

The History and Beliefs of Islam: Emerging Views

By Steve Krstulovich

Intense international focus on Islam, especially in the wake of current events, has generated renewed interest in better understanding its claims. Unlike the story usually told by Muslims, relatively recent historical research is uncovering new facts with important implications that can help us make sense of it all. It is largely in this century that the difficulty in trying to extract accurate historical information from the traditional Muslim sources has been fully appreciated amidst the numerous contradictions noted in the Quran, traditions (*hadith*), and biographies (*sira*) of Muhammad. In this article, it will be possible to touch on just a few short, but important questions.

Was Muhammad Really Born and Raised in Mecca?

The first two centuries of Islam are buried in the shadows of history. This is especially so in the case of Muhammad who is thought to have lived between 570 and 632 AD. Various lines of evidence seem to suggest that he may have been born and raised as a subject of the Christian Roman Byzantine Empire among Nabatean Arabs, instead of in Mecca as taught by Muslims. Very little has actually been critically confirmed about who Muhammad was and what he did.

Many records from his time were destroyed, and his sayings and biographies were published by Muslims long after his death in places far from Arabia. This is all very different from the record of Jesus in the New Testament, which has withstood enormous critical investigation. We have multiple accounts written about Jesus *during* the time of the Apostles, and more eyewitness testimony of his resurrection than of any other fact in ancient history.

Some research suggests that Muhammad's home may have been near the ancient city of Petra. It is an established fact that all mosques up to a century after Muhammad's death were built facing Petra instead of Mecca. Muhammad became the unquestioned leader of the Arab Ishmaelites when he fled to Medina in 622, ahead of a massive Roman military campaign to retake the Levant from Persia. The Ishmaelites were a group of tribes in northern and central Arabia connected with the rise of the Nabateans, who emphasized their connection to Abraham.

Was Islamic Empire Building Inadvertently Assisted by Volcanoes and the Black Plague? Almost incredibly,

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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
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Reaching Muslim Peoples



2018 is still new and with each year comes new goals and expectations for what we want to accomplish. Whether it is to realize new personal, professional, or spiritual goals, we thrust ourselves forward with new enthusiasm. *Webster's Dictionary* defines enthusiasm as “having or showing intense and eager enjoyment, interest and approval.” The Apostle Paul gives us a glimpse into how to define spiritual enthusiasm: “Never lag in zeal and in earnest endeavor; be aglow and burning with the Spirit, serving the Lord. Rejoice and exult in hope; be steadfast and patient in suffering and tribulation; be constant in prayer” (Romans 12:11-12, Amplified Version).

As a ministry, we begin this year with great expectation as to how God will open new doors of ministry and how His Spirit will draw many Muslims into the Kingdom of God. Just as the Apostle Paul challenges us to never lag in inten-

sity and earnest efforts aglow with the Spirit, we are enthusiastically equipping the global church to reach our Muslim neighbors. Paul indicates that the key to this spiritual fervor is to delight in hope, to be undeterred by suffering and tribulation, while being constant in prayer.

An article in the January 2018 edition of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* details the global trends of Christianity. Statistics indicate that Christianity is growing in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and especially India and China. This fills our heart with renewed enthusiasm. However, the article also reiterates the necessity of remaining steadfast in prayer and evangelism because of the suffering, tribulations, and increased martyrdoms across the globe. The authors indicate a decline of Christianity in the Middle East from 14 percent in 1900 to just 4 percent in 2018. It also estimates that from 2000 to 2010, approximately 900,000 people have been martyred for their witness of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, “in 1800 Christians and Muslims together represented only 33 percent of the world’s population. The estimates for 2018 show that Christians and Muslims together now represent 57 percent of the world’s population” (p. 27).

With increased secularization and decline of Christianity in Western civilizations and its expansion in the global south, Islam is attempting to step into the forefront of contending to narrate the spiritual lands of our world. **How will the church and our ministry contend with these global trends?** In the same article, the authors present statistics regarding the global growth of Pentecostals and Charismatics from 980,000 in 1900 to over 682 million in 2018. With the growth of the Spirit-empowered Church, since 1900 the number of “national workers” has grown from 2 million to over 13 million laborers in the harvest. **How will we meet this spread of Islam? We believe our primary mandate is to equip Spirit-empowered workers across the globe to reach Muslims with the gospel of Jesus Christ.** Please join Global Initiative in this task with focused prayer and finances!

Source of Statistics:

Todd M. Johnson, Gina A. Zurlo, Albert W. Hickman, and Peter F. Crossing. “Christianity 2018: More African Christians and Counting Martyrs.” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 1 (January 2018): 20-28.



Muslim World News



Church Attacked ... and Fined

Egypt

An Egyptian court found 15 people guilty of attacking a Coptic church south of Cairo, and also fined a Coptic man for illegally hosting the church on his premises.

The misdemeanor court in Giza governorate handed down one-year suspended jail sentences to the 15 attackers, with a fine equivalent to \$28 each for “inciting sectarian strife, harming national unity and vandalizing private property,” Reuters reported.

The Coptic owner of the premises in the village of Kafr al-Waslin received a fine equivalent to \$20,500 for hosting a church without a license.

A large group of Muslims gathered at the building after Friday prayers, following a rumor that a church bell was to be put on the top of the building and turned into an official church. The group broke into the building and trashed the interior, chanting “Allahu Akbar,” according to a *World Watch Monitor* source. – *World Watch Monitor*

Machete Attack: Refusal to Convert

Uganda

A Christian woman has been brutally attacked with a machete by her Muslim husband for refusing to convert to his religion, sources told *World Watch Monitor*. The attack led to the death of the woman’s one-week-old twins.

Regina Navatovu, 35, lived with her husband, Asuman Sekidde, in Bumogolo village in the south of Uganda. When Navatovu conceived in 2017, Sekidde claimed the children were not his and accused his wife of having an affair.

Sekidde had started to threaten to hurt his wife before

moving to Kalangala, more than 100 kilometers away, in Lake Victoria. The twins were born on December 18, 2017, and Navatovu made contact with her husband to let him know. Sekidde returned on December 22, and that night attacked his wife and the newly-born children with a machete.

Neighbors helped take the mother and children to a local hospital. One of the twins died from a loss of blood, the other was unable to be kept warm by the unconscious mother and died from hypothermia, reported the *Ugandan Daily Monitor*. Navatovu lost her right hand and some fingers from her left hand in the attack.

“The local media reported that this was a case of proven adultery, but the real issue was not the paternity of the babies, it was about faith,” *World Watch Monitor*’s source said. – *World Watch Monitor*

Church Building Torched

Kyrgyzstan

A Baptist community in eastern Kyrgyzstan fears for its safety after unknown attackers set its church building on fire. The damage has forced its 40 Kyrgyz and Russian members to start searching for a new place of worship, while wondering if there will be a further attack.

The church was in Kajisay, a small town in the Issyk-Kul region that borders China.

When local radio and TV stations broadcast news of the arson attack, it caused a “great public outcry,” sources told *World Watch Monitor*.

An investigating police officer said the attack was “organized by those who don’t like your church and Christianity in the midst of a Muslim country.” – *World Watch Monitor*

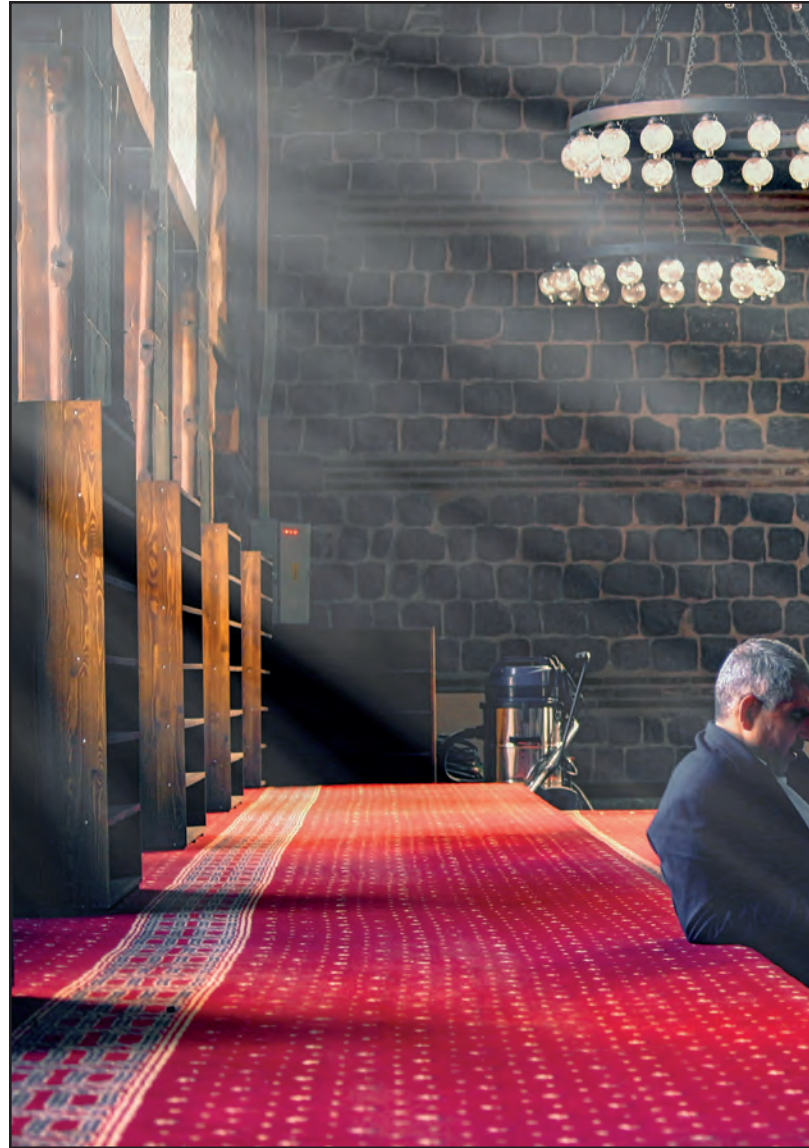
The History and Beliefs

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the Muslim Arabs were able to create an empire that, in less than a century, spanned from Spain to Afghanistan. A volcanic winter during 535-536 brought decades of drought and famine, unleashing an epidemic of bubonic plague. The ensuing “Black Death” decimated the competing Roman Byzantine and Sassanid Persian empires for 210 years, while leaving the deserts of Arabia largely unaffected. Numerous battles between the Sassanids and Byzantines ensued as each struggled to bolster their flagging revenues from the plunder of one another. To reinforce depleted manpower for their armies, both empires engaged *healthy* rival proxy Arab tribesmen (the Lakhmids and the Ghassanids) from northern Arabia. Each of the proxy Arab forces learned valuable military tactics that would position them and their successors well in future campaigns of Muslim expansion.

Did the Early Muslim Pentchant for Violence Lead to the Destruction of Their Own Historical Records? The Islamic empires built by the Arabs were characterized by violence. The first two centuries saw four civil wars and countless battles and acts of terror, with at least three of its first five leaders being assassinated. When Umar I, who reigned from 634 to 644, became leader of the Muslims, he began to carve out his own empire against the Persians and Byzantines. Umar destroyed many records in libraries at Ctesiphon (near Babylon), Alexandria, and elsewhere. This zealotry lead the third Muslim ruler, Uthman, who reigned from 644 to 656, to destroy all of the earlier copies of the Quran he could find, whether in whole or in part. After destroying the Quran, he published a few copies of his own version, none of which have been found. The earliest existing fragments of the Quran all date to the reigns of later rulers. This is in marked contrast to the faithful preservation of early manuscripts of the Bible by Christians in spite of attempts by hostile rulers, such as the Roman Emperor Diocletian in 303 AD, to destroy them.

What Prompted the Practice of Second-Class Citizenship (*Dhimmitude*) in Islamic Settings and Does It Exist Today? The growing Islamic empire faced a conundrum—their conquered subjects now vastly outnumbered them. Thus, Islam had to enlist Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian scholars, jurists, and administrators from their rapidly conquered territories to help manage their diverse subjects. Accordingly, the initial target of their religious persecution was other Arabs in conquered lands, thus using forced conversion to broaden the influence of Islamic beliefs among



Arabs in general. At the same time, the Islamic conquerors “allowed” non-Muslims to retain their religious practices under *dhimmi* restrictions as second-class subjects.

When Muawiyeh I, who reigned from 661 to 680, became leader of the Islamic empire, he readily accommodated these diverse subjects—*dhimmis*—while fiercely attacking the Christian Roman Byzantines. There is scarce mention of Muhammad or even any fragments of a Quran datable to his reign. Muawiyeh even went on a pilgrimage around Jerusalem in the steps of Christ and prayed at Golgotha. He tried to assure his *dhimmi* subjects of peace and attempted to portend an empire composed of many faiths. However, when

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he established the Umayyad Dynasty, named after his grandfather, a civil war broke out. His rival, Husayn, the grandson of Muhammad and son of Ali, who reigned before him, was killed. Husayn's death cemented the opposition of the "followers of Ali" in the Shiite sect of Islam in 680.

The concept of *dhimmitude* became widespread to varying degrees at different times and places during centuries of Islamic expansion. Muslim historians have suppressed its history, and especially in the modern era *dhimmitude* is a rarely heard term. Although it has been somewhat ameliorated by Western powers in the last two centuries, it is still practiced to varying degrees in most Muslim lands. In

general, in addition to demanding that *dhimmis* pay a special tax (*jizya*), its terms can prohibit the repair and building of churches and synagogues, the hanging of a cross on churches, Christians displaying their religion in public, converting Muslims, stopping others from converting to Islam, possessing weapons, harboring "spies", telling "lies" about Muslims, possessing alcoholic beverages, marrying Muslim women, and teaching non-Muslim children about the Quran. *Dhimmis* are to defer to, assist, and show honor to Muslims. They may also be prohibited from taking Muslim titles of honor, and from leading, governing, or employing Muslims. In extreme cases, *dhimmis* are to dress and act distinctively so as to show their lower status, and in some cases even live in smaller dwellings than Muslims. Breaking any term of the pact has, at times, invited retaliation not only against the offender, but also against the entire non-Muslim community of the offender. Suffice it to say that the spirit of *dhimmitude* is alive and well, especially in majority Muslim countries.

Was The Original Kaaba in Petra? Many facts emerging in the new historical view of Islam indicate that the original Kaaba of Islam was probably located in Petra, well-known as a sacred site of pre-Islamic pilgrimages. This spectacular ancient city was full of temples and lay at the hub of the main trade routes. Petra was also the center of Arabian culture and Allah was one of several deities worshipped there. Petra's agricultural and physical features also much better fit the description of the holiest site in the Quran.

The original Kaaba in Petra was destroyed during a civil war under the Umayyads. A new Kaaba was built in Mecca by another rival to the throne named Ibn al-Zubayr, a grandson of Abu Bakr, the first successor to Muhammad. Surprisingly, Mecca is mentioned only once in the entire Quran and does not appear in ancient literature and maps until more than a century after Muhammad. The serious implications are that Muslims are possibly praying in the wrong direction, and going on Hajj pilgrimage to the wrong place, contrary to the injunctions of Muhammad in their own Quran. A recent documentary film called "The Sacred City" powerfully presents much of the evidence.

The Umayyad leader, Abd al-Malek who reigned from 685 to 705, killed Ibn al-Zubayr in 692. Assisting him was a militant Arab schoolmaster named al-Hajjaj. With the approval of Abd al-Malek, Al-Hajjaj decided to replace the

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Kaaba in Mecca with his own and began leading pilgrimages there. Al-Hajjaj was known for his stern suppression of rebellion and was eventually elevated to the powerful position of vice-regent to Abd al-Malek.

Abd al-Malek was fiercely ethnocentric and changed the official language of the empire to Arabic. He also began to transform the empire into one run by Arabs primarily for the benefit of Arabs. To elevate the status of Arabs and quiet their complaints over the Umayyad fighting that had led to the destruction of the original Kaaba, Abd al-Malek built The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Construction lasted from 688 to 692 and Abd al-Malek ordered Arabic calligraphy to be placed on The Dome of the Rock, displaying some of the first extant examples of quranic texts critical of Christian practices.

Was Abd al-Malek Responsible for a Major Revisionist Makeover of Islam and the Quran? As part of his arabization program, Abd al-Malek sought to fashion a “religion of truth” from fragments of Islamic belief that was superior to what he deemed to be the Christian “superstitions” of most of his subjects. Contemporary writers of that era mention that texts, supposedly from Muhammad, called *The Cow*, *The Table*, *The Women*, and *God’s She-Camel*, which differed from then current *suras*, were circulating along with various quranic laws and commands. Abd al-Malek embarked on a campaign to clean up the contradictions and standardize contrasting texts. Abd al-Malek’s campaign included a state-sponsored makeover of the Quran under al-Hajjaj, who inexplicably declared that Allah viewed Abd al-Malek as higher than the prophets and the angels.

It was Abd al-Malek who officially gave Islam its name. He inscribed on The Dome of the Rock the following words: “Religion, in God’s eyes, is submission (*Islam*).” Abd al-Malek then became one of the first Arab leaders to formally proclaim himself the “Deputy of God” (*caliph*). In 695 he issued coins inscribed with the first extant occurrence of the complete *shahada* (profession or creed) that Muslims recite five times a day. It proclaims that Allah is the only deity and Muhammad is the apostle of Allah. Abd al-Malek used these declarations to help legitimize his own aspirations.

Why the Constant and Withering Suppression of Christianity? Walid I, succeeding Abd al-Malek as caliph, reigned from 705 to 715 and was even more self-assured in his Islamism than his father had been. Much of Walid’s motivation for actively suppressing Christianity was simple: he felt that Christian beliefs were utterly ludicrous. Thus, Chris-

tians and Christianity had to be suppressed. Under his reign, the empire reached its zenith with the conquest of Spain in 711. Conversions to Islam, forced and unforced, rose dramatically in the wake of Walid’s successful expansionism.

Active proselytizing to Islam increased under the Umayyad caliphs Umar II (717-720) and Hisham (724-743). During their reigns, *dhimmi* restrictions for non-Muslims were increased, thereby adding further pressure to convert. Near the end of the Umayyad dynasty, during the reign of caliph Hisham, the Christian monk John of Damascus wrote *The Fount of Knowledge*, in which he laid out a powerful exposition and defense of the church’s orthodox faith. He included a section entitled “The Heresy of the Ishmaelites.” This treatise was one of the first Christian refutations of Islam and presented Muhammad as an antichrist and false prophet. Needless to say, John’s perceived attack did not endear him to Muslim leaders.

Implications of Emerging Views of Islam. The new evidence being uncovered to help understand the historical basis of Islam continues to be developed and refined. It calls into question important aspects of a faith that profoundly affects our world today and asks whether current Islamic practices actually contradict the Quran and teachings of Muhammad. It also questions whether the text of the Quran itself has been altered far more significantly than previously thought, and whether the current Muslim view of Muhammad and what he taught was dramatically altered by the political concerns of later Muslim leaders.

All this is important, but does not necessarily address the spiritual need of Muslims for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It does, however, confirm to us that God is moving in unprecedented ways in our times to reach out to Muslims. Muslims who are seeking to know the truth will see the futility of attempting to find it in the fractured narratives of the Quran and the contradictory history of Islam itself. As followers of Christ, we must submit ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to keep in step with His purposes.

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Friday, March 2, 2018. Please pray for

*...ministry to Muslims in the United Kingdom. The number of Muslims in the U.K. is 4.13 million, 6.3% of the population.
...rising tension on Christians in Quetta, Pakistan. Two Islamist terrorists attacked the Sunday morning service at a local church on December 17, 2017, killing nine Christians. Of Pakistan's 195 million people, 99% are Muslims.
...Farida, a Muslim in the North Caucasus region of Russia, who desires to follow Jesus. Her father stated, "If my daughter becomes a Christian, I will cut off her head."*

Friday, March 9, 2018. Please pray for

*...several thousand Syrian Armenian Christian refugees who have fled civil war and ISIS to seek refuge in Armenia.
...start-up business projects in Guinea, Africa, owned by Christian ladies, all converts from Islam. They are strongly resisted by local authorities. Of Guinea's 13 million people, 88% are Muslims.
...more than 6,000 Christian converts from Islam in Kazakhstan. Of Kazakhstan's 18 million people, 51% are Muslims.*

Friday, March 16, 2018. Please pray for

*...protection and courage for Mustafa, an African convert from Islam. Relatives killed and buried a chicken, as a sign that they were burying Mustafa.
...Nisreen in Turkmenistan, who left Islam to follow Jesus. She was told she would lose her job. She said, "Jesus will give me another job." She was told she would also lose her house. She responded, "Take it, Jesus will give me another house."
...thousands of Muslims in former Soviet Union countries who have turned to Christ since the 1990s.*

Friday, March 23, 2018. Please pray for

*...Holy Spirit anointing on radio broadcasts reaching into remote areas of the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia.
...a Turkish couple, Engen and Nurcan, converts from Islam, who serve as church planters and evangelists in rural Turkey.
...Najma in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. She grew up in poverty because her mother left Islam to follow Christ. Najma has now chosen to follow Jesus and is finding succor in a local church.*

Friday, March 30, 2018. Please pray for

*...internet and social media ministries in North Africa and the Middle East.
...Christian humanitarian relief agencies in South Sudan, which continues to be deeply troubled by a violent civil war. Of South Sudan's 13 million people, 58% are Christians.
...three believers from Muslim backgrounds in the Khuzestan province of southwest Iran who were arrested recently for attending "illegal house meetings."*

*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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Friday, April 6, 2018. Please pray for

...equipping classes being taught by a Global Initiative team member during April 10-20 in a key South Pacific nation.
...Roger and hundreds like him who are actively befriending Muslim refugees in Canada. Of Canada's 36 million people, Muslims have quickly grown to over a million.
...discipleship conferences in several Middle Eastern Muslim countries for new believers from Muslim backgrounds.

Friday, April 13, 2018. Please pray for

...a large number of pastors and evangelists from Muslim backgrounds in Ethiopia.
...Muslims Ali and Luay in the Delta region of Bangladesh. They have started to read the Bible and find themselves hungering to know more about "the Anointed One." Of Bangladesh's 162 million people, 87% are Muslims.
...a "Reaching Muslims Consultation" in a major Asian city during April 16-20. Workers, consultants, and presenters will gather from around the world.

Friday, April 20, 2018. Please pray for

...believers in Algeria who are facing new waves of persecution. Recently a church and a bookshop were ordered to close due to false accusations against them.
...the tropical islands of the Maldives in the Indian Ocean. A Maldivian found with a Bible in his house faces prison. It is illegal for Muslims to convert, and propagation of a religion other than Islam is a criminal offense.
...hope joy, and above all, faith, to come to millions of Middle Eastern children who regularly watch the SAT-7 KIDS television programs.

Friday, April 27, 2018. Please pray for

...the 1.7 million Muslims and the 1,000 Christians who live in the impoverished Gaza Strip, controlled by Hamas, a Sunni Islamist group.
...the Aceh Province of Indonesia, where sharia law is officially implemented. Recently at least one Christian has been flogged for minor "offenses" and Muslim mobs have torched churches.
...the country of Yemen. In the midst of one the most horrendous conflicts in the world today, believers are requesting Bible stories for their children.

**All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*

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