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From Affirmation to Accusation The Development of Islamic Claims of Biblical Corruption

Solomon White

Introduction



Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all profess to stem from common monotheistic roots, especially the lineage from Adam through Abraham, and also to Moses and the prophets. While each religion firmly affirms this common heritage, the three have since developed mutually exclusive theologies, practices, and understandings of history. Even that lineage is understood differently by each, and identifying what the situation was before the points of departure is essential. Islam's eventual assertion that the Qur'an has been "perfectly preserved" and is completely free of "corruption" deepens those differences, as this assertion summarily

refutes any earlier, now "corrupted" scriptures, and holds that the Qur'an is now God's only message to mankind.¹

This study reviews the Qur'an's actual statements and the support or dissent they might provide for later Islamic assertions of Biblical "corruption." Notable omissions here are a Biblical response and a counter-assessment of the Qur'an's viability, which would be equally pressing.² Also, though when Islam refers to a book (the Bible), it is to the Christian scripture, when Christianity speaks of its scripture, it is not talking first of a physical book, but of a person, Jesus Christ, the Living Word (Jn. 1:1, 14).³

¹ "The Qur'an is the very Word of Allah, His final message to all humanity, revealed to His final messenger Muhammad and transcending all limitations of time and space. It is preserved in its original tongue without any amendments, additions or deletions" (Al-A'Zami, M. M. *The History of the Quranic Text from Revelation to Compilation A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*; UK Islamic Academy: Leicester, England, no date, 13).

² A biblical response could include that "demonstrating the unity of Scripture addresses this belief [of Biblical corruption,] because it shows that the message . . . has not changed over time, location, language, or prophet" (Green, Samuel. *Where to Start With Islam*. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2019, 49).

³ Of interest here is the Qur'an's statements about the Christian Bible, as this will include both the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament, with the term "scripture/s" usually referring to the Christian Bible. For differentiation of the Qur'an's treatment of Jews and Christians see Gabriel Said

Over the centuries, Islamic charges have arisen that the Christian scriptures, whether accidentally or maliciously, have been falsified, corrupted, altered, and/or changed; that either the text itself has been manipulated, or that its meaning or interpretation has been changed.⁴

“Today it is almost a given of Islamic orthodoxy to hold that the Bible as a whole, both Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, have suffered wholesale corruption to where, in the main, they are utterly unreliable. . . . If anything unites Islamic apologists, it is the persistent assertion of Qur’anic perfection in contrast to the corrupted nature of the Bible, particularly the New Testament.”⁵

If the charge of corruption is false, “to say that the Holy Scriptures have been altered or manipulated is an offense against God, who has promised to protect them from error”⁶ (see: I Pet. 1:25; Matt. 5:17-19; 24:35; Isa. 40:8; 55:10–11). Speaking as Islam’s sole canonical text, the Qur’an’s comments concerning the integrity and authority of the earlier scriptures are taken as coming from the most serious source that Islam can offer.

The Qur’an’s Statements

The Qur’an’s vocabulary uses eight verbs or verb phrases to describe “corruption” or “falsification.” The Arabic terms mean to cover up or conceal, to exchange, to write something humanly inspired while calling it God-given, to twist the tongue (i.e., distort the explanations), to shift words out of context, to forget, or to hide (either the text or the truth).⁷ The collective Islamic term for these is *tahrīf*, defined as the “corruption of a document, whereby the original sense is altered. It may happen in various ways: by direct alteration of the written text; by arbitrary alterations in reading aloud a text which is itself correct; by omission or interpolation; or by a wrong

Reynolds, “On the Qur’anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*Tahrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130. 2 (2010), https://www3.nd.edu/~reynolds/index_files/scriptural%20falsification.pdf, accessed July 1, 2021.

⁴ For a rebuttal of *tahrīf al-ma’anī* (misinterpretation) and *tahrīf al-nass* (textual corruption), these being the “early” and “later” views respectively, see Schaffner, Ryan, *The Bible through a Qur’anic Filter: Scripture Falsification (Tahrīf) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature*, Dissertation, Ohio State University, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/34998023/The_Bible_through_a_Qurānic_Filter_Scripture_Falsification_Tahrif_in_8th_and_9th_Century_Muslim_Disputational_Literature, accessed July 1, 2021. Also, concerning the historical criticism used against the Biblical text, White notes that “... the Muslim understanding is that no such historical foundation is needed . . . for [the Qur’an’s] words to be true. This is the Qur’an. It has been preserved. For the large majority, that ends the discussion, even when the same believers will then embrace historical criticism to question the value of [Jesus’] words in the Gospels, which were recorded within the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses of His ministry!” (White, James R. *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur’an*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2013, 113-114).

⁵James R. White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur’an*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2013, 171.

⁶Carlos Madrigal, *Explaining the Trinity to Muslims: A Personal Reflection on the Biblical Teaching in Light of the Theological Criteria of Islam*. Littleton, CO: William Carey Library, 2011, 65.

⁷ Reynolds, “On the Qur’anic Accusation . . .,” 192-193.

exposition of the true sense.”⁸

The Qur’an’s statements about the Christian text are presented below, ayah by ayah. This collection is not exhaustive, but it represents most of what has been encountered in this study. It is important to distinguish between accusations concerning the text proper and those concerning how the text is handled, i.e., the behavior of its adherents, as extensions of the text, which are not a reflection on the text itself. Attention is given to the Qur’an’s comments on both, and items to be noted in the citations below include:

- Affirmations or charges (tahrif) about scripture, especially concerning scripture’s authority.
- Grammatical structures and the use of the past tense in particular. These often cite previously established scriptures as authoritative, thereby acknowledging that the Old and New Testaments predate the time of Muhammad and the writing of the Qur’an. That is to say, in Muhammad and/or the Qur’an’s view, there had not been a “corruption” of scripture up to or during their time, unless stated otherwise.⁹
- References to “the Book” can be perplexing; are they to the Qur’an or the Bible? Most seem to be directed to the Qur’an, but the Qur’an could hardly have been an assembled book at the time its statements were first made (the possibility of redaction addresses this concern).

The significance of most citations is taken to be readily apparent, and comments are limited.

Affirmations & Accusations About the Previous Scriptures, or Their Authority

The ayat (verses) attesting to the presence of a previous scripture, and to its validity, are many: “Surely it is indeed a sending down from the Lord of the worlds. . . . Surely it is indeed in the scriptures of those of old. Was it not a sign for them that it was known to the learned of the Sons of Israel?” 26:192–197¹⁰

“He sent down to you the Book with the Truth, confirming what came before it; and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel.”¹¹ 3:3-4a; also: 6:92

⁸ H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, “Tahrif,” *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: EJ. Brill, 1991, 560, as quoted in Saeed, Abdullah, “The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures.” *The Moslem World* 92 (Fall 2002): 421, https://equalaccess.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/The-Charge-of-Distortion-of-Jewish-and-Christian-Scriptures_Abdullah-Saeed.pdf, accessed July 1, 2021.

⁹ That then-current Bibles do not have significant variances with those before or since supports their validity, as the Qur’an also attests.

¹⁰ All quotations from the Qur’an are from Droge, A. J. *The Qur’ān: A New Annotated Translation* (Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2013), as presented in Nickel, Gordon D. *The Quran with Christian Commentary A Guide to Understanding the Scripture of Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020). Any emphases are added. Also see “Tampering with the Pre-Islamic Scriptures” (Nickel, 142).

¹¹ The Gospel – the Injil – is mentioned various places in the Qur’an. There is question whether it is referring to the four NT gospels, or to other documents which Islam, not Christianity, attributes as being “gospels.”

- “The scriptures of those of old,” that “it was known to the learned of the Sons of Israel,” and “what came before it” are all in the past tense, confirming that the earlier scriptures predate the Qur’an. Here, the Qur’an supports both the OT (Torah) and the NT (Gospel) as God-given, as a coordinated whole, and as mutually confirming.
- “The Koran clearly stresses that Allah has sent the Gospel as a true guide for human beings, just as the Torah was sent earlier.”¹²

The Angels said, “Mary, . . . his name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, highly eminent in this world and the Hereafter, . . .” And [Allah] will teach him the Book and the wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel. . . . “And (I come) confirming what was before me of the Torah, . . .” (Remember) when God said, ‘Jesus! Surely I am going to take you and raise you to Myself, and purify you from those who disbelieve.’ 3:45, 48, 50, 55a

- Allah himself is elevating Jesus to himself, and if Jesus is to “return” to him, the implication is that Allah is where Jesus was previously from and that Allah had sent him.
- “In Q 3:55a, the Qur’an insists that Allah’s support of those who followed Jesus has not, and will not, be eclipsed. . . . These verses stand in perfect contrast to the traditional Islamic view of Christianity as a falsified religion.”¹³
- The Qur’an, quite remarkably, shares “the concern of the [Early Church] Fathers with the Jewish opposition to Jesus.”¹⁴

(Remember) when God took a covenant with the prophets: ‘Whatever indeed I have given you of the Book and wisdom. . . . Say: ‘We believe in God, and what has been sent down on us, and what has been sent down on Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and what was given to Moses, and Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit.’ 3:81, 84; also: 2:136, 53, 87, 89; 4:163-166 (authenticates the Psalms and other, unnamed prophets); 17:55; 53:36-37; 87:18-19.

- Again, note the use of past tenses: the Qur’an is referring to previous prophets and writings. Since the Qur’an is the earliest Islamic text, these prophets must have been from the Old and New Testaments.
- Cited by name, “prophets” (plural) grammatically refers to those of the past, as Muhammad was the only prophet (singular) of Islam.

¹² Christine Schirrmacher, “Islamic Views about Christian Scriptures.” Institute of Islamic Studies · www.islaminstitut.de/en, 2019, https://www.islaminstitut.de/wp-content/uploads/2004/01/2004_Ifl_Islamic_Views_about_Christian_Scriptures.pdf, accessed July 5, 2021, 2, emphasis added.

¹³ Reynolds, “On the Qur’anic Accusation . . .,” 196. Reynolds further states “The Qur’an insists that God aided the sect that followed Jesus against their enemies and made them victorious (lāhirln). The Qur’an could hardly be thinking of (proto-)Muslim disciples of Jesus here. These disciples, according to Islamic tradition, were oppressed and vanquished. The Christians were victorious” (196).

¹⁴ Reynolds, “On the Qur’anic Accusation . . .,” 200.

- “No distinction”: all prophets, pre-Muhammad and Muhammad, are equal in revelation and authenticity – Muhammad is not presented as either final or superior.

You who believe! Believe in . . . the Book which He sent down before (this). Whoever disbelieves in God . . . and His Books and His messengers . . . has gone very far astray. 4:136

- “Before (this) . . .”: grammatically, this can only refer to book(s) before Muhammad, thereby validating the earlier scriptures.
- “Books” and “messengers” are plural: if only Muhammad and the Qur’an were legitimate, both would be singular (the earlier scriptures are again validated).

Yet how will they make you (their) judge, when they have the Torah, containing the judgment of God? . . . Surely We sent down the Torah, containing guidance and light. By means of it the prophets who had submitted rendered judgment for those who were Jews, and (so did) the rabbis and the teachers, with what they were entrusted of the Book of God, and they were witnesses to it. . . . We prescribed for them in it: ‘The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth.’ . . . We followed up with Jesus, son of Mary, confirming what was with him of the Torah, and We gave him the Gospel, containing guidance and light, and confirming what was with him of the Torah. . . . So let the People of the Gospel judge by what God has sent down in it. . . . And We have sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming what was with him of the Book, and as a preserver of it. So judge between them by what God has sent down. . . . (So) judge between them by what God has sent down, . . . and beware of them in case they tempt you (to turn away) from any part of what God has sent down to you. 5:43-49; cf. 2:89; also 6:92

- With no attempt to supersede, qualify, control, or otherwise redirect it, this is an extremely strong endorsement of the Torah and the Gospel’s authority and authenticity. That these are “containing guidance and light” gives stronger support yet, and is an attribution which would not be given unqualified to something known to be “corrupted.”
- The “submitted” prophets: with “submission” being the very definition of all that “Islam” is, this is the strongest Islamic validation possible of these prophets, who then ruled by the Torah.
- “Eye for the eye, tooth for the tooth”: this is an unmistakable reference validating the Torah – see: Ex. 21:23; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21.
- Of note here is that “the Qur’an refers not to nasärä, but to ahl al-injil, the ‘People of the Gospel,’ and instructs them to rely on their own revelation, the Gospel. Thus, [even] if the Qur’an speaks against certain Christians, it speaks in support of the Gospel, and moreover

assumes that the valid Christian revelation is still at hand in its [i.e., the Qur'an's] day."¹⁵

Say: "People of the Book! You are (standing) on nothing until you observe the Torah and the Gospel, and what has been sent down to you from your Lord." 5:68

- Again, this is very direct support of the Torah and the Gospel(s), saying that those who disregard them (not those who disregard the Qur'an) have no spiritual foundation.

Those who follow the messenger, the prophet of the common people, whom they find written in their Torah and Gospel. 7:157

- Though this intends to authenticate Muhammad, it is an even stronger authentication of the Torah and the Gospel (by using them as the authority to validate Muhammad). Those authorities – "the Torah and the Gospel" – are identified in the same breath, jointly substantiating both, and again without qualification. Notably, to later "corrupt" the earlier documents would also be to directly "corrupt" Muhammad's authority.

No one can change the words of God. 6:34b; also: 10:64; 6:115

- If the earlier books were divine (as per the above Qur'anic validations), this says they cannot be changed. It is not possible that tampering or corruption occurred, as they are still intact.

If you are in doubt about what we have sent down to you, ask those who have been reciting the Book before you. 10:94; also: 4:47

- Though potentially qualified elsewhere, Muhammad and the Qur'an are here making their authority contingent on the previous scriptures!

A blessed Book – We have sent it down to you, so that those with understanding may contemplate its verses and take heed. To David We granted Solomon. 38:29-30

- The "blessed Book" here appears to be in the line of David and Solomon, not that of Muhammad or the Qur'an. It is in the line of Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 22:2; Deut. 18:18 – ". . . from among their brethren," i.e., the Jews), not the line of Ishmael.

Say: 'I am not the first of the messengers . . . ' 46:9

- There were no earlier Islamic messengers; the Qur'an refers to the Biblical prophets.

¹⁵Gabriel Said Reynolds. "On the Qur'anic Accusation . . . ," 195 emphases added. Reynolds continues: "this reference to the 'People of the Gospel' is nowhere matched by a reference to the 'People of the Torah'" (195).

Ayat about Christianity, the “People of the Book,” and the Children of Israel

Do not dispute with the People of the Book. . . . And say: ‘We believe in what has been sent down to us, and what has been sent down to you. Our God and your God is one, and to Him we submit.’ 29:46; also: 3:113-114

- If the scriptures had been corrupted, there would not be this respect for the “People of the Book,” or their scriptures.

People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in the signs of God, when you are witnesses (to them)? People of the Book! Why do you mix the truth with falsehood, and conceal the truth, when you know (better)? . . . They speak lies against God, and they know (it). 3:70-71, 75d; also: 3:64-65; 3:199; 4:131; 5:5c

- The charge of admixture is a de facto recognition of and is premised on truth previously established.

Ayat Alleging Error

The Qur’anic charges include falsification of the text, corruption, alteration of the revealed truth, distortion, or the exchange of truth for falsehood. Note that the most immediate charges here look to refute the “People of the Book,” not to discredit the Biblical text itself.

Do not mix the truth with falsehood. 2:42; also: 3:70-71, 75d

But those of them who did evil exchanged a word other than that which had been spoken to them. 2:59; also 7:162

Say: ‘People of the Book! Do not go beyond the limits in your religion, (saying anything) other than the truth, and do not follow (the vain) desires of a people who went astray before (you). 5:77

A group of them has already heard the word of God, (and) then altered it after they had understood it – and they know (they have done this)? 2:75; also: 5:13b, 41

- Sayyid Qutb attributes “them” as being the “most knowledgeable of the Jews . . . that is the scholars and rabbis.”¹⁶ If so, the verse is not an idle accusation.

¹⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur’an* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1996), I 84.16; as found in Abdullah Saeed, “The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures,” *The Moslem World* 92 (Fall 2002): 423. https://equalaccess.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/The-Charge-of-Distortion-of-Jewish-and-Christian-Scriptures_Abdullah-Saeed.pdf, accessed July 1, 2021.

- Again, the “Word of God” would need to be the Christian/Jewish scriptures, as the Qur’an was still in the making when these statements were made, and the Qur’an was not in the care of Jews or Christians.

Suppression (covering, concealing, hiding) of truth and revelation -

Do not mix the truth with falsehood, and do not conceal the truth when you know (better). 2:42

. . . Who is more evil than the one who conceals a testimony which he has from God? . . . Those to whom We have given the Book recognize it, as they recognize their (own) sons, yet surely a group of them indeed conceals the truth – and they know (it). 2:140, 146; also: 2:159, 174; 3:187

Fabricated revelation (i.e., attesting one’s own inspiration as being from God), distorting the explanations, or shifting words out of context.

Surely (there is) indeed a group of them who twist their tongues with the Book, so that you will think it is from the Book, when it is not from the Book. And they say, ‘It is from God,’ when it is not from God. They speak lies against God, and they know (it). It is not (possible) for a human being that God should give him the Book, and the judgment, and the prophetic office, (and) then he should say to the people, ‘Be my servants instead of God’s.’ Rather (he would say), ‘Be rabbis by what you have been teaching of the Book and by what you have been studying (of it).’ 3:78-79; also: 4:46

Forgetting the revealed truth.

Do you command the people to piety and forget yourselves, though you recite the Book? Will you not understand? 2:44; also: 7:165

They . . . have forgotten part of what they were reminded of. 5:13

A compounding issue is that Islam asserts the Bible initially was, in fact, the unalterable Word of God.

No one can change the words of God. 6:34

Perfect is the word of your Lord in truth and justice. No one can change His words. He is the Hearing, the Knowing. 6:115-116

No one can change the words of God. That is the great triumph! 10:64

No one can change His words. 18:27

If the Bible was in fact the immutable Word of God and that, according to Islam, his word cannot change, there is the yet more astonishing notion of Islam’s embrace of abrogation (which Christianity does not accept).

The Qur'an's Statements, in Summary

Contrary to the current Islamic narrative, the Qur'an itself attests that the Christian scriptures are authoritative and historically valid, particularly noting the Tawrat, Zabur, and Injil.¹⁷ Other Biblical writers and characters are either more generically or implicitly included, though the narratives are often significantly changed. The Biblical writings are stated to be definitive, conclusive, and sanctioned, or in the case of the Injil, that at least the earthly life and ministry of Jesus is generally authentic and that He is now with God the Father in Heaven. Contrary to later developments, the Qur'an itself makes no accusations, nor even alludes to or suggests anything less than the full veracity and authority of the Biblical texts, much less that they are "corrupted." Flatly, there are no charges of scripture's corruption in the Qur'an. Where accusations do occur, they are not against the text, but against the text's adherents and the perceived or asserted spiritual infidelity of the "People of the Book." There are also high commendations for Christians – even the label "People of the Book" is a highly respectful and honorable expression – but the accusations against them are many, frequent, and sharp.¹⁸

Evidently, the Qur'an is principally concerned with the misuse of scripture. . . . the Qur'an [itself does not] insist that passages of the Bible have been rewritten or that books of the Bible have been destroyed and replaced by false scripture. Instead, the Qur'an argues that revelation has been ignored, misread, forgotten, or hidden.¹⁹

The only possible caveats would be that Muhammad saw the previous scriptures as exclusively pointing to himself as the final prophet, and/or that he was referring to other, non-canonical texts as being the previous scriptures (i.e., the Gospel of Barnabas, alternate accounts of Adam, Ishmael as the son to be sacrificed, etc.). Either way, the scriptures were in use before his time, concurrently with him, and have since been historically verified, so that any claims of "corruption" can be firmly

¹⁷ The Zabur, the Psalms of David, are not mentioned elsewhere in this paper but are identified in 4:163; 21:105; and 17:55.

¹⁸ Would Muslims return the same kind of hearing that they expect from Christians, in response to such caustic comments? If this reading is representative, it seems the tenor of the Qur'an's accusations are barbed and personally aimed at outsiders, whereas the nature of scripture's accusations of spiritual laxity is primarily to its own people and are more a charge from the Almighty, not direct, personal attacks by any of the prophets.

¹⁹ Reynolds, Gabriel Said. "On the Qur'anic Accusation . . .," 193. Duran affirms that "if there is an alteration, it must be in sense not in the text. It is evident that the majority of the first Muslim scholars believed that the text of the previous scriptures, at least in the case of the Hebrew scripture, remained intact or unaltered. Tabarī understands these additions and changes as oral, not textual." (Duran, Didem Hizli. "The Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Alteration (Tahrīf)," accessed July 1, 2021, www.academia.edu/34494605/THE_QURANIC_ACCUSATION_OF_SCRIPTURAL_ALTERATION. 2, 13-14, 6). However, al-Qāsim and some of his contemporaries posited both textual corruption and misinterpretation (Schaffner, Bible ... Qur'anic Filter, 358-359). Schaffner also notes that then-contemporary Christians understood this not just as an attack on "the interpretation of scripture, but also [on] the very authenticity of the revealed text, [that of the two charges,] textual corruption seemed a much more pressing concern" (Schaffner, Bible ... Qur'anic Filter, 329-330, 359-360).

refuted by direct examination of whether those texts have changed over time.²⁰

The “Fallout” – a Historical Perspective

That Muhammad had “no serious engagement with the Bible [seems readily apparent, and] as a result the Qur’an’s description of it is vague and that of an outsider.”²¹ Muhammad did not quote the Old or New Testaments, whereas Jesus quoted the Old Testament.²² Islamic recounting of Biblical accounts is frequently skewed, and one wonders on what basis Muhammad would make critical statements about the Bible. If he had greater truth, why did he not directly and on an informed basis engage the Hebrew and Christian writings? Had Muhammad really seen himself in the Biblical prophetic line, he would have been much more careful to do so, or at least to carefully elaborate on the differences.²³ Muhammad’s (and Islam’s) statements lack both critical function and engagement.

Nonetheless, Islam’s claims eventually developed into full-fledged and systemic thought systems, including that the Bible “is full of contradictions [with] multiple versions and textual variants, was written by anonymous authors, . . . [and] excludes other gospels”;²⁴ frequently considering it “a mixture of myth, legend, and history together with the true Biblical message as it has been revealed by God.”²⁵

Though this was not, in the end, about textual corruption, the Qur’an’s accusations were later redirected from the people of the Book to the text itself. With the potent mixture of good and bad that the scripture now supposedly presents, the net result was to mistrust it and then to condemn the whole.²⁶

²⁰ A rather potent Christian counter-statement is that when a charge is leveled, often the accuser is guilty of the same charge (and hence, why they are sensitive to the issue): see Rom. 2:1-5; Matt. 7:1-4; and Gal. 6:1. Counter-examination of the Islamic texts, to review for Islam’s “corruption,” is also only a matter of working on a level playing field – Islam needs to submit to examination in these matters, just as it expects Christianity to do.

²¹ Samuel Green, *Where to Start With Islam*. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2019. 194, n15.

²² Ibid. 194, n15.

²³ As Reynolds comments, “the Qur’an never speaks properly of the Hebrew Bible at all” (Reynolds, Gabriel Said. “On the Qur’anic Accusation . . .,” 200). Also see 57:26-27.

²⁴ Green, *Start with Islam*, 183. Also noted is that “the central doctrines of the Trinity and salvation by Jesus’ death and resurrection are seen by Islam as only being established at the Council of Nicaea, long after Scripture was written, only exacerbates issues” (Schirrmacher, *Islamic Views ...*, 6). Further, that even without paraphrases, the plethora of Bible “versions” presents a real heyday for charges of textual corruption, not to mention any errant usage of the original languages by the end user. It seems that Bible translations all work from a relatively fixed, well-known set of manuscripts, that the manuscripts themselves are not fundamentally in question, whereas even the Arabic versions of the Qur’an vary significantly in which manuscripts they are translating from (see Daniel Brubaker, *Corrections in Early Qur’ān Manuscripts: Twenty Examples*. Think and Tell Press, Lovettsville, 2019).

²⁵ Ridā, from M. Ayoub, “Muslim Views of Christianity: Some Modern Examples”, in: *Islamochristiana* (Rome), 10 (1984), 58; as quoted in Schirrmacher, *Islamic Views ...*, 6.

²⁶ Strangely, though the arguments for tahrīf are presumably Qur’anic in origin, Muslim polemicists “do not seem concerned with expressing their arguments in [Qur’anic] terms” (Schaffner, *Bible ... Qur’ānic Filter*, 3), further confirming a radical shift.

Later hadiths expanded on Islam's developing teachings and position.²⁷ Though the particulars of "who, what, where, and when" of Biblical tahrîf were few,²⁸ deliberate corruption was increasingly asserted. Adding to this, in what was originally more likely to be an intensely oral society as well as one accepting progressive revelation, Allah had the power of abrogation. As such, Islam does not see an issue with Muhammad's revelations superseding all previous ones and so feels no sense of accountability or obligation to entertain the merits of the earlier scriptures or their defense.²⁹

The stage was now set for a theological coup d'état, and in a shallow twisting of the Biblical texts, these developments eventually culminated in the Old and New Testaments' supposed "proclamation" of Muhammad as the long foretold final prophet of God!³⁰ "In their zeal to promote Islam, in their desire to make it simple for the average Muslim, and from their veneration of the Qur'an, Islamic leaders ha[d] developed a series of beliefs about the Qur'an that no longer ha[d] any historical or scholarly basis,"³¹ but stood only by assertion and a claim of "revelation." The stage was now set for the religious and geopolitical tensions of today.

Conclusion

Are there accusations of Biblical infidelity in the Qur'an? Yes, there are. But are they directed at the earlier scriptures? No, it does not appear so. Islam has since transferred charges against the "People of the Book" to the text itself, even though those charges are not found in the Qur'an. Rather, the Qur'an consistently speaks with honor and reverence toward the earlier scriptures.

Even Islamic scholars are increasingly realizing that there are no grounds for the Muslim rejection of scripture. As Saeed has concluded,

[If the] scriptures of Jews and Christians . . . have remained more or less as they were in the seventh century CE,³² the reverence the Qur'ān has shown them at th[at] time should be retained even today. . . . The wholesale dismissive attitude held by many Muslims in the modern period towards the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity do[es] not seem [to] have the support of either the Qur'an or the major figures of tafsīr.³³

²⁷ See: Ibrahim, Farooq. "Is the Injeel Less or More Trustworthy than the Quran? Part 2/3." answering-islam.org, https://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Farooq_Ibrahim/trustworthy2.htm, accessed July 1, 2021.

²⁸ See Saeed, Charge of Distortion, 422-423, 427, where commentators such as Tabari, Razī, Qurtubī, Sayyid Qutb and others variously weigh in.

²⁹ Qureshi, Nabeel. No God but One: Allah or Jesus? Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016. 109-110. Also, 2:106; 16:101.

³⁰ Schirmacher, Islamic Views ..., 4.

³¹ Qureshi, No God, 185-6.

³² The time of Muhammad and the supposed compilation of the Qur'an.

³³ Saeed, "Charge of Distortion," 434-5. Also, the reverence given the "'Book of God', . . . as given to Jews and Christians, led scholars like Ibn Taymiyya to consider unwarranted the wholesale rejection by Muslims of the Christian and Jewish scriptures" (429).

The Biblical scriptures are not only completely exonerated of Qur'anic assertions of "corruption"; they stand as honored, authoritative, and revered.

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Divine Destinies A Comparative Study of Islamic and Christian Eschatologies

Dr. Patrick M. Kamau

Abstract



This article conducts a comparative analysis of Islamic and Christian eschatological teachings, examining perspectives on divine judgment, resurrection, and eternal destiny as presented in the Qur'an, Hadith, and the Bible. Central to this exploration is the role of Jesus (Isa), whose eschatological significance underscores profound doctrinal divergences between the two faiths. Christian theology affirms Jesus as the Messiah, whose Second Coming heralds the final judgment, while Islamic thought regards him as a prophet tasked with restoring justice and reaffirming divine law.

Adopting a comparative theological approach, the study draws upon primary religious texts and secondary scholarly sources, employing historical and doctrinal analyses to trace the evolution of these eschatological themes. Additionally, the article investigates how these theological frameworks shape contemporary religious discourse and foster interfaith engagement. The conclusion highlights shared ethical concerns about justice and moral responsibility, proposes pathways for collaboration on social justice initiatives, and encourages continued dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities. Ultimately, this study seeks to deepen understanding of the theological distinctions and commonalities between the two faiths, promoting respectful interreligious relations.

Keywords

Afterlife, Biblical teachings, Christian eschatology, Comparative theology, Dajjal, Day of Judgment, Divine justice, End times, Eschatology, Hadith, Heaven and hell, Interfaith dialogue, Isa, Islam, Islamic eschatology, Messiah, Resurrection, Second coming

I. Introduction

Eschatology, derived from the Greek term *eschaton*, concerns the end times. This core theological discipline examines the ultimate divine and human events in history, encompassing humanity's destiny and that of the universe. Eschatological themes are essential to Christianity and Islam for understanding the divine plan and fulfilling God's/Allah's intentions for creation. In this article, the Christian deity will be called God, while the Islamic deity will be designated Allah. In this article, "Jesus" refers to the Christian confession, while "Isa" refers to the Islamic tradition.

This article examines the eschatological doctrines of Islam and Christianity, comparing their teachings on the final events and human fate as articulated in the Qur'an, Hadith, and the Bible. The study aims to identify both shared convictions and doctrinal distinctions between the two religious traditions by focusing on key themes such as divine judgment, resurrection, and eternal reward or punishment. The topic centers on the role of Jesus/Isa, whose eschatological significance differs substantially between Christian and Islamic perspectives. Christianity depicts Jesus as the Messiah, whose 'Second Coming' will herald the last judgment. Islam views Isa as a prophet destined to return to reestablish justice and implement divine law.

This study employs a comparative theological methodology, examining primary religious texts and secondary scholarly sources while integrating historical and theological analysis to explore the evolution of eschatological themes. It examines how these eschatological conceptions shape contemporary religious discourse and offer insights for interfaith collaboration. The conclusion emphasizes the common ethical problems of both religions, particularly regarding justice and moral responsibility. It advocates partnership on social justice matters and urges sustained engagement between Christian and Muslim communities. This comparative analysis elucidates theological distinctions and shared beliefs, promoting respectful discourse in interfaith interactions. It explores eschatological themes, including final judgment, resurrection, eternal reward or punishment, and cosmic transformation. It further examines divine justice, human ethics, and the importance of existence, mortality, and the afterlife. In both Christian and Islamic traditions, these ideas significantly shape ethical behavior, religious observances, and communal identity.

Rationale Behind This Eschatology Comparative Study

Eschatology is a crucial field of study in contemporary religious and philosophical discussions, influencing the political, social, and cultural spheres beyond theology. A comparative analysis of Christianity and Islam is particularly pertinent given their common Abrahamic origins and the influence of eschatological ideas on religious communities' perceptions of the contemporary world.³⁴ Such a study is essential for fostering interfaith dialogue, promoting mutual understanding, and addressing the growing need for coexistence in an increasingly interconnected world.

Christianity and Islam, despite their doctrinal differences, share core theological concerns, especially regarding divine judgment, resurrection, and the afterlife. Both

³⁴ Siti Humairoh et al., "The Concept of Eschatology in Islam: An Analysis of Fazlur Rahman's Perspective and Al-Munir's Exegesis on Surah Al-Infithar," *Journal of Middle East and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2024): 15, <https://doi.org/10.7454/meis.v11i1.173>.

religions emphasize that human actions and beliefs have ultimate consequences, highlighting divine accountability. The doctrine of resurrection, understood as the raising of persons for judgment, is fundamental to both religions, bolstering their interpretations of moral accountability and divine justice.³⁵

A comparative analysis of these topics offers significant insights into the theological doctrines shaping each religion's eschatological perspective. By examining scriptural sources, historical interpretations, and contemporary theological discourse, scholars can better understand how these common issues affect religious practice, ethical behavior, and interfaith interactions. Moreover, this inquiry underscores how Islam and Christianity confront existential questions about human destiny, laying a foundation for dialogue that promotes mutual understanding and tolerance.³⁶

Historical & Cultural Context between Christian and Muslim communities

The historical relationships between Christian and Muslim societies, shaped by centuries of coexistence, conflict, and collaboration, provide an essential context for understanding their eschatological viewpoints. These relationships have been shaped by diverse sociopolitical, economic, and cultural circumstances, which have influenced theological interpretations and religious practices. From the medieval era, marked by intellectual exchanges between Islamic and Christian scholars, to modern global discussions, the intertwined histories of these civilizations illustrate how eschatological beliefs have shaped their responses to social and political difficulties.³⁷

Eschatological perspectives extend beyond theological discourse, influencing public policy, ethical behavior, and cultural expressions. Concepts of divine judgment and the afterlife shape legal and moral frameworks, informing societal attitudes toward justice, human rights, and governance.³⁸ Additionally, representations of the afterlife in literature, art, and architecture reflect profound eschatological concerns that shape religious identity and practice. Analysing these dimensions through an academic lens enhances scholarly understanding. It promotes interreligious dialogue by revealing shared and distinct interpretations of human destiny and moral order across Christian and Islamic traditions.

A. Eschatological & Theological Foundations in Islam

Islamic eschatology, derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, encompasses the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an is the literal word of Allah and provides a foundational understanding of the afterlife and divine judgment.³⁹ Numerous chapters (Surahs) of the Qur'an address eschatological topics, including

³⁵ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1981), 152.

³⁶ David W. Shenk and Badru D. Kateregga, *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 1997), 75.

³⁷ Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 54-56.

³⁸ "Cultural Eschatology: Why It Matters for Today's World," *Reality Pathing*, October 11, 2024, <https://realitypathing.com/cultural-eschatology-why-it-matters-for-todays-world/>.

³⁹ M. Bakhsh, "Islamic Eschatology and the Qur'anic Vision of the Afterlife," *Islamic Studies Journal*, 2014: 34(2), 122-137.

Qur'an 75:1-15 and 99:1-8, which depict the final judgment and the cosmic turmoil that precedes it. The Hadith literature further elucidates these Qur'anic doctrines by providing detailed explanations of the signs preceding the Day of Judgment, the resurrection events, and the ultimate destinies of individuals in Paradise (Jannah) or Hell (Jahannam).⁴⁰ The hadiths elaborate on the Qur'anic themes, underscoring human moral and ethical responsibility and emphasizing actions and faith as predictors of one's eternal fate.

In Islamic eschatology, the Day of Judgment (Yawm al-Qiyama) is the inevitable day when every individual will be resurrected and judged for their deeds. The Qur'an repeatedly affirms this day's certainty and the finality of divine judgment. The Qur'an (99:6-8) notes, "On that Day people will proceed in separate groups to be shown 'the consequences of' their deeds." Islamic eschatological literature also emphasizes the "minor" and "major" signs that precede the Day of Judgment, such as the appearance of the Dajjal (the Antichrist), the arrival of the Mahdi (the guided one), and the return of Isa (Jesus).⁴¹ These events mark the divine timeline leading to the final reckoning.

On the Day of Judgment, all persons are raised bodily, and their actions, recorded in their Book of Deeds, are evaluated to determine their eternal destiny. The Qur'an and Hadith underscore Allah's absolute justice, rewarding or punishing individuals according to their deeds in life (Qur'an, 99:7-8). The Qur'an vividly depicts the delights of paradise and the torments of hell, illustrating the consequences of divine justice. Paradise is depicted as a realm of perpetual joy for the virtuous, but hell is characterized as a domain of unending suffering for the condemned (Qur'an, 56:11-40).

B. Eschatological & Theological Foundations in Christianity

Christian eschatology is grounded in Scripture, with prophetic and apocalyptic literature playing a central role. It encompasses essential eschatological scriptures, notably the prophetic visions of Daniel and Isaiah, which lay the foundation for Christian eschatology.⁴² The Gospels, Pauline Epistles, and the Book of Revelation offer a more detailed and organized exposition of Christian eschatological doctrines. Fundamental to Christian eschatology is the conviction in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the establishment of God's everlasting Kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15). These scriptures delineate Christian anticipation of the world's ultimate transformation, in which divine justice will be perfectly realized through Christ's sovereignty.

⁴⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), 38.

⁴¹ Patrick Mburu Kamau. *Biblical and Qur'anic Missiological Perspectives: A Comparative Analysis* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Maandeeq Publishing, 2024).
<https://thetdl.on.worldcat.org/search?queryString=Biblical%20and%20Qur%E2%80%99anic%20Missiological%20Perspectives%20%3A%20A%20Comparative%20Analysis.%20&clusterResults=false&groupVariantRecords=true&bookReviews=off>

⁴² L. Davis, "Eschatology in the Old Testament: A Study of Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 2007: 126(4), 753-769.

Christian eschatology focuses on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when He will return in glory to judge the living and the dead, signifying the culmination of history and the establishment of God's eternal dominion (Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). A core tenet is the resurrection of the dead, asserting that both the virtuous and the wicked will be resurrected to undergo divine judgment, supporting the Christian conviction in corporeal existence after death and the restoration of creation (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). The designated judge, Christ, will distinguish the faithful from the wicked in the final judgment, determining their eternal fate, eternal life in communion with God, or endless separation in Hell (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15). Ultimately, Christian eschatology portrays paradise and hell as the ultimate conditions of existence. Heaven is portrayed as a new heaven and new earth where the faithful will reside in perpetual communion with God (Revelation 21:1-4). By contrast, hell is depicted as an eternal separation, defined by suffering and agony (Matthew 25:46).

C. Comparison of Core Themes in Christian & Islamic Eschatology

Christian and Islamic eschatologies converge on foundational themes, including divine judgment, resurrection, and eternal destiny, but they differ in their theological interpretations of these phenomena. Both faiths assert the inevitability of a Final Judgment in which all humankind will be held accountable for their deeds. In Islamic theology, this judgment is closely associated with the Book of Deeds, which precisely records each person's activities, and the weighing of deeds on the divine scales (mīzān) ascertains one's eternal destiny (Qur'an 17:13-14; 18:49; 99:6-8). In Islam, salvation is contingent upon virtue and compliance with divine mandates. In contrast, Christian theology emphasizes that salvation is a divine gift received through faith in Jesus Christ rather than earned solely through righteous works (Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9). Good works are understood as the manifestation of authentic faith. In contrast, Christ's atoning sacrifice is central to Christian soteriology, delineating a theological divergence from Islam, which prioritizes individual moral accountability and divine kindness without affirming Christ's redemptive work.

Christian eschatology underscores the bodily resurrection of the dead, inextricably linked to the triumphant return of Jesus Christ, who will judge both the living and the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 20:12-13). This event affirms Christ's sovereign authority as the divine judge and redeemer, whose return heralds the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. In contrast, Islamic eschatology depicts the resurrection (al-qiyāmah) as the moment when individuals rise from their graves to face divine judgment, with each soul receiving its rightful reward or punishment (Qur'an 36:51-54). While both traditions uphold the notion of eternal destinies, where the righteous enter into eternal communion with God and the unrighteous endure eternal separation, Christian theology emphasizes salvation through grace, made possible by Christ's atoning sacrifice. This distinct focus on divine grace and Christ's central role in the eschatological narrative highlights the unique Christian hope of resurrection and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. These theological contrasts, however substantial, provide a platform for practical interfaith discourse and reflection.

Divergent Eschatological Views on Jesus/Isa in Islam & Christianity

A fundamental theological contrast between Christian and Islamic eschatology concerns the identity and role of Jesus Christ in the end times, highlighting deeper doctrinal divergences in Christology and soteriology. In Christian eschatology, Jesus is recognized as the divine Son of God, and his Second Coming marks the culmination of redemptive history and the realization of God's redemptive plan. His return signals the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the inauguration of God's everlasting kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 20:11-15). As the Messianic King and supreme judge, Christ embodies divine authority, which is fundamental to the Christian aspiration for eternal life through trust in his redemptive sacrifice.

In contrast, Islamic eschatology reveres Isa as a great prophet without divinity. His return is linked to the defeat of the Dajjal (the Antichrist) and the reinstatement of justice under Islamic rule, thereby consolidating monotheism and directing humanity toward the worship of Allah (Qur'an 4:157-159; 43:61). According to Islamic faith, after completing this mission, Isa will die a natural death before the last resurrection and judgment. The Christian view of Jesus as the divine Redeemer and sovereign Judge characterizes Christian eschatology, emphasizing salvation by grace and the eventual consummation of God's eternal kingdom through Christ. This theological disagreement underscores the significance of Christ's divine essence and salvific mission in Christian eschatological expectation.

Theological Implications of These Differences

The divergent views on Jesus' role in the end times underscore profound theological differences between Christianity and Islam. While both traditions anticipate his return as a momentous event, Islam regards Isa as a prophet tasked with restoring divine justice and guiding humanity back to monotheism.⁴³ In contrast, Christianity affirms Jesus Christ as the divine judge and sovereign ruler, whose Second Coming heralds the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan and the establishment of His eternal kingdom. This distinction shapes each tradition's eschatological narrative and carries significant implications for interfaith dialogue, providing a unique engagement point for exploring Christ's nature, mission, and authority.

Christian eschatology envisions heaven as the eternal dwelling place of the righteous in the presence of God, where divine communion is perfected and suffering ceases. The biblical depiction of heaven emphasizes restoration and ultimate fulfillment, as Revelation 21:3 declares: "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." This passage highlights heaven not merely as a location but as the realization of an intimate and eternal relationship with God. Conversely, Christian theology portrays hell as a state of eternal separation from God, marked by anguish and remorse. Matthew 25:41 describes it as "the

⁴³ Tim Orr, "Contrasting Eschatological Roles: Jesus in Islamic and Christian Theology," Gospel-Centered Christianity and Other Religions: Unpacking the Depths of the Gospel—Its Foundations, Power, and Uniqueness (2024): 210–212, <https://www.4timorr.org/contrasting-eschatological-roles-jesus-in-islamic-and-christian-theology/>.

eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” with imagery of fire and darkness symbolizing physical torment and spiritual desolation. This understanding underscores the gravity of moral failure and the eternal consequences of rejecting God’s grace. Ultimately, Christian eschatology affirms that eternal destinies hinge on one’s response to Christ’s redemptive work, reinforcing the centrality of salvation through faith and divine grace.

Islamic eschatology offers a vivid, detailed depiction of Jannah and Jahannam, emphasizing the afterlife’s spiritual and physical dimensions. Jannah is described as a lush garden with rivers of milk and honey, where the righteous enjoy abundant pleasures, including luxurious banquets, companionship, and divine contentment, as highlighted in the Qur’an (56:12–40). Beyond these tangible rewards, the ultimate joy lies in the vision of Allah (Qur’an 75:22–23). In contrast, Jahannam is portrayed as a place of severe punishment, with varying levels of torment reflecting the gravity of one’s sins (Qur’an 15:43–44). Islamic teachings underscore proportional divine justice, allowing for forgiveness for some while others face eternal punishment. Christian teachings portray hell as a state of absolute separation from God, reflecting distinct theological perspectives on divine justice and the afterlife.⁴⁴

Christian and Islamic eschatologies offer distinct theological perspectives on divine justice and mercy, shaping their understandings of salvation and the afterlife. Christian theology emphasizes grace and redemption, asserting that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ, reflecting God’s supreme love and unmerited favor (John 3:16). In this view, divine grace is central, with human actions seen as secondary to Christ’s atoning sacrifice. By contrast, Islamic eschatology underscores a balanced relationship between divine justice and mercy, in which human deeds, adherence to divine commands, and sincere repentance play a pivotal role in determining one’s eternal destiny, thus affirming moral responsibility.

Although their interpretations diverge, both traditions employ vivid imagery of heaven and hell. Islamic eschatology offers detailed depictions of paradise and punishment, representing spiritual and physical recompense. Christian thought often interprets these images symbolically, portraying heaven as ultimate communion with God and hell as profound separation from His presence, the consequence of rejecting divine grace. These theological nuances reveal Christianity’s focus on salvation as a gift of grace, while Islam accentuates divine justice, tempered by mercy, as essential to one’s eschatological outcome.⁴⁵

Biblical Messiah & Divine Judge: Eschatological Perspective

Christian eschatology affirms that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, stands at the center of redemptive history, embodying both divine and human natures through His life, death, and resurrection (John 1:1–14). Central to this eschatological vision is

⁴⁴ Denny Burk, “Hell as Endless Punishment,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed March 17, 2025, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/hell-as-endless-punishment/>.

⁴⁵ Jim Connell, “The Christian and Islamic Views of Heaven and Hell: A Comparative Analysis,” FaithAnswers Press, January 22, 2024, <https://faithanswerspress.net/what-is-the-christian-understanding-of-heaven-and-hell-compared-to-islam/>.

the doctrine of the Parousia, Christ's Second Coming, which signifies the culmination of history and the full realization of God's kingdom. At this decisive moment, Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead, executing divine justice and inaugurating the eschaton, the final consummation of God's redemptive plan (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 19:11–16).

The expectation of Christ's return has profound theological implications, shaping Christian understandings of divine justice, salvation, and cosmic restoration. Scholars such as George Eldon Ladd emphasize the Parousia as a future event that decisively establishes God's reign, encompassing judgment and renewal.⁴⁶ N.T. Wright situates this doctrine within the broader narrative of God's mission to restore creation, challenging interpretations that reduce eschatology to a mere escape from earthly existence.⁴⁷ Ultimately, the doctrine of the Parousia remains a cornerstone of Christian hope, grounding the belief that Christ's return will bring the final restoration of creation, the triumph of divine justice, and the eternal reign of God's kingdom. This eschatological promise continues to shape the Christian faith, inspiring believers to live in anticipation of the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.

The title Messiah (Hebrew: Mashiach; Greek: Christos) in Christian theology signifies the divinely anointed deliverer foretold in Old Testament prophecy, whose mission is to establish God's eternal kingdom (Isaiah 9:6–7; Daniel 7:13–14). Christians affirm that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies through his life, death, and resurrection, forming the foundation of the Christian faith. His public ministry proclaimed this messianic mission (Luke 4:16–21), and his followers recognized him as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). As Michael Bird observes, this early confession profoundly shaped the Gospel narratives, anchoring Jesus' identity in the broader context of God's redemptive plan.⁴⁸ Theologically, Jesus' crucifixion is seen as both an atoning sacrifice for humanity's sins (Romans 3:23–25) and a decisive victory over sin, evil, and death (Colossians 2:14–15). Joshua Jipp highlights Jesus' role as Israel's messianic king, which profoundly shaped early Christian understandings of salvation and sanctification.⁴⁹ Moreover, his resurrection serves as the firstfruit of the eschatological resurrection, inaugurating God's ultimate victory over mortality (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

The dual nature of Jesus' messianic mission, his first coming, which inaugurated God's kingdom, and his anticipated second coming, which will consummate divine sovereignty, has profound theological significance in Christian eschatology. His initial advent fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, revealing God's redemptive plan through Christ's life, atoning death, and resurrection, which secured salvation for humanity and established the Church as a visible sign of the inaugurated kingdom. The

⁴⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 40–50.

⁴⁷ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 15.

⁴⁸ Michael F. Bird, *Jesus Is the Christ: The Messianic Testimony of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 22.

⁴⁹ Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 336.

Parousia represents the culmination of this divine mission, when Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead, fully restore creation, and establish God's eternal reign (Romans 8:19-23; Revelation 22:12-14). This eschatological hope affirms Christ's sovereign authority and shapes Christian faith and practice, calling believers to live in anticipation of the ultimate realization of God's redemptive purposes. The promise of Christ's return reinforces the assurance of resurrection and eternal life. It informs theological reflection on divine justice, grace, and cosmic renewal, underscoring the Christian conviction that Jesus is the sovereign redeemer and eternal king.

In Christian theology, the New Testament designates Jesus as the 'Son of Man' who will return as the supreme judge, holding all humankind accountable for their deeds, thoughts, and faith in him (Matthew 25:31–46). This eschatological judgment is powerfully illustrated in the Gospels and Revelation, where Christ presides over the last judgment, administering divine justice and determining eternal fates (John 5:22, 27; Revelation 19:11-16). Fundamental to Christian eschatology, this judgment culminates in everlasting communion with God in heaven or perpetual separation in hell (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). From a theological perspective, Jesus' role as the eschatological judge actualizes Old Testament predictions, notably Daniel's vision of the 'Son of Man' granted divine authority to adjudicate (Daniel 7:13-14). His crucifixion and resurrection are the basis of salvation, whereas his second coming denotes the culmination of redemption and the beginning of the new creation (Revelation 21:1-4).

Scholarly viewpoints elucidate this function; Gee analyzes John's Gospel through a Roman judicial framework, portraying Jesus as the judge, the devil as the prosecutor, and the Holy Spirit as the counsel.⁵⁰ Conversely, Stallman positions Jesus' judicial function within Jewish eschatological anticipations, bolstering his messianic power. As believers await the Parousia, the expectation of divine judgment serves as both a warning and a source of hope, reinforcing the call to righteousness and to a life aligned with God's will. This dual emphasis on justice and mercy highlights the transformative nature of Christian eschatology, in which the anticipation of Christ's return inspires a life of faithfulness, humility, and unwavering trust in God's redemptive plan.

Isa in Islamic Eschatology

Isa plays a significant role in the events leading to the final judgment. The Qur'an acknowledges Isa (al-Masih -Messiah). However, the Islamic faith rejects his divinity, emphasizing that Allah sent him as a human prophet (Qur'an 5:72–75). Islamic tradition holds that Isa did not die on the cross but was raised to heaven and will return near the end of time to accomplish several key tasks. Nonetheless, Isa plays a significant role in the events leading to the final judgment. His primary task is to confront and defeat the Dajjal (Antichrist). Isa's return will mark the ultimate triumph of truth over deception, slay the Dajjal, and restore divine justice.

⁵⁰ John Gee, "Jesus' Courtroom in John." *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020): 233–46. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/interpreter/vol39/iss1/16/>.

Furthermore, Isa's return is to restore true worship, affirm the oneness of Allah (tawhid), and correct theological misconceptions about his identity. This mission is symbolized by Isa "breaking the cross" and "killing the swine," metaphorically rejecting Christian theological doctrines such as the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity. His role, therefore, is not to establish a new religious order but to confirm the message of monotheism taught in Islam.⁵¹

Finally, Isa will be a just ruler, governing according to divine law and guiding humanity toward righteousness before the final resurrection and judgment. His leadership will be characterized by establishing justice and peace, ensuring that moral and ethical order prevails. In Islamic tradition, his governance will align with Sharia law, and he will play a pivotal role in preparing the world for the Day of Judgment, after which ultimate justice will be dispensed by Allah.⁵² Unlike Christian eschatology, which portrays Jesus as the divine judge, Islamic eschatology presents Isa as a servant of Allah who affirms the finality of Muhammad's prophethood and prepares the world for Allah's ultimate judgment (Qur'an 43:61).

Christianity & Islam: Eschatological Comparative Insights

Christian and Islamic eschatologies both anticipate the return of Jesus/Isa, yet their theological frameworks offer distinct interpretations of his role and purpose. From a Christian perspective, Jesus' second coming marks the culmination of God's redemptive plan, with Christ, as both divine and final judge, presiding over humanity's eternal destiny (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:22-27). This belief underscores Jesus' divine authority to execute salvation and judgment, aligning with the biblical vision of a renewed creation under his sovereign rule (Revelation 19:11–16). By contrast, Islamic eschatology regards Isa as a prophet whose return restores justice, defeats the Dajjal, and reaffirms monotheism, with ultimate judgment reserved for Allah alone (Qur'an 6:57). Theologically, this distinction highlights Christianity's emphasis on Jesus as the divine fulfillment of salvation history. At the same time, Islam views Isa's eschatological role as preparatory rather than redemptive, shaping contrasting doctrines of divine justice and eternal destiny.

Shared Eschatological Themes: Moral Responsibility

The eschatological roles of Jesus and Isa in Christian and Islamic theology reveal profound theological implications, particularly regarding moral responsibility and divine justice. In Christian teaching, eschatology underscores believers' moral accountability, rooted in the anticipation of divine judgment and the call to righteous living (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 5–7). The Parousia signifies the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, culminating in the establishment of His eternal kingdom and the restoration of creation (Revelation 21:4). In contrast, Islamic eschatology emphasizes taklif (moral responsibility), in which every action is recorded and weighed before Allah on the Day of Judgment (Qur'an 82:10–12). Isa's return heralds the final restoration of justice, preparing for Allah's ultimate judgment. Both

⁵¹ Alan Guzmán, *The Eschatological Roles of Jesus in Islamic and Christian Theology: A Comparative Study*. Leiden: Brill, 2021), 129. (Sunan Abu Dawood 4324)

⁵² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 310. Sahih al-Bukhari 3448,

traditions affirm a divine trajectory toward the realization of God's sovereign will, offering a framework for ethical living and underscoring the theological hope of divine justice and mercy. These shared eschatological themes shape believers' lives and provide a foundation for meaningful moral responsibility.

Historical Development & Contemporary Interpretations of Eschatology

Early Christian eschatology was deeply influenced by Jewish apocalyptic traditions, particularly the expectation of a Messianic Kingdom and divine intervention at the consummation of history. Prophetic visions, such as Daniel's "Son of Man" receiving dominion (Daniel 7:13-14), and Jesus' teachings on the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:29-31), reinforced belief in the imminent arrival of God's Kingdom. Early Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus, embraced chiliasm, the expectation of a literal thousand-year reign of Christ before the final judgment (Revelation 20:1-6), interpreting this millennial kingdom as a necessary phase in God's redemptive plan.⁵³ As Christian theology developed, the focus shifted from an imminent physical kingdom to a more spiritual understanding. Following the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), a theological shift emerged, highlighting the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit as a foretaste of eschatological fulfillment, as reflected in John 14:16-17 and Romans 8:11.

Church fathers such as Augustine of Hippo profoundly shaped this view, rejecting a literal millennium and interpreting Christ's reign as spiritual, manifesting through the Church until the final resurrection and judgment. The Reformation period (16th century) rekindled debates over biblical prophecy, with figures like Martin Luther and John Calvin revisiting eschatological doctrines.⁵⁴ Theologically, in the 19th and 20th centuries, these developments reflect an enduring tension between imminent expectation and spiritual fulfillment. This tension has shaped the Christian understanding of divine sovereignty, salvation, and ultimate restoration through Christ. The biblical vision remains centered on Christ's return as the climactic moment when God's justice, mercy, and redemptive purposes are fulfilled.

Early scholars such as Al-Tabari (839–923 CE) played a crucial role in shaping Islamic eschatological doctrines, particularly emphasizing the concepts of bodily resurrection (al-Ba'th) and divine judgment (Qur'an 39:68).⁵⁵ Islamic theology distinguishes between minor signs, ongoing events foreshadowing the end, and major signs, unprecedented, cataclysmic events that herald the final hour. The eschatological narrative culminates in two eternal destinies: the righteous (ahl al-Jannah) are promised everlasting bliss in paradise (Jannah) (Qur'an 55:46–78), while the wicked (ahl al-nar) face divine retribution in hell (Jahannam) (Qur'an 4:56; 67:6–7). Furthermore, the theological discourse on divine justice has sparked considerable debate among Islamic sects, particularly regarding the interplay between predestination (qadar) and human free will (Qur'an 13:11; 18:29; 76:3),

⁵³ J. H. Potter, Trans. Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), .

⁵⁴ Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (Columbia University Press, 1998), 145.

⁵⁵ Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 172.

reflecting the profound complexity of Islamic thought on divine sovereignty and moral responsibility.

Islamic eschatology has been profoundly shaped by theological discourse among different sects and schools of thought. Sunni and Shia perspectives differ on the role of the Mahdi, with Sunnis viewing him as a future redeemer from the Prophet's lineage (Al-Suyuti, Al-Hawi li al-Fatawi). At the same time, Shia Islam, particularly the Twelver tradition, identifies him as the hidden Imam (al-Mahdi al-Muntazar) who will return as the ultimate divine guide.⁵⁶ In theological debates, the Mu'tazilites (rationalists) and the Ash'arites (traditionalists) clashed over key eschatological issues.⁵⁷ The Mu'tazilites emphasized divine justice ('adl) and maintained that Allah's actions must conform to rational principles. They rejected the notion of intercession (shafa'ah), arguing that every soul is solely responsible for its fate (Qur'an 2:48; 6:164).⁵⁸ Conversely, the Ash'arites adopted a traditionalist stance, asserting that divine will supersedes human rationality and that the Prophet Muhammad's intercession will be granted to certain believers (Qur'an 20:109).⁵⁹

Islamic eschatology has become increasingly intertwined with political and ideological movements in contemporary discourse, reflecting its dynamic interpretive nature. The concept of the Mahdi has been notably politicized, particularly in the context of the Iranian Revolution, where his anticipated return is framed as a catalyst for establishing an Islamic state.⁶⁰ Furthermore, reformist thinkers have reinterpreted eschatological teachings as a call to restore justice and resist Western imperialism, colonialism, and globalization. Apocalyptic narratives have also gained prominence, with global conflicts and natural disasters perceived as portents of the impending end times.⁶¹ In specific contexts, these eschatological expectations are intertwined with discourses on social justice, envisioning the eschaton as a moment of divine intervention that will ultimately usher in Islamic justice, triumphing over oppression. Such evolving interpretations underscore the capacity of Islamic eschatological thought to adapt in response to historical and contemporary challenges, serving both theological reflection and socio-political mobilisation.

Comparative Findings of Eschatological Implications for Interfaith Dialogue

In interfaith dialogue, Christian and Islamic eschatologies reveal shared themes and profound theological differences, particularly regarding the return of Jesus (Isa) and divine judgment. Both traditions affirm the Day of Judgment, bodily resurrection, and eternal reward or punishment. However, the Christian understanding centers on

⁵⁶ Al-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din. Al-Hawi li al-Fatawi vol. 2, (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1983), 159.

⁵⁷ W. Montgomery Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought (Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 246.

⁵⁸ Richard M. Frank, Beings and Their Attributes: The Teaching of the Basrian School of the Mu'tazila in the Classical Period (SUNY Press, 1978), 50-60.

⁵⁹ Sahih Bukhari 99:532

⁶⁰ Vali Nasr, The Shia revival: How conflicts within Islam will shape the future (W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 95. Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, Islamic messianism: The idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism (State University of New York Press, 1981), 138.

⁶¹ John L. Esposito, Unholy war: Terror in the name of Islam (New York:Oxford University Press, 2002), 47.

Christ's divine identity and redemptive role in the end times, which remains irreconcilable with Islamic perspectives.

Nevertheless, these theological distinctions do not hinder meaningful dialogue. Shared values such as divine justice, the triumph of good over evil, and human moral responsibility provide common ground for cooperation. As global challenges intensify, interfaith engagement rooted in eschatological themes can promote collaboration on conflict resolution, human dignity, and the pursuit of justice. For Christians, such dialogue becomes a witness to the transformative hope in Christ's ultimate reign, underscoring the call to pursue mercy, forgiveness, and righteousness in anticipation of God's final restoration.

Jesus' Role & Implications for Interfaith Dialogue

In Christian theology, Jesus Christ holds a dual role as Judge and Savior, embodying divine justice and mercy as he fulfills God's redemptive plan. As the Son of God, Christ is entrusted with ultimate authority over salvation and judgment, a truth underscored in Scripture: "The Father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). His sacrificial death and resurrection form the cornerstone of humanity's redemption, offering salvation through grace and marking Christ as the decisive agent of divine justice at the end of time (Matthew 25:31–46; Romans 3:23–25).

Conversely, Islamic theology views Jesus (Isa) as a prophetic figure who will return to defeat the Dajjal (Antichrist) and restore justice, yet ultimate judgment belongs solely to Allah. In Islam, Isa's role lacks the salvific function central to the Christian faith, where salvation is found exclusively in Christ's atoning sacrifice. This divergence reflects contrasting understandings of divine justice and human accountability, with Christianity emphasizing salvation through grace and Islam underscoring submission to divine law.

In interfaith dialogue, these theological distinctions must be acknowledged while seeking common ground in shared eschatological themes, such as divine justice and moral responsibility. For Christians, dialogue offers an opportunity to witness the transformative power of Christ's redemption and to proclaim his sovereign authority in the final judgment. By engaging with humility and respect, such conversations can foster deeper theological understanding and affirm the Christian conviction that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's justice and mercy.

Recommendations for Comparing the Two Eschatological Hopes

Theological Forums and Academic Conferences. To facilitate sustained theological engagement, biennial interfaith forums and academic conferences dedicated to exploring Christian and Islamic eschatology should be organized. These gatherings will focus on core themes such as divine justice, salvation, and ultimate human destiny, providing a platform for scholars to engage in rigorous dialogue.

Interfaith Social Justice Initiatives. Recognizing the shared ethical imperatives of justice and compassion, interfaith coalitions will be formed to implement at least two collaborative social justice projects annually. These initiatives shall address pressing

societal concerns, such as poverty alleviation, refugee support, and environmental stewardship, serving as tangible expressions of eschatological hope for a just and peaceful world.

Educational Programs and Curriculum Development. In education, an interfaith curriculum centered on eschatological teachings will be developed and integrated into theological institutions. This curriculum will include modules covering Christian and Islamic perspectives on judgment, resurrection, and moral accountability, aiming to deepen theological literacy and foster mutual understanding.

Conclusion

A comparative study of Christian and Islamic eschatology yields profound theological insights into divine justice, resurrection, and the ultimate human destiny, as articulated in the Bible, Qur'an, and Hadith. While both traditions affirm justice, compassion, and moral accountability, they diverge significantly in their understanding of Jesus/Isa and the final judgment. Christian theology proclaims Christ as the divine Judge and Savior, whose atoning sacrifice offers redemption and whose return signifies the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. In contrast, Islamic eschatology affirms Allah's exclusive authority over judgment, with Isa's role limited to prophetic witness and the restoration of justice.

Interfaith dialogue finds fertile ground in shared eschatological hopes, such as the triumph of good over evil and the ultimate restoration of divine justice. Theological forums and academic conferences provide crucial platforms for deepening understanding while preserving each tradition's doctrinal integrity. Collaborative initiatives addressing social justice, poverty, and environmental challenges embody these shared values and reflect the Christian call to love and serve in anticipation of Christ's return.

However, these theological differences are not mere matters of interpretation but reflect distinct understandings of God's ultimate plan. Any attempt to reconcile them risks compromising the integrity of each faith. A more fruitful path lies in embracing theological distinctiveness with humility and fostering dialogue grounded in mutual respect. In doing so, Christians are called to witness the transformative hope found in Christ and to engage in conversations that uphold truth and compassion in the pursuit of justice, mercy, and peace.

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God's Purposes for Israel and the Promised Land A Biblical Guide for Somali Christians

Pastor Simon Fry

Introduction



In response to questions about modern-day Israel and the Jewish people, I was asked to teach on this topic at the Somali Believers Fellowship conference in April 2024. These are my expanded notes to help Somali Believers going forward.

I have reluctantly entered into a very divisive subject, and I encourage all Christians not to let this issue divide them, even if you disagree with where others

land. As long as God's people are trying to faithfully follow the Scriptures' teaching, they should be happy to agree to disagree (as many theologians have and do), even on differing conclusions about Israel and the Promised Land. Our unity in Christ as believers is of greater importance than any particular theological stance, and terms like 'Replacement Theology' or 'Zionism' are often used in unhelpful, divisive ways, so I have not used them at all.

In the local church I am part of, many fall on different sides of the spectrum. Some believe the modern-day state of Israel can virtually do no wrong. It is the Jews' land, and everyone else should leave if they don't like it! Others are very much on the side that the modern-day state of Israel is a propped-up Western colony practicing apartheid. In my view, neither extreme fits a fuller understanding of Scripture, and most of our members would not be at those extremes. My point is that they are still united in Christ and part of the same church. However, I am not writing for the church in the West, but for my Somali brothers and sisters who have come to faith in Christ. They read the rich history of God's work among the People of Israel. They are well aware of the teachings of hatred toward Jews within some sections of Islam (and sadly, some sections of the Church – largely historically, but there nevertheless). Thus, they are confused about how, in Christ, the Jews fit, particularly since the majority have not surrendered to Jesus as Lord, and they are especially uncertain about the Promised Land because of the fighting that kills so many civilians indiscriminately.

Below is my humble attempt to help my Somali brothers and sisters in Christ navigate what Scripture teaches about this important yet thorny subject.

God's Picture from the Beginning

To understand something's purpose, it is helpful to start at the beginning, taking a step back to clearly see the bigger picture.

Right at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 1:28-29, we are told that on day six of creation, God charged humanity with these words,

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

God's plan from the beginning was for people to live and rule over the whole earth. Because they were made in His image, they would have lived perfectly before sin entered the world and corrupted humanity. They would have brought God glory throughout the earth. This is God's stated plan for humanity, and as the word of the Lord never returns to him void⁶², it is still God's intention to do this, Numbers 14:21, Habakkuk 2:14. Rick Warren writes, “The ultimate goal of the universe is to show the glory of God. It is the reason for everything that exists, including you.”⁶³

God then takes Adam and Eve and places them in a garden to begin working out his plan (Genesis 2:8-15). The garden is a manageable-sized piece of land for them to begin with. From there, we know that sin and death entered the world, the world was cursed, and humanity became corrupted. Because of people's wickedness, God wiped out this ancient world by a flood; yet God saved Noah and his family because Noah had found favor in God's sight as one trying to live righteously. After God brought Noah out of the Ark, he charged Noah's righteous family to “Be fruitful and fill the earth.” The plan had not changed. In fact, in Genesis 11:1-9, when humanity rebelled against this plan, God took drastic action to ensure that the dispersing of humanity continued (n.b. verse 8).

The Promises to the Patriarchs

Scripture then focuses in on God's revealed purpose in the choosing and calling of Abraham from serving other gods⁶⁴ to following him. It is not that God is no longer concerned with the nations, as John Piper explains, “With the call of Abraham into perpetual covenant relationship with God. Israel became the focus of God's involvement in the nations.”⁶⁵

God gives Abraham and his descendants the Promised Land for them to manage and live in. Genesis 12:1-3:

“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a

⁶² Isaiah 55:11

⁶³ Rick Warren, Purpose Driven Life, Zondervan, 53

⁶⁴ Joshua 24:2-3

⁶⁵ John Piper, Providence, Crossway, 288

blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Then, later, after Abraham had followed God’s word in faith, we read God reaffirm his promise with a covenant in Genesis 15:18:

“On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.”

After this, Abraham and Sarah try to engineer God’s plan by their own efforts, producing a natural son of Abraham via a servant girl. However, God, whilst saying he will bless this son of the flesh,⁶⁶ strengthens his original covenant with Abraham. God makes it clear that it is through the son of His promise to Abraham and Sarah that they will inherit the land. God now makes this an eternal covenant. Genesis 17:4-8,19:

“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God. ... Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.”

The exact nature of the covenant and possession may be mooted as to what is the reality for those in Christ who have become true heirs of Abraham,⁶⁷ and that the heavens and earth will be burned up and dissolved;⁶⁸ but whatever the reality is, it will be an eternal one. God reaffirms this promise to Isaac later in his life, Genesis 26:3-5:

“And the Lord appeared to him and said, “... I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

⁶⁶ Genesis 17:20

⁶⁷ Galatians 3:26-29

⁶⁸ 2 Peter 3:10

Then God made it clear that it was not about human effort but about his promise by choosing Isaac's second-born son, Jacob, rather than his elder brother, Esau.⁶⁹ The LORD confers the promise to Abraham and Isaac on Jacob in Genesis 28:13-15:

"The LORD stood above Jacob and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Then again, in Genesis 35:11-12, after renaming Jacob, Israel (verse 10), he says:

"And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you."

However, God makes clear right from the beginning to Abraham that part of the giving of the land to Israel was due to the wickedness of its inhabitants.⁷⁰ It was an act of divine judgment against them. God even allowed a 400-year period of grace to them. Despite having some knowledge of God in that area through people like the righteous King Melchizedek,⁷¹ as well as God's general grace in creation,⁷² they spurned his kindness towards them, only adding to their sins. In the meantime, Israel would go down to Egypt and be oppressed there until God delivers them.

Entering & Possessing the Promised Land

In God's sovereign plan, he raises up Moses to deliver his people from Egypt with a mighty hand. When he first appears to Moses, God starts by referencing the three Patriarchs to whom he had made his oaths. God says in Exodus 3:6-8

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites."

God, in his grace, delivers them from Egypt. While Israel is at the foot of Mount Sinai before receiving his law, God reveals his intended purpose for them and the obedience he expects so they may walk in all the goodness he has planned for

⁶⁹ Romans 9:10-13

⁷⁰ Genesis 15:12-16

⁷¹ See Genesis 14:17-20, Hebrews 7:1-22

⁷² Romans 1:18-23

them. As they walk in obedience to God, they are to be like a kingdom of priests to the nations around them, representing God to the people and the people to God. For Yahweh is not a local tribal God, but the LORD of all the earth. Exodus 19:3-6:

“The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’”

It is interesting to note that the adult generation of Israel, whom God delivered from Egypt and saw his glory at Sinai, did not enter the promised land due to their disobedience. Israel had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.⁷³ At the end of this period, just before they enter the promised land under Joshua, Moses reminds them that they will walk in the blessing of God’s promises to them if they are obedient to the Law. Yet, they will come under his curse, even being removed from the land, if they rebel. Deuteronomy 28:1-2,15,63-65:

“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. ...

“But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you...

And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it...”

Israel’s possession of the Promised Land and walking in the covenantal blessing to Abraham is conditional upon their obedience to God. Moses affirms this again in Deuteronomy 30:19-20:

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

⁷³ Numbers 14

Mixed Multitude Based on Faith Represented in All Israel

Additionally, it is worth noting that Scripture makes it clear from this early point in Israel's history that those of any nation who make the LORD their God are included in their community. In Exodus 12:37-38, we read:

“And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.”

Then in Deuteronomy 29:2 we are told Moses summoned ‘All Israel’ and in verse 10-15 Moses makes clear who ‘All Israel’ includes:

“You are standing today all of you before the LORD your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you today, that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the LORD our God, and with whoever is not here with us today.”

In Joshua 8:33, we see very clearly that ‘All Israel’ included those who are not Abraham's physical descendants at this early point in the nation's life.

“And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord,”

From the formation of Israel as a nation, God made it clear that his desire for all the peoples of the earth was to bless them through Israel. God accepted those who look to him in faith. Faith in him triumphs over his judgment.

For example, Deuteronomy 7:1-4 makes clear that Israel must not marry any of the native women from the promised land, for they are all coming under his judgment. Yet not only is Rahab the prostitute spared by Joshua when she aligns herself with the people of Israel, but Matthew 1:5 makes it clear that Rahab later marries Salmon and is not only in King David's ancestry but also in Jesus Christ's.

In Deuteronomy 23:3, it says,

“No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever,”

Once again, there is a whole book in the Bible dedicated to the Moabite woman Ruth, who, through her faith in God and her alignment with Israel, becomes Boaz's

wife. Boaz is the father of Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David! So, King David's great-grandmother was a Moabite, and his great-great-grandmother was a Canaanite.

God's Heart to Bless the Nations

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, while the main focus is on God's plans being worked through the people of Israel, his heart is still to bless the nations.

Psalms 87-1-6 declares:

On the holy mount stands the city he founded;
the Lord loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.
Glorious things of you are spoken,
O city of God. Selah

Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;
behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush—
"This one was born there," they say.
And of Zion it shall be said,
"This one and that one were born in her";
for the Most High himself will establish her.
The Lord records as he registers the peoples,
"This one was born there."

Isaiah 18, addressing the people of Cush, closes with the following promise in verse 7:

At that time tribute will be brought to the Lord of hosts

from a people tall and smooth,
from a people feared near and far,
a nation mighty and conquering,
whose land the rivers divide,

to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the Lord of hosts.

Isaiah 19:19-25 says:

"In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt. When they cry to the Lord because of oppressors, he will send them a saviour and defender, and deliver them. And the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them. And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the Lord, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them.

On that day, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.

On that day, Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."

It is worth considering that many of those listed - Babylon, Philistia, Egypt and Assyria – are Israel's arch enemies. Even after coming under God's judgment for their treatment of Israel, he promises to bless them and include them as His people!

Summary of Key Points from the Old Testament.

From day six of creation, God has made it clear that he wants people all over the earth to live in a way that brings him glory. He began this process by placing Adam and Eve in the garden to work out his plan. Even after sin and death entered the world, this remained God's purpose, as he instructed Noah. God then calls Abraham to follow him and promises to give him the Promised Land through which he will bless the nations. He makes an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his offspring and gives the land as an eternal possession to them. They are called to be a kingdom of priests, representing God to the people and the people to God. However, possession of the land and God's blessings on Israel are linked to their obedience to him. Foreigners who, in faith, turn to God are included in God's purposes for Israel, for God's heart is still for all nations to be blessed and to worship him.

For All the Promises of God Find Their 'Yes' in Christ

In the fullness of time,⁷⁴ at just the right point,⁷⁵ God sent his Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus, who is the true offspring promised to Abraham.⁷⁶ He is the true son, the true Israelite called out of Egypt.⁷⁷ Jesus in his flesh was the true tabernacle and the greater Temple;⁷⁸ he was literally the presence of God amongst us, as John 1:1,14 makes clear:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 2:19-21

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."
... But he was speaking about the temple of his body."

⁷⁴ Ephesians 1:10

⁷⁵ Galatians 4:4

⁷⁶ Galatians 3:16

⁷⁷ See Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:13-15

⁷⁸ Matthew 12:6

Jesus is the only one who fulfils the law and fully pleases the Father in all he did.

Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.

Matthew 3:17, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry)

Matthew 17:5, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” (Towards the end of Jesus’ ministry).

Jesus is the great high priest forever and the true sacrifice securing an eternal redemption for all God’s people; thus, doing away with the need for the ceremonial/Levitical priestly duties of God’s Law.

Hebrews 4:14, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”

Hebrews 5:5-6, “So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’; as he says also in another place, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.’”

Hebrews 9:11-12, “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”

Hebrews 10:4-10, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Since the coming of Jesus, inclusion into God's people is no longer linked to physical Israel, but to faith in Christ. Both Jew and Gentile become adopted children of God only through Jesus.

John 1:11-13, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Galatians 3:28-29, "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. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

Galatians 4:21-31, "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written,

"Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than those of the one who has a husband."

Now, brothers, like Isaac, you are children of promise. Just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Romans 11:17-24, "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted

back into their own olive tree.”

Galatians 4:4-6 “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”“

Christians become his saints in Christ. The term “saints” in the Old Testament is used 21 times (in the ESV) to refer to the faithful among Israel.⁷⁹ Yet in the New Testament it is used 60 times, all of them referring to those faithful to Christ (apart from possibly one in Matthew), with only 5 references (Matthew 27:52, Acts 9:13, 32, 41, 26:10) where the people are clearly of Jewish ethnicity. More than this, in Christ we receive all God’s spiritual blessings and promises available to his people.

Eph. 1:2-3, “To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: ... Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,”

2 Corinthians 1:20, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.”

Jesus himself is clear that in the New Covenant, worship is no longer about coming to the Temple in Jerusalem but is about worshiping God in Spirit and Truth. John 4:21-24:

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

William Hendriksen, commenting on this passage, writes, “It is not where but the how and the what that is all important.”⁸⁰ In fact, just as Jesus is the true temple, the Church, through union with Christ, is being built on him as the cornerstone of God’s holy temple, made with living stones, as a place where God dwells by his Spirit in his people wherever they are in the world.⁸¹

Summary of the Promises That Are Fulfilled in Christ

It is in and through Jesus that all God’s promises are fulfilled. He is the true offspring of Abraham through whom every family on earth will be blessed. He is the true temple and the only one who fulfils the Law and the Prophets. He is the great high priest and the true sacrifice securing eternal redemption for all who believe in him. Now, through Christ and only Christ, all (both Jew and Gentile) are either included or excluded from being part of God’s redeemed people. In Christ, the believer becomes

⁷⁹ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, IVP, 1123

⁸⁰ William Hendriksen, NTC John, Banner of Truth, 166

⁸¹ See 1 Peter 2:4-7 & Ephesians 2:19-22

a saint, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places available to them, and God's promises now apply to their life. Life in Christ no longer focuses on worship at the temple in Jerusalem, for in Christ, his people become a living temple through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The key is no longer where they worship (i.e., Jerusalem) but how they worship God, and that is in spirit and in truth.

The Place of Israel in the Worldwide Kingdom of God

The Old Testament and Jesus are clear that under the Messiah, the Kingdom of God would extend beyond Israel to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 9:7 "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,"

Daniel 2:44 "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever."

Matthew 13:31-34, "He put another parable before them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'" He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

However, the Kingdom of God was not coming in the way that had been expected or in the way it had happened previously. For starters, it involved the death on a cross of the Messiah, not a military win, something that confused the Jewish listeners.⁸² Jesus made clear in John 18:36 his kingdom was not of this world; it was not a physical kingdom but a spiritual one.⁸³ Whilst in prison, even John the Baptist began to wonder whether Jesus was the one, as he obviously did not fit into his parameters for what the Messiah would do⁸⁴. Jesus' own Apostles seemed to struggle to grasp this point as well, even after being with him for 3 years, as they asked just before he went into heaven:

"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6

To which Jesus' response to them (and through them to us – let all take note) was basically, you don't worry about that, it's not for you know what, you need to focus on:

⁸² John 12:34

⁸³ For more on this, see SBS Journal Vol II Issue 1, June 2021, 108-125.

<https://somalibiblesociety.org/download/sbs-journal-vol.-ii-issue-1.-june-2021.pdf> (accessed 14 October 2025).

⁸⁴ Matthew 11:3

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Christ’s Church (now comprising both Jew and Gentile) is not to go out in the power of the sword to conquer nations under Christ’s banner, but to go out in the power of the Spirit to conquer hearts for Jesus. Matthew’s gospel puts it this way, Matt 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Once people’s hearts have been won over to Christ, they, through the power of the Spirit at work in them, are called to become his disciples, observing Jesus’ teachings out of love, not force.⁸⁵ Enforcing submission with the sword was the way of the Old Covenant, which has been done away with; it is not the way Jesus has commanded going forward, and it has no place in his Church for establishing his kingdom here on earth now. Jesus charged his Apostles and, through them, his Church to make disciples all over the world. All over the world, God’s intention is to have people living for Jesus, bringing him glory. The Church is charged to fulfil God’s original intention, made clear on day six of creation, now through the proclamation of the gospel and the subsequent making of disciples of those who respond to Christ from every nation, tribe, and language. Jesus, far from being limited to reigning from a physical place on earth (i.e., Jerusalem), is reigning from the far greater, exalted place at the right hand of God in heaven above.⁸⁶

Thus, in the revealed purposes of God, while he obviously wants followers of Christ established in communities of believers (churches) throughout the Promised Land, it is no longer just about there but about the whole earth, not just from one particular people group but from them all.

The early church, which at this stage in its history was exclusively Jewish, realized that God’s call to establish his Church was more important than their stake in the Promised Land, for in Acts 4:34 we are told,

“There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

The growth of the Kingdom of God is recorded through Luke’s account in Acts where he strategically mentions the Kingdom of God only 6 times (Acts 1:3, 8:12, 14:22,

⁸⁵ John 14:15, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

⁸⁶ Acts 2:33, 7:55-56, Romans 8:34, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, 10:12, 12:2, 1 Peter 3:22, Revelation 3:21

19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:31). He shows how it grew from Jerusalem (at the heart of Israel's thinking) to the heart of the mighty Roman Empire who ruled a significant part of the known world at that time. Not a physical conquering kingdom, but a spiritual Kingdom that could not be conquered. Despite much opposition and persecution, God's kingdom could not be overcome as its King overcame the power of sin and death.⁸⁷

In this Kingdom that will continue into eternity, whilst people's ethnicity and language will be represented and valued,⁸⁸ obviously including the Jews, their distinctiveness or firstness has not been lost, so to speak,⁸⁹ but superseded in Christ.⁹⁰ In fact, being Jewish gives no advantage before God outside of Christ.⁹¹ The claims of distinctiveness under the Old Covenant, the Apostle Paul makes clear, have no saving benefit, and the true spiritual meaning behind them finds their fulfilment in Christ.

Philippians 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

The early church Father John Chrysostom, commenting on this passage, notes, "The Gentiles were once called dogs",⁹² but Paul uses this about his opponents in the preceding verse. Now, the once proud mark of distinction that the Jews belonged to God is applied to Christians.⁹³ Gordon Fee writes, "In saying 'we,' both Jews and Gentiles together who have put their trust in Christ, 'are the circumcision.'"⁹⁴

Romans 2:25-29, "For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God."

William Barclay takes this to mean that anyone who is a true Christian, born of the Spirit and with his heart circumcised before God, is a true Jew.⁹⁵ John Stott writes, "The essence of being a true Jew (who may indeed be ethnically a Gentile) is not something outward and visible but inward and invisible." At the very least, the

⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:54-57

⁸⁸ Revelation 7:9

⁸⁹ See John 4:22, Romans 1:16, Romans 11:16-18

⁹⁰ Philippians 3:4-11 n.b. v7-8

⁹¹ Romans 3:9-20 n.b. v9

⁹² Thomas Oden, CSB Ancient Faith Study Bible, Holman, 1473

⁹³ Ralph Martin, Tyndale NTC Philippians, IVP, 142

⁹⁴ Gordon Fee, NICNT Philippians, Eerdmans, 298

⁹⁵ William Barclay, The letter to Romans, St Andrews Press, 42-43

Apostle makes it clear to the Jewish readers that to truly walk in what God has for them, they need to receive a new heart by the power of the Spirit at work in them through Christ. However, this rendering of the passage seems imposed by other theological convictions rather than implied by its context.

Ephesians 2:11-16, "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

Martin Lloyd Jones says on this passage, "Jew and Gentile are reconciled to God in exactly the same way; there is no longer any difference between them. There is only one way of being reconciled to God."⁹⁶ Francis Foulkes writes on this, "In Christ there is new humanity as a single entity. Furthermore, Gentiles do not simply rise to the status of Jews, but both become something new and greater."⁹⁷

Galatians 6:14-16, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." NIV puts v16 – "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God."

John Stott, who in Romans 11 applies the phrase 'All Israel' to just ethnic Jews for contextual reasons, says here that, given the Greek context and structure, Paul is referring to the Church as the Israel of God, a view Ralph Martin⁹⁸ agrees with. William Barclay writes, "The true Israel is not a matter of physical descent; the true Israel consists of all men who repeat Abraham's act of faith."⁹⁹ Yet even if it is referring to just ethnic Jews, as some take it, the context would limit it to those who have put their trust in the cross of Christ and are inheritors of the new creation.

So, Where Does this Leave the Jewish People Now in the Purposes of God?

The Apostle Paul addresses the question of where it leaves physical Israel for us in Romans 9-11, revealing God's sovereign plan for the Jewish people. Firstly, Paul

⁹⁶ Stephen Nichols, *ESV Church History Study Bible*, Crossway, 1789

⁹⁷ Francis Foulkes F. Tyndale NTC Ephesians, IVP, 90

⁹⁸ John Stott, *The Message of Romans* – BST, IVP, 303, 2012:180, Martin 1993:142

⁹⁹ Barclay 1974:5

makes it clear his intense love and desire for his kinsmen to be saved.¹⁰⁰ He hoped through his ministry some might be provoked into responding to Christ,¹⁰¹ for from them came the covenants, the law, the patriarchs, and according to the flesh even Christ came from them.¹⁰² Now, if this was the Apostle Paul's heart as revealed in Scripture, which is inspired by God for our teaching, reproof, correction, and training,¹⁰³ then this needs to become our heart and prayer for the Jewish people, too. There is no room in Christ for anyone to hate another person, for God loves everyone and wants them to come to a saving faith in Jesus. It is the job of the Church to demonstrate God's love to all people – Jew and Gentile.

In Romans 9:6-8, Paul explains:

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Thus, even for Israel in the Old Covenant as well as the New, it was never really about just being a physical descendant of Abraham, but those chosen by grace who, in faith, look to him. Charles Hodge wrote on this verse, "Not all the natural descendants of the patriarch are the true people of God ... the apostle distinguishes between the natural and the spiritual seed of Abraham."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, John the Baptist says to the Jews of his day,

"And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham."
Matthew 3:9

Jesus likewise said to the Jews who opposed him:

"If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,"
John 8:39

Thus, outside of Christ, their physical heritage, the wonderful privilege that it is, is to no advantage to them as Romans 9:30-10:4 makes clear. However, the Apostle Paul in Romans 11 makes clear that at some point close to Christ's return, there will be a massive turning to Jesus from the Jews. Romans 11:11-15,

"So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

¹⁰⁰ Romans 9:1-3

¹⁰¹ Romans 11:13-14

¹⁰² Romans 9:4-5

¹⁰³ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁰⁴ Charles Hodge, Romans, Crossway Classics, 276

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?"

Their full inclusion – whilst I doubt it means every single living Jew at that time will turn to Christ (it may do – the great Theologian Charles Hodge took this view¹⁰⁵), it certainly means a significant number, a majority. F.F Bruce writes on this passage, "It need not mean every single Jew without a single exception. But Israel as a whole."

Paul then completes his argument with what has proved to be a controversial verse in Romans 11:25-26:

"Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved,"

Basically, the argument centers on the phrase 'All Israel' in v26. Is 'All Israel' another way of Paul emphasizing the full inclusion of v12 – that is, a mass turning to Christ among the Jewish people? Key to that argument is that moments earlier, he used the word Israel to mean the Jewish people, so it must mean the same here, many would argue. Personally, I think Paul started this argument in Romans 9:6 by using the word Israel twice in the same sentence, making it clear that natural descent from Israel doesn't mean one truly belongs to Israel as part of God's elect people. Also, as we have seen above from Deuteronomy 29:10-15 and Joshua 8:33 in the Old Testament, the phrase 'All Israel' included the sojourners (Gentiles) with them. This, to me, seems more in line with Paul's argument in this passage and in the letter to the Romans, as well as with the rest of New Testament teaching, including our future inheritance together in Christ.

However, people want to interpret verses 25-26 as either all God's elect or a mass turning of the Jews towards the return of Christ; it is not worth falling out over.¹⁰⁶ The key thing to remember from these passages in Romans 11 is that, at some point, God will open the spiritual eyes of the Jewish people to realize that Jesus is the Messiah. This will cause a significant majority to turn to him (maybe every single Jew alive at that time), leading to the imminent return of Christ, who comes to bring life from the dead to all who are his.

Summary of God's Intentions for the Jewish People Since Christ's Arrival

The revealed plan of the Almighty, since the ascension of Christ, is for his Church (made up of both Jew and Gentile) to go and make disciples of all nations, not

¹⁰⁵ Hodge, 1993:336-337

¹⁰⁶ For more on this William Hendriksen Romans 9-16 1981:377-382 & Douglas Moo NICNT Romans 1996:719-726 both give a good overview of the various different positions held based on this verse

through force but through preaching the gospel and seeing hearts surrender to Christ. While there is an enormous privilege for the Jewish people of God in their history, outside of Christ, this does not bring them an advantage before God. The key thing for both Jew and Gentile is surrendering to Jesus as Lord. Despite the current mass rejection of Christ among the Jews, there will be a time, close to the Lord's return, when he will open their hearts to see him as he really is, and most will turn to Jesus as their Savior.

So, What of the Promised Land in God's Purpose for the World

John Stott writes, "Perhaps the dominant theme of the whole Bible is the sovereign, ceaseless, purposeful activity of Almighty God."¹⁰⁷ Yet we know only a fraction of what is happening. For example, we have very limited knowledge of what angels and demons do, and even the wisest could not make sense of Job's situation without God granting us a little insight beyond the physical into what was spiritually going on at the time.

In Deuteronomy 29:29, Moses wrote,

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever."

Louis Berkhof writes on this, "On the basis of this verse, it is customary to distinguish between the secret and revealed will of God. The former is the will of God's decree, which is hidden in God and can be known only from its effects, and the latter is the will of his precept, which is revealed in the law and in the gospel."¹⁰⁸ Calvin notes, "The moment we go beyond the bounds of the word of God, we are out of the course, in darkness. ... The best rule in sobriety is, not only in learning to follow wherever God leads, but also when he makes an end of teaching, to cease also from wishing to be wise."¹⁰⁹ Alec Motyer warns, "We are not privy to the secrets of another's heart, nor to the secret counsels of God."¹¹⁰ Wayne Grudem would add, "God has decided what to reveal and what not to reveal."¹¹¹

We are called to rejoice in and be obedient to the revealed word of God, but not to draw theological conclusions or opinions about God or his plans from his secret will. We tread most humbly on issues of how he causes everything to happen in accordance with his plan in areas not expressly mentioned in Scripture. This applies to trying to see the divine significance in the Jews governing the state of Israel on a significant section of the Promised Land in our day.

Before looking at this further, let me briefly consider two major occasions when people's faith and obedience, or lack thereof, change (from a 'Revealed Will' perspective, at least) God's promises going forward. In 1 Samuel 2:30-31, we read:

¹⁰⁷ Stott 2014:66

¹⁰⁸ Nichols 2023:290

¹⁰⁹ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Eerdmans, 204-205

¹¹⁰ Motyer 1991:213

¹¹¹ Grudem 1994:130

“Therefore, the Lord, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever,’ but now the Lord declares: ‘Far be it from me, for those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. ...’”

Due to Eli’s unfaithfulness, we see that what God had promised would no longer come to pass. Likewise, with King Jeconiah/Coniah, Jeremiah 22:24-30 tells us,

“As I live, declares the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off ... “

Thus says the Lord:

“Write this man down as childless,
a man who shall not succeed in his days,
for none of his offspring shall succeed
in sitting on the throne of David
and ruling again in Judah.”

God declares none of Coniah’s offspring shall sit on David’s throne or rule Judah due to his wickedness. Yet we see that because of Coniah’s grandson Zerubbabel’s faith and faithfulness Haggai the prophet is told to declare by God in Haggai 2: 23

On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts.”

The very words used to prophesy Coniah’s removal from God’s purposes because of his sin are used to reinstate his grandson Zerubbabel because of his faithfulness. This results in both Coniah and Zerubbabel being included in the ancestry of Christ. Matt 1:12:

“And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,”

So far from none of his offspring sitting on the throne of David, one of them sits on it now forever!

Thus, passages of Scripture like this should make all tread a little more humbly on the promises surrounding the Promised Land given to the descendants of Abraham, especially in light of the express command to go into all the world. That said, for me at least, the fact that Genesis 17:4-8 says it is an eternal covenant with Abraham and an eternal possession of the land, albeit, as shown above, conditional on Israel’s obedience, makes it hard not to see this as implying that, as faithfulness to God increases among the Jews, God will grant them some possession of the Promised Land.

Yet, as has already been shown, the Promised Land is secondary now to the gospel going out to the whole world, as that is not just God's revealed will, but Christ's express command. Jewish Christians, like all other believers, are called to fulfil it. Thus, a Jew really living for God in the land of Israel today is just as likely to be called to the nations as a Gentile may be called to move to Israel to reach Jews living there for Christ.

The key revealed clear evidence in Scripture that the nearing of the return of Christ in Romans 11 is not based on Jews living in the Promised Land, but on them turning to Christ, which can and does happen anywhere. The claims that the Jews being back in the Promised Land fulfilling passages of the Old Testament are just as easily argued against as for, so there is no point going into them here. Not to mention, living in and governing are two separate things as well.

However, since it must be God's secret will that Israel possess and govern some of the Promised Land at this time (as it currently must be, since they are there), the revealed will of God would be that they maintain it, not by obedience to the Old Covenant, as that is obsolete.¹¹² As the book of Hebrews makes abundantly clear, it would be through them that the principles of the New Covenant established by Christ would be maintained. This would involve them turning to Christ, loving their enemies, turning the other cheek, not an eye for an eye, and showing forgiveness as they have been forgiven.¹¹³ Winning their neighbors with the love of Christ, as part of loving their neighbors as themselves, not trying to bully them, or eradicate them. Luke so beautifully places the command to love your neighbor, following it with the story of the Good Samaritan, a parable that so powerfully demonstrates the outworking of Jesus' command and is so pertinent to hostilities in our time.¹¹⁴

That said about the Church fulfilling God's revealed will this side of eternity, it is not a physical Kingdom it is called to establish, in fact, God will do that when Christ returns.¹¹⁵ Therefore, it must be acknowledged that in this fallen world, the government of a nation/people will have to do things that the Church doesn't and mustn't. The Church is called to love and forgive its enemies, leaving it to God to bring justice; whilst, in protecting its citizens, a government is called to bring justice and even punishment to the wrongdoer. On a national level, this gives a nation the right to defend itself against attack, protecting those under its care. However, there is no time to expand on this here, other than to make clear that those in Government (even if they themselves are a Christian) will have to make official decisions on behalf of the state that they cannot make as individuals. e.g., a judge can sentence a convicted criminal to capital punishment where this is legal, yet if he took the law into his own hands, it would be murder, and he would be liable to judgment. Yet those in

¹¹² See also Luke 16:16 & Matthew 11:11-14

¹¹³ Matthew 5-7 (remember Jesus words were originally to a Jewish audience)

¹¹⁴ Luke 10:25-37 (the hostility between Jews and Samaritans is on a par to the modern-day hostility between Jews and Palestinians)

¹¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

positions of Governmental power will be held accountable by God for the decisions they make.¹¹⁶

In addition, before I conclude, it is worth noting that throughout history, national borders have shifted. The King of the Nations is not governed by arbitrary borders drawn up to suit whatever nations are in power at that time; these things change as Jesus said they would.¹¹⁷ The exact nature of the rising and falling of nations, however, definitely comes under the hidden will of God; that includes even the timings of when and who will govern the Promised Land in the New Covenant era. Whether the area of the Promised Land is governed by the Jews or not, the imperative of Scripture for God's people, the Church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, remains the same.¹¹⁸ The Church is called to bring glory to God over the whole earth, and it does this by helping to establish disciples from every tribe, tongue, and nation. This includes both Jews Palestinian and whoever else is living in the small section of the world called the Promised Land at this point in history. This is Christ's command to his Church in the Great Commission and was the example laid down to us by the Early Church from Acts 8 onwards – they were predominantly Jewish at the start.

Conclusion

All of creation was made by, and for the Lord Jesus Christ, and in him everything finds it's/their true purpose.¹¹⁹ Everyone in Christ, both Jew and Gentile, is now called to play their part in fulfilling the great commission.¹²⁰ We do this predominantly by living out the great commandment:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets, to the glory of God.” Matthew 22:37-40

For God's word will not return to him void, what he commanded to happen on the 6th day of Creation will be fulfilled. There will be people from every tribe and tongue all over the earth (including the Promised Land) living through the power of the Spirit in a way that pleases Christ, bringing God glory over the whole world as the waters cover the sea.

¹¹⁶ Psalm 2:10-12, 110:6

¹¹⁷ Matthew 24:7, Acts 17:26

¹¹⁸ Just as it has been since Jesus' disciples asked similar questions in Acts 1:6-8

¹¹⁹ Colossians 1:15-20

¹²⁰ Matthew 28:18-20

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Minor Patriarchs as a Tactical Target

Fuzzy Bear

Strategy for the Season



When we consider the Somali Peninsula and the Cushitic tribes, we must always seek the Lord for a strategy to steward for a season, as part of a vision. Having spent time in the Somali Peninsula, building relationships with many locals and focusing my prayer life on reaching Somalis for many years, I believe the strategy for this season is to pursue the young men I will call the “Minor Patriarchs.” In simple terms, I think the target population is the Minor

Patriarchs: married Somali men under 19. In this article, I will share the reasoning behind my belief that this is the strategy for this season.

Shifts among Somali Youth

When I consider Somali youth, I observe a pattern of searching, not for Islam but for meaning and a sense of self. They are searching for their identity and trying to figure out how they can play a role in the world around them. Is it really true that to be a Somali is to be Muslim? Or is it Somali genetics and culture that predates Islam and permeates through time and life itself, regardless of religious affiliation or lack of one? I hear this questioning happening among many in the diaspora and even among local young adults who are being raised by social media.

I believe they are searching for who they are and who they are truly meant to be. Deep down, Somalis know that Islam is Arabic, not Cushitic. They know it is a foreign religion that has washed away their identity from their natural culture, so they look everywhere for clues. It is the blessing and curse of schools of thought that they can observe patterns, revealing new questions: Who am I? Why do my people adhere to a northern religion rather than one from our region? That is our first real discussion point for this submission.

What religion would be part of an origin story for the Somalis? Some would say Waaqism. Waaqism is a remnant of something else. Maybe a more ambiguous religion that Paul refers to when he says “the very oracles of God” (Rom 3:2 ESV). I realize the reference says the Jews received, but one could make a strong argument for the inclusion of Jews in this statement, given its nature. While Ethiopians would claim Enoch as their own, making him Cushitic because Ethiopia didn’t exist at the time or in the biblical timeline, rather the Cushitic kingdom, often translated as

Ethiopia or Sudan, extending from lower Egypt to northern Tanzania.¹²¹

Enoch, who would undoubtedly be considered to have received oracles from God while walking with Him, is not referenced in any text as having a specific nationality, as he predates the Tower of Babel and the Flood of Noah (Genesis Ch 5-11). This doesn't mean he was or wasn't Cushitic; in fact, he predates the concept itself. Such concepts didn't develop in history until after the Tower of Babel. There are a series of indirect ties between those who received the oracles of God and the Cushitic peoples. Noah's son Ham is the father of Cush, who is often regarded as the ancestor of African peoples in this context. Moses' wife, Zipporah (Numbers 12), and Solomon's wife, Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13), would also be indirect ties to the Cushitic kingdom, often translated as Ethiopia or Sudan. For clarity, Somalia, as a tribal reference and general geography, could also work.

Still, Ethiopia and Sudan are closer to Egypt's southern border and northern Sudan, where the Cushitic rulers are believed to have originated. Then we have the "Ethiopian eunuch," who served the Candace or Cushitic queen (Acts 8:26-40). Yes, the text would roughly read "the Cushitic eunuch who serves the Queen of the Cushitic kingdom." He meets Philip, gets saved, and takes the Gospel to "Ethiopia," or, better put, the Cushitic kingdom, which includes modern Somalia. I believe these oracles, which focused on the Messiah to come and his death, burial, and resurrection as the payment for our sin, so we can be in a relationship with God, because it can't be earned, as the Law shows us, as we are incapable of being perfect, are the foundation of the theological worldview among Cushitic tribes. I would even argue that the history regarding Enoch plays a bigger role than is often discussed.

I hold this view because of the demonic influences recorded in the Book of Enoch and the ongoing use of blood magic in the Horn of Africa.¹²² When we look at the teachings that stem from those who received the "Oracles of God," we see a very charitable culture that is industrious and artistic. Many of these expressions in Cushitic tribal dynamics appear to mirror a biblical culture more than an Islamic one. It's no wonder that the Somali Bible Society Census shows more Somali youth as believers.¹²³ This is because the adage "to be a Somali is to be a Muslim" is really a cover-up for "being Somali is to accept Islamic colonization." I would even suggest that, given this reality, codependency with the outside world was ushered in, hindering the Somalis' natural entrepreneurial spirit. I believe the Holy Spirit has opened the eyes of young men and women to see that Islam doesn't represent their culture well, but rather that the good of their culture is mirrored and enhanced in Christ. The more Christ's character, which is in many ways natural to the culture, is awakened, the more hardships will be faced. This is one of the risks this strategy

¹²¹ Fuzzy Bear, "Integrity vs. Trauma: A Cushitic Discipleship Dichotomy," in Gedenkschrift: Ahmed Ali Haile—Mission Work Among Somalis, ed. Aweis A. Ali (Addis Ababa: Maandeeq Publishing, 2025).

¹²² R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912; repr., Defender, 2016).

¹²³ Somali Christian Census, 2023 Bureau of Statistics, Somali Bible Society. Somali Bible Society Journal. Vol. IV. Issue 2, December 2023. <https://somalibiblesociety.org/download/census-of-somali-christians-2023.pdf> (accessed on 31 December 2025).

entails.

Cultural Risk & Benefit of Focusing on Minor Patriarchs

The risk is always persecution and martyrdom; it's part of kingdom growth, and it's why almost all the disciples were martyrs. Let's focus on the benefit. Statistically, the majority of those who come to faith are under 19 years old,¹²⁴ and 93% of immediate family members come to faith if the father does, compared with 17% if the mother does.¹²⁵ In Somali culture, sons are seen as a provision for life; they are the insurance and retirement plan. The old man, we'll say the Major Patriarch, is a significant threat because he will demand death for conversion.

I bet that if all his sons and their families have converted, he won't call for death. That would be a slow suicide. He will either join them or ignore the issue. If he chooses to ignore it, the practice of their faith will, in time, unravel the mosque's rhetoric about Christ, and he will likely come to faith, too, so the whole family will come to faith. Since the gospel historically grows across family networks, I believe this strategic focus will aid rapid kingdom growth across this season of Somali ministry, empowering sustainable growth from within the Somali region as the healthy aspects of Somali culture are amplified in Christ. I don't believe it's a coincidence that the hangool (shepherd's staff) represents the responsibility to protect and nurture the people when given to a Chief. Christ is the Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd

"Truly I tell you, anyone who doesn't enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger; instead they will run away from him, because they don't know the voice of strangers." Jesus gave them this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

Jesus said again, "Truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, since he is not the shepherd and doesn't own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them. This happens because he is a hired hand and doesn't care about the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. But I have other

¹²⁴ Kara Powell, Faith and Youth Development (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019).

¹²⁵ Georgia Baptist Mission Board, 2020.

sheep that are not from this sheep pen; I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.” (John 10:1-13 CSB).

I believe this is another example of God’s kingdom culture in Somali culture. Minor Patriarchs don’t need to assault their wives to gain their respect; rather, they should make them feel safe through nurturing and protection. As these Minor Patriarchs come to faith, they will be better equipped to protect their families from the evils that occur in the community. I was once in a Somali city trying to hail a ride just outside a business associated with a prominent mosque in the area. A young, prominent Somali man came out of the business, and a young beggar, maybe 6 years old, ran up to him as though she knew him. I was shocked not because of the initial interaction; that is normal for beggar children, except they usually go for the foreigners. The shock was that she grabbed his belt with one hand and, with the other hand and her mouth, motioned for sexual service. The man looked at me, then at the young girl, and told her to leave. I thought I must have misunderstood the situation, though I had seen similar behavior in other Somali communities.¹²⁶

Later in the month, I was in the area, and the girl approached me this time with a completely different demeanor, begging for food. My suspicions were confirmed, so I asked around and found that this was not uncommon among religious leaders but was overlooked by the community.¹²⁷ While such things happen across all faiths and communities, no Christian community accepts such behavior because a righteous God doesn’t permit sexual immorality, including the sexual abuse of children.¹²⁸ When we find issues in Christian communities like this, it is an individual or small group that is compromised, not a city that turns a blind eye. Focusing on the Minor Patriarchs protects the whole family, not just the leaders who abuse the community. The Minor Patriarch, as an individual within the family and community, protects the wife and children; they are a force for positive change. They won’t just bring people to faith and therefore send them to heaven, but they will also bring peace and prosperity to their regions and clans, just as The Good Shepherd models.

Is this the Season?

As I began writing this article, I wondered whether this was the right time to encourage Minor Patriarchs as a Tactical Target. I felt from the Lord that this was the

¹²⁶ Editor’s note: Sexual abuse of children is a significant problem among Somalis everywhere. Somali news outlets and social media platforms regularly report such abuse.

¹²⁷ In November 2025, a Somali Qur’an teacher was sentenced to 14 years in prison for raping two children in Burao, Somaliland: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2025/Nov/203724/teacher_sentenced_to_14_years_for_raping_two_children_in_burao.aspx (accessed 01 December 2025)

¹²⁸ In November 2021, a Somali Qur’an teacher was sentenced to 35 years in prison for sexually abusing children in Texas, USA: <https://fb-independent.com/quaran-teacher-gets-years-in-prison-for-abusing-children-p15114-106.htm> (accessed 02 December 2025)

article needed, but I questioned whether this issue in the SBS Journal was the right time and place. Then, Dr. Aweis Ali mentioned internet advocates,¹²⁹ including a USA-based YouTuber named Hussein Jama, who was calling on the Muslim community to stop Aweis, in part because Aweis focused on the youth.¹³⁰ I have known Aweis for years and was not aware of this. I only knew that the SBS Census identified many Somali Christians as youth.¹³¹ Aweis pointed out that it was primarily propaganda and that he had never evangelized actual youth. In a sense, I owe the internet advocate a thank-you. It was in that conversation that I realized: yes, this article was the Lord's prodding. The obstacles to writing this article are attacks from Satan, as they are this season, and the SBS Journal is the perfect space to advocate for this vision.

The Prayer Focus and the Vision

Pray for 4,000,000 new Somali Christians over 10 years:

As we pray for a big vision, we engage that vision; big fruit follows big prayers, and small fruit follows small prayers. If someone says it's impossible, tell them they must not believe in cars, cell phones, or God. Naysayers are proven wrong by all three, just as those who scream "impossible" at 4,000,000 new Somali Christians will be proven wrong in 10 years.

Minor Patriarchs as a Tactical Target

We have considered the risk vs. reward, and we see that yes, there is significant risk, but the reward for God's kingdom is much greater. Pursue the Minor Patriarchs, but do not extract them to disciple them. Find ways to train them where they are, disciple them well, and always encourage them to apply all their growth in faith at all times with all people, wherever they are. Teach them to do as they learn. They don't need to be a pastor to share the gospel, disciple others, or baptize others. Remember, good discipleship consistently reproduces and grows in quality, embracing the risks in this life so that God's kingdom can be fully established on this earth and they can receive their reward in heaven.

Encouragement to Engage

I can't settle for good enough any longer. Jesus deserves better than good enough. He won't receive the reward he deserves until we embrace risk and use our tactical opportunities. The 170,000 Somali Christians of the Somali Peninsula are the foundation we need to build on. Discipling for biblical accuracy, not safety. As they engage their Minor Patriarchs, they will give them strength not only in the number of believers and finances, but also in the ability to help each other without foreign help. The Minor Patriarchs will also begin to see themselves as the powerhouse God intended. 4,000,000 new Somali believers is not much when you start with 170,000 who are empowered to accomplish the goal. The world is the oyster for Somali

¹²⁹ Rev. Dr. Aweis A. Ali is the General Secretary of the Somali Bible Society.

¹³⁰ Hussein Jama, CADAYN: Ninkii Caruurta Gaalaysiinayay oo Noqday Taageero Hassan Sheikh Mohamud!!, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6egCwE6HRU> (accessed 01 December 2025)

¹³¹ Somali Christian Census, 2023 Bureau of Statistics, Somali Bible Society. Somali Bible Society Journal. Vol. IV. Issue 2, December 2023. <https://somalibiblesociety.org/download/census-of-somali-christians-2023.pdf> (accessed on 31 December 2025).

Christians; they need to bring more Somalis with them. As Somalis come to faith in Christ, so will other tribes from the Horn of Africa, Africa, and the Middle East. Every time a Somali comes to Christ, a multitude of people throughout the world are left questioning their beliefs; even atheists question their faith when they hear about Somali Christians.

Join me in praying for 4,000,000 new Somali Christians in 10 years and in embracing the tactical focus that believes God can use the Minor Patriarchs to empower God's kingdom among the Somalis and change the world!

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About the Author

Fuzzy Bear grew up in North America. In his 20s, he joined Youth With A Mission (YWAM) and moved to the Horn of Africa to work with the Somali community. Alongside his wife, Fiona, he has dedicated his life to improving the local community through initiatives focused on education, healthcare, and support for local businesses, despite numerous challenges. Their passion for sustainable change is evident in their collaborations with local leaders and international organizations. Fuzzy and Fiona's resilience has earned them respect and admiration in the region. Living in the Horn of Africa has enriched their lives and deepened their appreciation for local culture. Their journey inspires others to engage in humanitarian work and make a positive impact. The author can be reached at evangelismdirector@somalibiblesociety.org

The Triune God

Stephen Thompson

Introduction



"But my heart demands the Trinity, as much as my reason. I want to be sure that God cares for us, that God is our Father, that God has interfered, stooped, sacrificed Himself for us. I do not merely want to love Christ - a Christ, some creation or emanation of God's — whose will and character, for aught I know, may be different from God's. I want to love and honour the absolute, abysmal God. Himself, and none other will satisfy me; and in the doctrine of Christ being co-equal and co-eternal sent by, sacrificed by His Father, that He might do His Father's will, I find it and no puzzling texts, like those you quote, shall rob me of that rest

for my heart, that Christ is the exact counterparty of Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being." Hughes Dictionary of Islam¹³²

The word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible or the Qur'an. Nor do the three persons in the Bible who make up the Trinity ever say, "I am one of three." The "trinity" the Qur'an points to is a false trinity. Tawhid refers to the absolute unity or oneness of God and is a fundamental concept of Islam. Does the character of God mean he is more than one? The three persons in the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, clearly possess divine attributes in the Bible. Do we find the Trinity in the Old Testament? The essential doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ were clearly established at early Church councils and are based on a sound understanding of what the Bible teaches. Does one need to believe in the Trinity to be saved? Are the three names of God in the Bismillah representative of the Trinity?

The Trinity

The word "Trinity" is a theological term, not the "three" condemned by the Qur'an. It is similar to terms such as Atonement, Christology, and Eschatology. These terms have meaning for scholars and university lecturers, but require a lot of unpacking for the ordinary person. The word "Trinity" is like these terms but perhaps used more commonly. (Sometimes God is also called Triune.) As such, we do not find the word "Trinity" in the Bible. However, the Father is God, the Son, or Jesus, the Eternal Word, is God, the Holy Spirit is also God, and God is one. In the Qur'an, in several

¹³² <https://www.answering-islam.org/Books/Hughes/t.htm> (accessed December 3, 2025)

places, it says, “Do not say ‘three.’” In some English translations, the word “three” is replaced with “Trinity.” This is because our friends do not want to accept the Trinity and many other aspects of our faith.

In Surah 4:171,¹³³ we get this warning: “Believe wherefore in Allah and His apostles, and say not: three. Desist, that it may be well for you. Allah is but the One God: hallowed be He that there should be unto Him a son! His is whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth, and sufficeth Allah as a Trustee.”¹³⁴ This is a warning against believing that God gave birth to a son in the physical sense.

In Surah 5:73, it says, “Assuredly they disbelieve who say: God is the third of the three; whereas there is no god except the One God. And if they desist not from that which they say, there shall surely befall those of them who have disbelieved a torment afflictive.” In this context, both Jesus and his mother are depicted as human, although godly. In this context, this is a refutation of the “trinity” of God, Jesus, and Mary.

Then there are Surahs 5:116 and 117, “And call to mind what time Allah will say: O ‘Isa, son of Maryam! Was it thou who said to the people: take my mother and me as two gods beside Allah! ‘Isa will say: hallowed be Thou! It was not for me to say that to which had no right; had I said it, Thou would have surely known it; Thou knowest that which is in my mind and know not that which is in Thy mind. Verily Thou! Thou art the Great Knower of the things hidden. (117) I spake not unto them aught save that for which Thou badest me: worship Allah, mine Lord and your Lord.” Again, this is Jesus refuting a “trinity” that consists of Allah (God), Jesus, and Mary.

What is the Origin of the Denials in the Qur’an?

Around the time of Muhammad, there were Christians with fairly orthodox or standard views of the Trinity, such as we have today, and there were false views. These false views included diverse groups such as Nestorians, Monophysites,¹³⁵ and Ebionites,¹³⁶ each of which held different beliefs about Jesus’ nature. Early Nestorian Christians had a theological viewpoint, deemed heretical by major Christian councils. It viewed Jesus as two distinct persons: one divine and one human. It is named after Nestorius, who denied the title “Theotokos” (God-bearer) for Mary, stating she was only the mother of the human Christ. The traditional view, based on the early councils, is that Jesus has two natures united in one person.¹³⁷

¹³³ A surah is like a chapter of the Qur’an.

¹³⁴ All Qur’anic references Daryabadi translation unless otherwise mentioned - <https://www.quranwow.com>

¹³⁵ Monophysitism is a Christian doctrine that asserts Jesus Christ had only one nature, his human and divine natures being combined into one.

¹³⁶ The Ebionites were a Jewish-Christian sect that believed in observing Jewish law while viewing Jesus as an adopted Son of God, not divine.

¹³⁷ This view is a doctrine called **hypostatic union**. This means Jesus is one person with two complete and distinct natures, with neither nature changing, damaging, or blending into the other. Instead, both the human and divine properties remain entirely separate yet exist together in perfect unity.

Mainstream Christians at the time of Muhammad did not believe Mary was God because they reserved worship for God alone and viewed Mary as the honored mother of Jesus and not part of the Trinity. However, a small, heretical group known as the Collyridians may have worshipped Mary as a goddess,¹³⁸ and some of their practices could have been mistaken for mainstream Christianity. The main understanding of the Qur'anic passages that deny a "trinity" that includes Mary is that this was a misunderstanding of what Christians believed. This misunderstanding arose from the high degree of respect Christians had for Mary.¹³⁹

The Character of God

Does the character of God mean that he is more than one? Tawhid is a term that denotes the absolute unity or oneness of God and is a fundamental concept of Islam. God is unique and is the sole creator and sustainer of the Universe. He has no partners. All worship should be directed towards God and not his creation.¹⁴⁰ The opposite of Tawhid is Shirk, which is ascribing partners to God. Christian worship and adoration of Jesus are understood as worshipping creation rather than the Creator. A Surah which is regularly recited in the Muslim prayers and mosques is Surah 112 (Surah al Ikhlas or Monotheism) – "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Say thou: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the Independent, He begetteth not, nor Was He begotten. And there hath never been co-equal with Him anyone."

Does Tawhid contradict the Christian concept of the Trinity? Does the character of God (as Christian theologians believe) demand that He is more than a simple unity? If God's primary character is love (1 John 4:16) or he is ar-Rahman (most merciful) and ar-Rahim (most compassionate) (as Muslims believe), who was he showing love, mercy, and compassion to before he created humankind? God has personality, he is a moral and rational being, and we are made in his image (Genesis 1:27). In John, it is recorded, "The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands (John 3:35 NIV)." Also in chapter 5, Jesus says, "For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed (John 5:20 NIV)."

Louis Berkhof divides God's attributes into incommunicable and communicable. Communicable attributes are those that creatures like humans can relate to, such as power, goodness, mercy, and righteousness. At the same time, incommunicable are those for which there is no equivalent among humans, like immensity.¹⁴¹ God has personality, as shown by his communicable attributes, just as humans do, but in

¹³⁸ Editor's note: Collyridianism is described in some early polemical sources as a supposed Christian deviation that elevated Mary, the mother of Jesus, to divine status, treating her as an object of worship and effectively including her within the Trinity. However, the historical reality of this movement remains uncertain, as reports about it come solely from Epiphanius's Panarion, with no independent or corroborating evidence from other ancient writers.

¹³⁹ This information is mainly from Google.

¹⁴⁰ Mostly from Google.

¹⁴¹ Berkhof, L., Systematic Theology, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1949, 59 (accessed online at <https://downloads.biblicaltraining.org/Systematic%20Theology%20by%20Louis%20Berkhof.pdf> 3 December 2025)

humans, there are only faint traces of those attributes.¹⁴² “God’s capacity for personal relationships must be worked out with his own oneness.”¹⁴³

The critical comment here is that the three persons within whom God is relate to each other in the one eternal God. They are a community of three equally eternal persons.¹⁴⁴ This is not a doctrine Christians arrived at in their own imagination but is based on the evidence in the Bible. For example, the apostle Saint Paul writes, “Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father (Galatians 4:6 NIV).” This verse contains the essence of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is by the Spirit of the Son that Christians cry to the Father.¹⁴⁵

The Source of the Trinity

Where do Christians get the doctrine of the Trinity from? The doctrine of the Trinity is based on a sound understanding of the whole of the Bible and not just proof texts. It does not come from the concepts of a trinity found in other religions¹⁴⁶. All three persons in the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, clearly have divine attributes in the Bible.

Although the Old Testament does not spell out the doctrine of the Trinity as in the New Testament, there are hints of it. For example, the most common word for God in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word Elohim, literally translated as “gods.”¹⁴⁷ The Shema, which is like the Shahada of the ancient Israelites, reads as follows (in the Names of God translation of the Bible), “Listen, Israel: Yahweh is our Elohim. Yahweh is the only God (Deuteronomy 6:4 NOG).” Other evidence from the Old Testament includes Genesis 1:27 and 11:7, where God speaks in the plural “we” form. The Angel of the Lord as distinct from the Lord himself, Genesis 16:7-13; 18:1-21; 19:1-28; Mal. 3:1.

In Proverbs 8, Wisdom is portrayed as a person, perhaps pointing to Jesus, who was the Word of God made flesh (John 1). Berkhof also suggests other passages, such as toward the end of Isaiah, where God and his Messiah are distinct. For example, Isaiah 48:16 (NIV) “Come near me and listen to this: “From the first announcement, I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there. And now the Sovereign Lord has sent me, endowed with his Spirit.” So the Old Testament anticipates the fuller, more complete revelation of the Trinity.¹⁴⁸

In the New Testament, there are many proofs that God is a Trinity. It is clear that there are distinctions within the Godhead. In the Old Testament, Yahweh is often represented as the Redeemer and Savior of His people. For example, Job 19:25; Ps.

¹⁴² Berkhof, L., 91.

¹⁴³ The New Lion Handbook Christian Belief, general editor Alistair McGrath, Lion Hudson 2006, 83

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 83.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 84.

¹⁴⁶ A search on Google finds evidence of a trinity in Hinduism, ancient Egypt, in other Middle Eastern traditions and in Roman and Greek mythology (from a Google search).

¹⁴⁷ Berkhof L., 93.

¹⁴⁸ Berkhof, L., 93

19:14; 78:35; 106:21; Isa. 41:14; 43:3, 11, 14; 47:4; 49:7, 26; 60:16; Jer. 14:3; 50:14; Hos. 13:3. However, Jesus, as the unique “Son of God” because He came from the Father, is the Savior (Matt. 1:21; Luke 1:76-79; 2:17; John 4:42; Acts 5:3; Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Phil. 3:30; Tit. 2:13, 14). In the Old Testament, Yahweh is the one who lives among Israel and in the hearts of those who fear Him (Ps. 74:2; 135:21; Isa. 8:18; 57:15; Ezek. 43:7-9; Joel 3:17, 21; Zech. 2:10, 11). In the New Testament, it is the Holy Spirit that dwells in the Church (Acts 2:4; Rom. 8:9, 11; I Cor. 3:16; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 2:22; Jas. 4:5). In the New Testament, God sends His Son into the world (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:6; I John 4:9), and it is both the Father and the Son who send the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Gal. 4:6). We find the Father speaking to the Son and about the Son (Jesus) (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22), and we find the Son talking with the Father (Matt. 11:25, 26; 26:39; John 11:41; 12:27, 28). The Holy Spirit also prays to God in the hearts of believers (Rom. 8:26). So the persons of the Trinity clearly stand out as distinct from one another. At the baptism of Jesus (the Son), the Father speaks from heaven and the Holy Spirit appears to descend on him like a dove (Matt. 3:16, 17). In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20), the disciples are to baptize in the name of the three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are also named alongside one another in 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; and I Peter 1:2.¹⁴⁹

Ecumenical Councils

Muslims either misunderstand or misconstrue the early ecumenical councils and the doctrine of the Trinity. This is especially true of the Council of Nicaea.¹⁵⁰ This Council was important because it affirmed the divine nature of Jesus. It was called to refute a heresy known as Arianism, which denied the divinity of Jesus. It provided this definition of Jesus’ nature: “Declared that Jesus (the Son) is “the only-begotten of the Father,” “Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father”.¹⁵¹ First Council of Constantinople (381 AD) was called to address the divinity of the Holy Spirit and to expand the Nicene Creed.¹⁵² It affirmed that the Holy Spirit is of the same “essence” as the Father and the Son, and is to be “worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son”. This council solidified the belief that the Holy Spirit is not subordinate to the Father and the Son but is a coequal part of the Godhead.¹⁵³ Other councils were important in refuting heresy and defining Jesus’s dual nature. This is especially true of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which defined Christ as having two natures (divine and human). These natures are indivisibly united in His one person.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Berkhof, L., 94 He also mentions that in older English versions 1 John 5:7 speaks of the Trinity but is not used here as that does not follow the oldest most authentic manuscripts available.

¹⁵⁰ This has been in the news recently because the Pope visited the site of the council which happened 1700 years ago. A good clip about the Council of Nicaea is from **InspiringPhilosophy** and is called “The Truth about the Council of Nicaea” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSKBGdv07nQ> (accessed 3 December 2025).

¹⁵¹ Google. The term “only begotten” comes from the Greek “monogenēs” (μονογενής) which is not about physical reproduction but about the uniqueness of Jesus.

¹⁵² The Nicene Creed can be accessed here, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/nicene-creed> (accessed 3 December 2025).

¹⁵³ Google.

¹⁵⁴ Google.

The Trinity and Salvation

Does one need to believe in the Trinity to be saved? Nowhere does the Bible say one has to believe in the Trinity to be saved. This is what Saint Paul wrote: Romans 10:9-13 NIV “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The word “Lord” here is the Greek word “kyrios” which means something like master or lord and is usually seen here as pointing to Jesus’ divine authority. However, Saint Paul also wrote 1 Corinthians 8:6 NIV “yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” All things came into being through Jesus because he was the eternal Word of God and not because of his divine authority. So calling Jesus Lord can be respecting him as master and not divine. Clearly, from these verses in Romans, there is belief in the resurrection of Jesus (which also implies belief in his death). Belief or trust in the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross is necessary for salvation.

Early Islam & the Bismillah

The Prophet Muhammad’s early preaching advocated monotheism and opposed polytheism. He also preached against social injustice and certain evil social practices.¹⁵⁵ The early Muslims suffered intense persecution, and several groups of them fled to Abyssinia. Here they were received by the just and powerful king An-Najashi. (There are some Islamic claims that when he heard about Islam, he became a Muslim.) There were many similarities between early Islam and the Christianity practiced in Ethiopia at the time, which led to a historical relationship of coexistence and tolerance.

According to Surah 5:5, the meat of the Christians is halal (allowed) for Muslims. Ethiopians slaughtered their meat in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Muslims are also to kill in the name of Allah. The bismillah, “in the name of Allah, the most merciful and most compassionate,” was taught to the early Muslims by a Jew, Umaiya of Ta’if. Umaiya was familiar with the sacred books of both Jews and Christians.¹⁵⁶ The Bismillah is a kind of trinity, and all the Surahs of the Qur’an begin with it except one. The three names of God in the bismillah seem to reflect the three persons in the Christian Trinity.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Evil social practices, such as Female Infanticide, where female infant daughters were buried alive. Muhammad taught that a man who cared for his daughters would be rewarded in the afterlife.

¹⁵⁶ Hughes - <https://www.answering-islam.org/Books/Hughes/b.htm> (accessed 10 December 2025)

¹⁵⁷ Allah and ar-Rahman were used interchangeable in the early surahs of the Qur’an. Surah 17:110 “Say thou: call upon Allah or call upon Rahman, by whichsoever ye call, His are the excellent

Conclusion

When Christians worship Jesus, they are not worshipping a man but the divine Spirit, the Word of God who lived in the man Jesus Christ (John 1:14). Jesus is Lord because he is God's eternal Word. He has authority over all things (Matthew 28:18). Believing that God is a Trinity of three persons in one God is neither shirk nor polytheism. It is a valid way of understanding God in his attributes of love, mercy, and compassion. It reflects the one God we find in the Bible, in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all possess divine attributes. God in the Bible is defined as the Father, the Son (who is God's eternal Word), and the Holy Spirit (who is God's Spirit), existing as one God. Believing in the Trinity as historically defined by the early Christian councils is not necessary for salvation.

About the Author

Stephen Thompson grew up in East Africa until he was 13. Later, as an adult, he served with his wife, Rachel, as a global partner with SIM in NEP Kenya and Eastern Ethiopia, where he helped people through water and agricultural projects. They later lived in Addis Ababa, where he managed the Codka Nolosha Cusub radio program. At present, Stephen and Rachel live in a multicultural suburb in Auckland, New Zealand, where they seek to reach out to their neighbors. The author can be reached at thomsjrj@gmail.com

Mission, Islam, & the Legacy of Samuel M. Zwemer

Stephen Thompson

Introduction: Zwemer's Significance in Mission History



No one with any understanding of the history of Christian mission work among Muslims would question that Samuel Zwemer's contribution was truly significant. Latourette, in his introduction to Zwemer's biography, *Apostle to Islam*, ranks him as the most critical missionary to Muslims since Raymond Lull (seven hundred years earlier).¹⁵⁸ Dr. Phil Parshall, whose mission has made a substantial breakthrough in the

evangelization of Muslims, claims that his approach is the Zwemer approach.¹⁵⁹ Zwemer's contribution is also acknowledged by the establishment of an Institute "for research, teaching and information dissemination" in Muslim Evangelisation, which has been named after him.¹⁶⁰ From an early age, he was recognized as an authority on Islam. Robert Speer gives us some insight into this and what it was that motivated Samuel Zwemer when, in his introduction to Zwemer's book on Raymond Lull writes:

"To an attest perfect command of Arabic, an accurate knowledge of the Koran, untiring zeal and indomitable courage, he has added an absorbing love for the Mohammedans, and a desire to make known to them in truth that Savior whom in their belief their prophet annuls and supersedes."¹⁶¹

Samuel Zwemer's contribution was made both in his understanding of popular and intellectual Islam and in their interaction. He also made contributions through his knowledge of global Islam and of the history of Islam and its interaction with Christianity. Zwemer made a contribution to missionary work among Muslims during

¹⁵⁸ J Christy Wilson, *Apostle to Islam*, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1952, 5.

¹⁵⁹ S P Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism*, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980, 19. "This book is basically following the Zwemer approach, with the added dimension of exploring relatively untried and untested methodological options for communicating Christ in an Islamic cultural and religious milieu. My rather extensive reading of Zwemer indicates that he engaged in little experimentation or innovation in areas of methodology".

¹⁶⁰ Parshall, 238

¹⁶¹ S M Zwemer, *Raymond Lull, First Missionary to the Moslems*, New York and London: Funk and Wagnell Company, 1902, ix.

his lifetime through his ministry as a conference speaker and recruiter. His influence and contributions endure in the many books he wrote.¹⁶²

Early Life and Background

Samuel M. Zwemer was born in Michigan on April 12, 1867, and died on April 2, 1952, near New York, 10 days before his eighty-fifth birthday. He was the thirteenth of fifteen children, and when he was born, his mother prayed that the Lord would send him as a missionary. His parents were immigrants from the Netherlands and part of a group who settled in Michigan. Writers about this group never miss the point that “a log Church was one of the first buildings erected, before many of the families had a domestic roof over their heads or even food in their makeshift cupboards.”¹⁶³ Zwemer himself sums up these people, who influenced Zwemer to be the kind of man he was, when he said, “they never steered by the weather-vane of public opinion, but by the compass of conviction.... Their whole policy... was based on thrift and industry, on education and self-reliance on a home and a Church, and a state where true liberty was enthroned.”¹⁶⁴

Mission to Arabia and Early Ministry

Zwemer completed his theological studies at New Brunswick Seminary. While there, he worked with two other students, James Cantine and Philip T. Phelps, and Professor John G. Lansiny, to develop a plan for the evangelization of Arabia. In 1890, at age twenty-three, Zwemer was sent by his Church to Arabia. There, he founded evangelistic, educational, and medical work in Basrah (Iraq), Bahrain, Muscat (Oman), and Kuwait. While in Arabia, he learned Arabic and became an expert on Islam; he also began his career as a writer. Six years after arriving in Arabia, he married a nurse who was under appointment with CMS. His time in Arabia was not without sacrifice. In 1898, his brother Peter (who had joined the mission in 1894) died, and two of Samuel Zwemer's daughters died from dysentery in 1904.

Ministry in Cairo and Global Expansion

A new phase in Zwemer's life began in 1912 when he accepted a call from the United Presbyterian Church to work in Cairo. As Cairo was the intellectual capital of the Muslim world and located on major travel routes, it allowed Zwemer to broaden the scope of his ministry to all of Islam. To do this, he travelled extensively in India, Africa, and the Great Indies, including as far as Northwest China. He was involved in organising and chairing the first and second Protestant missionary conferences on Islam, in Cairo and Lucknow. During this time, he also worked closely with Temple Gairdner of CMS in Egypt.

¹⁶² Parshall, 19 - makes or significant comment in this regard when he writes: “ - not wise to completely dichotomize popular and intellectual Islam. They are very much interwoven with each other. The great apostle to Islam, Samuel Zwemer did the best job of synthesizing the two emphases. Zwemer, a prolific and outstanding writer, always maintained his focus on the Islam he saw actually being worked out in the Middle East. Yet, he could see the influence of the orthodox creeds and Qur'anic injunctions on every community of Muslims”.

¹⁶³ A Mulder, *Americans from Holland*, New York: J B Lippincott Co, 1947, 128.

¹⁶⁴ J Christy Wilson (1952), 25

Princeton Years and Final Ministry

Another phase in Samuel Zwemer's ministry began in 1929 when he became Professor of the History of Religion and Christian Missions at Princeton Theological Seminary. He held this position for nearly ten years and continued to have a significant ministry through his influence on students, his conference speaking, and his writing. After retiring from there, he remained active in literature and as a speaker until his death. His strengths lay in his firm conviction about the deity, incarnation, and resurrection of Christ; the need for the Church to be evangelistic, and his belief in the importance of prayer.¹⁶⁵

First-Hand Research and Observational Insight

Much of what Samuel Zwemer wrote came from "first-hand research in the Arabic sources and on first-hand investigation of Muslim beliefs- and practices."¹⁶⁶ Much of his understanding of popular Islam came from firsthand observation. For example, one of his colleagues in Cairo records this incident: "I am told that he set out one day to visit the famous tombs of the Kings of Luxor. On the way he met a Mohammedan funeral procession, and noting something in the customs that he had not encountered before, he turned aside and followed the procession, and never got to the tombs of the Kings."¹⁶⁷ His books show that he had both read widely on Islam and also had a good understanding from first hand observation. In his books *Heirs of the Prophets* (1946) he described Al-Azhar University ("the oldest Islamic theological seminary") his knowledge of the University came from many visits to the place. His other books, *Across the World of Islam* (1929) and *Studies in Popular Islam* (1939), are especially rich in examples drawn from his studies and travels.

Global Scope of Zwemer's Contribution

Zwemer's contribution to the Christian understanding of Islam was not limited to the countries in which he resided; it was global in scope. His contribution came from three primary sources: his extensive reading and research; his residence in Cairo, a centre of intellectual Islam and a central hub of travel; and his extensive travel in Islamic countries. As well as travelling extensively in Europe and North America as a conference speaker and on deputation, he travelled extensively as a field secretary for the American Christian Literature Society for Muslims seeking "to stimulate the publication and distribution of the Christian message through the printed page."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ The paragraphs on Zwemer's life use a number of sources:

a. J Christy Wilson, *Apostle to Islam* (and other biographical articles)
b. L L Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims - The Record*, California: William Carey Library 1977.

c. L Vander. Werff, "Our Muslim Neighbours, The Contribution of Samuel M Zwemer to Christian Mission," *Missiology*, X No 2. (1982), 185-197.

d. K S Latourette, 'Tribute to Samuel M Zwemer', - *Christianity Today*, (March 1967), 27.

¹⁶⁶ E E Calverley, "Samuel Marinus Zwemer," *The Muslim world*, XLII (1952), 157.

¹⁶⁷ J Christy Wilson (1952), 84. Also in *Flaming Prophet*, New York; Friendship Press 1970, 58. Mr Wilson has this to say: "It is said of Zwemer that he had an extraordinarily acquisitive mind. He liked to walk along the streets of Cairo and observe the customs of the people. Sometimes he would stop to watch some simple activity, such as the fastening of a small Koran to the arm of a child to ward off the evil eye. He often bought and read books in the language of the country, he gathered an abundance of fresh illustrations for any theme on which he was speaking."

¹⁶⁸ J Christy Wilson (1952) 97

Some of the places he visited included North and South Africa, Eastern Europe and the Balkans, East Indies (Indonesia, Malaysia, etc), Iraq, Persia (Iran), India (including Pakistan several times), and China (twice).¹⁶⁹

Major Works on Islam and Global Analysis

As early as 1909, Samuel Zwemer made a significant contribution to the global understanding of Islam with his book *Islam: A Challenge of Faith*. He included chapters on the condition of the Muslim world (with global statistics, information on the distribution of languages, political divisions, social conditions, illiteracy, and the contemporary intellectual awakening), the mission to Muslims, and a look at the future of Islam. *Across the World of Islam* (1929) was a significant work that came from his world travels. In this book, he updates earlier statistics. He includes chapters on Islam and Christianity in Africa, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, North Africa, South Africa, Java and the Dutch East Indies, Persia and Shia Islam, Russia, India, and South-eastern Europe. These chapters demonstrate a sound understanding of the geography of these lands and of the interaction between Christianity and Islam.¹⁷⁰ Many of his other books also attest to his contribution to the Christian understanding of Islam worldwide.¹⁷¹

Biographical Contributions: Raymond Lull

Many of Samuel Zwemer's books also show that he had an excellent understanding of the history of Islam and its interaction with Christianity.¹⁷² A couple of biographies, he wrote, are particularly significant contributions to the Christian understanding of Islam. His book, *Raymond Lull: First Missionary to the Moslems* (1902), was for many years a leader in the field of biographies on Lull.¹⁷³

In this, Zwemer demonstrates a sound understanding of both the Christian and Muslim worlds of Raymond Lull's time. He recognized the contrasts in morality among the so-called Christians, as well as the poetry and superstition of the period.¹⁷⁴ He also had an understanding of the state of the Muslim world at the time.

¹⁶⁹ J Christy Wilson (1952), Part 3, 97-164, describe these visits.

¹⁷⁰ S M Zwemer, *Across the World of Islam*, New York: Fleming H Revell Co. 1929. Although some of this material is a little dated it would still be useful background information for anyone interested in working in one of these countries.

¹⁷¹ Some of the titles here include: *The Unoccupied Mission Fields of Africa and Asia*, New York, 1911.

¹⁷² Examples of a couple of general books which are good here include: *Islam a Challenge to Faith* (London and Edinburgh: Marshall Brothers Limited, 1909) which includes chapters on the origin and sources of Islam, Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam and the Spread of Islam. Also, *Heirs of the Prophets* (Chicago; Moody 1946) where much historical background is given. For example p. 30 after discussing the power Muhammad had

He writes on the Caliphs: "With such a complex of martial, legal, spiritual, and social prerogatives claimed at the outset, it is no wonder that the caliphate became a powerful and mysterious force in the history of Islam".

¹⁷³ J Christy Wilson (1952), 200.

¹⁷⁴ . S M Zwemer (1902) a good quote on the contrasts in morality comes on (9): "The wealthy paid immense sums to redeem Christian slaves captured by the Saracens, and the Church took immense sums to persecute those who erred from the Faith, when the Crusaders under Godfrey of Bouillon (who refused to wear a crown of gold where his Saviour had worn a crown of thorns) came in sight of Jerusalem, they

He knew that its real strength was in its writings and science. "Islam was in power in the thirteenth century not so much by its conquests with the sword as by its conquests with the pen."¹⁷⁵

Zwemer had an excellent understanding of Raymond Lull's birthplace, background, and early life. He saw Raymond Lull in contrast to the knights of the Crusades, who proposed conquering the Holy Land by Biblical means, such as love, prayers, tears, and the giving of one's life (martyrdom).¹⁷⁶ Zwemer had a high regard for Lull because of his attitude toward study. For example, he writes: "He therefore decided to purchase a Saracen slave, and with this teacher, his biographers tell us that Lull was occupied in Arabic study for a period of more than nine years. Could anything prove more clearly that Lull was the greatest as well as the first missionary to the Moslems?"¹⁷⁷

Zwemer had a dear understanding of the 3-fold aspect of Lull's life work: "... he devised a philosophical or educational system for persuading non-Christians of the truth of Christianity; he established missionary colleges; and he himself went and preached to the Moslems, sealing his witness with martyrdom."¹⁷⁸

He had obviously read a lot of Lull's books; for example, he writes on Lull as philosopher and author: "One does not know which to admire most - the versatile character of the genius, or the prodigious industry of the author."¹⁷⁹ Generally, Zwemer knows how to review a life and draw lessons that would benefit his own life and the lives of those who follow him, for example, his summary of Lull: "the threefold talents uncommon among men and so seldom found in one character: namely, a powerful intellect, a loving heart, and efficiency in practical things ... place him at the front as the true type of what a missionary to Moslems should be today."¹⁸⁰

Biographical Contributions: Al-Ghazali

His other biography, *A Moslem Seeker After God* (1920), is an account of the life and writings of Al Ghazali, who was a mystic and Muslim theologian of the eleventh century. Of Al Ghazali, Zwemer writes: "... has left a larger imprint upon the history of Islam than any man save Mohammed himself."¹⁸¹ In the biography, Zwemer again demonstrates a clear understanding of the historical context and religious climate that shaped Al-Ghazali. He understood "pre-conversion," Al Ghazali, as a thoroughgoing sceptic largely due to the struggles Islam was going through at the

kissed the earth and advanced on their knees in penitential prayer; but after the capture of the city they massacred seventy thousand Moslems, burned the Jews in their synagogues, and waded in blood to the Holy Sepulcher to offer up thanks!"

¹⁷⁵ S M Zwemer (1902) 16

¹⁷⁶ S M Zwemer (1902) 52, 53

¹⁷⁷ S M Zwemer (1902) 55

¹⁷⁸ S M Zwemer (1902) 63.64

¹⁷⁹ S M Zwemer (1902) 113

¹⁸⁰ S M Zwemer (1902) 147

¹⁸¹ S M Zwemer *A Moslem Seeker After God*, New York: Fleming H Revell Co, 1920, 21.

time.¹⁸² “As in the nineteenth century for Christianity, so in the eleventh century for Islam the struggle between science and orthodoxy waged fiercely.”¹⁸³ Al Ghazali would have been orthodox in his theology.¹⁸⁴

Zwemer sees the importance of Al Ghazali to Islam in a four-fold summary by Dr Macdonald:

1. He led men back from mere scholastic dogma to a living contact with the Koran and the traditions as the true source of Islam.
2. He reintroduced into Islam the element of fear (i.e., of Judgement and the horrors of hell).
3. He gave mysticism an assured position in orthodox Islam.
4. He brought philosophy within the range of the ordinary mind (that is, not contradictory to true Islam).¹⁸⁵

He regarded Al-Ghazali's ethics as standards that, at times, surpassed those of the Koran and the Prophet. In his understanding of Jesus, Al Ghazali stopped short of the incarnation and attributed various insignificant miracles. His attitude towards Christianity did a lot to “leaven Persian thought and gave Jesus of Nazareth a large place in Mysticism ...”¹⁸⁶

Theological Analysis: The Muslim Doctrine of God

Zwemer's understanding of the theology and practice of Islam is from the perspective of revelation given in Christ as the first of all religions and the only key to man's knowledge and experience of the redeemed life.¹⁸⁷ He felt that any missionary to Muslims must be strong in his doctrine of Christ and inspiration due to the high value Islam places on belief in one God and its own book.¹⁸⁸ Two significant books showing Samuel Zwemer's contribution to the Christian understanding of Islam's theology are *The Moslem Doctrine of God* and *The Moslem Christ*.

To Samuel Zwemer, the Christian would not be able to intelligently communicate the Christian idea of God to a Muslim without a clear understanding of the Muslim's idea

¹⁸² S M Zwemer (1920) a couple of relevant quotes here. Firstly on Al Ghazali's Persian background 53 “At the time of Al Ghazali, Persian influence was supreme. It pervaded everything. The Arabs had ceased to write. The realms of poetry, theology, and science, were dominated by those of

Persian birth”. Secondly, on the religious climate of Tus 60, 61 “Religions disputation must have been the very atmosphere of Tus. Christians were numerous and the Moslem Shiah were almost as strong as the orthodox.”

¹⁸³ S M Zwemer (1920), 97

¹⁸⁴ S M Zwemer (1920), 147. on ‘His Creed and Credibility we find this quotation: “Not only did he find God in nature and in his own conscience and consciousness but he was a firm believer in revelation. Naturally the only revelation to which Al Ghazali turned as the basis, the very bed-rock of religious faith, was the Koran, the eternal, uncreated word of God according to Moslem teaching;....”

¹⁸⁵ S M Zwemer (1920), 192-194

¹⁸⁶ S M Zwemer (1920), 292

¹⁸⁷ L L Vander Werff (1977), 239

¹⁸⁸ J Christy Wilson “The Significance of Samuel Zwemer” The Princeton Seminary Bulletin, 1967, 58.

of God. "The strength of Islam is not in its ritual nor in its ethics, but in its tremendous and fanatical group on the one great truth, Monotheism."¹⁸⁹ Zwemer in his study on *The Moslem Doctrine of God*, was concerned to go back to the Koran and orthodox traditions (the Hadith); he was concerned to "not to sketch the theological views of Moslems in Liverpool nor the reformers of Islam in India, but of the vast orthodox majority of the people, both learned and illiterate."¹⁹⁰

Zwemer had no doubt about the importance of the 'oneness' of God to the Muslim. However, Zwemer also saw the idea that Mohammed received the name of God by revelation as false. "But history establishes beyond the shadow of a doubt that even the pagan Arabs, before Mohammed's time knew their chief god by the name of Allah and even, in a sense proclaims His Unity ...*Al-ilah* (contract to Allah) i.e. ... the god ..."¹⁹¹ The Koranic terms "God is one ... He does not beget ... And He has no equal ..." all define "the Essence of God, according to the Koran and the best commentaries."¹⁹²

Zwemer lists "the ninety-nine beautiful names of Allah" and also notes that "the word *Rabb*, Lord (although it is also an attribute, according to the Moslem ideas of Unity), is not mentioned among the ninety-nine names". He also notes that some of the divine titles have been applied by "the pious" to Muhammad.¹⁹³ Allah's attributes (many of his names are also attributes) are divided into three classes, the attributes of wisdom, of power and of goodness (in the rosary) but more commonly two divisions: "*Isma-ul-Jalayah* and *Isma-ul-Jemaliyah*, terrible attributes and glorious attributes."¹⁹⁴ In the same chapter where he analyses God's attributes, Zwemer looks at the Muslim definition of sin : "it is a wilful violation of known law or, as Wherry puts it: sin, according to most Moslem authorities, is a conscious act committed against known law; wherefore sins of ignorance are not numbered in the catalogue of crimes."¹⁹⁵

The greatness of Allah means that in relation to his world, man has no free will, and all good and all evil come directly from Allah.¹⁹⁶ "Mohammed teaches a God above us; Moses teaches a God above us and yet with us; Jesus Christ teaches God above us, God with us and God in us."¹⁹⁷ To Mohammed, the Christian doctrine of Trinity was "a species of tritheism, consisting of God, Mary and Jesus Christ."¹⁹⁸ Zwemer saw this as "a deliberate rejection of the Christian idea of the Godhead - the

¹⁸⁹ S M Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God*, Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1905, 7

¹⁹⁰ S M Zwemer (1905). 9

¹⁹¹ S M Zwemer (1905). 24,25

¹⁹² S M Zwemer (1905). 32,33

¹⁹³ S M Zwemer (1905). 46

¹⁹⁴ S M Zwemer (1905). 47,48

¹⁹⁵ S M Zwemer (1905). 50

¹⁹⁶ S M Zwemer (1905). 75.

¹⁹⁷ S M Zwemer (1905), 76. Zwemer quotes from James Freeman Clarke's *Ten Great Religions* Vol. II, p 68.

¹⁹⁸ S M Zwemer (1905). 80.

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” It seems that part of Muhammad’s problem was his lack of understanding of the gospel.¹⁹⁹

Overall, Zwemer found Muhammad’s concept of God rather gruesome.²⁰⁰ Zwemer understood Muhammad’s Allah to have too many of the attributes of Jehovah to be put with false gods, but his concept was insufficient in four ways. Firstly, “there is no Fatherhood of God”, Secondly, “The Moslem idea of God is conspicuously lacking in the attribute of love”. Thirdly, “Allah is not absolutely, unchangeably and eternally just”. And fourthly, “There is lack of harmony in Allah’s attributes.”²⁰¹

The Muslim Christ

As with *The Moslem Doctrine of God* in *The Moslem Christ*, Zwemer goes to primary sources. Islam is the only great non-Christian religion to give Christ a place, but it denies so much which is important in understanding Christ, i.e., “His deity. His atonement and His supreme place as Lord of all in its sacred literature.”²⁰² Christ is displaced - Zwemer mentioned this early in his book then later shows how in many ways Muhammad has replaced Christ.

“The sin and guilt of the Mohammedan world is that they give Christ’s glory to another, **and that for all practical purposes Mohammed himself is the Moslem Christ** ... Every detail of the life of Jesus Christ has been imitated and parodied by Mohammed’s later biographers and admirers ... He is supplanted in the hearts of all Moslems by Mohammed. They are jealous of his glory and resist any attempt to magnify the glory of Jesus Christ at the expense of Mohammed.”²⁰³

Zwemer sees the fact that the Muslims believe in Christ as being a vital point of contact with Muslims and devotes a whole chapter to ways of making use of the Muslim Christ in witness. For example: “Islam, as we have seen, admits His coming, his supernatural birth, his high office as the Bringer of a special revelation from God, His sinlessness, His compassion and His power to work miracles. His very names afford so many points of departure to lead from the Koran and tradition to the Gospels.”²⁰⁴

Apostasy and Conversion

Zwemer’s desire in understanding Islam was to use that understanding to lead Muslims to Christ, as shown in almost every chapter he wrote on the subject. For him, an understanding of the practice of Islam was vital to this. *The Law of Apostasy in Islam* (1923) is an important book here; for Zwemer, this was a real barrier to Muslims becoming Christians. Maybe the motivation for the book came out of the

¹⁹⁹ S M Zwemer (1905). 92.

²⁰⁰ J Christensen, *The Practical Approach to Muslims*, France: Mrs M Christensen and the North Africa Mission, 1977, 470-471. Compares Zwemer’s understanding with that of other authors who made Muhammad’s concept of God to look like something very beautiful and closely resembling Christianity (c.f. *Operation Reach*, Sept - Oct 1957”).

²⁰¹ S M Zwemer (1905). 107ff.

²⁰² S M Zwemer *The Moslem Christ*, London and Edinburgh: Oliphants Limited, 1913, 7.

²⁰³ S M Zwemer, (1913), 157, 161, 166.

²⁰⁴ S M Zwemer, (1913), 181.

fact that the first Muslim convert he met died of poison, as the law of apostasy was applied.²⁰⁵

Zwemer understood “the traditions” as clearly interpreting the Qur’an as demanding death for apostasy, with some variation allowing for repentance.²⁰⁶ Zwemer then goes on in his book to show examples in recent history of persecution of converts from Islam and then back through the centuries. He is amazed at the number of conversions from Islam over the years, in spite of the laws.²⁰⁷ He then discusses the number of accounts of hidden disciples (such as Nicodemus) who have remained secret believers because of the cost of open confession.²⁰⁸ Recently, with Western rule over many lands where Muslims are present (such as India), the Muslim convert has been given rights that protect him. However, missionary work has also been forbidden in some areas (such as northern Sudan, which has only recently opened up) to keep the peace.²⁰⁹

Women in Islam

In terms of the practice of Islam, Zwemer was concerned about the position of women under Islam. He co-authored three books on the subject, *Our Moslem Sisters* (1907) and *Daylight in the Harem* (1912) with Annie Van Sommer, and *Moslem Women* with his wife (1926). Also in his book *Across The World Of Islam* (1929), he has a couple of chapters devoted to women. All these books are very practical. *Our Moslem Sisters* is a quite comprehensive discussion of the position of Muslim women in various Muslim countries, with comments on the work done by Christians to bring the gospel to these people. In *Moslem Women* and *Across the World of Islam*, the authors begin with the theory (in the Qur’an and Tradition) and then discuss womanhood under Islam across the world of Islam.²¹⁰ In the Qur’an, women are important but not equal to men; men are allowed four wives (plus slave girls at their discretion). Certain regulations are laid down for diverse women, requiring them to veil themselves from the public and to be examples of modesty.²¹¹ In the traditions, marriage to a virtuous wife is regarded highly (even helpful in getting to heaven), and there are a variety of traditions on divorce.²¹² Legally, a woman has few rights, and in practice, in Muslim society, divorce is easy, and women are kept in superstition and ignorance.²¹³

²⁰⁵ S M Zwemer, *The Law of Apostasy in Islam*, London, Edinburgh and New York: Marshall Brothers Limited, 1923, 29.

²⁰⁶ S M Zwemer (1923), Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of references in the Qur’an then shows the interpretation of various commentaries and the traditions.

²⁰⁷ S M Zwemer (1923), Chapters 3, 4. He moves from the theory to the practice.

²⁰⁸ 51. S M Zwemer (1923), Chapter V. These hidden disciples came from all walks of life.

²⁰⁹ S M Zwemer (1923), Chapter VI. He sees the position improving and compares it with the struggle the West had for religious liberty.

²¹⁰ *Across The World of Islam* (S M Zwemer, 1929) and by A E and S M Zwemer *Moslem Women* (Massachusetts: The Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions 1926).

²¹¹ A E and S M Zwemer (1926), 39-42.

²¹² A E and S M Zwemer (1926), 43-46.

²¹³ A E and S M Zwemer (1926), 46-62 and the rest of the book for discussions on movements to liberate women and to save them.

Superstition and Popular Islam

Another major area in which Zwemer made a contribution to the Christian understanding of the practice of Islam was in the area of superstition. This is evident throughout his writings, particularly in *The Influence of Animism on Islam* (1920) and *Studies in Popular Islam* (1939). In the former are illustrations which are “examples of talismans and amulets from many parts of the Islamic World.”²¹⁴ In *Studies in Popular Islam* discusses (in particular) the rosary in Islam, with its various magical practices, the Ka’aba, the Sword of Mohammad and Ali, and various other superstitions.²¹⁵ For Zwemer, Islam’s ability to “adapt almost any practice of pagan religion” was one of its sources of strength.²¹⁶

Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy of Samuel M. Zwemer

As we have seen, Zwemer’s major contribution to the Christian understanding of Islam is left to us in his writings. These cover most aspects of Islam and draw on many dedicated years of study, travel, and living among Muslim people. A good summary quote would be from Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette: “Never in the history of the Church has any Christian covered the Moslem world so comprehensively, in study, travel, planning and advocacy of mission to it, as has Dr Zwemer ...”²¹⁷

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²¹⁴ J Christy Wilson (1952), 197.

²¹⁵ 58. S M Zwemer, *Studies in Popular Islam*, London; The Sheldon Press 1939, especially 6 ff on magical practices of the rosary.

²¹⁶ L L Yonder werff (1977), 245 the whole quote is “Islam’s strength for him (Zwemer) lies in its versatile three-stranded nature: an animism able to encompass and adapt almost any practice of pagan religion, a Semitic deism which can wear a nationalistic cloak, and its claim to supersede all that Jesus was, did and taught”.

²¹⁷ J Christy Wilson (1952), 205.

- Wilson J Christy, "The Epic of Samuel Zwemer", Muslim World, April 1967.
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Yoga Is Not Neutral A Biblical Warning Against Spiritual Deception

Dr. Danny R. Pate

Introduction



When this title was read, feelings about this topic instantly rushed into your mind. Some for, some against, and some indifferent. Yoga circulated in the United States, gaining popularity in the late 1800s and growing through the mid-1900s. The past 35 years have seen the most significant rise in popularity. Of course, like waves, interest and followers rise and fall. Such a long line of influence within U.S. culture makes people gloss over the risks

associated with such practices. Of course, there are people who, no matter how strong the argument against yoga, will brush it off and say, "It's just stretching!" I hope these people hear this clearly and change their perspective. Let me be clear and concise. Yoga is deceptive, demonic, and idolatrous. Let's talk about why.

Intention Does Not Define Objective Reality

To get a clearer picture of the risks associated with yoga, we must view it through a broader lens than working out or exercising. You may say, "I only see yoga through the lens of working out or exercising, so why would I be complicit in any evil spiritual discipline?" Your intention does not define objective reality. Right now, subjective belief defines popular culture. Subjective things are personal opinions, feelings, beliefs, or experiences. Individual perspectives, emotions, and biases influence them. They can vary from person to person. Objective things relate to facts, evidence, or reality independent of personal feelings or opinions. They are unbiased and verifiable. Objective things can be the same for anyone, assuming accurate observation. A subjective statement could be something like "That painting is beautiful."

Notice that it depends on the person and is open to their perspective. An objective statement could be, "That painting is 10 inches long and 12 inches wide." That statement is measurable, unbiased, and independent of the observer. This example helps us understand the difference between subjective and objective reality. One reality depends on your perspective, and one is independent of your perspective. Just because your intention seems innocent doesn't mean the consequences of participating are innocent. For example, if you steal food to feed your starving family, your intentions are good, but the consequences are real. Another example is that if you are with a group of friends who commit a crime but don't "participate," you are

still guilty of being an accomplice. These examples establish two things. Your intentions do not define what a thing is or isn't, AND just because you aren't maliciously participating does not mean you are innocent. These are two very real conclusions to draw. Intention does not disqualify guilt.

Origins & Objectives of Yoga

We next need to discuss the origins of yoga and some of its fundamental principles. The origins of yoga trace back to ancient India, where it emerged as a spiritual practice to achieve self-realization, the unity of body and mind, and liberation. From the start, as Christians, we should recognize some red flags of caution. Any spiritual practice that fails to place Christ at the center should be avoided. Jesus says in Matthew 16:24, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." Aiming for self-realization runs contrary to self-denial. Realizing oneself does not entail denying oneself. The following is an excerpt from a yoga blog:

Discovering the True Self: The ultimate goal of yoga is to realize one's true self beyond the physical body and mental constructs. This goal involves understanding one's inner essence, or "Atman," which is considered eternal and unchanging. Self-realization is recognizing the deeper, immutable part of oneself that connects with the universal consciousness. What is the Ultimate Goal of Yoga? Understanding Its Purpose²¹⁸

To realize one's true self or (self-realization) does nothing with the problem of our fallen nature.

Romans 5:12, "Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people—because all sinned."
Ephesians 2:1, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sin..."
Ephesians 2:3, "...Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath."

Through the sin of one man, death came to all humanity, and we became dead people walking. In that inherited sin, our natures qualified us to deserve wrath. Yoga would have you discover your nature and embrace it. Christ would have you discover your dead nature and become alive through Him. Yoga would have you embrace your death but portray it as alive, connected to some enlightened state of the universe. Do you see the danger of embracing this connection to self-realization without confessing the need for transformation through Jesus? The denial of self is a required step in coming alive. Our inner essence (Christians may call this our soul), yoga says, is eternal and unchanging. Peter explains differently, saying, "Obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:9). The Gospel of Jesus offers the transformation of our souls, not just transformation but also salvation. This is a message that yoga does not communicate. We have the opportunity for salvation through Jesus Christ, and thus our souls can be changed.

²¹⁸ Ray Beckham, What is the Ultimate Goal of Yoga? TTRial, <https://ttrial.org/what-is-the-ultimate-goal-of-yoga/> (accessed 12 November 2025).

John 3:14-18, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Next, yoga seeks to unify the body and mind. While unifying the body and mind may be presented as a positive, it does not hold in the case of what Christ did for us. The mind of Christ was set on a path contrary to the body and, in fact, was even harmful to His body. The body, another way to call the flesh, wants everything contrary to the Spirit of God. Aligning your body (or flesh) with your mind could significantly harm you. Now, you could make a case that having your mind rule over the things of the body (or flesh) would be a great help, but the question arises: which consumes the other, the mind consuming the body or the body consuming the mind? These goals run contrary to the Christian foundations. The following is another excerpt taken from the same yoga blog.

Experiencing Unity: Yoga aims to foster a sense of unity with the universe. This state of oneness transcends personal identity and ego, allowing individuals to experience a profound connection with all existence. This realization leads to an understanding that the self is an integral part of a larger, interconnected whole.²¹⁹

Here, we see the idea of the self as a necessary part of the connected whole propagated. Again, this runs counter to the biblical principle of denying self.

Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Lastly, yoga aims at achieving liberation. According to the same yoga blog:

Freedom from Samsara: One of the primary goals of yoga is to achieve Moksha, or liberation, which is freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara). This liberation marks the end of suffering, ignorance, and attachment, offering a state of ultimate freedom and peace. Transcending Material Limitations: Yoga seeks to transcend material desires and ego-based limitations. By overcoming these attachments, practitioners can experience a state of liberation where they are no longer bound by worldly concerns or personal identity.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Ray Beckham, What is the Ultimate Goal of Yoga? TTRial, <https://ttrial.org/what-is-the-ultimate-goal-of-yoga/> (accessed 12 November 2025).

²²⁰ Ray Beckham, What is the Ultimate Goal of Yoga? TTRial, <https://ttrial.org/what-is-the-ultimate-goal-of-yoga/> (accessed 12 November 2025).

Biblical Analysis

Let's analyze how these aims stand up biblically. Yoga seeks freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. If by "cycle" you mean reincarnation, in which, according to some spiritual philosophies, the soul takes on different bodies over many lifetimes due to past actions, then I can see how a believer in this idea would desire freedom from it. However, yoga and any other spiritual discipline can NEVER, and I mean NEVER, free someone from the futility of life outside of Jesus Christ. Also, it should be noted that no one can ever do more good than harm. While that person may not outwardly exhibit what we call "bad," apart from Jesus Christ we are nothing but evil all the time. This reality justifies our desperate need to be saved from ourselves, because in us is wickedness.

Romans 3:10, "None is righteous, no, not one."

Our freedom can only be attained through Jesus.

Romans 8:1-4, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

While yoga's transcendence of worldly concerns and personal identity is a value, the question must be asked, "What is this transcendence aiming at? How are we achieving that transcendence?" Jesus is the only way to attain this. Many spiritual practitioners believe that multiple paths lead to enlightenment; some may call this enlightenment God. However, Jesus made this clear and without gray areas by saying,

John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Only one path leads to God. Only one path leads to enlightenment and transcendence. His Name is Jesus. Jesus told a religious leader named Nicodemus,

John 3:3, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The rebirth stage is necessary if the individual hopes to attain life.

Idolatrous Roots of Yoga

Thus far, we have examined the principles and objectives of yoga and their incompatibility with biblical truths, the teachings of Jesus, and the outflowing of genuine Christianity. Now, we will address the pagan and idolatrous nature of yoga. Some of the earliest indications of yoga are found in pictorial depictions of postures

in the Indus Valley Civilization around 3000 BC. These early forms of yoga are likely tied to the rituals and spiritual practices of early Hindu traditions. In ancient Hindu scriptures (1500-500 BC), yoga concepts emerged, focusing primarily on rituals, hymns, and sacrifice to connect with the divine. The term “yoga” comes from the Sanskrit root meaning “to unite” or “to yoke” and was associated with discipline and spiritual practice.^{221, 222, 223}

We should see problems in this practice failing to align with Christian values and principles. The earliest roots of yoga are ritualistic and spiritual, aiming to connect with the divine. The very term, yoga, is an adaptation of the original word meaning ‘to unite’ or ‘yoke’.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 Paul says, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. God said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. And, I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

Christians are not called to be like the world. Christians are not to be yoked together with the world and its pagan practices. Some would say Christianity is not inclusive. We just read that Paul quoted the Old Testament passage and said, “Come out from them and be separate.” Christianity is not a message of inclusivity. We are exclusively devoted to God. God is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14). We are to serve and worship Him alone. Christianity is exclusive in the God it worships and in how we are supposed to be unlike the world, which desires to fulfill its desires. Jesus Christ and Christianity are an exclusive faith. Jesus Christ is the exclusive way to life. Not all roads lead to God. They may “Lead to Rome,” but they do not lead to God. Jesus Christ alone is the narrow way to reunite with our heavenly Father God.

The following is an excerpt from an experienced yoga teacher.

Whilst many of the yoga postures we see today are influenced by nature, inspired by trees (Vrksasana), the moon (Ardha Chandrasana), or even birds (Bakasana), some postures depict the deities revered in Yogic and Hindu

²²¹ Ancient Hindu Scriptures: Advocate the Importance of Yoga and Meditation, Santosh Yoga, <https://santosh.yoga/ancient-hindu-scriptures-that-advocate-the-importance-of-yoga-and-meditation/> (accessed 12 November 2025).

²²² YOGA – From Ancient Hindu Scriptures to the Modern Westernized Practice. The Hindu Portal, <https://www.thehinduportal.com/2015/11/yoga-from-ancient-hindu-scriptures-to.html#gsc.tab=0> (accessed 12 November 2025).

²²³ History of HAF's Take Back Yoga Project. HAF, <https://www.hinduamerican.org/projects/hindu-roots-of-yoga> (accessed 12 November 2025).

culture. As a way of connecting to, revering, and paying respect to deities, many yoga postures represent not just what the deity looks like but also everything they stand for. As we practice the postures, we put our focus on the energy and essence of the deity and look to embody their qualities.²²⁴

We see from a yoga teacher that some poses depict revered deities. These postures are intended to connect with, revere, and pay respect to false gods. These specific postures embody the deity's appearance and all they stand for. Do you see how demonic and deceptive this is, especially for Christians? The following are excerpts from a yoga blog:

The practice of yoga is rooted in spirituality and tradition. Many poses are named after gods and goddesses. These poses not only provide physical benefits but also offer a connection to the divine. In this blog post, we will explore some yoga poses that represent gods and their significance in yoga practice.²²⁵

Hanumanasana (Monkey Pose)

Hanumanasana, also known as the Monkey Pose, is named after the Hindu monkey god, Hanuman. This pose represents strength, devotion, and humility. According to Hindu mythology, Hanuman was known for his devotion to lord Rama and his unwavering loyalty.

This pose stretches the hips, hamstrings, and groin and builds leg strength. It also encourages devotion and humility as you move into the pose with reverence for the god it represents.

Natarajasana, also known as the Lord of the Dance Pose, is named after Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and transformation. In Hindu mythology, dancing is regarded as a form of worship and has the power to bring about transformation and liberation. Your body will resemble Shiva's cosmic dance and his mastery of the three worlds. This pose improves balance, flexibility, and concentration. It also encourages artistic expression and a connection to the divine through movement and dance.

Virabhadrasana (Warrior Pose)

Virabhadrasana, also known as the Warrior Pose, is named after the Hindu warrior Virabhadra. According to Hindu mythology, Virabhadra was created by lord Shiva to avenge the death of his wife, Sati. Your body will resemble the strong and powerful warrior Virabhadra.

²²⁴ 6 sacred yoga poses. Yoga Easy, <https://www.yogaeasy.com/artikel/6-sacred-yoga-poses/> (accessed 11 November 2025).

²²⁵ What Yoga Poses Represent Gods? Hosh Yoga, <https://www.hoshyoga.org/what-yoga-poses-represent-gods/> (accessed 11 October 2025).

Closing

Yoga has deep roots in spirituality and tradition, with many poses named after gods and goddesses from Hindu mythology. Practicing these poses provides physical benefits and a connection to the divine and spiritual qualities of the gods they represent. Hanumanasana represents devotion and humility, Natarajasana represents grace and artistic expression, and Virabhadrasana represents strength and courage. By incorporating these poses into your yoga practice, you can deepen your connection to the divine and cultivate these qualities within yourself.²²⁶

Conclusion

False gods, or doctrines of demons, may be labeled as tapping into positive qualities, but the only realm they connect you to is the idolatrous realm of the demonic. Poses and positions that honor false gods of ancient India, intertwined with Hinduism and Buddhism, are intended to do so. Posing for a false god confers honor or reverence on that god. If you are a follower of Christ and someone performs a pose that mimics the posture of Jesus on the cross, you likely would think it is meant to honor or mock. The intentional pose is not neutral and links back to the deity Christians follow. The same is true of yoga. The poses link back to the gods they represent. By mimicking those postures, yoga practitioners are honoring what the poses represent. You may say, "Well, many of the poses represent nature and have nothing to do with ancient religious gods."

While some poses may honor or acknowledge nature, others acknowledge the gods of worship. A little leaven causes the whole loaf to rise. If you have a healthy drink and put some poison in it, is it not still a poisonous mixture? You can't have one without the other. A little cancer is still cancer. I have seen churches that even host or hold yoga events. What fellowship can the True God have with false gods? How can we bring a form of idolatry into the house of God? But even more true is that you, as a follower of God, are a house of God, and how can we, as houses of God, partake in activities that run contrary to God's commands, His Word, and character? My hope in discussing this issue of yoga is that you don't hear a pointing finger. I hope you hear concern for awakening to the truth. I want Christians, myself included, to become more pleasing to God in everything we do and speak.

About the Author

Dr. Danny Pate is a lover of Jesus, husband, and father of four children. Since traveling to Kenya in 2019 for short-term evangelistic mission work and Ethiopia in 2025, specifically for the Somali people, his love for Africa has only grown. Danny hopes to be a conduit for others to discover a passion for the Presence of God and for intimacy with Christ. Worship has transformed his Christian experience into a living expression of devotion. With a desire to teach, preach, and save by the truth of

²²⁶ What Yoga Poses Represent Gods? Hosh Yoga, <https://www.hoshyoga.org/what-yoga-poses-represent-gods/> (accessed 11 October 2025).

God's Word, the author hopes to reach all people for Christ. His regular podcast series is titled The Bible Study Podcasts, and he has published four books on Amazon. Contact him through thebiblestudypodcasts.com or email at drpate0715@yahoo.com

Between Protection and Participation A Somali Church Dilemma

Abdi Walalo and Aweis A. Ali

Abstract



This article explores a key question facing the emerging Somali church: Should new believers from a Muslim background be protected from struggling or compromised Christians until they mature, or should they be integrated early into the broader body of Christ? Using a real case of failed generosity in southern Somalia, two Somali Christian leaders, Aweis Ali and Abdi Walalo, share contrasting yet complementary reflections. Their

discussion examines issues of dependency, discipleship, and discernment within a fragile Christian movement emerging from Islamic Somalia.

Introduction

In 2022, Rev. Guled, a Somali Christian minister, introduced Brother Maaddeey, a Somali Christian in his fifties, to Rev. Hassan, a Somali evangelist based in a neighboring country.²²⁷ Guled intended that Hassan would encourage and equip Maaddeey and his rural Christian community.

Guled has ministered to Maaddeey, his family, and their neighbors since 1993, forming a small but strong Christian community in a farming village in southern Somalia. Over more than thirty years, he avoided bringing in external mission resources, believing that reliance on aid could weaken their faith. To safeguard them, Guled made sure that believers who previously received mission-supported scholarships, rent subsidies, or food aid remained separate from these independent congregations, mainly made up of Rahanwein and Somali Bantu clans.

This approach yielded remarkable fruit. The community, free from the temptations of missionary generosity, lived out its faith in simplicity, dignity, and unity. Proverbs 15:16 (NIV) reminds us, “Better a little with the fear of the Lord than great wealth with turmoil.”

A Generosity That Caused Problems

At Maaddeey’s request, Hassan provided him with a substantial amount of cash to support his family. Later, he provided him with resources to manage a food distribution project and discussed plans for Hassan to purchase a farm to generate

²²⁷ Guled, Maaddeey and Hassan are pseudonyms used for security reasons.

income for local believers who work as farm laborers. Maaddeey would manage the farm if the purchase were to proceed.

Unfortunately, Maaddeey, a humble farmhand and donkey driver, could not withstand the pressure and temptation that accompanied sudden access to funds and power. His status in the village rose overnight, and using Hassan's financial support, he married a second wife and later a third. The community's perception of him shifted from that of a servant of Christ to that of a man of questionable integrity. By the time Guled learned of the developments, significant spiritual and social damage had already been done.

The Backlash

The uncoordinated introduction of mission finances produced four major crises within the village:

1. Division within the Christian community: A dispute over resource allocation fractured what had been united fellowships. Maaddeey's relationship with his older Christian brother deteriorated following allegations of financial favoritism. Maaddeey sidelined his own brother, a wise, retired, ordained elder, to consolidate power. As Proverbs 13:10 (NIV) cautions, "Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice."
2. Tension with Muslim neighbors: The surrounding Muslim community accused the Christians of distributing aid unfairly to their own relatives and friends. What began as an act of love became a source of suspicion and resentment, violating Paul's admonition: "Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister" (Romans 14:13, NIV).
3. Economic disruption: The food distribution occurred during harvest season, undercutting local farmers who struggled to sell their produce. Villagers complained that they would have preferred farming tools or seeds.
4. Persecution and betrayal: Some Muslims accused Maaddeey before al-Shabab's local Islamic court, calling him "a Christian preacher who flooded the market with free food." Fearing for his life, Maaddeey denied his faith, began attending the mosque, and even opened a small Qur'anic school to prove his loyalty to Islam. The damage was spiritual as well as social; the community's Christian witness was compromised.

Seeking Wisdom

Faced with this painful reality, Aweis Ali sought a Solomonian wisdom from his longtime ministry partner, Abdi Walalo. Their conversation raised important theological and pastoral questions about discipleship, mission aid, and community relationships. Should vulnerable believers be protected from corrupt influences, or should they be integrated into the broader Christian community, trusting God to keep them safe?

Aweis Ali's Take

While I fully endorse mission funding for evangelism, discipleship, leadership training, and trade skills, I strongly oppose direct financial handouts to individual Somali believers unless coordinated with trusted church leadership. Unsupervised generosity, even with good intentions, can destroy more than it builds. Paul's approach in 2 Corinthians 8:21 (NIV) serves as a model: "We are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men."

From my perspective, the Somali church has not been harmed much by persecution, but by the "sweet poison" of dependency, what I call "the devil's candy." Once believers experience the allure of easy money, their spiritual appetite changes, entitlement replaces endurance, and faith becomes transactional.

Many Somali Christians outside Somalia have succumbed mainly to this dependency. Many anticipate receiving inflated travel budgets and stipends before attending ministry events. By contrast, believers within Somalia who have never received mission finances display remarkable spiritual vitality. They worship faithfully without rent subsidies, stipends, or food aid.

Since 1996, I have intentionally kept mostly separate what I call "clean" believers, those untouched by financial manipulation, from those who live off missionary aid. I have never flown them to foreign conferences or exposed them to donor-driven Christianity. They receive biblical teaching and pastoral care within their local contexts.

In my observation, "the devil's candy" is more dangerous than persecution. Persecution refines faith (Acts 8:1-4), but unearned resources corrode it. Scripture testifies that hardship produces endurance (Romans 5:3-4), but material indulgence produces spiritual decay. Money invested in ministry is life-giving; money handed to individuals without accountability is a silent killer of the church.

Abdi Walalo's Take

I am disappointed by the unforeseen harm caused by the generosity in Maaddeey's village. However, I do not believe that protection and isolation are lasting solutions. The problem is not generosity itself, but the lack of wisdom, accountability, and spiritual readiness. As 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV) reminds us, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

In my years of ministry, I have reflected on the tension between protection and participation. Protecting new believers from harmful influences has merit, as Becker and Simuyu argue, "The initial discipleship of an MBB is a crucial time for solidifying faith and obedience as followers of Jesus. In many contexts, it is not possible for this to take place in the open, so secret meetings (greenhouse environments) are essential. But as soon as possible, MBBs should be disciplined together with other MBBs" (Woodberry, 180). They also concede that such protection must be temporary, in 'greenhouse environments.' Faith matures in community, not in

isolation. More research is needed to wrestle with what an incubation season entails, whether time or content.

I recall mentoring a young Somali woman who had recently accepted Christ. To protect her, I kept her away from other Somali Christians for several months. When she finally joined a broader fellowship, where some believers were weak and others mature, she flourished. Later, she said, “You kept me in a fishbowl when I was meant for the ocean.”

Her words echo Jesus’ parable of the wheat and weeds (Matthew 13:24-30). The Master commands, “Let both grow together until the harvest.” A perfect church composed only of spiritually mature believers does not exist. Even in the New Testament, new converts interacted daily with flawed followers. Divisions and immorality characterized the early church in Corinth, yet Paul urged reform rather than withdrawal.

Protection has its place, but transformation requires exposure. The Holy Spirit, not human shielding, preserves new believers. Our task is to disciple and equip them to discern right from wrong. As John 17:15 (NIV) records Jesus’ prayer: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

Mission Finances

I affirm the use of financial resources for God’s glory, but they must be stewarded wisely. Aid should never be impulsive or paternalistic. In times of famine, targeted assistance is necessary to save lives. Income-generating projects and scholarships can empower believers, but they require prayerful discernment, community consultation, and mutual accountability. Proverbs 15:22 (NIV) wisely observes, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” Yet it is essential to recognize the reality of our time that, “relative to non-Muslim contexts, the Muslim world has a disproportionately large number of donors seeking partnership with a disproportionately tiny number of mature local believers.”²²⁸ (Woodberry,346)

Aweis Ali’s Conclusion

From my ministry experience, the greatest threat to the Somali church is not persecution, but moral decay fueled by dependency. When faith is tied to financial reward, it ceases to be faith. Paul’s example remains instructive: “We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you” (1 Thessalonians 2:9, NIV).

My conviction remains firm: Somali believers must be disciplined to depend on God and one another, not on foreign generosity. Separation from financially compromised believers is not elitism; it is spiritual hygiene. The church must rebuild from within, cultivating faith that stands on its own feet. Only then will the Somali body of Christ mature into a pure and resilient witness for future generations.

²²⁸ J.R. Meydan and Ramsay Harris: Are We Chocking or Nourishing Young Plants with Funds

Abdi Walalo's Conclusion

While I share Aweis' concern for purity, I fear prolonged isolation may hinder spiritual growth. Holiness matures through engagement, not escape. The church must trust God's sanctifying process even amid imperfection. We are called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), not to retreat from those who stumble.

The Somali church stands at a crossroads: between protection and participation, between fear and faith. Our calling is to build redemptive fellowships, communities that model grace, accountability, and interdependence. Only when the weak and the strong grow together can Christ's body in Somalia reflect the transforming power of the gospel. As Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) declares, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

We need to develop a robust scripture-based discipleship guide that allows us to wrestle with the reality of physical needs and our journey of sanctification. I am thankful that the Scripture is not silent on this subject.

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About the Authors

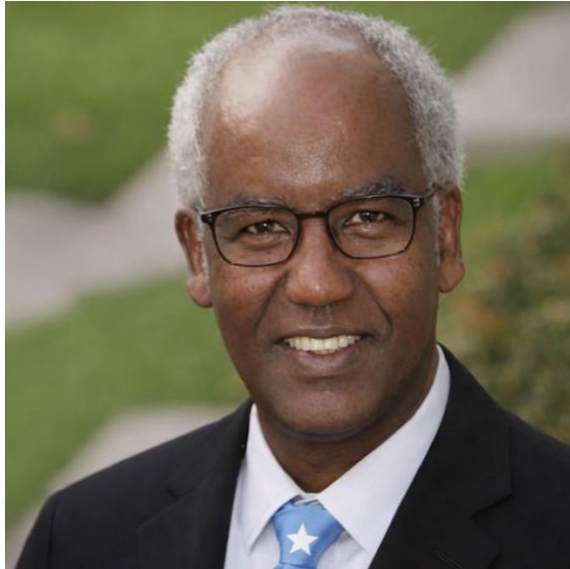
Rev. Abdi Walalo is a recognized expert in evangelism and discipleship, with a particular focus on Muslim communities. His work primarily centers on Somali populations in Africa and the diaspora. Driven by a strong missional orientation, he actively engages in outreach efforts targeting both Muslims and former Muslims. His initiatives aim to promote Christian teachings and facilitate faith development within these communities, contributing to broader religious and cultural dialogues. He can be reached at abdiandlaura@gmail.com.

Rev. Aweis Ali is a missiologist, author, and speaker. He is a passionate advocate for evangelizing nomadic pastoralists in the Somali Peninsula. He has ministered in the Muslim world for over 30 years and has lived and served in various regions, including the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa, and the United States. Aweis' research interests include the persecution of Christians, church history, and church growth in the Muslim world, Waaqism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Somali Peninsula, global paremiology, and Somali poetry. Aweis became a follower of Christ in 1986 through the ministry of SIM. He can be reached at AAli@AweisAli.com.

Walking with the Reconciler The Enduring Legacy of Ahmed Haile in a Warring Society

Andy Africanus

A Legacy That Refuses to Fade



Today, Ahmed Haile's legacy still echoes through a new generation of believers around the world, men and women who quietly and faithfully respond to God's call to bring peace to a society marked by conflict. It remains at war, not only in the physical realm but even more intensely in the spiritual. As new Somali states are formed, as people report seeing Jesus in dreams, and as some believers tragically succumb to loneliness and isolation, the reality of conflict permeates every layer of Somali life. The war is not merely external; it is internal, relational, cultural, and spiritual.

The enemy, as Scripture reminds us, is not finished stealing, killing, and destroying. Yet neither is God finished with reconciling, healing, and restoring.

Against this backdrop, the life and witness of Ahmed Haile stand as a quiet but powerful testimony that peace is possible even in places where violence, suspicion, and division seem entrenched. His legacy is not preserved in monuments or institutions alone, but in people: in the posture of those who choose humility over power, friendship over fear, and reconciliation over condemnation.

Why Ahmed Haile Still Matters Today

So how do I know that Ahmed Haile's legacy still echoes today? Because I find myself living within its influence.

At this very moment, as one of those who senses a calling to the Somali world, I am studying Teatime in Mogadishu, both in English and in Somali, as part of my language learning journey. That book is not merely a text; it is an invitation to see Somali people not as a "mission field" to be conquered but as a community to be known, respected, and loved.

Recently, I found myself rewatching a speech by Paul Marino on YouTube, in which he reminisces about walking alongside Ahmed Haile. Paul recalls entering Somali society with little understanding of its language, culture, or social rhythms. He

arrived, like so many well-meaning outsiders do, with enthusiasm but without comprehension.

Ahmed Haile responded not with impatience or superiority, but with humility. He took Paul's hand, not metaphorically, but relationally. He became his friend. He taught him Somali songs, proverbs, poetry, and the deeper meanings embedded within the culture. He welcomed him into a world that cannot be accessed through textbooks alone.

As I listened, something profound stirred in me. I found myself longing, not just admiring.

How I long for an Ahmed Haile in my own journey into Somali society and culture. How I long for many Ahmed Hailes in the lives of all who come to serve among these precious people.

Ahmed Haile did not merely "pave the way" in a strategic or organizational sense. He paved it relationally, incarnationally, and sacrificially. His way was simple, but profoundly so.

Seeing Beyond Religion to Beauty

One of the most enduring aspects of Ahmed Haile's legacy is the way he taught others to see.

He paved a way for many of us today to look beyond religious labels and ideological boundaries and to see the beauty God has placed within Somali people and their culture. He modeled a posture that refused to reduce people to their beliefs alone, without ever minimizing the fundamental theological differences that exist.

In this way, Ahmed Haile reminds me of Desmond Tutu. Tutu, too, laid deep roots of relationship within a wounded society. He worked tirelessly to bring South Africans together across racial, political, and historical divides, calling people toward forgiveness, reconciliation, and restorative justice. Neither man was naïve about evil. Neither ignored injustice nor suffering. Yet both refused to let evil have the final word.

Instead, they chose to see what others could not, or would not.

The Gift of Spiritual Sight

At this point, I find myself pausing and asking a deeper question:

Why were Ahmed Haile and Desmond Tutu able to see past the evils, without minimizing them, and still see the beauty in their people?

How could they, with such tenderness, care not only about the salvation of the lost, but also about the goodness still present within the lost?

They remind me of the prophet Elisha, who saw an army of angels when others saw only enemies. Where fear dominated the vision of many, Elisha perceived the unseen work of God.

Ahmed Haile saw God's hand at work among the Somali people and in their culture, while others could not. He perceived traces of divine beauty in poetry, hospitality, communal loyalty, and resilience, gifts that had endured centuries of hardship.

Why is that?

Reconciliation at the Heart of the Gospel

I do not claim to have an incredibly profound or novel revelation here. But for me, the answer lies in something deceptively simple: a heart committed to forgiveness and reconciliation.

This posture lies at the very core of the Gospel.

The Father did not send the Son into a sanitized, peaceful environment. He sent Him directly into a broken, warring society. Jesus became part of it. He learned the language. He entered its culture. He walked its dusty roads. And ultimately, He suffered and died within it.

God would not have done this if forgiveness and reconciliation were not central to His heart.

Perhaps, then, it is not the "spirit of Ahmed Haile" still at work today, but the Spirit of God, relentlessly reconciling the lost, that we continue to see. The same Spirit who lived in Ahmed Haile worked through him and continues to work through others who adopt the same posture.

Ahmed Haile did not invent reconciliation. He embodied it.

Walking With, Not Over, Others

One of the most radical aspects of Ahmed Haile's approach was his willingness to walk with others rather than over them.

In many mission contexts, knowledge flows in one direction: from the "trained" to the "untrained," from the outsider to the insider. Ahmed Haile inverted that model. He recognized that God had already been at work in Somali culture long before any missionary arrived. He believed that learning was not a weakness, but an act of respect.

This is especially relevant today, as cross-cultural engagement increasingly reveals the limits of Western frameworks. Sometimes the most important learning is unlearning, letting go of assumptions, fears, stereotypes, and unexamined theological baggage that hinder genuine relationships.

Ahmed Haile's life calls us to a slower, more relational way of engaging, one that prioritizes presence over productivity, listening over speaking, and friendship over strategy.

Hopes for the Future

As I reflect on Ahmed Haile's life and legacy, several hopes rise within me, hopes that shape how I pray, how I learn, and how I imagine the future of Somali Christian witness.

First, I hope to see more mature Somali brothers and sisters in Christ who are willing to take humble steps to walk alongside expatriate workers, guiding them into the beauty, depth, and complexity of Somali culture. This is not about elevating one group over another but about mutual dependence within the Body of Christ.

Second, I hope we all embrace the discipline of unlearning. Sometimes our most significant obstacle to reaching the lost is not a lack of zeal but an excess of certainty. When we unlearn, we make room for God to surprise us.

Third, I hope that God will use each of us in our own unique way, just as He used Ahmed Haile, to bring peace to warring societies, whether those wars are political, cultural, spiritual, or deeply personal.

Finally, I want to grow in my ability to see beauty, especially in places where others see only brokenness.

Salt, Light, and Presence

Following in the footsteps of these great men of reconciliation and forgiveness, and ultimately in the footsteps of a God who reconciles, I pray that we would honor them by embodying their legacy.

May we seek to reconcile what is broken.
May we forgive what seems unforgivable.

In doing so, may we become salt and light among a people who need not condemnation, but a fragrance that attracts.

A salt that enhances cultural beauty without masking it.
A gentle light that brightens the darkness without fear.

A Prayer for the Road Ahead

May we be a home for the isolated and the lonely.
May we be friends of sinners.
May we be bridges to the broken.
May we be answers to prayer.
May we be beacons of hope for the lost.
May we be peacemakers.

And may the legacy of Ahmed Haile endure, not as nostalgia, but as lived obedience, until reconciliation is no longer the exception but the norm.

About the Author

Shaped by the diverse landscapes and voices of God's creation, Andy cherishes the beauty of cultures and stories beyond his own. His life has been guided by faith, creativity, and community, with a yearning to see all people encounter life as God intends, full, abundant, rooted in hope, and centered on Christ. He dedicates each day to learning, creating, and walking alongside others as they discover their God-given strengths and calling. Whether through words, images, movement, or study, he is drawn to God's meaning, ongoing growth, and transformation by His Spirit. He affirms that God's beauty teaches us, His stories matter eternally, and His people flourish when they are genuinely connected to Him. The author can be reached at info@SomaliBibleSociety.org

A Call for Papers (CFP)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

The Somali Bible Society Journal is an online publication that accepts papers that advance understanding of the Somali Church, its history, mission, and ministry. The SBS Journal also publishes interviews, book reviews, and poetry. No particular citation style is required, as long as the author is consistent in their chosen style. Given the nature of the Somali ministry, authors may use their real names or pen names when security concerns arise.

The length of papers is negotiable, but a minimum of 2,500 words is recommended. Longer papers are appreciated. Papers must be single-spaced in Microsoft Word. Papers are accepted throughout the year. Authors are encouraged to send an abstract of about 250 words before submitting a complete paper. If your paper is already completed, we would still consider it for publication. The author should include a brief biography with their abstract or completed paper, and a photo, unless there is a security concern. The author's email address is included in the published brief bio unless requested otherwise.

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The Good Samaritan Center

As of early December 2025, we have gratefully received \$74,391 toward the \$240,000 needed to secure the building site for the Good Samaritan Center. This leaves \$165,609 to raise before the July 2026 deadline, just six months away. Each square foot of this property costs \$58 USD. By [sponsoring](#) one square foot, or more, you can help lay the foundation for the [Good Samaritan Center](#) and bring this vision

closer to reality. This ministry center will significantly expand the capacity of the Somali Bible Society, its local church partners, and An-Nour University to serve, train, and impact communities. While major gifts are urgently needed, every contribution, large or small, makes a meaningful difference. [Contact the GSC:](#)

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DCA

The Desert Camel Awards

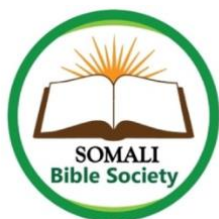
Recognizing Enduring Witness in Hard Places

The Desert Camel Awards celebrates outstanding leadership, integrity, innovation, and transformative impact across Africa and beyond. Symbolized by the strength and endurance of the camel, this prestigious honor recognizes individuals and organizations who rise above challenges and create lasting change in their communities. From humanitarian service to education, faith-based leadership, business excellence, and social development, the Desert Camel Awards shines a spotlight on Christians who lead with courage and vision.

[Nominate a deserving leader or learn more today.](https://desertcamelawards.org/)

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DCA

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VACANCIES ANNOUNCEMENT

Submission Deadline: 01 July 2026

The *Desert Camel Awards* (DCA) invites qualified, committed servant-leaders to apply for key **volunteer** ministry leadership roles. These roles are essential to advancing the mission, integrity, and continental and global impact of the *Desert Camel Awards*, which recognize exemplary Christian leadership, ministry, and service.

AVAILABLE POSITIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

President

The President provides overall vision, spiritual and strategic leadership, and governance oversight for the *Desert Camel Awards*. The President ensures that the Awards' mission, credibility, and long-term global influence are faithfully preserved and advanced.

General Secretary

The General Secretary oversees the official administration of the *Desert Camel Awards*, including institutional records, correspondence, communications, and coordination of leadership bodies, committees, and official functions.

Chief Operating Officer

The Chief Operating Officer manages the *Desert Camel Awards'* daily operations, including event coordination, logistics, organizational systems, and the implementation of strategic initiatives to ensure excellence, efficiency, and professionalism.

Chaplain

The Chaplain provides spiritual leadership, prayer support, and ceremonial guidance. The Chaplain ensures that all *Desert Camel Awards* activities uphold spiritual integrity, moral excellence, reverence, and faithfulness to biblical principles.

REGIONAL DIRECTORS

North Africa Regional Director

Leads regional engagement across North Africa by identifying, evaluating, and nominating qualified candidates who minister to Muslims and by representing the *Desert Camel Awards* throughout the region.

West Africa Regional Director

Coordinates regional nominations, candidate vetting, and stakeholder engagement to ensure that outstanding leaders and organizations that minister to Muslims in West Africa are appropriately recognized.

Central Africa Regional Director

Oversees the identification, evaluation, and recommendation of influential individuals and institutions that minister to Muslims in Central Africa for recognition by the *Desert Camel Awards*.

East Africa Regional Director

Coordinates regional outreach, nominations, and evaluations to identify and honor outstanding leaders and organizations that minister to Muslims across East Africa.

Southern Africa Regional Director

Ensures effective regional representation by leading the nomination, evaluation, and engagement processes for those who minister to Muslims across Southern Africa.

Diaspora Regional Director

Identifies and recommends those who minister to the African Muslim diaspora worldwide and promotes the mission and visibility of the *Desert Camel Awards* among those who are salt and light to global Muslim diaspora communities.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

All candidates must demonstrate a proven, fruitful record of ministry among Muslim communities, marked by spiritual maturity, integrity, and effectiveness in Gospel witness, discipleship, and compassionate service. Candidates must exhibit Christlike character, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to serve faithfully in diverse and challenging environments.

Proficiency in English is required for all candidates to ensure effective communication and coordination at the continental and global levels. In addition to English, the General Secretary and the Chief Operating Officer must be proficient in French, reflecting the multilingual nature of the *Desert Camel Awards'* operational context.

Candidates applying for Regional Director positions must be fluent in the primary working language of their respective regions. This includes, but is not limited to, French in Francophone regions, English in Anglophone regions, and Portuguese in

Lusophone regions. Such linguistic competence is essential to ensure effective regional engagement, credible representation, and meaningful participation in the nomination, evaluation, and outreach processes.

All candidates must demonstrate a spirit of humility, servant leadership, and a clear commitment to the mission, values, and integrity of the *Desert Camel Awards*.

Applicants should possess:

- Sound biblical or theological training
- Cross-cultural ministry experience
- Demonstrated leadership experience in ministry and service
- Proven character marked by humility, integrity, and Christ-centered leadership

Candidates must demonstrate a clear calling from God, a commitment to Scripture, and a passion for advancing the Kingdom of Christ with wisdom, courage, and love.

Qualified candidates from all ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and nations are encouraged to apply. The *Desert Camel Awards* affirms the biblical principle that calling, character, and faithfulness are paramount, transcending ethnicity or race.

RESIDENCE REQUIREMENT

Regional Directors must reside within the region they serve and maintain close engagement with local communities, embodying incarnational ministry in the spirit of Christ.

The President, General Secretary, Chief Operating Officer, and Chaplain may reside in any of the geographic regions served by the *Desert Camel Awards*. These officers are not restricted to a specific region but must remain actively engaged in advancing the mission, governance, and global outreach of the *Desert Camel Awards*.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The following officers collectively serve as the Governing Board of the *Desert Camel Awards*.

- President
- General Secretary
- Chief Operating Officer
- Chaplain
- All Regional Directors

All *Desert Camel Awards* leadership positions are **voluntary** and receive no financial compensation.

Please visit the DCA website to learn more about the DCA

<https://desertcamelawards.org/>

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