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The Jonah in All of Us

By Daryl Grasinger

A few years ago a pastor in the Middle East was imprisoned by the dictator of his country. Upon Pastor *Majid's release, members of his extended clan, who had fled to the safety of the West, urged him and his wife and children to join them. Bombs randomly exploded near his front door, pressure from Islamic extremists mounted, and the future was bleak. Members of his congregation regularly fled the country in hopes of finding a better life.

Anxious to do the right thing for his family, Pastor Majid reluctantly made plans to leave. To expedite visa applications, he traveled to a neighboring country to visit a Western embassy. While there, Pastor Majid attended church. The local pastor's message that Sunday morning was "Jonah, the Fleeing Messenger."

After the service, Pastor Majid asked the pastor, "Did you know I would be here today?" "No," the pastor replied. Then Pastor Majid tearfully explained, "For some time my heart has been troubled. I came here to apply for a visa in order to flee the war in my country. The message today was for me. I

now know that I cannot run away. I will go back and continue ministering to the people of my country."

The postscript to this story is that in the face of war and incredible danger in the past few years, Pastor Majid and his wife have faithfully planted churches, opened medical clinics and food banks, and extended vital help to orphaned children who are victims of war. Because of their faithfulness to the call of God, thousands of souls, including many Muslims, have come to faith in Jesus Christ.

What was Jonah's Problem?

We know that Jonah did a 180-degree turn when God said, "Arise, go to Nineveh!" But why was Jonah resistant? Was he simply resistant to submitting to God's will? Did he not want to relocate? Was he apathetic towards the Assyrians?

We gain insight when we see Jonah's response to the Assyrians turning to God. If the people did not repent, God was prepared to bring disaster upon the city. God's message to the King was, "Forty days from now Nineveh will be

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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



Recently I joined with workers who are ministering to Muslim refugees and immigrant communities across Europe. Workers shared powerful testimonies of the various ways in which they are impacting Muslims with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The common theme in the testimonies was how eagerly Muslims are responding to love and acceptance. Many refugees have faced horrific experiences of death and carnage in their home countries and readily gravitate to people who offer love and compassion.



Islam offers only guidance and submission, but provides no lasting remedy to the two deep-seated desires of the heart: genuine love and true compassion. Conversely, the gospel of Jesus Christ is inherently about love, compassion, and acceptance – and indeed, Muslims are responding! Tens of thousands have accepted Christ as their loving Savior and

comforting Lord. They demonstrate their profession of faith by receiving water baptism and seeking fellowship with Christian communities.

With this in mind, I thought of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) – a parable about compassion. The traveler was robbed, beaten, and left to die. Two religious leaders walked by, but demonstrated a complete lack of compassion. The text does not indicate why the duo refused to assist the man. Maybe they did not want to become unclean or perhaps they harbored prejudice in their hearts. Jesus revealed that it was the least-likely Samaritan who actually had compassion on the traveler.

This parable challenged me regarding how I respond to the spiritual “lostness” of Muslim people. For some of us, this parable exposes the need for a change of heart so we can respond as did the Samaritan. Jesus told this parable in answer to a lawyer's self-righteous question, “Who is my neighbor?” To many of us, our neighbors are the people we like or people with whom we have commonality. Muslims in our neighborhoods are culturally different from us and we may feel we have very little in common. However, we all share a common spiritual condition: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23b). Muslims are spiritually lost – just like any other person without Christ. Remember that biblical demonstrations of love and compassion can be important factors in leading lost Muslim neighbors to a saving knowledge of Christ. Ponder the following questions in light of the parable of the Good Samaritan:

1. How am I showing compassion to my Muslim neighbors?
2. Am I truly interested in reaching the world's 1.6 billion Muslims with the gospel?
3. Am I helping to provide opportunities for Muslims to experience the love and compassion of Christ?
4. Do I allow stereotypes and prejudices to keep me from showing Christ's love and compassion to Muslim people?

Let's search our hearts and make sure we are not walking in indifference like the priest or the Levite. May our actions of love and compassion demonstrate that we long to be identified with the Samaritan in Jesus' parable.

Muslim World News



Bible vs. National Security

Iran

An Iranian convert to Christianity serving 10 years in prison for “missionary activities” has written an open letter to the Iranian authorities, asking how Christian activities could be perceived as anti-state.

“Would it even be possible for a committed Christian – who was born and raised in Iran and whose forefathers lived in this land for thousands of years, and who is a servant to the God who has called him to a ministry of reconciliation – to act against the national security of his own country?” wrote Naser Navard Gol-Tapeh, 57, who has been in Tehran’s infamous Evin Prison since January 2018.

“As the charges against me in my indictment states: ‘Action against national security through establishment of house churches’, is the fellowship of a few Christian brothers and sisters in someone’s home, singing worship songs, reading the Bible and worshipping God acting against national security?” he continued.

“Isn’t it a clear violation of civil and human rights, and an absolute injustice, to receive a 10-year prison sentence just for organizing ‘house churches’, which is a sanctuary sanctified as a place to praise and worship God due to closure of churches in Iran?” – *World Watch Monitor*

Bibles Released After Six Years

Sudan

The Sudanese government has cleared a shipment of Bibles believed to have been held in Port Sudan for six years.

The Arabic-language Bibles were transported to the capital, Khartoum, after years of appeals by church leaders.

“Since 2011, government customs officials have delayed the clearing of several shipments of Arabic Bibles via Port Sudan, without explanation,” a source said, adding the Bibles were left decaying in shipping containers at the port while approximately 2 million Christians in the country faced a serious shortage of Bibles and teaching materials.

In October 2017, a senior church leader, who has overseen the import of hundreds of thousands of Bibles and other pieces of Christian literature to Sudan, told *World Watch Monitor* the Bible Society had not received any new Bibles to distribute in Sudan since 2013. – *World Watch Monitor*

Three Churches Shuttered

Indonesia

Three churches were closed in an Indonesian village amidst rumors Muslims were planning to protest against the churches’ presence because they did not have the required permits. A pastor from one of the affected churches in West Kenali village, Alam Barajo district, in Sumatra’s central Jambi province, said: “We had been worshipping here since 2004 and fulfilled all building license requirements. We have even built a good relationship with the local authorities. Yet the permit was not granted.”

“The rapid church growth in the area during the last decade may have caused restlessness among the majority-Muslim neighbourhood,” said the pastor, who leads an Assemblies God church. – *World Watch Monitor*

The Jonah

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destroyed!” When the King heard Jonah’s message, he believed and led over 120,000 people to repent and seek God’s forgiveness. What was Jonah’s response? Scripture says, “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry” (Jonah 4:1).

On a strictly human level, Jonah had a right to be angry. The Assyrians had wreaked havoc on lesser nations, including Israel. Historians indicate the Assyrians were barbaric in behavior – similar to the radical Islam we see currently.

But what was Jonah’s real problem? Jonah was out of touch with God’s perspective of mercy and judgment and saw the Assyrians through his personal and biased lens. Interestingly, God closes the story of Jonah with a question: “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh” (Jonah 4:11a)? This is a fair question for the church today. Should God not have compassion for Muslims who do not know the truth of Christ? Why should Muslims be excluded from receiving the love, mercy, and forgiveness of God provided through Christ alone?



From Nineveh to Modern-day Mosul, Iraq

Nineveh, the oldest and most populous city of the Assyrian empire, was located in what is now modern-day Mosul, Iraq. As a matter of fact, when ISIS invaded Mosul in July 2014, militants blew up Jonah’s tomb along with other holy shrines. Amazing! Thousands of years later, Nineveh and Jonah are still in the news.

What’s the point here? Scripture is clear that Satan’s purpose is to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). As followers of Christ, we need to be conscious of the fact we are in a constant spiritual battle. Our Western mind wants to reason first and spiritually discern later. However, believers need to consistently ask crucial questions:

“What is happening here spiritually?”

“Is there more to these conflicts than meets the eye?”

The Apostle Paul reminds us that “... the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel” (2 Cor. 4:4). This leads us to our next question.

Are Muslims our Enemy?

We must not forget that the driving force behind Islam is the same force that was behind the ancient Assyrians. It is not purely religious, political, or ideological. It is primarily spiritual! Jonah failed to recognize the spiritual forces driving the people of Nineveh to commit evil.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been working overtime to keep individuals from Christ. He is intent on keeping them from experiencing the love and freedom that comes through Christ alone.

Today, millions of Muslims are unaware of the truth of Christ due to their spiritual blindness. In many ways, they are “our Nineveh.” So, by what means will their eyes be opened to the truth about Jesus Christ?

Another Modern-day Jonah?

*Yusef Baraka and his wife had served four years as missionaries with a large evangelical denomination in northern

in All of Us

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Nigeria. They were sent to minister among Muslim Fulani nomads. The couple faced great opposition and deprivation, often not knowing where their next meal would come from. Few converts were gleaned—and even then—the converts, being nomads, always moved on. Discouraged and downhearted, Yusef and his wife pondered fleeing their mission and moving back to an easier life in the “Christian south.”

In a last-ditch effort to find direction, they attended a seminar for missionaries in the city of Jos. On the first morning, the guest teacher gave a devotional about Jonah. Yusef and his wife asked to speak to the teacher. In broken English, Yusef expressed his frustration: “I have so little fruit among the Muslims. I am thinking to leave, but I don’t want to be a Jonah.” The teacher queried, “How many Muslims have you witnessed to in the last four years?” Yusef reacted by producing a worn leather journal, held together by a piece of string. He slowly opened the journal and delicately turned the pages. Then he spoke, “These are the names and dates

of all the Muslims I have shared the gospel with during the last four years.” “And how many names are in your journal, Yusef?” the teacher asked. “Only 500,” he replied. The stunned teacher said, “Yusef, I don’t know of anyone who has personally witnessed to 500 Muslims in the last four years.” Suddenly there was light in Yusef’s eyes. He had not realized the magnitude of his effort. He blurted out, “If that is true, my wife and I will spend the night in prayer and tomorrow we will decide whether or not to return to the Fulani Muslims.”

The next morning before breakfast, Yusef and his wife sought out the visiting instructor. Now with a gleam in his eye and a smiling wife beside him, Yusef announced, “We have prayed all night and have heard from the Lord. Tomorrow we will return to the north and continue our ministry among the Fulani Muslims. The story of Jonah has reminded us that we should not flee from the Lord’s instructions.”

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The Jonah in All of Us

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Love Your Enemies, Pray for Those Who Persecute You

Whether you perceive Muslims to be a friend or foe, kind or evil, Christ calls us to love them. Does this mean just praying that Christ will reveal himself to them? Yes, there have been many testimonies of Muslims coming to faith in Christ through dreams and visions. As the church, we must continue to pray for the Lord to use these supernatural revelations, but this is not the primary means by which Muslims come to Christ today.

A survey reveals that Muslims come to faith in Christ as a result of two main factors. First, a follower of Christ demonstrated genuine love to them. In other words, Christians lived out their faith by loving the Muslim person just as Christ does and developed genuine relationships with them. In so doing, they had the opportunity to share the truth of Christ and their personal story.

Second, Muslims who came to faith in Christ received a copy of the Bible in their native language. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit...”

Let’s learn from Jonah’s mistakes. We cannot stand in utter judgment of Jonah, since we are all susceptible to responding just like he did. However, we should pray to understand God’s heart and perspective. We, too, deserve judgment, but our heavenly Father has shown us mercy!

Go and Show Mercy

In Jesus’ day, Samaritans were despised, similar to the Assyrians of Jonah’s day and the radical Muslims of our day. In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus closed the parable by referring to the Samaritan as “the one who showed mercy toward him.” Then Jesus said to his questioner, “Go and do the same” (Luke 10:37).

We know that our God is just and His judgment must come, unless we repent. Nevertheless, His heart is first to show mercy, especially for people in spiritual darkness. So, when Jesus wants to show people mercy, especially the world’s 1.7 billion Muslims, may we go and do the same. Let us “Arise and go to Nineveh!”

**Pseudonyms*



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

Friday, November 2, 2018. Please pray for

...equipping classes being taught by a Global Initiative associate in Colombia, South America during November 2-5.
...the growing number of “churches” in Tunisia that consist entirely of converts from Islam. More than a third of Tunisia’s 24 provinces have at least one “church.” Of Tunisia’s population of 11.6 million, 99% are Muslim.
...former Muslim “Adli” in Chad, Africa. Adli leads a team that is building relationships with a Muslim people group.

Friday, November 9, 2018. Please pray for

...the growing number of Muslim youth in Kosovo who are increasingly open to the gospel.
...Iranian pastor Yusef Nadarkhani. He was arrested in July after being accused of propagating house churches and promoting ‘Zionist Christianity’. Of Iran’s population of 82 million, 98.5% are Muslim.
...Nasser, a Muslim convert and church planter in a Muslim-majority country. He says “The good news is that more Muslims are coming to Christ. The bad news is that we don’t have enough room!”

Friday, November 16, 2018. Please pray for

...three “unofficial” churches in Algeria that have recently been allowed by the government to reopen.
...SAT-7 Turkish television programs that are reaching every region of the country with the good news of Jesus Christ.
...Christians in Kalimantan, the Indonesian portion of the island of Borneo. Muslims forced the closure of a church building in Banjarmasin – and thereby heightened religious tension in the area.

Friday, November 23, 2018. Please pray for

...churches in Europe that have shared Christ with Muslim refugees and are integrating converts into their congregations.
...safety for groups of believers across Afghanistan. One group meets every two months and is reading the Bible together from Genesis onward. Of Afghanistan’s population of 36 million, 99.8% are Muslim.
...Kurdish “fellowships” in Turkey. The predominately Muslim Kurds are the largest minority group in the country and comprise nearly 18% of Turkey’s population of 82 million.

Friday, November 30, 2018. Please pray for

...wisdom for Rajai, an Arab Muslim convert from a Middle Eastern country. Rajai now lives in a United Kingdom country and is seeking ways to share Jesus with his Muslim family.
...encouragement for small groups of new believers from Muslim backgrounds in Yemen in the midst of a brutal civil war.
...the 2,500 Kyrgyz language Bible dictionaries recently distributed in Kyrgyzstan in an effort to increase biblical literacy among leaders and church members. Of Kyrgyzstan’s population of 6 million, 87% are Muslim.

*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, December 7, 2018. Please pray for

...*Asia Bibi to be released from prison in Pakistan.* Bibi, a Christian, was sentenced to death in 2010 under Pakistan's blasphemy laws after a dispute with her co-workers.

...*a small group of Senegalese "village imams" who are reading the Scriptures together.*

...*Solomon, a house church leader in the Middle East.* His prayer included this plea: "God, you know [the persecution] we are facing. Our hope is in you. Lead your people into victory."

Friday, December 14, 2018. Please pray for

...*150 Muslim Bedouin families spread across the southern part of Jordan.* Each family received a "health visit" from compassion ministry workers. Visits included a wise but clear presentation of Jesus Christ.

...*church planting teams among Muslim unreached people groups in North India.*

...*churches and Christians in Mindanao, in the southern Philippines.* Insurgent Muslim jihadists regularly create havoc. Of Mindanao's population of 25 million, approximately 7 million identify as Muslim.

Friday, December 21, 2018. Please pray for

...*online discipleship ministries* focused on new believers from a Muslim background. An online discipler requests prayer that "the Holy Spirit will help me provide Scripture-based answers to questions from new believers."

...*Muhammad, a new follower of Christ in Syria,* who testifies, "I was a Muslim for 41 years, but after being tortured by ISIS I heard the gospel and decided to follow the Prince of Peace."

...*Muslims who have come to faith in Jesus Christ in the Comoros Islands.* Of Comoros' population of roughly 825,000, 98.3% are Muslim.

Friday, December 28, 2018. Please pray for

...*secret believers in the following Muslim-majority countries* where there is an official death penalty for apostasy from Islam: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Yemen, the Maldives, Sudan, and Mauritania.

...*over 2 million Muslims in the United Kingdom.* In Britain itself, 40% of its Muslim population lives in London.

...*shortwave radio broadcasts in all three major languages of Ethiopia:* Amharic, Oromo and Somali. Of Ethiopia's population of 107 million, 34.5% are Muslim.

**All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*

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