

## The Mystery of Islam

By Steve Krstulovich

**M**any 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 of history and foundation, which Islam uses to support its claims. Apologists prefer to address Islam simply on the basis of its own standard narrative, yet 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 as new teams of researchers become 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:

**570 A.D.**—Muhammad is born at 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.

**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 652 A.D. 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.

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# Until All Have Heard

*How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14*

**Mark Brink**

International Director  
Global Initiative:  
Reaching Muslim Peoples



In view of the events of the fallen world around us, suffering and persecution have been heavy on my mind. Recently I read news of a Middle Eastern country that is teetering on the brink of collapse with Islamic entities waiting to fill the vacuum. I also read about the assassination of a newly elected president and spreading Islamic fundamentalism in Africa. On Facebook, I saw a Christian worker sharing about the trials of a convert from Islam who is facing false accusations by those who are opposed to his new faith. These news clips remind me of the opposition the Kingdom of God and Christ's church face. In God's sovereign plan, Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God, endured the Cross, despising its shame, and took away the sins of the world. The supposed tragedy of the Cross becomes the salvation and glory of the Church. Likewise, the present suffering and persecution of His disciples turns into triumph as the gospel spreads.

The Church has at its disposal the most significant assets for accomplishing the command of Christ to make disciples of all nations—the Holy Spirit's empowerment and intercession. The forces of darkness oppose the expansion

of the Church by demonic forces manifesting spiritually and physically in the persecution of the Church. Hatred of Christ's mission and His person will always be normative in an ungodly world (John 15:18), and the lifestyle of godly Christians leads to suffering and persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Through the millennia, despite persecution and many times because of persecution, the Church continues to grow (Acts 7:54-8:1). The Pentecostal/Charismatic church has experienced exponential growth—from 63 million adherents in 1970 to a projected 800 million by 2025. This expansion encapsulates the corollary between Spirit-empowerment, persecution, and proclamation in the development and growth of the Church of Jesus Christ.

In these challenging days, let us keep our eyes on the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ. Do not let persecution or the cares of this world distract you from the Great Commission. Be filled with the Holy Spirit and work while it is day, for the Lord will return for His Church and those without Christ will be lost for eternity. Join us in our mission of intercession and taking the gospel to Muslims.





# Muslim World News



## **Nigeria: 1,470 Christians Killed in Four Months**

According to the rights group Intersociety Rule of Law, 1,470 Christians were murdered and over 2,200 were abducted by jihadists in the first four months of 2021. “The latest research investigation conducted by Intersociety took weeks and cut across all the troubling Christian areas of the country,” states the report, “The number of defenseless Christians killed in Nigeria from January to April 2021 [is] 1,470; out of which Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen accounted for the death of over 800.”

The rights group included a 26-page reference in their report citing backup statistics which aided their findings, along with several other eye-witness testimonies and survivor stories. The report goes on to state that despite the Nigerian government’s insistence that violence in the country is due to “herder-farmer clashes” and has no real religious motives, an extensive investigation concludes otherwise.—*International Christian Concern*

## **Azerbaijan: Gravestones for Roads**

Azerbaijan is utilizing gravestones from Armenian cemeteries as building material, according to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Artsakh, David Babayan. Azerbaijan continues to deface and destroy Armenian Christian heritage sites, including cemeteries and churches, as they seek to eradicate evidence of their culture and identity.

Cemeteries in Hadrut have been destroyed, as seen by satellite images. Reports now indicate that those gravestones are being used as building material in areas of Nagorno-Kara-

bakh (Armenian: Artsakh) and particularly for the building of new roads.—*International Christian Concern*

## **Burkina Faso: Baptism Party Attacked**

Suspected Islamic extremists attacked a baptism party in northern Burkina Faso, killing at least 15 people and sending terrified civilians fleeing to other towns.

The attack took place in May 2021 near the town of Tin-Akoff. It is the fourth attack against civilians in May in the commune, according to an internal security report for aid workers. While there was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, the internal security report viewed by the Associated Press blamed extremists linked to the Islamic State group.—AP

## **Algeria: Persecution of Apostate**

After Slimane Bouhafis was released from prison in 2018, having served nearly two years for violating Algeria’s blasphemy laws, further persecution drove him to Tunisia. Threats on his life continue, and he is stuck in legal limbo.

Initially sentenced to five years in prison in 2016 for messages he posted on Facebook favoring Christianity over Islam, Bouhafis benefited from advocacy efforts that drew international attention, and he received a partial presidential pardon in 2017 that resulted in his release on April 1, 2018.

Fearful for himself and his family, he sought asylum in Tunisia, as obtaining a visa for Europe or North America was too difficult. Bouhafis arrived in Tunisia in October 2018, where he remains under threat today.—*Morning Star News*



# The Mystery

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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*).

Yet, the Islamic sources backing up these claims were created too late and too faraway 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 A.D.) 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 A.D.) biography (*Sira*) of Muhammad written in Iraq, and Al-Tabari's (d. 923

A.D.) 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

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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 (S 7:24), where Abraham destroyed the idols in the Kaaba (S 21:51-71), and where Muhammad was born and lived until 622 A.D., 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 741 A.D., 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 Dabanogoris regio 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 A.D., 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 652

A.D. However, not even a trace of these Qurans 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 in 1936, 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 1985.

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 652 A.D.?

Researchers have uncovered several steps involved in the compilation of the Quran. Ibn Mujahid selected seven different official versions in 936 A.D. 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 Aramaic script, which has no vowel points or diacritical marks. 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 (640 A.D.), Fragments of the Charts of Jacob of Edessa (692

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A.D.), Ad Annum (705 A.D.), the Byzantine-Arab Chronicle (741-754 A.D.), and the Zuqin Chronicle (775 A.D.). 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 691 A.D. 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 Caliphal Protocols suddenly mention Muhammad in 691 A.D. 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 (S33:40) 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 727 A.D., 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 eight centuries as a means of announc-

ing new rulers, making political statements, and recording when and where they were minted. Interestingly, all of the coins in the Islamic Empire up until 660 A.D. 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 661 A.D. However, his coins bear Christian crosses in the western end of his empire and Zoroastrian fire altars in the east. Significantly, it is not until 696 A.D. 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 690 A.D., when the name Muhammad first appears. After 710 A.D., Islamic rites, such as pilgrimage, prayer, and fasting, begin to appear. Then, after 720 A.D., 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).





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**Friday, July 2, 2021. Please pray for**

*...a team translating the Gospel of Luke for Madagascar's Antakarana Muslim unreached people group (50,000 people).  
...the approximately 34,500 Christians in Libya, about 0.5% of a population of 6.8 million. 98.6% of Libyans are Muslim.  
...Hikmat in Bosnia-Herzegovina who continues to read the Bible and says he wants to follow Jesus as Savior but is gripped with fear of "family consequences." Of Bosnia-Herzegovina's population of 3.3 million, 50% are Muslim.*

**Friday, July 9, 2021. Please pray for**

*...gospel programs being produced in the Tamasheq language for nomadic Muslim Tuaregs (3 million people) in Africa.  
...Laiqa, a Muslim lady in the UAE. She has read the Gospel of Matthew and wants to meet face-to-face with a Christian.  
...a group of Christians from a Muslim background in Karaj, Iran, who have been interrogated by intelligence officials and told not to meet with other Christians—even in private homes.*

**Friday, July 16, 2021. Please pray for**

*...744,000 Fur people of Darfur, Sudan. They have suffered war and starvation, and are almost entirely Muslim.  
...more Christian Arab workers who would be willing to meet with new Saudi believers in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.  
...the development of "mature leaders" in the Kurdish church. The 30 million Kurds of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran are overwhelmingly Muslim, but the small Kurdish church is finding ways to shine the light of the gospel.*

**Friday, July 23, 2021. Please pray for**

*...the ongoing volatile situation in Mozambique. Insurgents have tried to overturn towns in the north and impose Shariah law. Of Mozambique's population of 31 million, 52% are Christian and 17.2% are Muslim.  
...the successful negotiation of radio contracts in Niger. Christian programming can potentially reach into the homes of Niger's population of 24 million, 93.3% of whom are Muslim.  
...the ministry of Freedom to Captives, using Facebook and Instagram to reach Muslim women in the Middle East.*

**Friday, July 30, 2021. Please pray for**

*...Arabic-speaking workers who have decided to stay in Greece and disciple new believers from a Muslim background, most of whom are refugees from Iraq and Syria.  
...Holy Spirit protection over the expatriate "church compound" in Qatar that is shared by several churches. The government gave permission and the "compound" is growing. Of Qatar's population of 2.8 million, 87.7% are Muslim.  
...more indigenous believers with a calling to reach the 1.3 million Bedouin people of Jordan; almost all are Muslims.*

*I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and  
thanksgiving be made for everyone. — 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV*



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[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

**Friday, August 6, 2021. Please pray for**

*...Christian organizations in Afghanistan helping to shelter and feed 12.5 million Afghanis who live in poverty.  
...mission workers trying to reach the Wala people group of Ghana. There are 100,000 Walas—all of whom are Muslims.  
...Muslim children in Tajikistan watching the SAT-7 Christian children's show 'Golpand.' Of Tajikistan's population of 9.5 million, 99% are Muslim.*

**Friday, August 13, 2021. Please pray for**

*...Pakistani leaders to put an end to the crimes of forced marriages and conversions of young girls in Pakistan. Of Pakistan's population of 220 million, 98.6% are Muslims.  
...healing for Hafsi, a local believer from a Muslim background in Tunisia. He is very active in sharing his faith with Muslims, but is now suffering from a serious illness.  
...protection for Christians in the Somali-speaking area of Ethiopia. The predominately Muslim population of the region has forced Christians to flee.*

**Friday, August 20, 2021. Please pray for**

*...the stronghold of tradition to be broken in Mauritania. Islam is woven into the very fabric of Moor communities. Of Mauritania's population of 4.6 million, 99.5% are Muslims.  
...God's anointing on the Arabic programs of SAT-7. A recent report states: "Every year our office receives thousands of messages from viewers telling us how they came to faith."  
...the Rajput Muslims of Pakistan, India, and Nepal. Rajput in Sanskrit means "son of a ruler or king." Rajput Muslims constitute about 25% of the 19 million Rajput peoples. There are no known believers among the Muslim Rajput.*

**Friday, August 27, 2021. Please pray for**

*...Khmer Christians in Cambodia who are beginning outreaches to the almost entirely Muslim Cham people of Cambodia. The 252,000 Cham practice folk Islam, incorporating magic and superstitions.  
...Christian ministries trying to reach the 37 million Muslim Jawa Pesisir Lor people of Indonesia.  
...Akmal, a recent convert from Islam in Afghanistan: "I was heartbroken by the unrighteousness I saw around me. I saw a program on TV about Jesus. I accepted Him as my Savior and now I am so happy."*

*\*All personal names used herein are pseudonyms*

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P.O. Box 2730, Springfield, MO 65801-2730  
1-866-816-0824 (toll free)  
[www.reachingmuslimpeoples.com](http://www.reachingmuslimpeoples.com)  
[www.jumaaprayer.org](http://www.jumaaprayer.org)