or raping civilian women terrorizes opponents and weakens the

¹³ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 108.

will to fight, groups like ISIS see no ethical dilemma in employing these tactics.

In the first 50 years of Islam, all significant Muslim leaders were also militants. The first caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, and Muawiya all used the sword to spread Islam. Within a few generations, they forcefully conquered all of the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, and parts of Europe.

Contemporary Islamic Militancy

The goal of the militant Muslims of today is the same goal set out by Muhammad: Islamic world domination. Quran 9:29 states: “Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture— [fight] until they give the *jizyah* [religious tax] willingly while they are humbled.”

Fourteen centuries have passed since Muhammad’s time. The past half century has witnessed a strong resurgence of militant Islam, based on the Quran, and the example of Muhammad. This worldview has been supported and promoted by many Sunni and Shia scholars. Perhaps the most influential Sunni scholar has been Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian who was hanged by his government in 1966. Qutb was a great influence on Osama bin Laden, and on bin Laden’s successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, as well as many other contemporary jihadists.

Qutb pointed Muslims to the example of Muhammad and early Islam. He wrote: “At one time this Message [Islam] created a generation—the generation of the Companions of the Prophet—without comparison in the history of Islam, even in the entire history of man. ... The spring from which the Companions of the Prophet—peace be on him—drank was the Quran—only the Quran And the Hadith [authentic sayings] of

the Prophet and his teachings were offspring of this fountainhead.”¹⁴

Qutb also stated that early Muslim caliphs practiced offensive warfare against infidels, not just defensive warfare. This is required to bring about the goal of Islamic world domination. He chastises pacifistic Muslims as ignorant (*jahili*) defeatists. In his famous work, *Milestones Along the Way*, in Chapter 4, “Jihad in the Cause of Allah,” Qutb calls for the overthrow of all earthly governments that deprive humanity of the right to live under the Law of God as given by Muhammad.¹⁵

Though the *jihadist* perspective is not the only valid interpretation of Islam, it is on the rise today. Militants seek to overthrow infidel governments and bring them into the *Dar al-Islam* (“Abode of Islam”). Even attacks by lone wolves are part of a larger plan for Islamic world domination, not a protest against perceived injustices.

Let Muslims See the Real Jesus

The silver lining in the resurgence of militant Islam is that many Muslims are becoming disillusioned with Islam. More Muslims are open now to the gospel than ever before. A recent global survey estimates 9 million Muslims have come to faith in Jesus in this generation!¹⁶ Revivals are breaking out in many Muslim countries and communities. Part of this is due to the revulsion caused by militant Islam. One Christian minister among Muslim reports:

A few weeks ago I received an email from one of my students. She’s working among Muslim women and had just

¹⁴ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones Along the Way*, English translation: www.kalamullah.com/Books/Milestones%20Special%20Edition.pdf, 29, accessed April 25, 2023.

¹⁵ Qutb, *Milestones Along the Way*, 63-98.

¹⁶ Patrick Johnstone and Duane A. Miller, “Believers in Christ from a Muslim Background: A Global Census,” in *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, vol. 11, Article 10, 2015.

gotten off the phone with one of her friends who was weeping uncontrollably. My student initially assumed someone in her family had died. However, once my student's friend regained her composure she made a startling statement: 'I have been a Muslim for 41 years and in all that time have never questioned Islam. But now I have decided to leave it.' When my student asked her, 'Why?' she related that she had been watching ISIS videos, and, because of the brutality that they justified as being the 'methods of the Prophet,' she decided to leave Islam.¹⁷

Muhammad and his early followers were characterized by militancy. Compare this with Jesus, who led no army. When Peter sought to defend Jesus by the sword, Jesus rebuked him. Jesus' apostles went into the world to preach the gospel, armed only with the love of God. Let us follow the example of Jesus and His disciples by taking the gospel of peace to the end of the world. May this message touch many Muslim lives, including those of militant Muslims, who trade the covenant of Muhammad for the new covenant of our Lord Jesus Christ. The days of spiritual harvest are upon us!

¹⁷ David Cashin, "How is ISIS Spreading the Gospel?" accessed April 25, 2023, www.commanetwork.com/how-is-isis-spreading-the-gospel.



UNDERSTANDING ISIS

Jim Bennett
2015

In mid-2014, ISIS was rampaging through parts of Syria and Iraq, leaving in its wake beheadings, rapes, and murders, all under a black and white flag bearing the words in Arabic script, “There is no deity except Allah and Muhammad is his messenger.” A panicked Saudi Arabia reissued a call of desperation to the West for help in slaying the beast. It was too little too late, and as the saying goes, “The rest is history.” This article looks at the problem from the strategic sectarian viewpoint of Sunni Islam versus Shia Islam.

From Whence the Monster?

For months during 2014, the acronyms ISIS, ISIL, and IS dominated media headlines. Sunni Muslim opposition groups in Syria have fought since 2011 to topple the Shia Alawite president, Bashar al-Assad. An increasing number of foreign Islamic *mujahideen* (“freedom” fighters), many with experience from previous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, infiltrated insurgent ranks. In early 2014, a hybrid mix of insurgents took the name Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS. With growing geographic ambitions, ISIS became ISIL—Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Finally, with rabid religious fervor and stunning territorial gains, ISIL morphed

simply to IS, [the] Islamic State.¹⁸ In mid-2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared IS to be the new Islamic caliphate (line of succession) and himself the new caliph (successor). At this writing, the full-fledged ISIS monster has occupied large parts of Syria and Iraq, murdering, confiscating property, displacing Christians and others, even Muslims, while installing the severest form of *Sharia* (Islamic law) in each conquered place.

The Real Context

The Islamic world of 1.6 billion is composed of two main branches: 90 percent Sunnis and roughly 10 percent Shias. When Muhammad died in A.D. 632, at the age of 62, he had not designated a successor. Most of his followers (later to be called Sunnis, people of the right way), believed that a successor should be chosen by group consensus; the minority (later to be called Shias, partisans, or those who broke away) felt that successors should be blood relatives. This key dispute spurred Sunnis and Shias to develop parallel lines of succession. After almost 1,300 years, the Sunni Caliphate, at the time in the hands of the Ottoman Empire, was abolished in 1924 by Kamal Ataturk, the father of modern Turkey. The Shia line of succession, the Imamate, took a strange twist in A.D. 874 when the young four-year-old “Imam in waiting”—who was to become the twelfth Shia Imam—disappeared and entered a state of “occultation.” Shia Muslims refer to him as the *Mahdi* (the guided one) and eagerly await his imminent return when he will lead Islam to control the world. Meanwhile, Shia Islam vests its power in its *Ayatollahs* (reflections of Allah) who rule “in the spirit of the *Mahdi*.” Conversely, Sunni Muslims do not believe their “*Mahdi*” has yet appeared; they too await his imminent return.

¹⁸ The final official acronym for the Islamic State should be IS. However, ISIS is used in this article, since it is the acronym most people recognize and use.

Main Players in the Syrian Drama

Many view the Syrian crisis as the latest Middle East episode of two angry rivals vying for supremacy: Saudi Arabia, the main Sunni player, and Iran, the main Shia player. Shia Iran envisions itself as the historical underdog when compared to the larger Sunni world. At best, Sunni Saudis view Shias as “aberrant believers” who have an illegitimate line of succession, and at worst, Shias are not real Muslims. Shia Iranians view Saudi as representing the greatest blunder in Islamic history—allowing non-blood relatives into the line of succession. Adding insult to injury, Shia Iranians see Saudi as the modern-day regional Sunni bully, who restricts Shia access to the two most holy sites of Islam, and represses its own Shia population. In February 2014, the Middle East Media Research Institute published an article entitled, “Iran Calls for Violent Shi’ite Reaction Against Saudi Arabia” in which the authors highlighted the sectarian tension:

Both Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Iran president Hassan Rohani have indirectly accused what they call Saudi Arabia’s collaboration with the West against Islam of harming Iran’s interests across the Middle East, and have warned that the Saudi protection of “*takfiri* [apostates] circles” so that they can carry out operations against Iran in the region will ultimately backfire on it.

Another aspect of the attack on Saudi Arabia was religious in nature; senior Iranian ayatollahs called for labelling the Wahhabis [Saudis, especially the royal family, who adhere to an extreme view of Sunnism] enemies of the Muslims, collaborators with the infidels, or offshoots of the forces that abandoned God after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. They bolstered these claims by stating that these views have their roots in the Koran. Some even called for the issuing of a *fatwa* [religious ruling] against the

Wahhabis [Saudis], while others called for Muslim forces to unite against them.¹⁹

A Double Threat

Saudi Arabia is 100 percent Muslim—85 percent Sunni—with Shias making up 15 percent of the total population of 29 million. Shias in Saudi constantly express anger about marginalization and discrimination, and regularly agitate for change. Thus, the government feels a growing internal threat from its Shia population. The larger threat, at least as perceived by the Saudis, comes from ever-encroaching external pressure from the main contiguous Shia axis or “crescent” entities in the region—including Iran, the 60 percent Shia majority of Iraq, the minority Shia Alawite leadership in Syria (Bashar al-Assad), and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah (party of Allah) in Lebanon. Iran, with the backing of Russia and other states, assists all the axis entities with money, weapons and, in some cases, men to gain greater regional influence. Last, but not least, Saudis are convinced that Iran nurtures dreams of controlling the two most holy sites of Islam, which happen to be in Saudi Arabia.

What Does All This Have To Do With Syria and ISIS?

Syria’s population of 18 million is 60 percent Sunni, with a 13 percent Shia Alawite minority. Alawites are strict adherents of Ali, the first Shia Imam. A military coup in 1970 gave the presidency to a Shia Alawite—Hafez al-Assad, father of the present ruler, Bashar al-Assad. Bashar assumed the presidency upon the death of his father in 2000. More than three years ago, Syrian Sunni insurgency groups mounted a campaign to topple

¹⁹ A. Savyon, Yossi Mansharof, E. Kharrazi, and Y. Lahat, “Calls For Violent Shi’ite Reaction Against Saudi Arabia,” Middle East Media Research Institute, February 12, 2014, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://bit.ly/4617ngr>.

the minority Shia Alawite president, someone Shia Iran considers to be indispensable to their regional axis interests.

The Plot Thickens

Early on, the Sunni Saudis, accused by Iran of being complicit in initiating the insurgency, made a decision to provide all-out backing to the primarily Sunni Syrian opposition. They poured in tens of millions of dollars, clandestinely sent advisors, and encouraged the entry of foreign *mujahideen*. What could be better for Saudi than to see a Shia president toppled, a black eye delivered to rival Shia Iran, a break in the Shia axis alignment, and a new Saudi-backed Sunni government installed? All well and good for Saudi, except they got more than they bargained for when their insurgency dream in Syria turned into a satanic nightmare called ISIS.

On the other hand, Iran, not wishing to lose a key Shia surrogate ally, sent their own fighters, advisors, money and materials to Damascus to aid the Shia Alawite president in his quest to hold to power.

So Who Are These ISIS People and What Motivates Them?

The short answer is that they are primarily Sunni Muslims whose initial aim was to help bring down a Shia “dictator” and free the state of Syria to practice the “right” version of Islam. Many are veteran *jihadis* (fighters) from previous holy wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Some appear to be “innocents from abroad”; radicalized and recruited online. Others come from repressive and/or poor Muslim countries; often counseled by their clerics to go to the *jihad* in Syria and Iraq and “decapitate themselves an infidel” (Q 8:12). And then, say the clerics, according to Quran 9:15, your “act of war” will bring “healing to your hearts.”

Islam teaches that the only sure ticket to heaven is to die in the cause of Allah. Radicalized *jihadis* who are taught that their moment of death will be “like a pinch” and “will guarantee

Allah’s blessing for the family,” sign up to die. ISISs savagery, especially their penchant for decapitations, has precedence even in Islam’s prophet Muhammad, who once gave permission for 700 simultaneous beheadings. *Jihadis* are schooled in the Quranic phrase, “Strike terror in the hearts of unbelievers”; for them, the savagery is about creating terror.

In turn, Shia radicals share counterpart Sunni *jihadi* instincts. They are more than willing to resist to the point of martyrdom. *Ashura*, a major Shia religious festival, commemorates the martyrdom and beheading of Hussein, son of Ali, the revered first Shia Imam, at the Battle of Karbala in A.D. 680. The highpoint of *Ashura* is a self-flagellation ceremony, whereby participants beat and bloody themselves in order to identify with Hussein. In any case, no Spirit-filled believer would doubt that the main motivating force behind ISIS and their unspeakably evil savagery is Satan and his demonic minions. Satan’s very nature is to kill, steal, and destroy.

Have Islamic Apocalyptic Prophecies Played a Motivating Role?²⁰

All Muslims are *required* to believe in “the last days.” Both Sunni and Shia Islam have full-orbed eschatologies of the last days, including expected prophetic and apocalyptic happenings. Some Islamic prophecies come from the Quran itself, but most come from the sayings and actions of Muhammad, as contained in extensive volumes of *Hadith* (traditions); Sunnis and Shias having different versions. Other prophecies are drawn from the *Sirah*, a term referring to the comprehensive histories of Muhammad and Islam.

²⁰ To access relevant materials on Quranic and *Hadith* references to end-time events and prophecies, see: www.one-islam.org, www.contenderministries.org, and www.truthnet.org. For Islamic eschatological writings, see the works of Ibn Kathir.

Islamic prophecies that have motivated both Sunni and Shia fighters in the Syrian conflict are highlighted in a recent article by Mariam Karouny, working in Beirut for the Reuters News Agency. Here are excerpts:

Conflict in Syria kills hundreds of thousands of people and spreads unrest across the Middle East. Iranian forces battle anti-Shi'ite fighters in Damascus, and the region braces for an ultimate showdown.

If the scenario sounds familiar to an anxious world watching Syria's devastating civil war, it resonates even more with Sunni and Shi'ite fighters on the frontlines—who believe it was all foretold in seventh century prophecies. From the first outbreak of the crisis in the southern city of Deraa to apocalyptic forecasts of a Middle East soaked in blood, many combatants on both sides of the conflict say its path was set 1,400 years ago in the sayings of the prophet Muhammad and his followers.

Among those thousands of sayings, or *hadith*, are accounts which refer to the confrontation of two huge Islamic armies in Syria, a great battle near Damascus, and intervention from the north and west of the country. The power of those prophecies for many fighters on the ground means that the three-year-old conflict is more deeply rooted—and far tougher to resolve—than a simple power struggle between President Bashar al-Assad and his rebel foes. Syria's war has killed 140,000 people, driven millions from their homes and left many more dependent on aid. Diplomatic efforts, focused on the political rather than religious factors driving the conflict, have made no headway.

“If you think all these *mujahideen* came from across the world to fight Assad, you're mistaken,” said a Sunni Muslim *jihadi* who uses the name Abu Omar and fights in

one of the many anti-Assad Islamist brigades in Aleppo. “They are all here as promised by the prophet. This is the war he promised—it is the Grand Battle,” he told Reuters, using a word which can also be translated as slaughter.

On the other side, many Shi’ites from Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran are drawn to the war because they believe it paves the way for the return of the Imam Mahdi—descendant of the prophet who vanished 1,100 years ago and who will re-emerge at a time of war to establish global Islamic rule before the end of the world.

According to Shi’ite tradition, an early sign of his return came with the 1979 Iranian revolution, which set up an Islamic state to provide fighters for an army led by the Mahdi to wage war in Syria after sweeping through the Middle East. “This Islamic revolution, based on the narratives that we have received from the prophet and *imams*, is the prelude to the appearance of the Mahdi,” Iranian cleric and parliamentarian Ruhollah Hosseinian said last year. He cited comments by an eighth century Shi’ite *imam* who said another sign of the Mahdi’s return would be a battle involving warriors fighting under a yellow banner—the color associated with Lebanon’s pro-Assad Shia Hezbollah militia. “As Imam Sadeq has stated, when the forces with yellow flags fight anti-Shi’ites in Damascus and Iranian forces join them, this is a prelude and a sign of the coming of his holiness,” Hosseinian was quoted as saying by a Fars news agency.

The *Hadith*, or sayings [and actions] of the prophet and his companions, have been handed down orally over the centuries and are the most important sources of authority in Islam after the Quran itself. Many date back to medieval battlefields in what are now Syria and Iraq, where the two main Islamic sects took shape. The historical texts have

become a powerful tool, quoted across the region from religious festivals in Iraq's shrine in the city of Kerbala to videos released by Sunni preachers in the Gulf, and beyond.

“We have here *mujahideen* from Russia, America, the Philippines, China, Germany, Belgium, Sudan, India and Yemen and other places,” said Sami, a Sunni rebel fighter in northern Syria. “They are here because this is what the prophet said and promised; the Grand Battle is happening.” Both sides emphasize the ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic state which will rule the world before total chaos. Although some Sunni and Shi'ite clerics are privately skeptical of the religious justifications for the war, few in the region express such reservations in public for fear of being misinterpreted as doubters of the prophecies. “Yes, some of the signs are similar but these signs could apply at any time after the fall of the Islamic state” [Islamic state is undefined] one Sunni Muslim scholar in Lebanon said, asking that he not be identified. “There is no way to confirm we are living in those times. We have to wait and see.”

For the faithful, the *Hadith* chart the course of Syria's conflict from its beginning in March 2011, when protests erupted over the alleged torture of students who wrote anti-Assad graffiti on a school wall in Deraa, Syria. “There will be strife in Sham (Syria) that begins with children playing, after which nothing can be fixed,” according to one *hadith*. “When it calms down from one side, it ignites from the other.”

Hadith on both sides mention Syria as a main battlefield, naming cities and towns where blood will be spilled. Hundreds of thousands of people will be killed. The whole region will be shaken from the Arabian Peninsula, to Iraq, Iran, and Jerusalem, according to some texts. Saudi Arabia will collapse. Almost every country in the Middle East will

face unrest. One statement says, “Blood will reach knee-level.”

A widely circulated *hadith* attributed to Muhammad says Sham, or Syria, is Allah’s favored land. Asked where the next *jihad* will be, Muhammad replied: “Go for Sham, and if you can’t, go for Yemen ... (though) Allah has guaranteed me Sham and its people.”

Another refers to Muslims gathering “at the time of war in Ghouta, near a city called Damascus.” Ghouta, east of Syria’s capital, has been a rebel stronghold for the last two years.

A Sunni *hadith* speaks of a battle in a town called Dabeq, in northern Syria near the Turkish border, and intervention by a foreign army to split the Muslim fighters, seen by some as a reference to a possible Turkish incursion.

“These *hadith* are what the *mujahideen* are guided by to come to Syria; we are fighting for this. With every passing day we know that we are living the days that the Prophet talked about,” said Mussab, a fighter from the Nusra Front, a Sunni hardline group.

Murtada, a 27-year-old Lebanese Shi’ite who regularly goes to Syria to battle against the rebels, says he is not fighting for Assad, but for the Mahdi, also known as the *Imam*. “Even if I am martyred now, when he appears, I will be reborn to fight among his army. I will be his soldier,” he told Reuters in Lebanon.

Murtada, who has fought in Damascus and in the decisive battle last year for the border town of Qusair, leaves his wife and two children when he goes to fight in Syria:

“Nothing is more precious than the *Imam*, even my family. It is our duty.”

Abbas, a 24-year-old Iraqi Shi'ite fighter, said he knew he was living in the era of the Mahdi's return when the United States and Britain invaded Iraq in 2003. “That was the first sign and then everything else followed,” he told Reuters from Baghdad, where he said he was resting before heading back to Syria for a fourth time. “I was waiting for the day when I will fight in Syria. Thank God he chose me to be one of the Imam's soldiers.”

Abu Hassan, a 65-year-old pensioner from south Lebanon, said he once thought the prophecies of the end of days would take centuries to come about. “Things are moving fast. I never thought I would be living the days of the Imam. Now, with every passing day, I am more and more convinced that it is only a matter of a few years before he appears.”

Conclusion

This article scratches the surface; many angles have been left unmentioned. The issue is incredibly convoluted—in some ways incredulous—and the observations made here cannot be comprehensive; the full story is much wider and bigger. Jesus said, “I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” In the midst of the chaos, national churches are assisting refugees, preaching the gospel, and faithfully serving the Lord.



THE MYSTERY OF ISLAM

Steve Krstulovich
2021

Many people like a good mystery, but when it involves matters of faith and destiny the level of interest increases even further. This is certainly the case concerning mysterious aspects of Islam that have come to light in the last few years. For example, several YouTube sites, with tens of thousands of subscribers, are now airing weekly episodes revealing new findings about the foundations of Islam.

The focus is on the standard narrative that Islam offers of its own history and foundations, which it uses to support its claims. While many apologists prefer to address Islam simply on the basis of its own standard narrative, an ever-increasing number of viewers are following these unfolding discoveries, and, as a result, Muslims are turning to Christ. Since the pace of new discoveries is rapidly increasing with new teams of researchers becoming involved, it is important to remember that our understanding can change as new facts come to light.

The Standard Islamic Narrative

The standard Islamic narrative is known by nearly one in every four people on the planet who base their faith upon the life and sayings of Muhammad and the revelations of Allah in the Quran. It goes like this:

- A.D. 570 Muhammad is born in Mecca and lives in the Hejaz region of Arabia
- 610-622 The angel *Jibril* (Gabriel) gives him the “Meccan” portions of the Quran.
- 621 Muhammad ascends to heaven from Jerusalem on a winged horse.
- 622 Muhammad and his followers flee persecution at Mecca and go to Medina.
- 622-632 The angel *Jibril* gives him the “Medinan” portions of the Quran.
- 630 Muhammad conquers Mecca.
- 632 Muhammad dies without the Quran being written down.
- 632-644 Abu Bakr and Umar are the first two “rightly guided caliphs.”
- 644-656 Uthman, the third “rightly guided caliph,” produces Qurans in A.D. 652 for Medina, Kufa, Basra, Damascus, and Mecca, and destroys all other copies.
- 656-661 Ali is the fourth and last of the “rightly guided caliphs.”

Islam claims that Muhammad was the last and greatest prophet, and that the Quran has been perfectly preserved. Thus, Islam sees itself as the final religion based upon the teachings of the Quran and the sayings and life of Muhammad in the Traditions (*Hadith*). These are complemented by biographies of Muhammad (*Sira*), and Islamic history (*Tarikh*) and commentaries (*Tafsir*).

However, the Islamic sources backing up these claims were created too late and too far away from Arabia to simply be trusted. The earliest known Quran containing all 114 chapters (*surahs*) that appear in modern versions is the Topkapi manuscript, written more than a century after Muhammad, and contains thousands of differences. More than two centuries

after Muhammad, Al-Bukhari (d. 870) of Uzbekistan compiled the first authoritative *Hadith* collection of the life and sayings of Muhammad based upon oral stories. This is equally true regarding Ibn Hisham's (d. 833) biography (*Sira*) of Muhammad written in Iraq, and Al-Tabari's (d. 923) Islamic history (*Tarikh*) and commentary (*Tafsir*) written from Iran about three centuries after Muhammad.

By contrast, all the New Testament writers knew Jesus personally or heard from eyewitnesses who did. The four Gospels contain the words and biographies of Jesus, the book of Acts contains Christian history, and the Epistles provide commentary. They wrote their accounts within a few decades after His death, and Luke talks about many others who wrote about Jesus as well (Luke 1:1-4). This meant that many other eyewitnesses and even Christ's enemies were still alive to confirm or dispute the truth of their claims (Matt. 12:22-32; 1 Cor. 15:3-8).

Taking a Deeper Look at Islam

The accuracy of the early Islamic account has long been questioned, especially since few written records exist from that time period. This has allowed Islam to defend itself by claiming that critics were arguing from silence, while discouraging Muslims from questioning the Quran or Muhammad. Therefore, most apologists tend to defend Christianity without questioning Islam's standard narrative.

Things began to change when Carl Pfander (d. 1865) began to critique the early Islamic sources. Gradually others began to look into this during the twentieth century. Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) questioned the *Hadith*, Theodor Noldeke (d. 1930) questioned Islamic history, Arthur Jefferey (d. 1959) discovered pre-Islamic sources for the Quran, and Joseph Schacht looked into the origin of Islamic law and its connection with the *Hadith*.

This set the stage for the "Revisionist School" of scholars, in the 1970s, to attempt to reconstruct a fact-based account of

Islam's history from seventh and eighth century evidence, instead of the later sources used by Islam. John Wansbrough (d. 2002) found indications that neither the Quran nor Islam actually came from Muhammad. Patricia Crone (d. 2015) explained how Mecca was not the city Islam claims in Muhammad's time, and Gerald Hawting explored the religious environment of seventh century Islam. Hawting was the last Revisionist professor at the University of London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) before Muslim opposition shut the program down.

However, others have carried on the work elsewhere. Robert Hoyland found descriptions of Islam made by non-Muslims in the seventh and eighth centuries. Norman Calder (d. 1998) revealed evidence of ninth century Islamic law falsely attributed to earlier centuries. Yehuda Nevo (d. 1992) published desert inscriptions suggesting a late date for Muhammad and Islam. Gunther Luling identified pre-Islamic hymns in the Quran. Gerd Puin and Heinz Ohlig are not Revisionists but found that the earliest known copies of the Quran differ from later versions. Others have gone on to make even more discoveries and, as a result, Islam is often left arguing from silence against factual evidence suggesting a very different account of its foundations.

Where is Mecca?

For example, Islam claims that Mecca in Arabia is the oldest and best-known city in history, where Adam and Eve lived (Q 7:24), where Abraham destroyed the idols in the Kaaba (Q 21:51-71), and where Muhammad was born and lived until A.D. 622, at the hub of the trade routes. However, the name Mecca only appears once in the Arabic Quran, at Surah 48:24 where it simply associates Mecca with a valley. Interestingly, Mecca is not in a valley. Mecca has been added in English Qurans to associate it with the *Masjid al-Haram* mentioned fifteen times, which is now called the *Kaaba*. But this place is described as having a stream, fields, grass, trees, fruit, olives,

and mountains overlooking the *Kaaba*, which Mecca did not have. However, the ancient city of Petra had all of these things and was a hub of the ancient trade routes. The first known mention of Mecca appears more than a century *after* Muhammad in A.D. 741, but oddly enough refers to a location in Turkey associated with the Garden of Eden, near the city of Harran, where Abraham’s relatives lived.

Some have tried to find evidence for Mecca in other ancient locations, but all in vain. The “temple for all Arabs” mentioned in the second century by Agatharchides proved to be Wadi Ainounah, which is about 600 miles from Mecca. Likewise, Pliny the Elder’s mention in the first century of Dabanegoris region referred to a location on the east coast of Arabia, across the country. Ptolemy’s mention of Macoraba in the second century turned out to be the small settlement of Mahabishah near Yemen.

Interestingly, the inscription on a rock located about 45 miles down the road from Mecca to Ta’if was photographed and catalogued by researchers. It indicates that the Kaaba (*Masjid al-Haram*) was built in 697, or 65 years *after* Muhammad. The inscription was destroyed last year, but the records remain.



Where is the Quran?

Islam claims that Uthman sent out official Qurans in A.D. 652. However, not even a trace of these Quran’s has surfaced—even though they were reportedly sent to cities that have remained under Muslim control ever since. By contrast, we have entire New Testaments that are hundreds of years older, even though they were found in areas not under Christian

control. The earliest known Qurans only date from the eighth and ninth centuries, and have thousands of differences. Some contain only a few chapters while others have more chapters than in modern Qurans. Moreover, dozens of differing Arabic versions of the Quran are still in use around the world today. Al-Azhar University had to standardize their teaching around the Faruq Edition of the Quran in 1924, named after their king, to provide uniform education for students in Egypt. This was then picked up by Saudi Arabia and renamed the Fahd Edition, after their king, and was first declared to be the official worldwide version of the Quran in 1982.

Far from being perfectly preserved, even early Islamic sources speak of verses in the Quran being lost, forgotten, cancelled, missing, changed, overlooked, modified, and substituted. In fact, they claim that the Quran was revealed to Muhammad in seven different styles (*Ahruf*). How could these have been preserved when Uthman destroyed all versions but his own in A.D. 652?

Researchers have uncovered several steps involved in the compilation of the Quran. Ibn Mujahid selected seven different official versions in A.D. 936. Then Al-Shatibi added another fourteen official versions in 1194. Still later, al-Jazari added yet another nine official versions in 1429, making a total of thirty official Qurans containing tens of thousands of differences. Only eight of these official versions come from Mecca or Medina, while twelve come from Kufa in Iraq.

Moreover, all of the earliest manuscripts of the Quran are written in northern Nabataean Arabic script, which has no vowel points. If it would have been written in the southern Sabaic Arabic used in Mecca and Medina, which had vowel points, it would have resolved many of the problems in understanding the text of the Quran.

Where is Muhammad?

No real evidence has been found for the Muhammad of Islam from the seventh and eighth centuries aside from several

documents that mention a man called Mehmet, but who is said to have been a king with great authority from the Arab Tayaye tribe. These sources include Thomas the Presbyter (A.D. 640), Fragments of the Charters of Jacob of Edessa (A.D. 692), Ad Annum (A.D. 705), the Byzantine-Arab Chronicle (A.D. 741-754), and the Zuqun Chronicle (A.D. 775). New research seems to suggest another person who more closely fits this description. The same is true for the four “rightly guided caliphs,” except for a single rock inscription containing the name Umar, which could refer to anyone by that name. In fact, the records indicate that early Arab leaders were not even called *caliphs*, but rather “commanders of the faithful.” The Quran itself contains only four verses referring to Muhammad—“the praised one.” By contrast, ninety-three verses of the Quran refer to the Islamic name for Jesus (*Isa*). The Dome of the Rock was built in A.D. 691 by Abd al-Malik, the first caliph known to have used the term Islam. It is inscribed with sayings attacking Christian belief in the divinity of Christ, but only incidentally mentions “the praised one,” or Muhammad. Similarly, the Caliphate Protocols suddenly mention Muhammad in A.D. 691 for the first time.

Some texts were once considered evidence in a failed attempt to fill in the void. One is the “Ashtiname Letter,” which is a sixteenth century forgery used by the monks at St. Catherine’s Monastery to gain protection from the Muslims. Another is the Constitution of Medina, which first appears in Ibn Hisham’s ninth century *Sira* and contradicts the Quran’s view of Jews. A third is the “Doctrina Iacobi,” which speaks of a nameless prophet who proclaims a Christ who was to come, which contradicts the Quran’s (33:40) claim that Muhammad is the last prophet.

A Look at Some of the New Evidence

So, what is some of this new evidence from the seventh and eighth centuries telling us about Islam’s foundations? In addition to the perishable records destroyed during this period,

there are many more durable records that are just beginning to be fully appreciated in the search to solve this mystery. One such record is the direction of prayer (*qibla*) found in the foundations of the earliest mosques. From the time of the early Umayyad dynasty until the takeover by the Abbasids, there seemed to be four directions in which the *qiblas* pointed. The *qiblas* in the earliest mosques all seem to point to the ancient city of Petra, rather than Mecca. The first one known to face Mecca only appears in A.D. 727, a century after Muhammad. During this transition many mosques either faced between Petra and Mecca or parallel to the direction from Petra to Mecca.

Another durable record is provided by the coins issued throughout the Islamic Empire. Coins were very important in the seventh and eighth centuries as a means of announcing new rulers and making political statements, and for recording when and where they were minted. Interestingly, all of the coins in the Islamic Empire up until A.D. 660 were either Christian coins minted in Syria, Lebanon, or Israel, or Zoroastrian coins minted in Iraq. The first Muslim to mint a coin was Caliph Muawiya in A.D. 661. However, his coins bear Christian crosses in the western end of his empire and Zoroastrian fire altars in the east. It is not until A.D. 696 that the first truly Islamic coins were issued from the same mints during the reign of Abd al-Malik. No coins were minted in Arabia.

Another durable record is provided by 100,000 rock inscriptions scattered across the desert, of which 30,000 have been cataloged. None have been found that mention Muhammad, Mecca, Islam, Muslims, or the Quran before A.D. 690, when the name Muhammad first appears. After A.D. 710, Islamic rites, such as pilgrimage, prayer, and fasting, begin to appear. Then, after A.D. 720, the terms Muslim and Islam begin to appear. Even though the script in the area of Medina and Mecca was southern Sabaic Arabic, the script on these inscriptions is northern Nabataean Arabic, used in Petra. This is also the script used in the earliest Qurans.

These tentative interpretations of some of the new

discoveries are beginning to paint an interesting picture of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries that is attracting many new researchers. New investigations are being conducted concerning what the Chinese records say about the Arabs, with whom they had vigorous trade relations during this period.

A Firm Foundation

The prominent role on the world stage that Islam has assumed has erased the luxury it once had of expecting others to uncritically accept its foundational claims. As Christians, our scriptural foundation has also come under rigorous scrutiny from critics. However, God in His infinite wisdom left a trail of factual evidence that helps establish a firm foundation for the Christian faith. It begins with eyewitness accounts, which are recorded in thousands of manuscripts. In some cases, these manuscripts date back to within a few decades of the events, and are backed up by serious scientific and archaeological investigations.

Seeing the dilemma that Muslims are facing should move us to let them know that God has provided solid evidence in the historical record. He is not far from each one of us, and earnestly seeks for us to have a true and loving relationship with Him through the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 17:23-31).



PART 2

MINISTRY TO
MUSLIMS



MORE THAN DREAMS

Paul Parks
2009

Today many Muslims are asking, “Who is Jesus, and why has He come?” In seeking God for the answer, they are often encountering Jesus in dreams and visions.

A few years ago in a Middle Eastern country a group of terrorists trained in the desert in order to overthrow their “un-Islamic” government. They spent their days practicing marksmanship and honing their ability to surprise the enemy. They were taught to be ruthless and unmerciful.

Khalil was a part of this small band of about twenty men. He was a scholar who had shown an ability to argue and debate with the best. One night, the terrorists were to receive a special visitor. He was a holy man, the *emir*; and was considered to be their spiritual advisor. It was Ramadan and they were excited to see him. He brought unhappy news. At the local hospital in the capital city, Christians were evangelizing Muslims who were coming for treatment. This news stirred their anger. How could their government tolerate such behavior from the Christians who opposed true Islam?

The holy man took a book from out of his robes and handed it to Khalil. Upon being told that it was a Christian Bible, Khalil dropped the book to the ground. He was fearful of the Bible. He had heard that Christians used the Bible to cast spells on people—and he refused to even touch it. The *emir* scolded him and told him it was just an ordinary book. “I am giving you this Bible for a special purpose,” he said. “After reading it, I want

you to write a book that will reveal all the lies and contradictions contained in the Christian scriptures. The whole world will then know that the truth about God can be found only in the Quran. You will be paid a good monthly wage until the book is finished.”

Khalil went home to the capital, where his mother and grown siblings all lived together. He was repulsed by the “worldliness” and lack of obedience to Allah he saw in his family. In order to launch his book project, Khalil began reading the Bible. He saw that it had a very different focus from that of the Quran. He realized that the Islamic arguments leveled at the Bible were not valid. In fact, when leveling the same arguments at the Quran, it was the Quran that was discredited. He was terribly confused. Which book was true? Khalil began his writing project, but it was not a refutation of the Bible! Instead, he titled his project “Is the Quran the Word of God?”

With doubts about the Quran now filling his mind, Khalil decided to contact a local Christian. When both his Bible and passport were stolen, he was even more confused. Was God punishing him for his doubts? Finally he cried out in prayer for God to reveal to him the truth, whatever it was.

That night Jesus appeared to him in a dream and said, “Do you have any doubts? I am the one you seek. Read the Gospel and you will know the truth.” Khalil protested that he had lost his Bible. Jesus replied “The Gospel cannot be lost.” Khalil awoke and discovered his Bible in a nearby closet. Feeling he had been disrespectful to his mother, he immediately went to her room and asked for forgiveness. The next morning he sought out a local pastor who led him to full salvation. His life was changed forever.

Is this an isolated case? In a recently updated study prepared by Fuller Theological Seminary, a survey of 750 Muslims who converted to Christianity shows five predominant reasons they chose to follow Christ.

1. The primary reason that influenced Muslims to convert was the lifestyle of Christians. Former Muslims cited the love that Christians exhibited in their relationships with non-Christians and their treatment of women as equals.
2. The power of God in answered prayers and healing. Experiences of God's supernatural work—especially important to folk Muslims who have a characteristic concern for power and blessings—increased after their conversions, according to the survey. Often, dreams about Jesus were reported.
3. Dissatisfaction with the type of Islam they had experienced. Many expressed dissatisfaction with the Quran, emphasizing God's punishment over his love. Others cited Islamic militancy and the failure of Islamic law to transform society.
4. The spiritual truth in the Bible. Muslims are generally taught that the Torah, Psalms, and the Gospels are from God, but that they became corrupted. These Christian converts said, however, that the truth of God found in Scripture became compelling for them and key to their understanding of God's character.
5. Biblical teachings about the love of God. In the Quran, Allah's love is conditional, but God's love for all people was especially eye-opening for Muslims. These converts were moved by the love expressed through the life and teachings of Jesus. The next step for many Muslims was to become part of a fellowship of loving Christians.

In most conversions, a combination of factors were present, but the study sought to discover what, in the convert's mind, was the main cause for conversion. The survey acknowledged that the most predominant factor in influencing Muslims to come to Christ was the lifestyle of Christians, but it is highly significant

that the second most influential factor was “Experiences of God’s supernatural work ... and often dreams about Jesus.”

Fuller’s survey reports that “more than one-third of the converts to Christianity in Turkey say they came to Christ because He appeared to them in a dream.”

What causes lie behind these supernatural events? Muslims seem to have supernatural encounters involving dreams and visions when:

1. Christians begin to intercede in prayer for Muslims, specifically that they would receive a revelation of Jesus and who He is.
2. Christians realize Muslims are unlikely to come to their churches, and as a result step out of their “comfort zone” and take the message of Jesus to them.
3. Muslims begin to question what they have been told about Christians, since they find their personal encounters with Christians to be more positive than negative.
4. Muslims experience a deep emotional or spiritual valley, a sickness, or a serious temptation, often resulting in periods of questioning their Islamic faith.

Certain characteristics or themes are fairly common in most Muslim pre-conversion dreams. For example, John 14:6 is a Scripture verse that often surfaces in pre-conversion dreams: “I am the way the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me.”

Interestingly, Jesus does not explain “the plan of salvation” in a dream or vision. Dream encounters by themselves do not produce followers of Christ. Almost without exception, the true “conversion” experience occurs when the Muslim seeker finds a Christian believer who explains the truth about Jesus, why He came, and what a seeker must do—repent and believe.

Sometimes that information is found in written form or through electronic media.

A very credible ministry has collected and verified many amazing recollections of Muslim believers who came to the Lord through a dream or vision. They have produced a docu-drama format telling the stories of five former Muslims who have come to Christ as a result of a dream or vision. Each story is in the national language of the convert, with subtitles describing the conversion stories of:

- Ali—a Turkish man in bondage to alcohol. While making the pilgrimage to Mecca, hoping to be freed of his addiction and be led in the way of a true Muslim, he found Christ instead. (In Turkish)
- Dini—an Indonesian teenager who became a Christian on a night that Muslims individualize their prayers to Allah. (In Indonesian)
- Mohammad—a herdsman in Nigeria who survived various attempts on his life by his father and eventually led his father to faith in Christ. (In Hausa)
- Khalil—a radical terrorist who was transformed when Jesus appeared to him and changed his heart. (In Arabic)
- Khosrow—a young Iranian man who was depressed and without hope until he met Jesus. Now joy fills his heart. (In Farsi)

These powerful stories will encourage believers to partner with God for the redemption of more sons and daughters of Ishmael. Let us pray earnestly that Muslims throughout the world will receive supernatural dreams and visions that will lead them to the truth about Jesus Christ.



SIGNS AND WONDERS AMONG MUSLIMS

Harry Morin
2010

Muslims know that they are not the only creatures on earth. Among the many other forms of life, they believe in spirit beings. They refer to these beings as the *jinn*. They also believe that some of the *jinn* are good and that others are evil. It is the evil *jinn* that Muslims fear the most. According to Islamic teaching, the evil *jinn* serve as Satan's cohorts or legions. Their aim is to continue their rebellion against God by inflicting harm on people. Muslims regard these spirits as far more powerful than themselves because the spirits can breed sickness, play tricks on the human mind, bring misfortune, and cause fatal accidents. The *jinn* can possess people, drive them mad, and, as a result, terrify Muslims with their powers.

The Western mind is prone to dismiss all of this as superstition or to rationalize such mysteries with scientific theories. While the Western mindset aims for people to subdue the powers of the universe, the Muslim mindset is different. Muslims believe that they are subject to these unseen spiritual powers because they acknowledge their own human limitations. Thus, they live in hopelessness and fearful resignation to the spirits. They also live in dire need of a power that can set them free from the powers of evil.

Muslims Respect Possessors of Power

Muslims recognize a hierarchy (a spiritual body organized into ranks, each one subordinate to the one above it) of spiritual power. The most powerful of all beings is God who wields the greatest power in the universe. Angels, who occupy the next rank, exercise the power to do what God wants. However, because such spirits live in heaven, Muslims believe they are not accessible to people. The *jinn* occupy the next rank in the hierarchy of power, and after the *jinn* come people. Generally, Muslims don't compare people to others in the hierarchy because, in their view, people are subordinate to these other powers; still, there are exceptions.

Throughout the centuries of Islamic history, certain Muslims—primarily Sufis—were known to possess extraordinary power. These exceptional Muslims were miracle workers, known to heal the sick, cast out demons, walk on water, and even levitate (to rise, float or travel in the air in defiance of gravity) from one city to another. Over time, Muslims elevated these isolated individuals to sainthood. Some of these saints have become legendary figures because of the amazing miracles they are believed to have performed.

Frankly, some educated Muslims claim that such miracles are only myths. Some cultures permit special people to be honored by attributing supernatural powers to them. In the case of Muslim saints, it is possible that Muslims exaggerated their miracles in order to honor them. Still, many of the alleged miracles may indeed be true because Satan is the great counterfeiter who can perform such exploits. Even the Bible bears record of unbelievers with power to heal people and to expel evil spirits.

Muslims revere their saints as very special people. Since the saints did what ordinary people could not do, Muslims believe their marvels and wonders were possible only because they had a special connection with God. Muslims viewed these miracles that benefited people as signs—as definite proof—of God's favor. These signs also showed clearly God's approval for the

miracle-workers. Because of these things, Muslims revere and respect these saints as God's friends and servants. How does this information about Muslims relate to us and the Church?

God and the Strategy of Miracles

The book of Acts describes the amazing growth of the Early Church. Thousands of men and women joined the original followers of Jesus. Even hard-to-reach people like the Jewish priests and Samaritans became believers. Several factors contributed to this astonishing growth:

1. The disciples became apostles, recognizing that they were sent specifically to do God's work. Jesus commissioned them to go throughout the world; so they became people with a vision for missions (Acts 1:8).
2. The apostles were filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 4:31).
3. The apostles preached the word of the gospel with boldness (Acts 4:31).
4. The apostles performed miracles of healing and exorcism (Acts 5:12-16).

The book of Acts provides an important model for us today. In order for Christians to reach Muslims, they must get involved in God's work. Like the disciples of Jesus, they must strive to become apostles, and they must be filled continually with the Holy Spirit. In addition, they must proclaim the Word with boldness and they must pray and believe for miracles.

While the apostles preached many sermons about Jesus, it was the miracles they performed that melted the hearts of people to believe. The miracles were a sign of God's approval and a confirmation of Jesus' mission. The Apostle Peter said, "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22).

God continues to use this method to reach difficult, skeptical unbelievers—and Muslims fall into this category. Christian workers in Muslim areas must believe that they are engaging in the ministry of the apostles (Ephesians 4:11). They must also realize that God will use miracles in their ministry to confirm the truth of their message. When a Muslim feels the impact of a miracle, his heart opens to the words of Scripture. A miracle will often expand his faith to accept Christ as Savior and Lord of his life.

Christians and the Strategy of Miracles

The fact that Muslims believe in miracles is a given. So, too, is the fact that God purposely uses miracles to confirm Jesus' ministry among people. These two facts lead to an important conclusion: Christians who long to reach Muslims effectively with the gospel must think seriously about miracles in Jesus' name. Divine miracles should be a major part of the Christian mindset. They should be seen as a means of bringing people to the lordship of Christ.

Christian workers need to build a Muslim's faith in the power of Jesus' name. Even the Muslim's Quran confirms the miraculous power of Jesus (Q 3:49; 5:110). In fact, Jesus is the only prophet in the Quran associated with physical healing of the sick.

Christian workers must proclaim the good news that this healing power is still available today. They must also make clear that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Jesus did not come simply to appease, manipulate, or trick the *jinn*; instead, He came to destroy completely Satan's influence in people's lives and to set them free from fear and bondage to evil spirits.

Christian workers must remind Muslims that Jesus is alive in heaven and that God never withdrew His favor from Jesus. Muslims need to know that Jesus still heals and blesses people today. Furthermore, they need to know that Jesus ordered His

followers to continue the ministry of healing and exorcism and to believe for His miracles by praying in His name.

Christian workers should be available to pray for Muslims and to lay hands on those who are sick and demon-possessed. They must demonstrate faith that Jesus still does the impossible. In addition, they must see all this as a biblical strategy for impacting Muslim people.

The Miracles of Dreams and Visions

Dreams and visions also make a major impact on Muslims, since they believe that these experiences relate to the spirit realm. In an Islamic view, dreams come from either God or Satan. Muslims believe that dreams relating to prophets are especially ordained by God. Most people in the West rationalize dreams as purely human phenomena that remain a mystery. In any case, they do not link dreams to the spirit world. Nor do believers tend to speak about God impacting and directing people through dreams and visions.

The Bible, however, provides many examples of God speaking to people in dreams and visions. One notable example is the experience of Saul of Tarsus, a Jew, who was also a strict Pharisee. He was like the fundamentalist Muslim of today who is concerned about preserving religious tradition. Saul was determined to destroy the new religious movement that centered on Jesus, for he saw this movement as a serious threat to the existing religious establishment. As a result, he gave his nod of approval that led to the martyrdom of Steven. He was also responsible for the imprisonment and persecution of many of Jesus' followers. Would Christians in that setting have thought that someday Saul would become one of them? Yet, God completely transformed his life through a vision—a “vision from heaven” (Acts 26:19)—that featured a bright blinding light and the voice of Jesus.

The following are examples of people whom God encouraged or spoke to in dreams:

- Jacob (Gen. 31:11)
- Joseph in Old Testament (Gen. 37:5)
- A stranger (in the story of Gideon) (Judg. 7:13)
- Solomon (1 Kings 3:15)
- Daniel (Dan. 7:1)
- Joseph in New Testament (Matt. 2:13).

God also used dreams to speak to unbelievers, such as the following:

- Abimelech, king of Gerar in the story of Abraham (Gen. 20:3)
- Laban the Syrian in the story of Jacob (Gen. 31:24)
- The butler and baker in the story of Joseph (Gen. 40:5)
- Pharaoh in the story of Joseph (Gen. 41:7)
- Nebuchadnezzar in the story of Daniel (Dan. 4:18)
- The Magi in the story of Jesus' birth (Matt. 2:12)
- Pilate's wife in the story of Jesus' trial (Matt. 27:19).

Today, God continues to use dreams and visions to stir people's hearts, including Muslim people. More and more testimonies are emerging about Muslims embracing Christ as a result of dreams. Christian workers must take note of this fact and pray specifically for God to touch the life of a Muslim acquaintance through a dream or vision.

Conclusion

The Christian worker needs to remember that signs and wonders are not an end in themselves. Signs and wonders must lead to something more: they must lead Muslims to the truth of the gospel. They must lead Muslims to the lordship of Christ and to a transformed life that frees them from witchcraft and

sinful habits. Christian workers must focus continually on these objectives in order for signs and wonders to accomplish great things for the Kingdom of God.



HER HOPE FOR HEAVEN

Lynda Hausfeld
2013

Muslim women comprise a tenth of the world's population. Whether we live in Houston, Havana, Hyderabad, or Hong Kong, they are our neighbors. That makes them ours to invite to Heaven.

But we hesitate—not because we deliberately ignore the fact that God commissions them to us for Heaven's glory (Acts 17: 26)—but because we do not know how to invite them. For very legitimate reasons, our perspective of who they are hinders us from initiating and nurturing redemptive friendships that are most likely their only hope for Heaven.

Satan, the enemy of their souls and ours, knows that Christian and Muslim women friendships are their key to heaven, so he does all he can to impede loving encounters between us. He makes us mutually fearful and suspicious of one another, by telling them we are blasphemous infidels and by telling us they are unreachable *jihadists*. The only truth in his tactic is that, as father of all lies, he delivers what both Christian and Muslim women know they can expect from him: damning deception.

So, who is my Muslim neighbor? The purpose of this article is to help us understand her better, and feel less presumptuous about expectations that have kept Christian and Muslim women in separate camps—in spite of the fact that we share the same grocery aisle or beauty shop chair. Our goal is to expound upon

truth that fosters friendships between us, so that Christian women can feel empowered to reach out to their Muslim neighbors everywhere.

We have quite a bit in common with our Muslim neighbors. Just like I am not the same as every Christian girl, she is not the same as every Muslim girl. She deserves friends who are careful not to stereotype her, in spite of all the understandable reasons Christian women might be inclined to do so. It is really helpful to understand from the onset that our Muslim friend will muddle through interesting assumptions she has of us, as well. Perhaps the grandest joy of friendship with Muslim women is discovering how alike we are, even in the most contrasting of contexts.

Because Islam was birthed in Arabia, and because of the importance given to the Quran's original Arabic text, we might think that most of the world's Muslims speak Arabic. However, only 350 million of the world's 1.5 billion Muslims reside in or are from Arab nations! Unless she is specifically from the Arab Middle East, Egypt/North Africa, or the Arabian Peninsula, our Muslim friend's mother tongue will likely be Urdu, Persian, Turkish, Bahasa, or Tagalog. If she has settled in the West, it could also be English, French, or German.

I traveled to France to do some work among a group of very conservative Muslim women in Paris. Because of this, I expected these Parisian Muslims to veil. Finally, after seeing only unveiled women for a whole day, I mustered the nerve to ask my hostess where the Muslims were. "What? You don't see Muslims?" she asked. Smiling, she pointed them out to me: "There is one. The lady crossing the street is one. Over at the corner—she is one. The storekeeper is one. They are all Muslim women!" My friend kindly reminded me that in Paris it is against the law for a Muslim girl to veil for school or work, so most women whose life takes them outside the home will not veil. I apologized for my shortsightedness; I had known of the law's passage, but had not anticipated its real implications.

The veil is a relevant topic because typically it is what distinguishes Muslim women from the rest. The practice of veiling was originally implemented for the protection of the prophet's wives and other believing women, who at the time (sixth century) were being victimized by lascivious pagan men. It became an important expression of modesty and submission, for a woman who veiled did so in obedience to Allah and for the sake of her husband, who as a good provider should require that she do so, and for the community's honor.

Modesty is central to a Muslim woman's faith expression, but how or whether or not she even wears the veil is as varied as the cultures and communities she represents. In some places, veiling is so meticulously practiced that the curtains and outer walls of the house serve as added layers of protection for the Muslim woman against a dishonorable world. In others, the historical trajectory of society and culture diminishes the severity of veil practice, in some places to the point of its non-existence. In Iran, a woman must cover everything except her face and perhaps her eyes. In Kyrgyzstan, she might wear a simple headscarf. In Istanbul, a female Muslim university professor might be indistinguishable from a renowned secularist, but a Muslim TV anchorwoman in London might stand out because of the veil she chooses to wear on camera.

Veil or no veil, what most Muslim women value is the modesty it represents. Whether she is a traditionalist, a moderate, or even a modernist, your Muslim friend esteems modesty as a practice that honors Allah, Islam, and her community. All of her good practices are part of what helps her earn a place in Islam's paradise after her earthly life is done. Modesty itself is not merely about the veil. It is about public comportment and how women relate with other men, especially. A good Muslim woman will generally express herself moderately in public, very intentionally avoiding inappropriate attention. Eye contact or handshakes with men who are not family members will be guarded; even very powerful Muslim women know the value of graciously

deferring to others in public contexts—reserving hilarious laughter or rebuke responses for safer, more honorable settings.

Almost as important as modesty is our Muslim friend’s regard for hospitality. It is part of the honor culture into which Islam was birthed, which remains key to Muslim life and works. Indeed, Muslim hospitality is the picture of an open heart. When we are invited into our friend’s home, she makes us her honored guests. Our host will serve us the best of what she has, in the most honorific way possible. She will want us to linger, and she will cater to our enjoyment. The hospitality she extends to us will far surpass the pleasure of good food and company. It will open the door to friendship that has capacity to sweetly—and loudly—live Christ in her presence.

Our Muslim neighbor values hospitality, and she needs ours. We can make her feel very special in our homes, too. She will appreciate our help navigating grocery stores and beauty salons, school systems and hospitals. We can explain our community’s events and subdivision association expectations. Knowing what we know about her modesty values, we can invite her into our circle of virtuous, safe friendships. She relishes our presence at her celebrations, and she anticipates the pleasure of being at ours. When she struggles, she wants our prayers. She strives to be obedient and righteous enough for paradise, and she needs us to tell her that Christ is her righteousness and Heaven is God’s free gift to her.

Shirin Taber, the Muslim child of an Iranian father, is a believer today because of a friend’s extreme act of hospitality.²¹ Shirin’s Catholic mother, often feeling overwhelmed by her cross-cultural marriage, was befriended by a Christian neighbor who lovingly journeyed with her through some insecure times. She encouraged Shirin’s mother to know Christ personally. Just as things were looking hopeful for the marriage, Shirin’s mother fell ill with cancer and died. Shirin’s devastated Muslim

²¹ Taber, Shirin. *Muslims Next Door: Uncovering Myths and Creating Friendships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

father did not know how he would care for his three children, so to help him, Pamela and her husband took them all in. Shirin credits Pamela's grace and compassion with her own journey to Jesus. Pamela always encouraged Shirin and her brothers to know God personally, just like she had done with Shirin's mother. At age 15, Shirin chose to follow Christ. God made Shirin's family Pamela's neighbors so that they might know He is God. Pamela's selfless hospitality touched the soul of this family with love that could only be His, and Shirin received it. All of Satan's ploys—his intention to destroy Shirin's family—crumbled to nothing in the face of true, Christ-like friendship and hospitality.

Satan builds enmity between Muslim and Christian women to keep us apart, because he means for all to perish. He knows the dangers of our friendships. Christ brings us together so that Muslim sisters who would otherwise never know the Hope of Heaven will be able to find it in us. Be it resolved, then, that as followers of Jesus Christ, who commissions us with the privilege of sharing hope for Heaven with the Muslim neighbors He gives us, we choose to recognize and rise above Satan's murderous schemes that are against us all. We choose to love Muslim women with Christ-like practice and passion so that we all will enjoy Him forever, together.



SPIRITUALLY MISMATCHED: AVOIDING THE HEARTACHE OF A CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM MARRIAGE

Donna Hardee Krstulovich
2020

Introduction

The phenomenon produced by globalization, international travel, immigration, and online dating sites is a rise in cross-cultural, interfaith interactions. When two people fall in love and decide to marry, both partners bring their own worldviews, family backgrounds, and expectations into the relationship. The absence or presence of faith adds another dimension to any relationship.

This article examines key spiritual differences by comparing and contrasting Christian and Islamic views on dating, marriage, family relationships, divorce, and children. The scenarios are composites of statements, stories, and examples of real people and true-life situations known by the author.

Dating a Muslim

Scenario 1

Your Christian friend tells you she has met an incredible guy. She is dating a charming, handsome Muslim man and they are planning to get married. He is polite and respectful. She loves his accent and is enamored with his exotic, intriguing culture.

He showers her with compliments, tells her she is beautiful, invites her out to meals, and gives her gifts. She says, “He is more respectful than the Christian guys I have dated.” She is convinced that she has met the man of her dreams. What would you tell her?

A Christian girl who follows Jesus should first ask, “Is it biblical?” In the letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul says not to be unequally yoked to unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). Mennonite missionary and author, David Shenk, grew up in Tanzania and served for over fifty years among Muslims in Somalia, Kenya, and the United States. In his most recent book, *Christian. Muslim. Friend.*, he writes a word of caution regarding romantic relationships between a Muslim man and a Christian woman. He cautions that children belong to the husband and he will raise them as Muslims: “These realities mean it is not wise for a Muslim and a Christian to become romantically involved.”²²

Most conservative Muslims do not date. Many Muslim families prefer arranged marriages for their children. Muslim women represent the honor of the family, so they carefully guard their daughters and do not permit them to go out alone with a man. The Prophet Muhammad said that if a man and a woman are alone, the third person in the room is Satan. Muslim men who work or study in different countries, away from family pressures and responsibilities, do not always follow their own cultural norms. A Christian woman needs to learn about his culture and his religion even if she lives far from his country of origin.

The Quran allows a Muslim man to marry a Jewish or Christian woman, but does not allow a Muslim woman to marry a Christian man. As a Jewish American, Phyllis Chesler (2014), in her fascinating book, *American Bride in Kabul*, recounts her

²² David Shenk, *Christian. Muslim. Friend.: Twelve Paths to Real Relationship* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2014), 101-101.

college days romance with her Afghan husband. Fifty years later, she describes her hard-learned lessons:

As soon as we arrived in Kabul, my Westernized husband became another person—one whom I had never before met. Thus, I learned that even a well-read scholarship student can be easily fooled by the man she loves and that a man who can easily pass for a Westerner in the West can just as easily revert to Eastern ways when he returns home. ... My husband’s betrayal was not personal. It was cultural. He merely treated me as an Afghan wife, not as an American college student with serious intellectual and artistic aspirations.²³

Scenario 2

Your Christian friend tells you about a recent conversation with her intelligent and charming Muslim boyfriend she met online. She really likes him. She tells him she is a Christian and he tells her, “Muslims love Jesus. Jesus is in the Quran.” He tells her that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. They both believe in angels, holy books, prophets, and the last day. She says, “The religions don’t seem so different after all.” What would you tell her?

Many people today refer to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as “Abrahamic Religions.” However, Islam rejects the key defining issues of the Christian faith—the person and deity of Jesus Christ, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. Muslims say that Isa in the Quran is Jesus, but Isa is not the Son of God, or the Savior of the world, as Christians believe, but only a prophet. Islam offers no assurance of salvation. Muslims believe that Isa did not die on the cross but was taken alive to heaven and will come back as a Muslim. Because many Christian women have never studied Islam and some do not

²³ Phyllis Chesler, *American Bride in Kabul: A Memoir* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Griffin 2014), 207.

know how to defend their faith, they accept what their Muslim boyfriends say without questioning. They are drawn in by spiritual deception.

When I taught a class in the Philippines for students from all over Asia, a bright young Pakistani Christian student shared a revealing conversation he had with a Catholic girl who was on a flight with him. She told him she had a Pakistani Muslim boyfriend and they planned to marry.

Surprised, he asked, “How can you marry him since you are a Christian?”

“It doesn’t matter; we are the same,” she responded. “In the Quran, God is called Allah, and Jesus is called Isa. The names are different but we worship the same God.”

“Actually we are not the same. Jesus and Isa are two different personalities. In the Bible, Jesus is the Son of God. In the Quran, Isa is only a prophet. Isa never hung on the cross for your sins, but Jesus died and hung on the cross for your sins. Jesus rose again, but Isa never rose again. So, how can we be the same?” he answered.

After this conversation, my student realized that Muslim men deceive Christian girls into marrying them by falsely saying they both worship the same God.

A Muslim husband and his family often pressure a wife to convert to Islam. A Christian nurse and a Muslim doctor worked together in England, fell in love, and decided to marry. She knew nothing about Islam. They were married in an Islamic ceremony conducted in Arabic. Without knowing what she was saying, she repeated the *shahada* (the Islamic creed). Later she was told that she had converted to Islam. She felt deceived and betrayed. They moved to his country where she recommitted her life to Jesus. She had constant struggles with her husband’s family, and eventually they moved back to England. She said that her children really struggled with identity as they did not fit into either culture.

Some Christian women marry Muslim men convinced that they will lead their husbands to Christ. However, there are no

guarantees that this will happen. In fact, many wives pray for years without seeing any movement toward Christ in their Muslim husband's life. A widowed Christian woman received a phone call from a Muslim man, a long-time family friend whose wonderful wife had recently died. He asked this widow to marry him. She was flattered. He was such a fine man and she thought she would be able to lead him to Christ. He came to the United States for the marriage, got his green card, then went back to his country, and told her never to call him again. He broke her heart.

Scenario 3

A Christian friend loves joining international students on her campus for meals and conversations. She is interested in learning about different cultures and loves to experiment with different types of cooking. She meets a Muslim student. She is impressed with his devotion to Islam. He does not drink. He prays five times a day and fasts during the month of Ramadan. His culture sounds fascinating and she appreciates his sense of family and community. He wants to marry her. What would you tell her?

The influence of culture and religion cannot be underestimated in a marriage relationship. Cross-cultural marriages between two Christians or two Muslims from different countries will encounter cultural differences, but by practicing the same faith, the couple can experience spiritual compatibility. In a Christian/Muslim marriage, if the Muslim man and the Christian woman are more secular and nominal in their religious practice, they will still face cultural adjustments. For a Christian to marry a Muslim who has grown up in the West, the cultural adjustment may not be as great as with a Muslim who has grown up in a predominantly Islamic society. However, if either the non-practicing Muslim or Christian begins to seriously pursue their faith and obey the teachings of their respective holy book, the spiritual differences inevitably

surface, revealing the stark incompatibilities of Islam and Christianity. They will be spiritually mismatched.

Couples who remain in the wife's home country after marriage, speak the same language, and have freedom of mobility, will experience less cultural stress. Wives who return to the husband's home country face challenges with language learning, living arrangements, gender segregation, and family expectations. If she does not learn the language, she will have a hard time becoming part of his family.

I met a North American lady who married a Muslim doctor and converted to Islam. While living in the West, the family went to the mosque together and fasted during Ramadan. Her husband decided to take her and their two children back to his home country. The family no longer attended the mosque together because only men in his country attend mosque. His extended family controlled her. She had to wear clothes from his country in order to be modest and they gave her a Muslim name. Her children suffered. She said everything changed when they moved to his country. Eventually they moved back to North America.

Marrying a Muslim

Marriage is God's idea. In the book of Genesis, God created men and women in His own image, both as male and female (Gen. 1:27). Marriage is a covenant relationship with God (Mal. 2:14) between one man and one woman. Husbands leave their parents and are joined to their wives to form a new family unit (Gen. 2:24). Through marital intimacy, the husband and wife become one (Matt. 19:6; Eph. 5:31). The marriage bed is not to be shared with anyone else (Heb. 13:4). Christ compares the marriage relationship with His sacrificial love for the church: "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25).

My Iranian friend who met Jesus said that in Islam the husband buys the wife. Islamic marriage is a *contract* whereas a Christian marriage is a *covenant* before God. The Quran

permits a Muslim man to marry four wives, provided he treats them equally: “Marry women of your choice, two, three or four. But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one” (Q 4:3). Christian wives feel heart-broken and betrayed if they find out that their handsome, charming Muslim husband has another wife in his home country. Even Muslim women fear that one day their husbands will take another wife. I talked with a Pakistani Muslim woman who is the first wife of a man she rarely sees. Sadly, she told me that her husband married a Dutch woman and lives with her in Holland.

A Muslim husband has authority over his wife sexually. The Quran tells him that “your wives are as a tilth (a place of sowing seed) unto you, so approach your tilth when and how you will” (Q 2:223). She must be available to him any time he wants. In contrast, the Bible says that “husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph. 5:28). The Christian husband and wife have mutual authority over each other’s bodies (1 Cor. 7:3-5).

Domestic violence occurs in every country. Whereas the Quran condones it, the Bible does not. Christian husbands are to love their wives and not be harsh with them (Col. 3:19). The Quran permits a husband to punish his wife for disobedience (arrogance or rebellion) by first admonishing her, then refusing to share her bed, and finally, by beating her (Quran 4:34). Muslim husbands can be very over-protective by guarding their wives and monitoring their activity because wives’ actions can reflect negatively on his honor and reputation. A woman’s freedom of movement can be curtailed because she is not trusted to go out on her own without a chaperone or be in the company of other men.

Divorce in Islam

In the case of divorce in the West, the mother usually receives legal custody of the children and the father has visiting rights. In Islam the children belong to the father. Divorce in majority Islamic countries is easy for a man and difficult for a

woman. A Muslim man can easily divorce his wife by saying, “I divorce you” three times. Some of the reasons a husband divorces his wife include not bearing sons, conversion to another religion, and aging. For women, divorce is more difficult and allowed only in the case of the husband’s impotence or insanity.

The Extended Family

Initially, a Christian wife may be enamored by her Muslim husband’s tightly knit family, their hospitality, and regard for community. She may not see that she is marrying the whole family with all its expectations, financial and social responsibilities, and endless obligations. In the West, the nuclear family is the main family unit. Muslim family structure is very different. His extended family will greatly influence his decisions. A Christian woman who expects to have the primary relationship with her Muslim husband will experience sadness and disappointment when her husband listens to his mother instead of her. The husband finds himself caught between his wife and mother, who both compete for his attention.

The wife of a Muslim man will generally be expected to put his family first in every way—financially and otherwise. The oldest son is responsible for the other siblings. Wives who save money for their own family become discouraged to find their husband sent the money to his relatives. A wife will be expected to entertain her husband’s extended family who may come and stay at any time.

Children Belong to the Husband

One of my most heart-breaking memories happened while traveling back into the Islamic country where I lived. I sat down to wait for my early morning flight. My attention was drawn to a European woman who was inappropriately dressed and seemed uncomfortably out of place in the room of staring men. I sat down beside her and she began to pour out her heart. She had fallen in love with a Muslim man years earlier while

studying together at a university. They married and had three children. Without warning her husband took the children back to his country. Desperate and determined to find them, she was traveling to her embassy in the capital city hoping they could help her. I volunteered to drive her there and she asked me to sit in on the meeting. A very gracious embassy official motioned for us to have a seat at his desk and he listened as she painfully poured out all the difficult details. He had a far-away look in his eyes. “These mixed marriages...” he said, as his voice trailed off. “There is very little we can do. The children belong to the father.” She begged him to do something. As we drove away, past a playground, she suddenly screamed, “There are my children!” Could it be? I stopped for her to get a closer look and she broke down in hysterical sobs when she realized they were not hers. She returned to her country alone, dejected, and heart-broken.

Count the Cost

- Know what Islam teaches about marriage.
- Men are allowed to marry four wives.
- Husbands can discipline their wives.
- The children belong to the husband. They will be raised Muslim.
- Marriage in Islam is a contract, not a covenant before God like biblical marriage.
- Jesus and Muhammad treat women radically different.

Conclusion

Many Christian women who marry Muslim men, often against the advice of their families and friends, believe that their marriage will be the exception but later express deep regrets due to being spiritually mismatched. The Bible clearly states in 2 Corinthians 6:14 that a Christian should not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. Seek the godly counsel of your pastor. Emotional entanglement, naive thinking, and spiritual

deception can blind one to the realities of the situation. Encourage Christian women who are considering marrying a Muslim man to think biblically, consider the consequences, and count the costs to avoid entering into in a spiritually mismatched marriage.



ADDRESSING KEY MYTHS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ISLAM

M. L. Rogers
2023

The old Cadillac sat like a relic in the grocery store parking lot, telling stories of better days. An elderly African American woman slowly emerged from its rusty shell, listlessly clutching a fistful of coupons. A casual observer would have thought this woman's life reflected the values of her church-going peers, but the red and white bumper sticker donning the rear of the steel beast revealed the divergent path she had trod.

Whatever compelling reasons led this aged woman to outfit her vehicle with a sticker that read, "Islam made the difference," one could be sure that this was no flippant statement, nor was this woman an anomaly. On the contrary, Islam is growing fastest in the United States among African Americans, most of whom at one time described themselves as Christians.²⁴ Along with Southeast Asians and those from the Middle East, African Americans comprise one of the three largest ethnic groups of American Muslims and make up about 20 percent of the total U.S. Muslim population.²⁵

²⁴ Mark Hausfeld, "Islam in America: Understanding and Engaging Diaspora Muslims Through the Local Church," J. Philip Hogan World Missions Monograph, vol. 2, 12; Carl Ellis, ed., *Saving Our Sons: Confronting the Lure of Islam with Truth, Faith, & Courage* (Chicago, IL: Imani Books, 2007), 9.

²⁵ Global Initiative: Reaching Muslims Peoples, *Journey to Understanding: Equipping Christians to Engage Muslims with Faith* (Springfield,

The reasons for this attraction to Islam within African American communities are convincing. Proponents of this faith have constructed false narratives concerning roots, racism, and retaliation that present a strong pull for many people within communities of color. The following discussion refutes these narratives and shows that only in Christ will African Americans find their truest identity, dignity, and peace. The Christian faith is the superior choice for people of African descent.

Myths about Roots

“Most of the Africans that came over in slavery were Muslims,” said Abdul as we shared a meal in a small Midwestern restaurant. Having left behind the Christian faith, he now proudly embraces the religion of his ancestors. Abdul’s thinking coincides with that of many African American Muslims throughout the twentieth century who “would testify later that by practicing Islam, they were reclaiming a religious and spiritual heritage that had been stolen from them when their ancestors were kidnapped in Africa.”²⁶

While Islam certainly held sway in certain pockets of Africa during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, no one knows for sure how many Muslims came through the Middle Passage to the Americas. Richard Turner estimates that Muslims constituted at least 15 percent of the slave population of North America.²⁷ Jane Smith cautiously places her estimate at 20 percent.²⁸ Edward Curtis concedes that estimates widely range between the thousands to more than a million.²⁹ Jacob S. Dorman

MO: Onward Books, 2018), 16; Pew Research Center, “Black Muslims Account for a Fifth of all U.S. Muslims, and About Half are Converts to Islam,” accessed April 16, 2019, <https://pewrsr.ch/3ZuYhGs>.

²⁶ Edward E. Curtis, IV, *Muslims in America: A Short History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 22.

²⁷ Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), xvii.

²⁸ Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 76.

²⁹ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 4.

contends that almost no Muslim slaves arrived in North America after 1770.³⁰ Knowing or even accurately estimating the number of African Muslims brought to North America during the Transatlantic Slave Trade seems impossible. While history does not provide clear answers on the religious roots of enslaved Africans, this much is certain: whatever the religious background, enslaved African Americans largely embraced Christianity. Those who came over on slave ships as Muslims did not, by and large, pass their faith on to future generations. The Islamic movements among African Americans during the twentieth century occurred without a generational link to Muslim slaves of the South, for Islam did not survive the days of slavery. This means one of two things or perhaps both: (1) either the number of practicing Muslims forced into the Transatlantic Slave Trade was not as great as some say and, therefore, not large enough to ensure a critical mass of ongoing followers, or (2) the problems borne during the dark and painful days of slavery necessitated a more robust solution than any other religious system could offer. Whether born into African Traditional Religion or Islam, many of these precious people left these behind and embraced Christ. According to Jemar Tisby, African Americans

saw the truth of the gospel message even as slaveholders ... distorted [it] ... [They] looked to the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt as a model for their own exodus from American slavery. Black Christians saw in Scripture a God who “sits high and looks low”—one who saw their oppression and was outraged by it.³¹

³⁰ Jacob S. Dorman, *The Princess and the Prophet: The Secret History of Magic, Race, and Black Muslims in America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2020), 36.

³¹ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 19-20.

Born in the hot fields of racial injustice and oppression, the Black Church “emerged as the ark of safety for people of African descent.”³² In the face of the hardships of slavery, the hope of the Christian faith shone. Since its inception, “no pillar of the African American community has been more central to its history, identity, and social justice vision than the Black Church.”³³

A search for one’s roots has a great deal to do with the quest for identity. As the dignity and identity of African Americans sat in shambles because of the abhorrent slave trade, many found a new identity in the refuge of the Christian faith. As image-bearers of God (Gen 1:27), they discovered dignity that could not be dismantled.

Still today, the Black Church “animate[s] Black identity.”³⁴ African Americans who have left the church for the mosque in search of their roots should consider what they have passed over. In an age when atrocities like police brutality, racial profiling, and mass incarceration persist, is Islam up to the task of providing hope and a refuge? Or, like their ancestors who courageously endured the barbarity of slavery, will they find their identity through a superior way? Juxtaposed to the impossibility of knowing how much Islam truly impacted their family tree prior to the slave trade, African Americans can know that Christianity played a vital role in the Black community then and now. These are the true religious roots of a shining people, forged in the fires of hardship.

Myths about Racism

“What factors led you to convert to Islam?” I asked carefully. Our conversation had been cordial but guarded. Abruptly, Abdul’s pleasant countenance wrinkled into a scowl

³² Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 19.

³³ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Black Church: This is Our Story, This is Our Song* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2021), 1.

³⁴ Gates, *The Black Church*, 2.

as memories of racism and injustice overtook his thoughts like monsoon winds. “Racism was *the* factor,” he responded. Sitting across from me at the restaurant, the lines on this former churchgoer’s face told many tales of a painful past. Though once a committed Christian, Abdul had become a Muslim in a prison cell after reading literature from the Nation of Islam.

Stories like Abdul’s populate the landscape of Black Islam. It was the seed of racism planted in the fertile Jim Crow soil that led to a burgeoning crop of Islamic movements among African Americans in the early twentieth century, the most prominent of which was the Nation of Islam. Today, many African Americans, like Abdul, still cross the threshold of Islam through the doorway of this movement.

Black Muslims have rightly confronted Christians on our past prejudices and, at times, outright racism. Sadly, this confrontation has confused the actions of an imperfect people with the ethics of a Perfect Message; the problem has never been with the latter. Writer and Professor Esau McCaulley captures this concept:

I did not join the Nation of Islam for a variety of reasons, even when I most despaired of a hopeful future for African Americans in this country. Why? I came to believe that we must ask questions in their proper order. *The fundamental question was whether or not the Christian story was true.* I believed that the tomb was empty on the third day. White supremacy, even when practiced by Christians, cannot overcome the fact of the resurrection.³⁵(emphasis added)

In leaving the church for the mosque, Black Muslims have left behind the Truth. In a sad twist, they have also forsaken a Message of equality for one of Arab supremacy. Rather than promoting one culture over another, as Islam does, the Christian

³⁵ Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 72-73.

faith elevates all cultures, and, therefore, innately eschews the sin of racism.

In Ephesians 2:11-22, the Apostle Paul reminds his Gentile audience that they no longer hold second-class status, but have attained equal footing with their Jewish counterparts (v. 19). This new unity and equality between Jew and Gentile does not extinguish diversity. The Gentiles do not become Jewish, or the other way around. The cross brings them together, yet they retain their cultural identities. This ideal plays out in countless Bible translation projects. Language is intimately wedded to culture, and Christians have understood since the beginning that God wants to speak to His people in their mother tongue. In the Christian faith, a diversity of cultures is truly celebrated.

In contrast, when visiting an American mosque, one will encounter Asians, Africans, Latinos, Blacks, and Whites all chanting Arabic prayers, with or without understanding of what they are saying. Islam lays a heavy yoke of Arabic culture over any people group that embraces it, including Arabic dress, gender customs, and language. This means that one cannot truly read the Quran unless he or she understands Arabic. For this reason, Abdul reluctantly admitted, “There’s a lot of Arab-centrism in Islam.” While Muslims promote an air of unity, if anything, it is a unity of uniformity under the banner of Arab superiority.

It is this ethic that gave rise to the Arab Slave Trade, which lasted for more than thirteen centuries, and enslaved roughly 11 million Africans to serve in Muslim harems, households, and armies.³⁶ This slave trade left many African towns and cities decimated and depopulated. While the flames of this unholy fire raged on, some Muslims in Africa participated in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Jacob Dorman tells how Muslim theocratic warlords captured many non-Muslim Africans as slaves, and sent as many as half a million of them into the misery of the Middle Passage between 1711 and 1810.³⁷ Other

³⁶ Dorman, *The Princess and the Prophet*, 34-35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

Muslim groups, like the Fulani, participated in the slave trade as well.³⁸

In light of Islam’s elevation of one culture over another, Black Islamic scholar Richard Turner describes what he calls “the myth of a race-blind Islam”: a discourse and an intellectual tradition “that have created and perpetuated ahistorical conceptions of Islam.”³⁹ In other words, the Islamic narrative that promotes itself as anti-racist disregards centuries of racial injustice and the harmfulness of Arab superiority.

African Americans who have left the church for the mosque because of racism should consider what they have traded. The Christian message, rooted in an understanding of the value of all human life (Gen. 1:27), does not elevate one culture over another and, therefore, is inconsistent with racist ideology. In Galatians 3:28, Paul states, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In Christ, there is a new unity that incorporates these three major divisions of humanity: race (Jew/Greek), economics (slave/free), and gender (male/female).⁴⁰ The seeds of equality and unity found in the Bible would lead to a bountiful harvest of abolitionism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This message resounds so loudly in the pages of Scripture that Hugh Auld, the slave owner of the renowned Frederick Douglass, said, “If [a slave] learns to read the Bible it will forever unfit him to be a slave.”⁴¹ The gospel is the perfect Message. In this Truth, people like Abdul can find true equality and unified diversity.

Myths about Retaliation

³⁸ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 6.

³⁹ Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 55-56.

⁴⁰ James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds. *Eerdman’s Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman’s, 2003), 1380.

⁴¹ J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 178.

“Turn the other cheek?” questioned Abdul, as our conversation continued. “Nah, man, I’m not doin’ that.” For many African American Muslims like Abdul, Jesus’ call to forgive our enemies stands in harmful opposition to resistance of oppression. For them, Islam provides the platform to give full vent to anger and retribution.

History shows, however, that people of passivity have never populated the Black Church.⁴² This church became a cauldron of Black political action, even dating back to the late eighteenth century; this activism did not come about in spite of but because of the faith of these early African Americans.⁴³ Like Esau McCauley, they saw “the theological energy of the Bible [as moving] toward liberation”⁴⁴ and, therefore, found biblical models to resist oppression.

This resistance does not diminish the need to forgive. But how does one do that, considering past and present injustices? There is no room for flippant answers here. The pain is real, and the solution cannot be trivial. Enter the gospel. Ephesians 2:16 presents a beautiful picture of reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles after centuries of animosity: these two groups come together “in one body *through the cross*, thereby killing the hostility” (emphasis added). The fruit of forgiveness, cut from the cross, brings unity out of an impossible impasse. Only in the cross does anyone possess the true power to forgive. At the cross, God’s divine judgment and glorious grace intersect. It is there that injustice meets its match, as God shows himself as supremely just. It is there that the high price of forgiveness is paid for—once and for all. McCauley asserts, “It is only by remembering that God’s forgiveness costs him something that I find the divinely given power to pay the cost of forgiveness instead of revenge.”⁴⁵

⁴² Gates, *The Black Church*, xix.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, xix, xx.

⁴⁴ McCauley, *Reading While Black*, 133.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

Without a cross, Muslims have nothing to do with their bitterness and hurts but let them mutate into cancer cells of rage and retaliation. Civil Rights activist John Perkins, whose hardships would have led many down a vengeful path, contends, “Revenge is dangerous because it’s never really satisfied with an eye for an eye. Instead, it rushes quickly into punitive excess, taking much more from the offender than is due.”⁴⁶ Further, holding on to anger and bitterness “damages [one’s] very soul” causing him or her to view everything that others do or that happens to them “through the eyes of hurt.”⁴⁷ The sacrificial death of Christ on the cross enabled Perkins to let go of his pain and to forgive, thus releasing hate’s heavy harness over his life. According to Tim Keller, offering forgiveness for past injustices is an absolute necessity for living a happy and whole life:

If you are made in the image of God, who is a forgiver, then it is a directive—you *must* forgive. In the short run it can feel good to be angry at somebody who has wronged you, or to pay them back. But in the long run what is going to happen? Disintegration. It can hurt your body to be angry. It can certainly hurt your relationships, making it harder to trust and commit. It can distort your whole life. Why? Because when you are disobeying a moral directive from God, you are going against the grain of your own nature, against the grain of the universe.⁴⁸

Here again, the Christian faith shines as the superior choice, as it gives voice to critical resistance while giving believers the power to lay aside the burden of anger and to forgive. Today,

⁴⁶ John Perkins, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018), 107.

⁴⁷ Perkins, *One Blood*, 107.

⁴⁸ Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God: Finding God in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 115-116.

Jesus is inviting African American Muslims like Abdul to bring their painful experiences to the foot of the cross where they will find rest for their souls, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt. 11:29-30).

Whether it is a question of roots, racism, or retaliation, the gospel provides the answer for Black Muslims today. It is our prayer that those who have left the church for the mosque will come back home to the One who is ready to meet them right where they are, because every African American Muslim needs to know the Truth about Jesus.



LANDS THAT GOD WILL NOT FORGET: THE FORMER SOVIET UNION COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL ASIA

Daryl Grasinger
2020

The persecution of Christians in former Soviet Union countries in Central Asia is, of course, bad news. But, ironically, it is also good news because it is evidence that people there are embracing the Good News of Jesus Christ in growing numbers and faithfully following Him.

Central Asian Countries (2017)

1. Azerbaijan – 10 million (96% Muslim, 3% Christian)
2. Kazakhstan – 18.5 million (70% Muslim, 26% Christian)
3. Kyrgyzstan – 6 million (86% Muslim, 14% Christian)
4. Tajikistan – 8.9 million (90% Muslim, 1.5% Christian)
5. Uzbekistan – 30 million (93% Muslim, 4% Christian)

Christian communities historically existed in this vast region, but they were destroyed by the invasion of Islam that began around the eighth century. In the twentieth century, religions there were brutally suppressed by the communist Soviet Union. When that broke up in 1991, not only did new countries spring into existence, but also fledgling churches of

Muslim converts emerged, which now fight for their spiritual life, oppressed by secular dictatorships and Muslim extremists.

Persecution Gets Personal in Kyrgyzstan

Often in Central Asian countries the most painful persecution is inflicted on Christians who have converted from Islam. These Christians are often embroiled in a constant struggle with the local Muslim community and even family members who turn against them. In Kyrgyzstan, a landlocked nation of 6 million people of whom 86% are Muslim, persecutors are often protected or encouraged by corrupt police officers.

In May 2018, a Kyrgyz Christian woman, recently converted from Islam, was held captive in her home and beaten by her Muslim family for refusing to renounce her faith in Christ. A church was burned down in the same area. When police arrived to investigate the arson, they demanded to know why the members attended church instead of going to the mosque. They even suggested the believers might have set fire to their own building.

Recently, three Muslim men almost killed Eldos, a 25-year-old Christian convert from Islam, in an attack in the Issk-Kul region of Kyrgyzstan. The assailants attempted to force him to say the *shahada* (the Islamic creed), the reciting of which is considered by Muslims to be conversion to Islam. Eldos was viciously beaten and left bleeding with a severe concussion, a fractured jaw, broken teeth, an eye injury, and a suspected brain hemorrhage. The police reportedly attempted to disguise the religious motivation for the attack by claiming Eldos was beaten for playing loud music.

Small Churches Forced to Break the Law

Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan all require churches to register, but the rules of registration are impossible for small congregations to meet, thus rendering them unlawful. From 2011, a religious organization in Kazakhstan is required

to have 50 members who live locally, while in Kyrgyzstan, a 2009 law demanded 250 signatures from members in order for registration to be granted, and in Turkmenistan, as of April 2016, 50 founding members were required. Turkmenistan traces its Christian roots back to the third century, but now it is an isolated and closed nation, dominated by Islam and a presidential personality cult.

In Kazakhstan, churches that are unable to register are subjected to police raids on their meetings and members' homes; fines, detention, and imprisonment; seizure of church equipment and Christian literature; and the closure of church buildings. But in April 2018 even registered churches in the west of the country were asked to submit the full names, ages, places of study and state-assigned identification numbers of all people under 18 who attended church meetings. A government official admitted that the demand for personal data "was not sent to Muslims ... just to Christians."

In a town in a Muslim-dominated area of southwestern Kyrgyzstan, a network of small fellowships of Muslim-background Christians is forced to operate in semi-secrecy due to strong opposition from local mosques, social ostracism from the Muslim community, and even threats of violence. The "network pastor" and his wife visit the homes of Christian families who converted from Islam, encouraging them to stand firm in their faith. The pastor also holds regular gatherings in his own house, and they hold children and young people's ministry. "We have good contacts with local people and visit them at home and share the gospel and read the Bible. Some of them have started to visit our Sunday Christian gatherings," the pastor said.

Christian Businesses Protect Against Poverty

Christian converts from Islam are often persecuted by being denied work. In Kyrgyzstan, many Christian men, who cannot accept these conditions, are forced to leave their communities

to search for work, leaving their wives and children behind and their small churches weakened by their absence.

In one remote Kyrgyz community, a Christian compassion ministry provided the money for five struggling Christian families from Muslim backgrounds to buy cattle. The families were blessed by the help of a non-believer who knew the cow market. He secured the best cows for the lowest prices, enabling the families to buy 18 animals.

“When we brought one of the brothers five cattle, his children couldn’t sleep because they were looking at the cows all night! All the family was very happy,” said one of the Christians.

The cows produce milk, of course, but, more importantly, they produce manure that is processed using earthworms to make bio-humus compost, which is sold in the spring. “No one in our region works in the production of bio-humus and it is an extremely valuable product,” said one of the Christian men.

The cows mean these brothers in Christ can remain with their families and continue to play important roles in their local Christian fellowships.

Building the Church, Brick by Brick

Because of their poverty, Central Asian congregations often struggle with the costs of their meeting places. Buying property and constructing or renovating church buildings requires great sacrifice. Church members readily contribute their labor and meager funds to help with construction or equipment. Last year in Tajikistan, a very poor nation which is estimated to be 90% Muslim and just 1.5% Christian, a local church installed a new heating system so that very young and elderly worshippers could attend worship during the freezing winter months. In another Central Asian country, radiators and new windows were installed to keep out the cold in a building shared by several congregations. And in Kazakhstan, even with government restrictions, a new church building has been constructed—which is now shared by four congregations.

Having a permanent building is very important for Christians in Kazakhstan. A permanent building enables a church to begin the process of registration so that they can meet legally.

Strengthening Pastors through Training

A crucial aspect of ministry in Central Asia is enabling local church leaders to get the ministry training and Bible teaching they have not had the opportunity to gain. This is especially helpful to those caring for new believers facing persecution. Sometimes it is necessary to convene training sessions in remote areas, as the authorities are less likely to interfere in such places. Leaders are also trained in a variety of skills: how to resolve conflicts in the church, how to help people with family problems, and how to improve security to avoid being persecuted.

An extra benefit of these training gatherings is that isolated and hard-pressed church leaders and workers can encourage one another. “Kazakhstan is a very big country and most of our church leaders don’t have any communication with each other or with senior leaders of our association. Some of these pastors are on the verge of emotional breakdown. These sessions help them to recover emotionally and spiritually,” says one of the organizers.

Muslim Background Believers also take advantage of organized training sessions. They usually choose to meet in smaller groups rather than large ones, so as not to draw attention from the Muslim majority.

Hope for Uzbekistan with New President

For many years, Uzbekistan was the harshest Central Asian country in its treatment of Christians, but President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who came to power in 2016, is more tolerant of religious activity than his predecessor. In 2017, there were official celebrations in Uzbekistan to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and, for the first time in almost

two decades, local congregations and church buildings have been able to get registration, so that they can function legally.

The first Uzbek Bible became available in 2017 and in that year 3,000 copies were sold legally by the Bible Society of Uzbekistan. “It is important for us because these copies are permitted officially for use and cannot be confiscated,” said a local church leader.

Around 93% of the population of Uzbekistan is Muslim. In the fourteenth century, Tamarlane, who is celebrated as a hero among the Uzbek people, almost entirely eradicated Christianity. And, despite the somewhat more tolerant attitude of the central government, Christians—especially converts from Islam—still face persecution from other sources such as Muslim relatives, local government officials, and Islamist extremists.

Gathering to pray in a private home remains illegal and those who are caught usually find themselves in court the next day and have to pay a fine. Ironically and thankfully, the fines have become much smaller since Mirziyoyev came to power.

Illegal to Give the Gift of God’s Word

A Christian man was fined two weeks’ average wages in January 2019 for giving a woman an Uzbek-language copy of the New Testament as a gift. A court ordered that the book be destroyed. Using a New Testament for “missionary purposes” is a crime, according to the government’s Committee for Religious Affairs.

At the police station, the man was informed that his case was being dealt with by the local “Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department” and he was charged with breaking two separate laws. These were Administrative Code Article 184-2, which refers to the illegal production, storage, or import of religious material for distribution, and Article 240-2 banning proselytization.

Southeastern Uzbekistan borders Tajikistan. As in Uzbekistan, the Tajik authorities make efforts to prevent

Muslims getting Christian literature. In January 2019, 5,000 calendars sent to Christians in registered evangelical churches in Tajikistan were burned by the authorities. The calendars contained Bible verses and the authorities told a church leader that the number of calendars was much higher than the number of Christians believed to be in the country.

Import and distribution of religious literature must be approved by the Tajikistan authorities. Similar confiscations have led to Christians being imprisoned—such as Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov, a father-of-three in his early 40s, who was jailed in 2017 for three years after police confiscated “subversive” hymn books from his church.

A Great Testimony from Azerbaijan

A cow played an unlikely role in the life of Rena, who turned from being a persecutor to being a follower of Christ in a town in Azerbaijan, a nation which is 96% Muslim. Rena was furious that her sister and mother had left Islam to follow Jesus as Christians. She scorned them and screamed at them, “Will you shame us among our people; maybe you will even put a cross on your house?” Her mother simply held out the New Testament and said, “If you knew about this book, you’d want to read it.”

One day Rena lost her cow and spent three days searching in vain for the animal. On the third day, she thought, “They say Jesus Christ is alive. If this is true, let my cow return to me, and I will believe in Him.” Rena continued, “When it got dark, we went along the road and in lights from cars I saw something running toward us. It was my cow! Then I said, ‘Lord, I believe that You are the truth.’ And when I came back to my courtyard with the cow I said, ‘My cow has been found and Jesus Christ made it happen!’” She added, “From that day I am a Christian and I am following Jesus.”

The church in Rena’s village has now planted two new churches in neighboring villages in Azerbaijan and last year celebrated the first anniversary of their official registration as a

church. Their application had previously been rejected six times!

Looking to the Future

Christians in the former Soviet Union countries are embroiled in a constant struggle to follow their faith. In many areas, they are denied the basic freedom to meet together to worship freely. However, since the fall of the Soviet communist regime, thousands of Muslims have turned to Christ, hundreds of new churches have been planted in many people-groups, and there is a great hope for more good news in the future.



THE INSIDER MOVEMENT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Khalil Ullah
2011

An astounding phenomenon, though not exclusive to ministry to Muslims, is overtaking much missionary work among Muslims. A growing number of professing Christians involved in witness to Muslims are a part of what is called, “Insider Movements,” or the “Insider Movement.” This controversial approach to ministry has resulted in many of its proponents affirming that Muhammad was a prophet from God, the Quran is at least partially-inspired Scripture, and it is possible for Muslims to retain their Muslim identity as “Muslim followers of Christ.” Such beliefs have resulted in radical practices such as professing Christians and former Muslims legally converting to Islam and the production of “Muslim-idiom translations” of the Bible that do not literally translate such words and phrases as “Son of God,” “Son of Man,” and “Son” in reference to Jesus and “Father” in reference to God.

Another aspect of this phenomenon is the relative ignorance of the Insider Movement among churches and individual Christians, including those who pray for and financially support its proponents. It may not be an exaggeration to say that every evangelical organization in witness to Muslims is affected in some way by the Insider Movement. Rebecca Lewis, in the *International Journal of Missiology*, writes,

An “insider movement” is any movement to faith in Christ where a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities

and social networks, and where b) believing families, as valid expressions of faith in Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.⁴⁹

You follow Jesus as a Hindu, as a Muslim, as a Buddhist, or as whatever other variety of socio-religious community you might be from.

The Insider Movement for Muslims is any approach in which Muslims are told that they can retain their Muslim identity and also have saving faith in Jesus Christ. The premise is that this will allow such believers to remain “inside” their family and community and be witnesses to them. If such believers identify themselves as “Christians,” it would most likely force them “outside” of their families and communities and cut off their ability to witness to them. Fouad Elias Accad, a late director of the Bible Society of Lebanon, while not using the phrase “Insider Movement” in his book, *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam*, nevertheless strongly advocates for this approach:

If a Muslim could trust Christ without alienating his family and friends, he could become a means within his own community to testify to them. ... Today there are Muslims trusting Christ in Muslim lands who do not consider that they have become “Christians” (the word has a political connotation to Muslims), but instead see themselves as having become truly Muslim (the word Muslim means “surrendered to God”).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Rebecca Lewis, “Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities” in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24:2 (Summer) 2007: 75.

⁵⁰ Fouad Elias Accad, *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 8.

“Muslim-idiom Translations” of the Bible

Another important aspect of the Insider Movement is the rise of “Muslim-idiom translations” of the Bible. It may be argued that the initial idea for some of these “translations” was unrelated to the Insider Movement, but the two have since come to be closely allied. These “translations” have appeared in audio, print, and video versions of the Bible. The list of languages in which at least any portion of Scripture has incorporated such “Muslim-idioms” and/or its guiding principles is growing. The author is aware of such “translations”, whether in part or in whole, in various dialects of Arabic, as well as in the Baluchi, Bengali, Dari, Indonesian, and Malay languages. Three very controversial aspects of such “Muslim-idiom translations” have to do with:

1. Replacing filial language (i.e., “Father,” “Son of God,” and “Son”).
2. A non-literal translation of “Son of Man” in reference to Jesus Christ.
3. The use of Islamic honorifics (using Islamic titles for Jesus and other biblical people that Muslims regard as “prophets”. This includes using “Master/Mister” prior to the name of Jesus, “the Prophet” prior to proper names like Moses, David, Solomon, etc. and using the phrase, “peace be upon him,” after the names of “prophets”).

Analysis

In order for an approach or movement to be considered biblical, it must be able to withstand the scrutiny of the Old and New Testaments. While the following is not a comprehensive list, looking at four of the foundational premises of the Insider Movement in light of Scripture will help us to arrive at a proper assessment:

1. **Insider Movement premise:** being an “insider” will result in witness to family and others in one’s community.

Challenge: Witnessing is the result of obedience to God’s Word and the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Consider some biblical reasons for witnessing:

- Excitement about what Jesus has done for us (Matt. 9:30-31; Mark 1:43-45; 7:36-37; Luke 5:14-15)
- The fear and love of God (2 Cor. 5:11-15)
- Jesus’ call to proclaim the Gospel (Mark 3:13-14; Rom. 1:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:16)
- Jesus’ command to witness to everyone (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-48; John 20:21)
- The Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49-49; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4ff).

Another consideration concerning witness is how Jesus, the apostles, and first Christians (i.e., Jews) regarded their identity. Believers were taught and practiced baptism, which was a public identification of following Jesus (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; John 4:1-2; Acts 2:38-41). They also met together for instruction (Acts 2:42-47). There was no known effort to highlight their being Jews in order to witness to unsaved family and friends. This is all the more remarkable when we remember that Jews in the first century faced similar pressures and persecution as do Muslims for following Jesus Christ.

2. **Insider Movement premise:** being an “insider” will result in acceptance of such a witness.

Challenge: Jesus’ teaching and experience while on earth was exactly the opposite of this premise: “Only in

his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor” (Matt. 13:57). The people of His community wanted to kill Him after He preached to them (Luke 4:28-30), His family considered Him mentally deranged (Mark 3:21, 31-32), and His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:2-5).

Consider the following passages from the Bible that stand in contrast to the above premise:

- Jesus promised that some will accept our witness while others will not (John 15:20).
- Jesus promised to divide households (Matt. 10:34-39).
- In marriages where only one spouse is a believer, there is no guarantee that the witness of the believing spouse will result in salvation of the unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:16).
- Jesus told the Apostle Paul that the Jews (His community) would not receive His testimony and commanded him to go to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21).

It is impossible for any human to save the soul of another human. Redemption of the soul is the work of God (Ps. 49:6-9; Matt. 19:25-26) and the convincing work that leads a person to be saved is also the work of God, the Holy Spirit (John 16:6-11). This is not to minimize the role of witnessing but it does counter the false presupposition that remaining “inside” one’s family and community guarantees acceptance of the “insider’s” witness.

3. **Insider Movement premise:** “Muslim” has no religious significance—it only refers to culture.
Challenge: By assigning a new meaning to “Muslim” that Muslims themselves do not accept is at best

disingenuous and at worst deceptive. The retention of “Muslim” as an identity is based on creating a double entendre in which it means one thing for “Muslim followers of Christ” but another for genuine Muslims who properly understand the term to mean an adherent of Islam, which includes the belief and confession that Muhammad is the final prophet of Allah and that the Quran is Allah’s Word.

The Bible is very clear regarding the importance of truth and honesty:

- God does not lie and cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18)
- Jesus, God incarnate, is the Truth (John 14:6)
- Satan is the father of lies, not God (John 8:44)
- Believers are to “put off” lying (Eph. 4:25)
- “Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor. 4:2)

4. **Insider Movement premise:** Filial language (i.e., “Father” and “Son”) and the phrases “Son of God” and “Son of Man” are not divinely inspired terms that must be literally translated.

Challenge: If the Bible is divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:15-16) so that even the use of a word in its singular form (e.g. “seed” in Gal. 3:16) points to Jesus, how much more three of the most important designations of our Lord: “Son,” “Son of God,” and “Son of Man”? Jesus’ use of different names and titles for himself is consistent with God’s self-disclosure through different names in the Old Testament. If these three designations can be

substituted with other words and phrases, ultimately these terms are superfluous to understanding the Person of Jesus. Consider the significance of the following:

Son

- at Jesus' birth (Luke 1:32)
- at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:17)
- on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5)
- in a clear claim to divinity (John 5:16-26; 10:24-39)
- in the Trinitarian baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19)
- in Old Testament prophecies of Jesus (Ps. 2:12; Isa. 9:6)

Son of God

- at Jesus' birth (Luke 1:35)
- Satan and demons recognized this fact about Jesus (Matt. 4:3ff; 8:29)
- Peter's great confession of faith (Matt. 16:16)
- the primary conclusion people must come to about Jesus to be considered believers (John 20:31)
- Old Testament revelation about the Creator (Prov. 30:4)

Son of Man

- Jesus' most-used title for himself
- Old Testament phrase referring to humanity (Num. 23:19; Ps. 8:4; Ezek. 2:1, et. al.)
- Old Testament prophecy regarding the Messiah (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 26:64)
- Provides a linguistic "parallel" by which to help understand "Son of God"

Father

- the only way Jesus addressed God in prayer with the exception of His quoting Psalm 22:1 while on the cross
- the way to address God in prayer (Matt. 6:9)
- the way God desires to relate to people (Matt. 5:45; Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32)
- points to the believer’s intimacy with God (Rom. 8:15; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 4:6)
- points to the unity and intimacy between God the Father and Jesus the Son (Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; 10:30; 17:21)
- in the Trinitarian baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19)

The goal of any Bible translation must be faithfulness to the original texts. To “translate” according to an audience’s sensibilities, real or perceived, changes the focus from conveying the author’s intent to what pleases people—a very slippery slope indeed!

Conclusion

Many individuals within reputed evangelical missions organizations, publications, and programs involving denominations and para-church ministries have been promoting “Insider Movements” as both a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, as well as a biblical method of culturally-sensitive or contextualized way of effectively ministering the gospel of Jesus Christ to Muslims. In light of the Bible’s teaching, some of the foundational premises of the Insider Movement are seen to be in error.

Ultimately, the Bible does not allow for retaining any identity that conflicts with one’s commitment to Jesus Christ. Jesus made it very clear that commitment to himself takes

precedence over all other affections and identities (see Matt. 10:32-39; Luke 14:25-35). The Insider Movement, regardless of intent, is a syncretistic approach that is biblically untenable. A great missionary to Muslims, Samuel Zwemer, wisely observed, and with which we conclude: “A passion for Muslim souls does not mean that we are to compromise or to conciliate at any price.” “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6).



OUR MISSION FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Mark Hausfeld
2014

Our family landed in Islamabad, Pakistan, on August 15, 1995. We were the only non-Pakistanis that stepped off the Pakistan International Airlines Boeing 747. As my wife and three children disembarked through the door of the huge aircraft, the smell of jet fuel, dirt, and jasmine flowers hit my senses full on. As the five of us walked the two stories down from the 747's door to the tarmac of the airport, waves of heat radiated off my face. I saw no one who looked, dressed, or spoke like me. It seemed that all eyes stared at our family— not to be rude, but because our family was as unique to them as they were to us. We were now officially in Pakistan—“The Land of the Pure (Islam)”—and we were thrilled!

We processed through passport control and proceeded to baggage claim to retrieve our luggage. It was a relief to find that all the items we had checked in Manchester, England, made it safe and secure. With the help of porters and their carts, we made our way through the masses, people who had a different understanding of “body space” than us. As the mass moved forward, we were swept along to a spot where even more people were waiting for their friends and loved ones. Without much effort, we saw our colleague and soon-to-be mentor in the crowd. She was the only Anglo face in a beautiful display of brown countenances. Soon we were engaged in conversation about the peoples and land that God had called us to serve.

Our colleague shared with us about Pakistani holidays and how important they are to the populace. We asked many questions and learned through fascinating conversations the when and why of each holiday. It became clear that what was important to Pakistanis in life, culture, and religion was all wrapped up in their extraordinary holiday celebrations. To engage these dear people, we would need to prioritize what was important to them, and be very conscientious of how to celebrate with them—and do it with utmost respect.

Eventually my wife and I became totally focused on our host country holidays. One day our colleague shared something that we had not even considered: Pakistanis were keenly interested in the holidays of other nations, particularly festivities in the United States. We began to discuss how we might share the meaning of our holidays with Pakistanis. We decided not to focus on the primarily cultural holidays like the 4th of July, Memorial Day, and Labor Day, but on those with biblical meaning: Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. I will focus on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving was our favorite holiday while overseas for two reasons. First, it is a special time that is set aside to give thanks to God, specifically for His provision in our lives. Second, the holiday is uniquely American. We felt the American uniqueness of the holiday would interest our Pakistani and international friends. More importantly our desire was to share with these friends the biblical reason why President Abraham Lincoln instituted the holiday during the Civil War on October 3, 1863.

Our first Thanksgiving in Pakistan was very special. My wife and I were in language school, so for Thanksgiving, we invited our three Pakistani teachers, our fellow students from the Maldiv Islands, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates and China, as well as our co-worker to our home.

All the non-American friends had some idea that a giant bird was going to be served! It was interesting to hear their assumptions. It all made for anticipation on their parts, and a readiness to listen and learn from our guests on our parts.

Gathering in the dining room, we all stood behind our chairs. I shared that as followers of Jesus our custom was to pray before we ate. I stated that we first want to thank God for His provision for our lives and specifically for the food we were about to eat. Prayer is always meaningful to Muslim peoples. Making prayer the priority of the meal touches the hearts and minds of Muslim peoples. Our Muslim friends were intrigued that prayer was given such a place of importance during an American holiday.

During the meal, I shared the full meaning of American Thanksgiving. Each friend expressed thanks for the meaningful discussion. One Chinese student commented that she was certain that was why God has blessed the United States. We ate and talked through the afternoon. When dessert was served, I asked if each person would share something for which they were thankful. Each one gave sincere expressions of gratitude. It was a solemn and meaningful time. The celebration ended and all the guests said they hoped we'd do it again next year.

Each year at Thanksgiving, tens of thousands of university students from Muslim nations sit in their dorm rooms or eat in a sterile campus cafeteria. I have spoken to many students who said they were never invited into an American home during Thanksgiving. How sad that American Christians have the world coming to their doorsteps, but don't seize the opportunity to connect with these students. From my personal and ministry viewpoint, God has brought these thousands of Muslim students to the U.S. not merely for an education, but to be connected with, befriended by, and loved by real Christian believers (Acts 17:26-27). Thanksgiving can be a great time to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with these students.

Christmas

In Pakistan, our Muslim friends and neighbors called Christmas “Bara Din” or the Big Day! I was amazed at the anticipation Pakistanis would demonstrate while awaiting Christmas. Our family put up a Christmas tree, decorated the house with lights, and put out a Nativity crèche. Muslims walking our street would see the Christmas tree in our living room window and just stop and smile. The whole Advent season seemed to captivate them. It is important to understand that Muslims do believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, but on their official calendar they do not “commemorate” December 25th as the birthday of Jesus. And, of course, while Christians do not necessarily believe Jesus’ birth occurred on December 25, the important fact is the “celebration” of His birth. It is not just a “commemoration” of a birthdate, it is the incarnation; God becoming flesh and dwelling among us to take away the sin of the world. For the Muslim, Jesus was only a prophet, and though they believe He was born of the Virgin Mary—as Allah spoke it to be—and it was, the Muslim understanding is far different than what the Scripture teaches. This is what makes the Christian holiday so significant. It gives us the perfect time to share with our Muslim friends the truth of the incarnation, the real meaning of Christmas.

We enjoyed inviting our Muslim friends and neighbors in for a party. It gave them an opportunity to see the Christmas tree, look at the presents, and then ask questions about Christmas. At a certain point, we would ask them all to be silent. We then took the Bible and read the Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke. The purpose was to share the Word of God and clarify for our misinformed Muslim friends that Christians do not believe God had intimate relations with Mary that resulted in Jesus being born. We always made the most of this time to let the truth of Scripture speak in a powerful way to reveal the true story about the virgin birth of the Savior.

During the Christmas season, we would get Bibles in the Pakistani national language of Urdu and give them as presents

to our Muslim friends. We presented these gifts privately so that no one would feel intimidated receiving a Bible in the presence of another Muslim. The goal was to get the Word of God into their hands so that they could “take up and read.” Romans 10:17 reminds us that “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.”

Remember that what I have shared above was all done in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Think of the opportunity we have in the context of freedom, especially in the United States. Once more, we, as the Church, must remember that Muslims are in our midst to engage, befriend, and lovingly reach with the Good News about Jesus. It is missional hypocrisy for us as Christians to get excited about reaching a lost Muslim in a people group across the ocean, but be unwilling to walk across the street or drive to the local university in order to seek out Muslim men and women who are equally lost. Let us remind ourselves that God has brought lost Muslims to a context of freedom for a reason—to hear about Jesus.

Just as our family landed in Pakistan nearly twenty years ago, encountering a new and different land, so Muslims are coming to our communities with similar sensations of newness and perhaps apprehensions. The Church in the West must consider it a great opportunity to engage these Muslims and share the truth about Jesus with them. Every Muslim has the right to hear the truth about Jesus. Merely leaving the task to pastors and missionaries will result in an incomplete task. Now is the time for the local Church to arise and for its people to be a truly missional people. Remember, missions is not where, but whom!

May you have a Happy Thanksgiving and a Merry Christmas. Please consider having Muslim students and neighbors around your table during these two holidays.



THE INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES CELEBRATES ITS 25TH YEAR

R. Michael Langford
2022

April 2022 marks the 25th year for an intensive training program that began in Asia, equipping over 1,000 students, and impacting more than 50 nations. The Institute for Islamic Studies (IIS) was the first of a growing number of intensive training programs that reach around the world. This article will highlight its strategic beginnings and global impact.

A Work of the Holy Spirit

Led by the Spirit, an Indonesian pastor, serving on the advisory committee, challenged the leaders of the regional seminary to incorporate training for ministry to Muslims into the curriculum. He then presented a large check to underwrite the startup cost of such a program.

This is noteworthy since Indonesia is the most populace Muslim majority country in the world. Additionally, the majority of the world's 1.9 billion Muslims live in Asia. The next three Asian nations with the largest Muslim populations are Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

Through the years, we have observed that workers from these four nations prefer to study in Asia. The Chairman of the Pakistan Assemblies of God told me, in person, that Pakistani workers benefit greatly from studying abroad at the Institute for

Islamic Studies (IIS). Truly, the Holy Spirit was strategic in positioning intensive training in Asia.

Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS) in Baguio City, Philippines, serves all of Asia, the Pacific Islands, and China. APTS has hosted the IIS program for 25 years. They offer academic credit for students in degree programs up to the master's level, and provide a Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies with an Islamic Studies concentration.

The following stories illustrate the strategic work of the Holy Spirit to multiply workers through the IIS.

Training the Trainers

A student came to the inaugural Institute from a nation in Southeast Asia where ministry to Muslims is intensely restricted. The next year, he was instrumental in launching an IIS in a bordering country because of the extreme sensitivity.

A pastor from Eastern Europe traveled to Asia to participate in IIS since there was no program like IIS in his region. Since courses are taught in English, which was not his first language, he would take class notes in his mother tongue and then translate them into English each night in order to prepare for exams. In essence, he did double the work. This level of commitment deeply impressed us.

Within four years of returning to his home country, God used this brother to launch a training program patterned after the IIS at APTS. Today, this training is part of a school that prepares missionaries for ministry to Muslims in restricted access nations where Westerners have difficulty entering.

The pastor of the leading Assemblies of God church in an Islamic republic came to APTS to prepare for opening a Bible School in his homeland. He enrolled in the IIS as part of his degree program. At the end of IIS, he shared that he was praying earnestly about resigning his church and going to the most resistant Muslim unreached people group in his nation. Four years later, God used him to open a Bible School focused on raising up workers for this unreached group.

As I reflect over the past twenty-five years, I am humbled and deeply moved that the Holy Spirit has repeatedly orchestrated this kind of replication. We may think we've figured out how to do God's work only to discover that what God had in mind is more than we imagined.

Paul instructed Timothy: "Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others" (2 Timothy 2:1-2, NLT).

A pastor told me, "We must train 'two deep' after the pattern Paul introduced in this passage. Applied to training workers, we are not finished until those we train have trained others. Training the trainers is the heart of the multiplication process."

IIS has crossed denominational and organizational lines. I tell my students, "First, I am KoG. Then, AoG." In Asia, AoG is an acronym for Assemblies of God. Then, KoG is short for Kingdom of God. This declaration is based on the conviction that the work of the Holy Spirit on behalf of unreached Muslims demands all of us! For many, the "us" that readily comes to mind is the local church, denomination, or organization. As much as we need these structures, the work of the Spirit on behalf of the unreached overarches the lines that often divide us.

God honored the intention of IIS to seek Kingdom-level engagement by His favor with the range of Evangelical mission agencies that have sent workers for training in the IIS. We stopped counting at twenty-two different organizations or agencies. Further, the desire for Kingdom-level engagement is evident in leading Evangelical missionary scholars who have taught in the program over the years, often more than half of the faculty in a given year.

Preparation and Refreshing

The following story illustrates the extent to which the Spirit will go to bring “us” together in the larger work of reaching Muslims. I had been communicating with a British missionary woman serving in a former Soviet republic with a majority Muslim population. Unknown to me, my fax of the program brochure had garbled to obscure several lines. After arrival, she picked up a printed copy of the program brochure and exclaimed, “I would not have come if I’d read this line before coming, ‘Training Pentecostal missionaries!’ That line was missing in your fax!” Interestingly, she has returned five times, referring to the IIS as her time of refreshing. She continues to labor faithfully among a dominant Sufi Muslim sect that gives allegiance to the most powerful shamans of Eastern Europe.

After I received an application for program enrollment from a Catholic Charismatic missionary, I called the leadership team to discuss the ramifications of accepting him into the program. We sensed this was ordered of the Spirit, trusting that he was a Christ-follower, as evidenced by the baptism in the Holy Spirit. God honored our decision. The participation of this brother “rocked our world” as the Holy Spirit powerfully anointed him during times of intercession and worship.

We hear of the special bond between soldiers who fought in a battle or sheltered in the foxhole together. Likewise, there is a kindred spirit between workers among the Muslim unreached. Studying, interceding, worshiping, and fellowshiping among the like-minded is transformational.

Confirmation and Calling

The Holy Spirit is in the business of connecting and directing. Each morning, class begins with a brief devotional. It was a Monday morning when a missionary-in-training shared her testimony and calling to a Muslim unreached people group, the Cham of Cambodia—one of the oldest people groups in Southeast Asia.

Two days before, unknown to her or the class, I had been given a copy of a newly dedicated contextualized Bible in the trade language of this people group. A colleague returned from teaching in Cambodia and brought me the copy. At the end of her testimony, I presented the Bible to her. She was speechless and moved to tears! We closed with a prayer of dedication for her and the work God had called her to. She later told me that this was a clear confirmation of God's leading.

Changed and Convinced

Many students have testified that they harbored hatred for Muslims. It seems counterintuitive that someone would desire training in ministry to those who abuse them, kill their loved ones, or make their lives so difficult. We have witnessed the miracle of transformation countless times as the Holy Spirit cleanses the heart of hatred and fear and fills it to overflowing with love and compassion. This supernatural work of grace continues as we create a venue for the Holy Spirit.

A couple enrolled in IIS at the exact time when they were grappling with the place to which God was calling them. Both are medical doctors and veteran missionaries. At the beginning of the course, the wife sat back in her chair, arms crossed, seemingly unhappy to be in the class. By the end of the class, she sat on the edge of her seat, leaning forward, as if hanging on every word shared by the professor, herself a former Muslim. She later testified that God had changed her heart. Now, she looked forward to serving in this difficult part of the Muslim World.

During an IIS, a Filipino Marine shared that Muslims killed his father. He and two of his brothers planned a grudge killing of the perpetrators, but God changed his heart. He told his brothers that they must forgive. They chose to follow him.

During morning devotions at IIS, a Filipina shared how her brother had been killed by Muslims. "God has changed my heart," she declared with tears streaming down her face. After

returning to Mindanao, she served with another single woman in a fruitful ministry to Muslim women.

An Evangelical leader came to IIS from an Islamic republic. He stated, “When I came, I was afraid. This is broken in my life because I see those who continue in ministry after all these years.” He began a training program similar to IIS. He continues to minister in a sensitive nation among high-ranking Muslims.

As you read this article, are you reminded of something in your heart toward Muslim peoples? I urge you to ask the Holy Spirit for a baptism of love for Muslim peoples who are bound by Islam and demonic powers in their world.

The Priorities of Prayer and Spiritual Formation

Prayer is the foundation of transformational training. From IIS’s inception, there was an intentional focus on prayer. Each Friday, students gather for *Jumaa* Prayer Fellowship. Student-led intercessory prayer for nations and Muslim Unreached People Groups are part of the afternoon sessions. Join me in prayer for the anointing of the Spirit upon future programs.

In addition, there is an intentional emphasis on spiritual life and formation. The IIS begins with a week of Spiritual Emphasis, which sets the tone for the program. Each day, class opens with devotions and prayer, and about half of the afternoons include a time of intercession for specific areas of the Muslim world.

Rejoicing Together

In celebrating this milestone, it is my joy to express appreciation to the line of exemplary missionary scholars who contributed to the formation and continuation of IIS. We are debtors to: Melvin Ho, Bill Menzies, John Carter, Wonsuk Ma, Phil Parshall, a Baptist missionary with SIM, Ron Peck, Jim Bennett, Mark Hausfeld, Mark Brink, and Dale Fagerland, who

was instrumental in the formation of the program and gave significant time to the IIS over a period of eighteen years.

For twenty-five years, the cost of the IIS has been met in unexpected ways. I marvel at the creativity of the Holy Spirit. The Indonesian church that gave the funding for the startup also underwrote the program budget for the first seven years.

Leaders and team members from the Center for Ministry to Muslims, Assemblies of God World Missions USA, now Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples, have contributed time, talent, and funds entrusted to them toward the IIS program over the last twenty-five years. Their contribution kept the program budget to a minimum. The sum of their investment is indescribably significant.

In addition, financial support came from other Assemblies of God missionaries and ministries, including International Correspondence Institute (ICI) Philippines and Boys and Girls Missionary Challenge (BGMC). A number of the non-Assemblies of God faculty covered their own travel expenses, and several gave an offering in addition. Many unnamed donors sent designated gifts. We give God the glory and thank each one for their love and generosity.

Joyful Closing Reflections

We were serving in Mindanao, Philippines, when a representative from the Center for Ministry to Muslims (now Global Initiative) came to the Philippines to collaborate with APTS leadership in the development of an intensive training program that would become the IIS. We were led of the Lord to relocate to Baguio City to be part of the inaugural year. From that first year, it has been my privilege to serve in the IIS. God was at work in marvelous ways, and I did not want to mess it up! I am deeply grateful for the trust given to me and to the Holy Spirit who is graciously and powerfully at work in the lives of those fortunate enough to participate in the IIS. To God be the glory, both now and forever.

In closing, I am honored to highlight the behind-the-scenes contribution of my wife, Sharyl. She graciously managed many of the details that are part of a resident training program, such as set-up, copying of materials, welcome packets, etc. Day or night, she was available with loving care and encouragement. Some students had suffered greatly for their faith. Other former Muslims came with unresolved background issues. Many needed a third party to listen, to love unconditionally, or to offer counsel. Though unheralded, Sharyl has been a vital part of the impact of the IIS. (In October 2020, she was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. Her love for the IIS and the many students she served has not waned, nor her passion for unreached Muslims.)

Finally, I invite you to join me in thanking God for favor and supply throughout the twenty-five years that the IIS has served on behalf of unreached Muslims. Pray with me that God will continue to use the IIS as an instrument of grace that brings transformation, inculcates vision, and renews strength. Pray that every financial need will be met and every worthy student will be able to receive the training they abundantly deserve.

* Some names and locations were excluded or changed due to sensitivity



REACHING MUSLIMS THROUGH MEDIA

Tommy Hodum
2021

In light of COVID-imposed restrictions, I recently asked myself, “How can we better reach the world’s 1.9 billion Muslims with an adequate witness of Jesus?” The huge task has sometimes found us trying to move a mountain with a spoon rather than a shovel! The question, then, is, “Are we using all the right tools to deliver the truth about Jesus to Muslims?”

The obvious response to the question is that we must be willing to employ a full-court press and use every media tool available in order to deliver the Good News of Jesus to every Muslim. This article will highlight the roles of traditional and social media being employed by missionaries in fulfilling the Great Commission to preach the gospel to the world’s 1.9 billion Muslims.

The Role of Traditional Media

While reading an article entitled, “Media and Technology: The Rainbow, the Ark, and the Cross,” the following statement captivated me: “Noah used the Ark, Moses used the staff, Nehemiah used the city wall, Jesus used mud for healing the blind—and God used the rainbow, the dove and the

cross.”⁵¹ Initially, I thought it strange to list these biblical

⁵¹ “Media and Technology: The Rainbow, the Ark and the Cross,”

“symbols” as media. In modern parlance, media is described as the means of communicating information—such as radio and television, newspapers, magazines, and the internet—that reach or influence people widely. As I pondered that definition, the words “to reach or influence people widely” caught my attention. The biblical symbols mentioned above were indeed means of communicating and influencing. That is exactly our goal at Global Initiative—to communicate the gospel to Muslim people in a way that influences them to consider the truth about Jesus.

When thinking of traditional media, our minds usually go first to radio and television programs. Due to space limitations, this article shares the stories of two powerful ministries that fit the role of traditional media to reach Muslims.

Al-Karma Television

Dr. Alex Hanna was born and raised in Egypt. After beginning his medical practice in Egypt, the Lord gave him a vision of working among lost people around the world. He had no idea how that would ever come to fulfillment. Meanwhile, Dr. Hanna became known as the doctor who prayed for his patients. Sick Muslims heard of his “ministry” and regularly sought his help. Muslims said that if his prayer did not work, then they would ask for a prescription. Dr. Hanna recalls that he made little money because prayer worked and it was always free!

Dr. Hanna, his wife, and two daughters immigrated to the U.S. in 1990. Shortly afterwards he was offered the opportunity to participate in an Arabic TV ministry. This was the groundwork that would lay the foundation for a powerful worldwide Arabic TV ministry. In 2009, the Hanna’s were appointed as Assemblies of God U.S. missionaries. Shortly

thereafter, Alex began programming on the Al-Karma TV network with a potential audience of 350 million viewers on fourteen different satellites streaming 24/7. Dr. Hanna faithfully preached the gospel and felt strongly that a part of his call was to pray for the sick, especially Muslim seekers. He says, “Muslims are very hungry for someone to pray for them.”

A Redemption Miracle for Mahmoud

Muslim response to the Al-Karma telecasts has been nothing short of miraculous. Dr. Hanna recalls the day he received a call from a Muslim viewer named Mahmoud. Somehow Mahmoud lost \$2,500 that belonged to his kind Christian employer. He had no idea where he had lost the money and lamented, “I had absolutely no way to pay the debt.” One night, he saw Jesus in a dream and heard Him say, “You will find the money in a suitcase in a hidden part of the trunk of your car. I AM PAYING THE DEBT FOR YOU.” Mahmoud recovered the money and returned it to his employer. He immediately asked Brother Hanna, “Why did Jesus pay my debt?” Dr. Hanna explained to him about “the debt of sin” that we all owe and cannot pay. Then Dr. Hanna asked him if he wanted to accept the greater gift of salvation. Immediately, without question or hesitation, Mahmoud said yes and entered the Kingdom of God!

A Healing Miracle for Fatima

Dr. Hanna’s audience knew that he faithfully prayed in the name of Jesus for Muslims to be healed. Fatima, a Muslim lady in Egypt, had a stage 4 cancerous tumor on her vocal cords. She could not speak clearly or swallow normally. Her doctors told her, “Fatima, you have no hope to live. We advise you to write your will. You have only two to three months of life.” Fatima was devastated but remembered seeing Pastor Hanna praying for the sick and asking God for miracles on the Al-Karma TV channel. She announced, “Before I write my will, I will ask

Pastor Alex to pray for me in the name of Jesus. I know he prays for the sick and they are healed.” Fatima was so weak and debilitated that she was unable to personally contact Pastor Alex and request prayer. A Christian friend in Egypt agreed to do it for her and called Pastor Alex at Al-Karma and explained Fatima’s desperate condition. The friend simply asked, “Will you pray for her to be healed?” Pastor Alex prayed a powerful prayer of faith and, two weeks later, Fatima was able to call him and discuss her miraculous healing. She could now speak and swallow normally. The most glorious outcome from this miraculous physical healing is that Fatima asked how she could give her life to the Lord. Pastor Alex led her in the sinner’s prayer and now Fatima is healed both spiritually and physically.

ABNSat Television

Joseph Habibi, a Palestinian by birth, lived and faithfully ministered in Egypt for many years. His future wife, Pat, an Assemblies of God missionary, arrived in Egypt in 1982. Joseph and Pat were married in 1983, relocated to the United States in 1985, and became Assemblies of God U.S. missionaries in 1987. Originally, they moved to the metropolitan area of Detroit, Michigan, to work among Chaldeans. However—and Joseph says God has a sense of humor—they eventually landed in a Muslim neighborhood in nearby Dearborn. Joseph and Pat became known throughout the community through a “Friends of the Book” club and regular outreaches conducted in public schools. Soon the Lord led Joseph to start a weekly six-hour radio program. Encouragement came in the form of huge numbers of responses to his programs. Joseph exercised a step of faith and made the leap to TV on a local cable channel. Telecasts were straightforward, consisting of Arabic music, a clear and powerful gospel message, and prayer.

For thirty years, Joseph has faithfully preached the gospel via television. Incredible numbers of viewers, especially

Muslims, have heard the truth about Jesus. Joseph recently shared the following comments:

What a year! During the pandemic, the Islamic world has been unexpectedly open. Like everyone else, they were limited in their ability to move about—but I was amazed at how many Muslims tuned into our programs. Excited converts often call us while we are doing live programs; they want to share their testimonies. We are now reaching the Middle East and soon will begin broadcasting in India with its enormous Muslim population.

Muslims, especially in the Middle East, are tired of killing and mayhem. They are asking questions like, “What is there to look forward to in this life?” Through our media telecasts, we are able to address their questions, even the difficult ones, and give them hope in the person of Jesus Christ.

A strong point of our telecasts is the use of personal testimonies of Muslims who have accepted Jesus. Sometimes their stories are heartbreaking, but always inspiring. One brother told how radical Muslims reacted to his conversion. He said, ‘They broke numerous bones in my body, but I have remained strong in my faith.’ Today, God uses him on our programs to explain the differences between Islam and Christianity, and then testify as to why he chose to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The Role of Social Media

Current media now includes social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, etc. Without a doubt, social media has an incredible influence on our world today!

Social media usually refers to the websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. In comparison to traditional media (especially radio and television), let’s consider the role of social media in communicating the gospel to Muslims and *influencing*

them to consider Jesus as Savior. A paper, entitled, “What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?” provides helpful insights into the role of social media as an *influencer*. The authors looked back a decade, analyzed the data, and drew some conclusions that have powerful implications for missions. Here is an abbreviated version of their conclusions:

1. Social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring.
2. A spike in online conversations often preceded major events on the ground.
3. Social media helped spread the fervor for freedom across international borders.⁵²

In other words, as a result of using social media tools and resources, fervor for freedom spread across North Africa and the Middle East. In today’s world, a successful missions strategy must embrace a range of social media tools that will create a fervor for truth about Jesus Christ among Muslims.

What are some forms of social media that are or will be used in accomplishing that purpose? The answer: employ every possible means available in order to accomplish the task. Hopefully, the following list will challenge us to see how social media can by-pass barriers and restrictions and enable Christians to spread the life-giving truth about Jesus.

Potential social media tools include:

- **Podcasts:** As of 2021, there are over 2 million podcasts and more than 48 million podcast episodes (Podcast Insights, 2021).

⁵² Howard, Philip N., Aiden Duffy, Deen Freelon, et al., “Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media during the Arab Spring?” SSRN, Posted April 17, 2015, accessed January 2022, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2595096.

- **Emails:** In 2021, 4.03 billion people around the world use email. 319 billion emails are sent daily.
- **Facebook:** 2.85 billion active users
 - India, first in usage, has 310 million users while Indonesia has 190 million users.
 - Facebook accounts for over 45% of monthly social media visits.
 - More than 4 billion video views take place on Facebook every day.
- **WhatsApp:** The most popular global messenger app worldwide with 2 billion monthly active users
- **Instagram:** 500 million people visit Instagram stories daily. Fifty-nine percent of the content are photo posts. Kazakhstan and Brunei were jointly ranked first and second with a reach of 72% and 71%! Advertisements on Instagram can reach 1.16 billion people.
- **Pinterest:** 442 million active monthly users; 75% are from outside the U.S. While there are 2 billion searches on Pinterest monthly, 600 million of them are visual searches.
- **Twitter:** 353 million monthly active users worldwide. The total number of tweets sent per day is 500 million. India ranks third in Twitter accounts worldwide.
- **LinkedIn:** 772 million users worldwide with 310 million using it monthly. Two million posts, articles, and videos are published on LinkedIn every day. An ad on LinkedIn can reach 12% of the world's population over thirteen years of age!
- **TikTok:** 850 million users worldwide with 167 million using it daily. Sixty percent of all users are GenZ. TikTok is available in 154 countries and seventy-five

languages. There are 100 billion average monthly video views on TikTok; 34% of TikTokers create videos daily.

- **Snapchat:** 250 million daily users; 57% of content is videos.
- **YouTube:** The second most visited website in the world! 1.3 billion people use YouTube. 300 hours of video are uploaded every minute. 5 billion videos are watched on YouTube every single day. 80% of YouTube views are from outside the U.S. YouTube is navigable in 76 different languages (95% of the internet population).⁵³
- **Zoom:** Hosts 300 million daily meetings!

Here are current samplings of testimonies and reports of the role of social media in influencing Muslims to know the truth about Jesus Christ:

- A ministry called “Freedom to Captives” uses Facebook and Instagram to reach Muslim women in the Middle East.
- Ministry teams on the islands of Sulawesi and Java, Indonesia, report a marked increase in the use of online media in reaching Indonesian Muslims.
- Muslim Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Libyans are regularly responding to Arabic gospel programs via the internet.
- An Arabic media ministry team in the Middle East reports: “We praise God for the huge number of Muslims who are connecting with us via social media.”

⁵³ Bagadiya, Jimit, “Social Media Statistics You Must Know in 2021,” Posted February 7, 2023, accessed June 6, 2023, <http://www.socialpilot.co/blog/social-media-statistics>.

- Muslims are accessing online Arabic resources provided by a Christian library service. Over a thousand Arabic digital books have been downloaded.

While social media can be debilitating and dangerous—consuming time and talent for the wrong reasons—it also has incredible potential to spread the gospel. Social media has been described as a gift from God to be used to bring Jesus to hurting masses. One example comes from the Philippines where the reach of social media is extraordinary. The latest Global Digital survey revealed that there are 67 million internet and active social media users in the country, with 62 million Filipinos using social media on their mobile devices.

An anonymous website designer and social media manager for Philippine-based Areopagus Communications shares personal insights into the evangelistic tool of social media:

I felt a deep calling to online evangelism. The Lord let me know that the digital world is where the skills He gave me could best be used. As a web designer, I realized the huge potential of utilizing online technologies to reach out [with the gospel] to more people. With algorithms and analytics, the number of followers is not that important anymore. Reach is the key. As long as I reach and inspire even just one person online, it's enough for me. God will do the rest. Yes, we should encourage young people to use social media not only for learning and entertainment, but for evangelization as well. The devil sows hate and lies in social media to destroy lives. To fight evil, we must put Christ in social media by proclaiming and living the truth.

Conclusion

I began this article with two questions: “How can we better reach the world’s 1.9 billion Muslims with an adequate witness of Jesus?” and “Are we using all the right tools to deliver the truth about Jesus to Muslims?” While we will always need

missionaries to go into all the world, it seems inevitable that the answer to the two questions is to engage every possible tool, including traditional and social media, to get the water of life to spiritually dying Muslims.



KEY THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN DISCIPLING MUSLIM BACKGROUND BELIEVERS

Ken Ferguson
2016

One out of every five individuals on the planet is a Muslim, and 70 percent of the world's unreached peoples are Muslims. If the Great Commission is truly about making "disciples of all nations," then making disciples of Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) is an integral part of the charge. Considering the vast differences between Muslims and Christians, one soon realizes the challenge. Islam has zero tolerance for any other religion, and seeks to isolate those who have converted to Christianity, silence their witness, and pressure them into reverting to Islam.

Converts from Islam face persecution and potential martyrdom. Failure to produce healthy disciples in Islamic society precipitates failure to plant churches. Many MBBs manage to endure the pressures of conversion, but some return to the mosque. Others emigrate, thus eliminating the potential for witness in their home communities. Although extraction provides safety and security for these MBBs, it does not build churches in Islamic societies.

You may ask, "Is there a difference in making a disciple from a Muslim background than from any other background?" The answer is yes. Certainly, there are similarities, but the successful spiritual formation of converts from Islam requires careful bridge building from Islamic beliefs, values, and practices to Christian beliefs, values, and practices. We must

teach the Word by clearly distinguishing sound biblical doctrine from ideology and cultural practice.

What people believe does make a difference. Christians base their faith on what they perceive to be truth as revealed in the Bible. Admittedly, different interpretations of truth produce different creeds or theologies, but most fundamental beliefs remain similar among orthodox Christian groups.

Muslims, on the other hand, base their faith on teachings from the Quran and from the *Hadith*, which are collections of traditions concerning what Muhammad said and did. To Muslims, their prophet was not only the receiver of revelation as expressed in the Quran, but the interpreter of that revelation. They follow those teachings so they might stay on the path toward God's mercy and perhaps enter paradise. The following are some areas that we take for granted that must be taught to converts from Islam.

For Muslims, the Quran reveals God's will and law, not his character. They believe Allah is completely separate from creation, unknowable, and unapproachable. Christians believe the Bible to be a self-revelation of God. While Muslims believe the Quran was sent (*tanzil*) down from heaven in the same form as it exists in the throne room of God, Christians believe that the Holy Spirit inspired writers, and they communicated God's message.

Muslim Background Believers should be taught God is not merely transcendent (separate from creation), but He is also immanent (near). He communicates by interacting in history. They should be taught revelation in the Bible provides examples for instruction, gives wisdom, makes disciples, reveals truth, gives freedom, and leads to salvation. Additionally, God's Word teaches, reproves, corrects, trains, prophesies, predicts, shows how prophecy is fulfilled, gives hope, and establishes the believer. In other words, Scripture produces disciples. It forms Christ in the believer (Gal. 4:19).

Muslims accuse Christians of worshiping three gods. Christians use the non-biblical term "Trinity" to express the

biblical idea that the one true God reveals himself in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Although the Bible neither uses nor explains the term, the self-revelation of God teaches the concept. Concerning mankind's relationship with God, Christians believe in transcendence. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9).

Christians also believe in immanence, or nearness. This refers to God's presence in the world and His interaction with creation. Just how close is God? "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Not only does the Bible teach immanence, but it describes God as love: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:8). Paul refers to God as "the God of love and peace" (2 Cor. 13:11).

Islam denies the deity of Jesus Christ. Although Jesus never explicitly claimed, "I am God," He made statements that could not have been made by someone less than God. He said the angels, usually referred to as God's angels (Luke 12:8-9; 15:10), and the kingdom, usually referred to as the kingdom of God, belonged to Him (Matt. 13:41). Furthermore, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus consistently set himself up as superior to Moses and the Law of Moses (Matt. 5-7; Luke 6:20-49). In John's Gospel, Jesus understood His role as judge of all mankind (John 5:22), and He explicitly declared that all would honor Him just as they honor the Father (John 5:23).

Jesus also states the Scriptures testify about Him, and He strongly implies one obtains eternal life only by coming to Him (John 5:24). Jesus actually made a claim to preexistence: "'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!'" (John 8:58). Jesus forgave sin, claimed to have a special relationship with the Father, and had a special role in creation. The Epistles teach that He is the exact representation of God the Father (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

Muslims deny the crucifixion. Christians believe that the vicarious atonement of Christ provided salvation from judgment, deliverance from the power of sin and death, and acceptance by God. Jesus understood it as His mission. His sacrifice distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Jesus explained that all the Scriptures predicted His suffering (Luke 24:46-47). If Muslims are confused concerning the role of Jesus, they have no clue concerning the Holy Spirit. Muhammad admitted that Allah did not communicate much about the Holy Spirit (Quran 17:85). One Muslim commentator, Yusuf Ali, identifies the Holy Spirit as a title for Gabriel. Some scholars believe that Muhammad identified the Holy Spirit in the Christian Trinity as Mary. Some Muslims claim that the Paraclete of John 14:26 refers to Muhammad, based upon a misspelling of the Greek. They claim the correct rendering would mean the “exalted one,” corresponding to the meaning of Ahmad, a derivative name of Muhammad.

Christians believe the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and He is coequal with the Father and the Son. The Church as a body of believers (1 Cor. 3:16-17), and the physical bodies of individual believers (1 Cor. 6:19-20) are sacred because the Holy Spirit lives in them collectively and individually. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit empowered Old Testament individuals for service to God. Jesus is the best example of someone empowered by the Spirit. Jesus is Isaiah’s “Servant of the Lord” (Isa. 42). He will bring justice to the nations, be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, open blind eyes, free captives from prison, and release those who sit in darkness from the dungeon (Isa. 42:1-9).

In Luke 4:18, Jesus applied the words of Isaiah to himself: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (Isa. 61:1). Converts need to understand that the same Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus Christ is available to help believers

today. Jesus said that He would not leave us alone, but He would send another “Helper” (John 14:16, NASB), and He promised that the Helper would be with us forever. Jesus then identifies the Helper as the Holy Spirit (John 14:26).

MBBs need to be filled with the Spirit according to Acts 1:8 and 2:4. The Holy Spirit filled all of the disciples, and they began to speak in other tongues as Pentecost fulfilled Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:16-21). The Holy Spirit strengthened New Testament believers in the face of persecution and will also help MBBs. Encourage your friends to receive Holy Spirit baptism by faith.

A look at Paul’s use of metaphors will help MBBs better understand the Church as their new community. Disciples “are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people, and members of God’s household” (Eph. 2:19). Citizenship indicates rights and responsibilities, blessings, and obligations. Family suggests greater intimacy and greater responsibility than citizenship. In Ephesians 2:20-22, Paul describes a building, a holy temple in which God inhabits by His Spirit, and the building materials are believers.

Paul’s favorite metaphor of the Church is the “Body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). Christ ministered through His physical body on earth; now His body is the Church. It shows the Church’s unity and diversity (1 Cor. 12:12), depicts the universal Church (Eph. 1:20-23), and points to the relationship of the Church as a group of believers with Christ (1 Cor. 12:27).

MBBs should be carefully taught why Christians celebrate the ordinances of the Church. All who repent and believe on Christ as Savior and Lord are to be baptized by immersion, declaring to the church and to the world that they have died with Christ and have been raised with Him to walk in newness of life (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 10:47-48; Rom. 6:4).

The Lord’s Supper symbolizes the fellowship that believers have with the Lord and with one another. It provides a means of grace and opportunity for spiritual growth. The symbols representing the Lord’s body and blood express our sharing of

the divine nature of the Lord (2 Pet. 1:4), memorialize His suffering and death, and prophesy His Second Coming (1 Cor. 11:26).

Islamic prayer is ritualistic and perfunctory, offered to a transcendent deity in an act of submission. For Christians, prayer is conversing with the Almighty. We need to teach new MBBs that God hears and answers prayer. For Christians prayer is not a way of appeasement or gaining favor with God. It is a means of grace, fellowship, and guidance. Likewise, Bible study is not merely obligatory formality, but Christians believe that the Word is spiritual food and is life giving (Heb. 4:12). We should encourage disciples to study in order that they may grow spiritually. The Bible provides guidance for disciples: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps. 119:105).

Many Muslims feel powerless against forces of evil and circumstances of life, so they turn to spirits and mediums for power. Followers of Christ do not have to live under Satan’s bondage or in fear of his power. Luke 10:19 records that Jesus gave His disciples authority over the power of the enemy because they have an arsenal of spiritual weapons available to them (Eph. 6:10-18).

In conclusion, in this cursory look at key theological issues involved in discipling Muslim Background Believers, we are reminded of our inadequacies. The challenge of discipling MBBs requires unqualified reliance on the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.



WELCOME MBBs, TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD!

Fred Farrokh
2015

This is what we have been interceding for. Slowly but surely, they are coming. Men, women, and children are leaving behind Islam for the Lord Jesus Christ and His eternal kingdom. At Global Initiative, we believe God is positioning the Church to receive a great harvest of Muslim souls.

As a Muslim-background believer in Christ (MBB) myself, and team member of Global Initiative, I would like to thank Intercede readers for praying for Muslims. Your prayers are being answered. In this article, I want to shed some light on this growing movement of Muslims to Christ.

Where We've Come From

It may be helpful to take a look back before looking forward. The world of Islam has stood entrenched as a challenging mission field for the Church. There are several reasons for this. First, Islam originated after Christianity and, therefore, includes teachings against Christianity within its central doctrines. Second, Islamic Law prescribes the death penalty for apostates who leave Islam. Third, for many centuries, the Church conducted limited ministry among Muslims. Some valiant men and women did go forth to preach Christ among Muslims. Thankfully, this number has increased in the past century.

Given the missional challenge presented by Islam, Global Initiative (then known as Center for Ministry to Muslims) launched the Jumaa Prayer Fellowship in 1982. Jumaa encourages Christians to pray for Muslims, especially on Fridays, which is the Muslim day of congregational worship. Global Initiative also provides specific prayer requests so Christians can pray more precisely for Muslims.

At the time Jumaa Prayer Fellowship was initiated, there were still a number of Muslim countries with *zero* known believers in Christ! In 1991, George Otis published a book titled, *The Last of the Giants*, noting that the last major mission field for the Church was the Muslim world.⁵⁴ Even as Goliath “bit the dust” after David felled him with one stone, so shall the Spirit of Islam fall and millions of Muslim captives be released. Indeed, the devil has no defense against the prayers of the saints.

Dramatic Changes in the Muslim World are Opening Hearts to the Gospel

Most of the Muslim world has been in a tumult the past several decades. In 1979, the Islamic Revolution in Iran replaced 2,500 years of monarchy. Iranians then got to see Islamic militancy and *sharia* law implemented.

Sunni militancy came to the fore about the same time with a militant movement that became known as al-Qaeda. Then, in 2010, The Arab Spring began—exactly 1,400 years after Muhammad initiated the religion of Islam in A.D. 610. The Arab Spring resulted in the toppling of longstanding dictators in the Middle East. Islamic militant groups took advantage of the chaos to wreak havoc and destruction, and even re-establish the caliphate through ISIS.

⁵⁴ George Otis, *The Last of the Giants: Lifting the Veil on Islam and the End Times* (Ada, MI: Chosen Books, 1991).

This upheaval has caused many Muslims to re-evaluate Islam. The Jihadists claim to represent the teachings and example of Muhammad, which has resulted in further internal debates among Muslims.

In the heartache, anguish, and wars that have engulfed the Middle East, the Prince of Peace is moving to bind up the brokenhearted. Many Muslims are now in desperate need of the peace, healing, hope, and salvation that only Jesus can bring.

Dramatic Answers to Prayer

In 1994, Haik Hovsepian Mehr, an Assemblies of God pastor, was martyred in Iran. Pastor Haik actively reached out to Muslims, even though he was not from a Muslim background. This marked a time period in which other noted Iranian pastors were martyred, including several of Muslim family background. These martyrdoms coincided with a tipping point in the spiritual openness of Iranians. In the two decades that have followed, Iranians have become increasingly disappointed with Islam and increasingly open to the gospel. *Though no exact numbers are available, it is possible that Iran has the most Muslim background believers in Christ (MBBs) of any nation.*

In North Africa, where the indigenous church had long since been extinguished by Islam, thousands of Muslims have now left Islam for Jesus Christ. In Algeria, they call themselves “New Christians” (*al-Masihiyeen al Jodod*).⁵⁵ Christian satellite TV programs in Arabic are now widely watched in the Middle East. Regarding one significant show, an Arab pastor told me a few years ago, “When one particular show is on the air, traffic stops in North Africa!” Clearly, Muslims are searching for truth in difficult times.

This April, while in Southeast Asia, I talked to an Indonesian pastor who told me, “We are continually seeing

⁵⁵ Bassam M. Madany, “Learning from the ‘New’ Maghrebi Christians,” accessed August 2, 2015, www.answerislam.org/authors/madany/maghrebi_Christians.html

Muslims come to church, and getting saved and baptized—and we aren't even intentionally trying to reach them.” He asked if we could help equip them to respond to the harvest in his nation—home to the most Muslims of any country.

No Place to Call Home?

As of this writing, there is not one agreed-upon term for these Christians of Muslim background. Perhaps the most frequently used abbreviation is MBB. One thing is certain: life has not been a bed of roses for these newcomers to the Kingdom of God. A Turkish MBB named Ziya Meral did research on apostates from Islam and titled his work *No Place to Call Home*. He states:

Apostates are subject to wide-ranging human rights abuses including extra-judicial killings by state-related agents or mobs; honor killings by family members; detention, imprisonment, torture, physical and psychological intimidation by security forces; the denial of access to judicial services and social services; the denial of equal employment or education opportunities; social pressure resulting in loss of housing and employment; and day-to-day discrimination and ostracism in education, finance and social activities.⁵⁶

For Muslim apostates who have left all for Christ, there remains the dilemma of finding a new spiritual home. The Islamic mosque is no longer an option, since the mosque exists to affirm the prophethood of Muhammad, who denied that Jesus was Lord, God, or Savior. In some places, there are no churches to attend. In other places, established churches are concerned the new converts may be imposters or informers in disguise. Nevertheless, many established churches have opened their

⁵⁶ Ziya Meral, *No Place to Call Home: Experiences of Apostates from Islam, Failures of the International Community* (New Malden, Surrey, UK: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 2008), 6.

doors and their arms to their new brothers and sisters who have left Islam. In other contexts, most of the MBBs are meeting in homes or cell groups.

Interceding for MBBs

MBBs are one of the keys to reaching the Muslim world for Jesus. Former Muslims become excellent missionaries to Muslims once they become established in Christ. Here are some of the key prayer requests of MBBs:

1. **Dealing with “Reverse Prosperity.”** Sometimes we MBBs joke about “reverse prosperity.” One receives Christ and things fall apart—in the natural. Ziya Meral has described this above. But, in the spiritual realm, there is the joy of knowing Christ. As Paul stated in Philippians 3:8, everything of this world is “rubbish” compared to gaining Christ. This is the joy of our new MBB brothers and sisters. Yet persecution remains a very real challenge in most Muslim contexts. Pray that God will give MBBs supernatural courage—like Daniel in the lions’ den.
2. **The “Time to Mourn.”** Nabeel Qureshi is an MBB who wrote his testimony, entitled *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*.⁵⁷ If you want to get a book that describes the bittersweet journey to Christ for an MBB, this is the book for you! The sweetness is Christ, of course, and knowing one’s sins are forgiven. The bitterness and the mourning come from knowing your family members are lost, and those whom you love the most have been deceived about the most important question of all: “Who is Jesus Christ?” Nabeel even asks the Christians

⁵⁷ Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

who are witnessing to him to give him time to mourn this heartbreaking realization.

3. **Finding New Identity in Christ.** Muslim identity is centered in Muhammad. Anyone who wants to become a Muslim has to affirm the *shahada*, which states Muhammad is the prophet of Allah. Likewise, when a Muslim wants to leave Islam, he or she will ultimately have to break free of Muhammad's covenant. The only power strong enough to break this covenant is the New Covenant Jesus initiated with His own blood. Mark Durie, a missionary to Muslims, has written a helpful manual on this topic entitled *Liberty to the Captives*.⁵⁸ For MBBs, our new identity is in Jesus Christ himself.
4. **Finding a New Spiritual Home in the Body of Christ.** For MBBs, our new collective identity is part of the global Church. It will be amazing at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb to meet all our brothers and sisters from Muslim backgrounds—Arabs, Turks, Iranians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Indonesians, Uzbeks, Malays, and on and on!

MBBs, like me, want to thank you for praying for Muslims all these many years. Now is the time of spiritual harvest in the Muslim world. Let's keep praying and keep on witnessing!

⁵⁸ Mark Durie, *Liberty to the Captives: Freedom from Islam and Dhimmitude through the Cross* (Australia: Deror Books, 2010).



UNLOOSING THE BONDS OF ISLAM, FOR MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS

Mark Durie
2020

*Editor's note: Intercede is grateful to Dr. Mark Durie for providing this article. For further understanding of this subject, we refer you to his book *Liberty to the Captives*. Dr. Durie's books, blog, and other materials may be accessed at www.markdurie.com*

In Daniel's prophetic visions, there is a description of a ruler who arises out of the wreckage of previous kingdoms. He will be "a stern faced king, a master of intrigue, who will consider himself superior, and by causing deceit to prosper, will succeed in whatever he does, causing astounding devastation to the saints. He will become very strong but not by his own power and will destroy many when they feel secure" (Daniel 8:9-12, 23-25). Daniel prophesies that this king will be overcome, "but not by human power."

The part I wish to draw the reader's attention to is the reference to an overcoming which is "not by human power". In respect of Islam, how can the spiritual power of Islam be countered? What are the keys to understanding Islam's power and addressing it?

This is not just a theoretical question. Many missionaries to Muslims and Christians who have lived and labored under Islamic conditions know the spiritual pressure all too well. The key question in response to this pressure is: How does the power of the Cross set the believer free from the legacy of Islam's own "stern faced king," Muhammad?

There are two aspects to this question. One is the need to uncover the covenantal structure of Islam and its potency to cause spiritual disruption to disciples of Christ. It is necessary to inquire carefully and discerningly into the nature of the spiritual power that stands behind Islam and works through it. The second aspect is to know and be able to apply biblical principles of freedom.

My own background in pastoral ministry has included discipling people coming to Christ out of the occult, witchcraft, and Satanism. For such people, there is a very real and compelling need to specifically renounce old allegiances and break ties such as initiation rituals. This is an instance of the requirement to “renounce Satan and all his works,” as an ancient baptismal formula put it. Again and again, in ministering to new believers, we have found that specific renunciations can be very helpful to facilitate a disciple of Christ’s effectual transfer from one Kingdom to another. Indeed it is true for every new disciple, wherever they have come from, not just for people coming out of occult backgrounds. A decision to follow Christ means deciding to turn away from other paths and reject other lords.

Around seventeen years ago, I began to embark on a long quest to understand the spiritual structure of Islam. I found that its spiritual power is built upon two covenants, one for non-Muslims, which we will refer to as the *dhimma*, and another for converts to Islam, which we will call the *shahada*. Missions to Muslims can be impacted spiritually by both these covenants, sometimes in subtle ways. Effective discipleship, however, can lead to freedom from both these covenants and their characteristic influences.

The *Dhimma* Covenant

The *dhimma*, or covenant of surrender to Islam, is often not as well understood by Christians as it could be. It represents a powerful spiritual contract, which is constructed in a way which works to contain and frustrate Christian witness. In Islamic

jurisprudence, the *dhimma* is the covenant of surrender, which permits Christians (and Jews) to live under Islamic rule while retaining their faith—provided they render grateful service to Islam, in humility for having their lives spared. This service used to include an annual payment of tribute, known as *jizya*. The evocative *jizya* payment ritual—to which, according to classical Islamic law, adult Christian men were to be subjected annually—enacted a ritual slaying of the *dhimmi* male by striking him on the side of the neck. This blow symbolized his fate, should he break any of the rules or principles of Islam, including the prohibition on witness to Muslims.

The *dhimma* imposes many spiritual difficulties upon non-Muslim communities. It is a blood-oath, a covenant with death—a kind of self-cursing enacted under threat—which says, in effect, “Kill me if I break any of the rules which establish the dominance of Islam over me.” This concept, of previously agreed-to fatal violence, is reflected in one of the paragraphs in the Pact of Umar, an early example of a *dhimma* covenant. In it, the Christians of Syria undertake a covenant stating, “These are the conditions that we set against ourselves and followers of our religion in return for safety and protection. If we break any of these promises that we set for your benefit against ourselves, then our *dhimma* is broken and *you are allowed to do with us what you are allowed of people of defiance and rebellion.*”

The *dhimma* comes with dire baggage. Let us consider some examples. One of the *dhimma*'s persistent spiritual impacts is the mimetic tendency, according to which tolerated non-Muslim *dhimmis* seek to look like Muslims, in order to blend into the *Umma* (the Muslim community) and avoid the stigma and risk associated with *dhimmi* status. Classical Islam vigorously opposed the mimetic tendency by enforcing legal regulations designed to prevent *dhimmis* from appearing similar to Muslims. Muhammad himself is reported to have insisted that Muslims should look different from non-Muslims or else be counted as among the unbelievers: “I have been sent with a

sword in my hand to command people to worship Allah and associate no partners with him. I command you to belittle and subjugate those who disobey me, for those who look alike are of the same.”

Another spiritual fruit of the *dhimma*, stemming from the enforced psychological trait of gratitude (for being allowed to live), is a misplaced attitude of praise and admiration for Islam. Paired with this is self-rejection, a tendency to doubt and criticize oneself and one’s spiritual inheritance as a Christian.

Another potential spiritual impact of the *dhimma*, also reflected in the Pact of Umar’s conditions, is an agreement not to pass critical commentary on Islam. This is why, even today in many countries, speaking or writing critically about Muhammad, Allah, or the first caliphs attracts a blasphemy charge, with severe penalties. In communities who live under the shadow of the *dhimma*, self-imposed silence about Islam and its teachings is matched by a tendency to be distrustful of and disassociate oneself from those who are critical of the religion. This is an attitude driven by fear, which thrives under *dhimma* conditions.

Yet another impact of the *dhimma* is an agreement forced upon *dhimmis* to suppress visible and audible public religious practices (no bells, loud singing, crosses worn or displayed on churches, etc.). Under conditions set by Islamic law, all practice of non-Muslim faith has to be hidden away, invisible to the public eye of Muslims, lest they be drawn away from Islam, in what Islamic scholars have called *fitna* (“testing” or “temptation”).

The *dhimma* pact is a spiritual covenant, which can exert a profound influence, even where it no longer exists as a legal instrument. An example was the Yale theologians’ 2007 response to the “Common Word” letter addressed by 138 Muslim leaders to the Christians of the World. This Yale response included various remarks that conveyed gratitude and humility in ways that aligned with expectations of *dhimmis*.

Examples are: “We ask forgiveness of the All-Merciful One and of the Muslim community around the world” and “It is with humility and hope that we receive your generous letter.” The point is that humility and gratitude are two key psychological characteristics Muslim jurists have identified as expected of *dhimmis*. The fourteenth century exegete, al-Khasin, explained that *dhimmis* should pay the *jizya* head-tax in a way which manifests gratefulness: “they pay it with gratitude, confessing the graciousness of Muslims in accepting *jizya* from them.”

Jovan Cvijic, writing a century ago about Balkan *dhimmis*, described the debasing psychological effect of living under *dhimma* conditions. He reported that Balkan Christians under Islam had become “accustomed to belonging to an inferior, servile class, whose duty it is to make themselves acceptable to the master, to humble themselves before him and to please him. These people become closemouthed, secretive, cunning; they lose all confidence in others.” Closer to home, what might the spiritual impact of such *dhimmi* conditioning be upon missionaries or their disciples if, to some degree, they come under its spiritual influence?

One symptom of the spiritual condition of *dhimmitude* could be an increase of secretiveness and suspicion toward others due to fear. Symptoms could also include standing apart from other Christians and stigmatizing the “Christian” identity, while exalting the “Muslim” identity, as manifestation of the tendency to mimic. The tendency to mimic could also be reflected in Bible translations that avoid reference to the Fatherhood of God or to Jesus as the “Son of God.” Instead, more “Muslim-friendly” terms could be preferred so as to clothe Christian witness in language that helps it blend in and conform to Muslim expectations. There might also be a tendency to adopt hostility to anything perceived as critical of Islam, and a preference to avoid difficult discussion or analysis of damaging Islamic teachings.

I can testify of one missionary who used highly contextualized forms of ministry to reach Muslims very

successfully for a time. He explained that one of the side effects of this period of ministry on his character was a growing suspicion of others, to the extent he used to play his cards very close to his chest. He found this was damaging his capacity to work well in teams. Later, after he left the Islamic environment, he realized this character trait was making him less effective in ministry; fortunately, he was set free from this problem by a sovereign intervention of God.

Although the psychological characteristics of *dhimmi* can impact Christians who work among Muslims, the spiritual impact of the *shahada* is equally, if not more, important for discipleship.

The *Shahada* Covenant

What is the nature of the *shahada* covenant, which binds a person to follow Islam? It has two key affirmations: (1) There is no God but Allah, and (2) Muhammad is his Messenger.

The first part of the *shahada* declares that Allah is the one true God, and his attributes are as revealed in the Quran. This spiritual package includes the Quran's rejection of *shirk*, the idea that God "partners" with anything or is like anything. The spiritual effects of this declaration are manifold. They include assent to the characterization of the nature of God as presented in the Quran, a declaration which is incompatible with the gospel message of the incarnation and conflicts with the message of salvation through the cross.

As a spiritual constraint, just as powerful and important is the second part of the *shahada*, "Muhammad is his Messenger," which controls the interpretation of the first part. As a covenantal declaration, this means, at the very least, that the Quran, "sent down" via Muhammad, is the inspired word of God, including its assertion that Jesus is not the Son of God, its rejection of the crucifixion, and its declaration that Muhammad is the "seal of the prophets" (i.e., the last and final messenger of Allah). It also means that the Quran's statements about Muhammad are true, including many statements that

Muhammad's example and commands must be obediently followed. This declaration also binds a Muslim to be subservient to the *sharia* (system of law), which is built upon the foundation of the example of Muhammad.

Declaration of the *shahada* in effect affirms Muhammad as the perfect example to follow, and this opens up the soul of a Muslim believer and practitioner to the attributes of Muhammad himself, as recorded in the Islamic canon. This is problematic because Muhammad's example and teaching include a great deal of dark spiritual baggage. Islamic practices are not merely cultural, but are expressions of submission to Muhammad's example as the Messenger of God. Even simple acts, like putting the right foot forward when entering a room or covering one's mouth when yawning, can be acts of conformity to Muhammad's example because they, ultimately, are based upon and, indeed, demanded by Muhammad's *Sunna* (his manner or way of life, including his teaching and example). There are unhelpful traits, which run deep in Muslim cultures, and are conditioned by the influence of Muhammad's character. Examples are deception; an orientation towards feelings of victimhood and abandonment; behavioral attributes grounded in rejection, such as a readiness to take offense, or an attitude of superiority and competitiveness; fear; suspicion; violence; and open doorways to the occult.

This last point, openness to the occult, is something of considerable significance for missions work. The occult plays a big role in the lives of many Muslims. What is not always understood is that the Quran opened a doorway to the occult by teaching that some *jinn* (spiritual beings) are Muslim believers (Surah 72:1-2). This opens up the possibility of Muslims connecting with and partnering with *jinn* as part of Islamic practice. The Quran also teaches that people have attached to them a personal spirit-companion known as a *qarin* (Surah 50:23). Given this, it is hardly surprising that Muslim Background Believers often have an occult history, which needs to be renounced if they are to come to full freedom. The

key point about these aspects of Folk Islam is that they come under the spiritual license and authority of the *shahada*.

Renouncing the *Dhimma* and *Shahada* Covenants

A verse of Scripture to which I have kept coming back to in implementing a pathway of discipleship that leads to freedom for Muslim background believers is Colossians 2:8-15. Paul understood his mission in terms of transferring people from Satan's power into the Kingdom of Christ. He speaks about this in Acts 26:18, when he describes his commission from Christ himself, "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." In Colossians 2, he reveals his understanding of how this works in practice. Although humans can be "held captive" by human traditions (v. 8), we have come to fullness in Christ (v. 10). The key, decisive event was the erasure of the record that stood against us, the record of our sin (v. 14). Paul speaks of these "legal demands" being nailed to the cross. I like to think of the *dhimma* and the *shahada*, with all their dark claims, in this way. They have been nailed! Paul explains the spiritual consequences, using an image from the Roman victory marches. The "rulers and authorities," which are personal demonic powers, have been publicly humiliated and triumphed over (v. 15) through the cross because it is the cross that sets us free from dark spiritual bonds. The challenge for every Christian, including those who disciple others, is to apply this directly to the soul.

As I grew to understand the power of the *shahada* and the *dhimma* to limit the spiritual growth of followers of Jesus, I began to develop prayers for renouncing the covenants. Two different prayers were needed: one for the *dhimma* and another for renouncing the *shahada*. These prayers are included in my book *Liberty to the Captives*.

Both prayers have their place. I have seen Christians whose ancestors lived for generations under Islamic rule and who wanted to reach out to Muslims, but found themselves inhibited,

constrained, and held back by unseen bonds. I have also repeatedly seen these same brothers and sisters enter into a new-found freedom, experiencing fresh power for ministry after renouncing the *dhimma* and its curses. I believe this is a crucial key for releasing the church “under” Islam into its birthright of freedom in Christ.

At the same time, I have observed powerful transformative effects in new believers’ lives after they make formal acts of renunciation of Islam. One convert, after reciting the prayer to renounce the *shahada*, declared: “The prayer is more than wonderful and I used to feel as a caged animal that has been set free.” Another person wrote, “I felt as if a dark spirit has left me and gentle rays of light penetrated my inner being and wiped out all traces of darkness.”

Over the past six years, it has been my privilege to lead many converts from Islam through a process of renunciation as part of their basic discipleship, and then to take them through a period of further proactive discipling to address areas of former bondage. The purpose of this process is to build strong healthy Christian character. Without careful attention to establishing new believers in freedom, they can easily stumble, their pathway of growth becoming obstructed with resentments and frustrations.

Many believers who have tried to reach out to Muslims with the gospel have experienced the pain of seeing people they invested in become shipwrecked on the shoals of character failings, including competitiveness, perfectionism, and taking offence. One brother comes to mind. He came from a strong Islamic family and had been a militant, killing many people. His conversion was dramatic, and his devotion to Christ sincere and intense. However, he found it very difficult to get on with other Christians. The churches he attended would welcome him initially, but found him to be hypercritical, demanding, argumentative, and ready to take offence. Jesus he loved: Christians he found lacking. This brother found it impossible to like other Christians, let alone love them, and sustaining

membership in a church was an impossibility. Now he lives an isolated life in a Western nation, a solo Christian with deep unhealed wounds of the soul.

In our times, with more and more Muslims turning to Christ, discipleship is the big challenge to be faced. Those who work among Muslim Background Believers need to be equipped for this discipleship challenge. There must be an understanding of spiritual warfare, and of such topics as deliverance, prayer ministry, and inner healing, including healing from trauma. Generational spiritual bonds are real and require skillful engagement to be addressed and spiritual foundations rebuilt. The equipping needs to be two-fold. On the one hand, we need a deep understanding of the power of the Cross to set us free, including skill in *how* to apply this knowledge. On the other hand, we also need to understand the spiritual structure of Islam so that this structure can be intentionally dismantled and replaced by a biblical worldview, including a healthy emotional worldview. These are essential keys to the future growth of the church among Muslims as they turn in increasing numbers to follow Jesus.



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"Lord, what is the key for reaching Muslims?" asked David Irwin, missionary to Africa, who was overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. The Lord spoke to his heart a simple phrase: "Fast and pray for Muslims on Friday." The *Jumaa* (Friday) Prayer Fellowship was born.

This led to the publication of *Intercede*, a bi-monthly magazine that informs intercessors on a variety of subjects about Islam and Christianity and gives focused prayer points for each Friday. The chapters in this book are a compilation of 27 selected articles originally printed in *Intercede* and written by different authors who have lived and served among Muslim people globally.

Part One addresses important topics in Islam and Christianity such as the nature of God, theological differences, religious celebrations, ISIS, honor killings, the historical origins of Islam, and compares the teachings of the Quran, Hadith, and Bible.

Part Two focuses on ministry to Muslim people by addressing a variety of topics, including welcoming Muslim neighbors, supernatural encounters, ministry to Muslim women, African American Islam, Insider movements, and discipleship among Muslim Background Believers.

By reading this book, readers will learn more about Islam and Muslim people and develop a desire to intercede for Muslims—until all have heard the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Jim Bennett has served as an Assemblies of God World missionary assigned to Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples (GI) since 1998. He served in Jordan for 17 years with his wife, Theda, and three sons, and then as the president of Continental Theological Seminary in Brussels, Belgium, for six years. He then became the International Director of GI and served in this position for eight years. During the last 22 years, he has traveled to 89 countries to provide training regarding ministry to Muslims. Currently, he serves as the Director of Ministries at Global Initiative, and since 2006, he has served as the esteemed editor of the Intercede magazine.

This book honors Dr. Jim Bennett for his commitment to Jesus Christ, his love for Muslim people, knowledge of Arabic, understanding of Islam, and excellent scholarship that enhances the quality of the *Intercede* magazine.



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