



Somali Bible Society Journal

Volume II, Issue 2

December 2021

Published by the Somali Bible Society, Mogadishu, Somalia

ISSN: 2709-4332

<https://www.somalibiblesociety.org/sbs-journal/>
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Table of Contents

1. The True and Living God of the Bible Stephen Thompson.....	2
2. The Righteousness of God Andrew Johnston, PhD	11
3. Distinctive Features of the Joseph Story in The Qur'an By Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman	18
4. The Dichotomy of Isa and Christ Owen Mudford.....	29
5. Persecuted Without Cause Dennis Dyvig	45
6. The Privilege of Prayer for those in Christ Si Fry.....	52
7. <i>Annalena Waa Aar</i> (Annalena the Lioness): A Poem Aweis A. Ali, PhD	69
8. A Call for Papers (CFP).....	74
9. Advertise in the SBS Journal	75

The True and Living God of the Bible

Stephen Thompson

Introduction

Several Christian writers claim that *Allah* of Islam cannot be the God of the Bible and some even reject using the name *Allah* for the God of the Bible. However Arab Christians use the name *Allah* in their Bible. Were the translators of the Arabic Bible in error? As a side issue, it is interesting that most Arabic translations of the Bible don't use 'Isa for Jesus but *Yasou*'.

When the Bible was first translated into *Bangla* (the language of the people groups of Western India and Bangladesh) most of the terms that were used were the Hindu equivalents and this included the name for God. For years very few Muslims converted to Christianity. Then in the 1970s a translation was produced which used the Muslim equivalents instead of the Hindu ones. Since then thousands have become true followers of Jesus.



Samuel Zwemer, missionary to the Arabs
Photo credit: Wikipedia

The great missionary, known as the apostle to Islam, Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952) wrote "In as far as Moslems are monotheists and in as far as Allah has many of the attributes of Jehovah we cannot put Him with the false gods."¹ In this article we will look at God as he is revealed in the Bible, including his names and his essence. This can only be a shallow dipping into an ocean but understanding who it is He is and we are in relationship to and in worship to Him is invaluable for the true disciple.

The Names of God

The original manuscripts to the Bible were written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The main languages of the Bible are Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. In the Old Testament, which is the Bible for the followers of Judaism, the common names for God are *El* or *Eloah* (and its plural form *Elohim*), *YHWH* and *Adonai*. *El* is the word used to describe a supernatural being and not just the God of Israel or the true and living God but also the "gods" of the other nations.² For the Hebrews, *El* represented the holy God who entered into covenant relationship with His people, He was the king and they were His servants. If they disobeyed then He would punish them; if they obeyed He would

¹Zwemer, S.M., The Moslem Doctrine of God, chapter 8 available at https://www.answering-islam.org/Books/Zwemer/God/chap8.htm?fbclid=IwAR2ig9UkqreFma8ztYZXQelm2_QyV_0q02InM9U8jasGb1dgmxFbzf3KFTM (accessed 26 August 2021) Zwemer also felt that the Muslim concept of God was "inadequate, incomplete, barren and grievously distorted."

² Bray, G., The New Lion Handbook Christian belief (General Editor: Alistair McGrath), Lion, 2006, p.56.

bless them. Names with El as one of their components were common in the Ancient Near East (ANE) during Abraham’s time. For example we have Methusael (Gen. 4:18) and Ishmael (Gen. 16:11). The singular form in Hebrew *Eloah* is not so common in the Bible and mostly found in the poetic books such as Job and Psalms.³ The Aramaic word for God, *Elah* in its singular and plural forms is used in the sections written in Aramaic; such as a verse in Jeremiah (10:11) and Daniel.

Elohim, which can be translated “gods” (the plural form of *El* or *Eloah*) is widely used in the Bible (2750 times) and translated as “God” (singular). Mostly this is seen as a plural of majesty⁴ but many authors think it also points to the Trinity (one God who has revealed Himself to humanity through three distinct entities).” The basic meaning behind the name *Elohim* is one of strength or power of effect. *Elohim* is the infinite, all-powerful God who shows by His works that He is the creator, sustainer, and supreme judge of the world. “Bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure—you, the righteous [*Elohim*] who probes minds and hearts (Psalm 7:9).” *Elohim* is also used for judges and rulers or people in authority (see Psalm 82:6) (and false gods (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:28)).⁵

Some important verses which use *Elohim* include:

Genesis 1:1 (ESV⁶) In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Compare this with Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Was he talking with the angels or do we have a Trinity?



Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV) “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”⁷



El is often combined with an attribute of God to make a name of God. Common ones are *El Shaddai*, *El Elyon* and *El Olam*. *El Shaddai*, translated God Almighty, is the most common of the three and means the all sufficient one. The all-powerful God who is able to accomplish whatever he wants. *El Elyon* translated as the Most High God, God is above all. When Satan rebelled against God the Bible

³ Vine, W.E., (Old Testament M.E.Unger and W. White) Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, Nelson, 1996, p 96.

⁴ IBID, p.97.

⁵ <https://www.gotquestions.org/meaning-of-Elohim.html> (accessed 12 October 2021)

⁶ English Standard Version

⁷Leake M.,Bible Study Tools, What Does Elohim Mean and Why Is This Name of God So Important? <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/elohim-supreme-one-mighty-one.html> (accessed 12 October 2021)

records this of his desire “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14 ESV). *El Olam* translated as the Everlasting God, the God of Eternity, the God of the Universe, the God of Ancient Days.⁸

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אֲדֹנָי

YHWH and *Adonai*. The word *adon* means “lord” or “master.” It is used in contrast to the word “*Ba’al*” which means “possessor” or “owner.” *Adon* or master is used as a polite address. It is used of God as being the one in authority, like a master over his people able to reward or punish: Hosea 12:14 ESV “Ephraim has given bitter provocation; so, his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds.” The related word *Adonai* has the idea of “Lord over all.” The word *YHWH* is written without its vowels

and its precise meaning debated. These days if the vowels are included it is written *Yahweh* and traditionally, it was *Jehovah* in English.⁹ For the children of Israel *YHWH* was a sacred and holy name rarely said, in the text when they met the word; they read *Adonai*. Based on Exodus 3:14-15, the name *Yahweh* is associated with the concept of being or existence.¹⁰ In the ESV translation from verse 14 “God said to Moses, “I am who I am.”¹¹ And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” 15 God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD,¹² the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

The name *YHWH* appears quite early in the Bible, Genesis 2:4 ESV “in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.” In Genesis 4:26 ESV “At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.” From the line of promise, the line of Seth, they entered into relationship with God using the name *YHWH*. In Genesis 12:8 *YHWH* is associated with the covenant with Abram (later Abraham) ESV “And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.” In Genesis, the main God Abraham and the patriarchs (Isaac, Jacob and the twelve sons of Jacob) relate to was *YHWH*. Many authors emphasis that the name *YHWH* points to God who is self-sufficient in his existence. He does not need humanity.¹³ For others, what is important is the cosmic battle where *YHWH*, the creator is overcoming the turbulent cosmos. Psalm 89:9-10 ESV “You rule the raging of the

⁸Blue Letter Bible, The Names of God in the Old Testament, https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/misc/name_god.cfm (accessed 12 October 2021)

⁹ Vine, W.E., p.140.

¹⁰ McComiskey T.E, God, names of in The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (W.E. Elwell, editor), Baker Book House, 1991, p.202.

¹¹ Or I am what I am, or I will be what I will be.

¹² In many English translations when the word LORD is spelled with capital letters, stands for the divine name, *YHWH*, which is here connected with the verb *hayah*, “to be” as in verse 14. In the Somali Bible the name is *Rabbiga*.

¹³ E.G. John Piper 10 Things “Yahweh” Means <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/10-things-yahweh-means> (accessed 18 October 2021).

sea; when its waves rise, you still them. 10 You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm."¹⁴

Important in considering God as *YHWH* is God as a relational God. While *Elohim* is God involved in the material world, for many *YHWH* was the personal and relational God who wants us and is motivated by love. He is God with us and involved in our lives.¹⁵ When the Lord Jesus described Himself as "I am" (John 8:58) he was associating Himself with *YHWH*. He was the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham, and that was a fulfilment Abraham looked forward to (John 8:56).¹⁶ In the gospel according to Saint John, the Lord Jesus often talks about himself as "I am." For example, "I am the light of the World;" "I am the bread of life;" "I am the resurrection and the life." Through these descriptions he is describing himself as God.



Some of the names of God in the New Testament are *theos*, *kurios* and *abba*. We will also briefly consider Jesus and the Holy Spirit. *Theos* is just the common Greek name in New Testament times for a god or a deity. The name was adopted by the translators of the Greek Septuagint translation of the Bible¹⁷ as being the

equivalent for *Elohim* and *YHWH*. The Christians carried on this tradition using *theos* as the main name for the one true and living God. Sometimes *theos* is used with the definite article ('the' in English 'ho' in Greek). This creates some translation issues we will not be going into here.¹⁸ *Theos* has a range of divine attributes many of which are also found in Christ. *Kurios* is the Greek for lord or the one "having power." It is similar to *adon* or *adonai* in the Old Testament. After the gospel accounts it is very seldom used of anyone except God or Jesus (often called the Lord Jesus. Acts 16:31 ESV 31 "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.")¹⁹

Abba is an Aramaic word and is found in Mark 14:36; Romans 8:16 and Galatians 4:6. In Jewish traditions, slaves were forbidden to use this term to address their masters.²⁰ The word describes the fatherhood of God and the intimate relationship we can have with Him as believers.²¹ Remember we are taught by the Lord Jesus to call God, "Our Father..." Matthew 6:9 (In this case God is *pater* the Greek word for father but of course we can use whatever name we call our father by in our mother

¹⁴Enns, P. Yahweh, Creation, and the Cosmic Battle <https://biologos.org/articles/yahweh-creation-and-the-cosmic-battle/> (accessed 18 October 2021)

¹⁵ Martin, J., 7 Meanings of Yahweh and Why It's Such an Important Name for God <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/why-it-matters-that-god-is-yahweh.html> (accessed 18 October 2021)

¹⁶ McComiskey T.E., p.202.

¹⁷ A Greek translation of the Old Testament translated some 200 years before Jesus. When a passage from the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament it usually comes from the Septuagint.

¹⁸ Vine, W.E., p.271.

¹⁹ IBID, p.379.

²⁰ IBID, p.1 (NT section).

²¹ McComiskey T.E., p.203.

tongue). Holy Spirit is also God in the New Testament and not an angel. Some verses which point to his divine nature include: eternal (Hebrews 9:14), present everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10), all-knowing (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), almighty (Luke 1:35-37) and holy (Romans 1:4).²² The Lord Jesus is also God as is shown by the term Immanuel in Matthew, the “I am” passages in John and the way He is described in the letters or epistles of the New Testament.

The Essence of God

Αββα אֱלֹהִים

The question can be: what is the essence of God or what substance is He made of? God being spirit (John 4:24) puts Him in the dimension of the unseen world, so we can expect He will not move and function like us humans. However, there are hints of another dimension in the Bible. In Exodus 33 Moses asks to see God’s glory (or his “glorious presence” as in the NLT). God tells Moses that he cannot see his face and live however he will let Moses see his back. Isaiah in Isaiah 6 claims to have seen the Lord (*Adonai*) sitting on his throne. It was a vision and he does not tell us too much about what God looks like except that it creates in him a sense of unworthiness and sinfulness.

Otherwise in the Old Testament we have some situations where it appears like God appeared as a man. An example is Genesis 18 where one of the angels could have been an early appearance of Jesus as a man.²³ The two angels with Him also appeared as men. Another is when king Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, threw Daniel’s three friends into a furnace and then sees a fourth man with them described as “the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods” (Daniel 3:25 ESV). In Christ God was “manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16) however I believe we can emphasize that we don’t worship the human Jesus but the divine Spirit who lived in the human Jesus, the one true and living God.

The attributes of God

In discussing the names of God, we have touched on many of the attributes of God. God almighty, the self-Sufficient one, the eternal one (without beginning or end), the ruler over all, the covenant God who wants to enter into relationship with us but does not need us (YHWH), God who incarnated himself in the person of Jesus and the Holy Spirit (God with us and in us since Pentecost Acts 2). Bible scholars divide the attributes of God into various groups. For the authors of Bible Study Tools, he has “incommunicable” attributes (qualities possessed by God alone) and others which are “communicable” (qualities that both God and we humans possess, though only he possesses them perfectly).²⁴

²² Biblword, Who is the Holy Spirit? https://www.biblword.net/who-is-the-holy-spirit/?gclid=Cj0KCCQjwtrSLBhCLARIsACh6RmiTgQ3jivHIZpDXJO76dcCs_MMIgQoAfUfkduJTrNbUoPdn14F4sgaAstEEALw_wcB (accessed 18 October 2021).

²³ Known by theologians as a *Christophany*

²⁴ Bible Study Tools <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/15-amazing-attributes-of-god-what-they-mean-and-why-they-matter.html> (accessed 24 October 2021).

The article on the [Bible Study Tools](#) website discusses 15 attributes of God and why they are important. We will discuss some of them here.

He is infinite, he has always existed; an attribute which is hard for us to grasp because we are limited. *He is Immutable* (he never changes). “I the LORD do not change. So, you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed” (Malachi 3:6 NIV²⁵). Muslims say this means that Jesus cannot be God because God who was not man cannot then become a man. Obviously, this verse in Malachi and the one they often quote in Numbers (23:19) are talking about how he is absolutely faithful to his promise to bless Abraham and his descendants through the line of Isaac.²⁶ In entering the human person called “Jesus,” God the divine Spirit did not change. *He Is Self-Sufficient* – He has no needs. Because God has no needs, he can always meet our needs (Ephesians 3:20). *God is Omnipotent* – He is all powerful. *Omnipotent* means to have unlimited power. Muslims argue that if God is all powerful then he had no need for the Lord Jesus to die on the cross in order to forgive us. However, he also acts according to his will and in line with his other attributes. In the Lord Jesus his goodness, love and mercy and his justice meet. As a loving God he wants to forgive us but as a just God he needs to punish us for our sins. In the cross, he himself takes our punishment.²⁷

God Is Omniscient – He Is All-Knowing. Isaiah 46:9-10 NLT²⁸ “Remember the things I have done in the past. For I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish.” Muslims then say, Jesus cannot be God because he does not know the day of his return (Matthew 24:36). Perhaps this is because by becoming a man he limited his knowledge (Philippians 2:5-8)²⁹. Or “knowing” here could be used in a different way. Words have different mean according to their context. Here “knowing” can be about “announcing” it would be the Father’s role to announce when the Son would come back.³⁰

God Is Omnipresent. Psalm 139:7-10 ESV “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.” There seems to be a difference here between Muslims and Christians. Muslims argue that God is not present everywhere except in his knowledge. Because he knows everything nothing is hidden from Him.³¹ *God Is Holy*

²⁵ New International Version

²⁶ Numbers 23:19 Good New Bible - God is not like people, who lie; He is not a human who changes his mind. Whatever he promises, he does; He speaks, and it is done.

²⁷ His love, mercy and Justice are also discussed in the Bible Study Tools article.

²⁸ New Living Translation

²⁹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-know-return.html> (accessed 24 October 2021)

³⁰ <https://carm.org/about-jesus/if-jesus-is-god-then-why-did-he-not-know-the-time-of-his-return/> (accessed 24 October 2021)

³¹ Acts 17 Apologetics, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PheMaSXhJjc&t=65s> (accessed 24 October 2021) 2018.

– He is infinitely, unchangingly perfect. The word “holy” means set apart or sacred. God is unique. It also emphasises his perfection and purity. We are to copy Him in his holiness – Matthew 5:48 ESV “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”³² Or 1 Peter 1:15-16 ESV “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” We are called to be pure, morally perfect and our lives set apart for God.

Learning about God and his names and attributes can deeply enrich our prayer lives and our worship of Him. Instead of our prayers just being a few words of thanks and confession and a long list of requests we can enter into a time of adoration and praise as we think about who He is, His names and attributes. Praise songs become more meaningful for us. Some have developed lists of names or attributes of God which they use in their prayers (a bit like Muslims use their 99 names of God). In the footnotes here I have included one a reference to one such list which comes from the Navigators in Australia.³³

Conclusion

God as Spirit is also *personal*. As a personal God He has personal capacities of intelligence, choice and emotion. As a person he response to us in mercy, grace, forgiveness and by giving us salvation. To call God “Father” is only meaningful if God is a person.³⁴ God being a person in the Bible, I believe, sets Him apart from the God of Islam. God as a person means we can and need to develop a relationship with Him.³⁵ We should relate to him as “*Aabbo*” (or maybe *Eebbe* in traditional Somali). We are his children and we can talk to Him as a loving Father, he is not far from us. We should talk to Him as our loving Father but act like we are his slaves in total submission to Him because he has our best interests at heart. We can never repay Him for His great gift of Salvation, found in the life and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! Through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ we have access to God and don’t need to go through any angels, priests or saints.

³² <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/15-amazing-attributes-of-god-what-they-mean-and-why-they-matter.html> (accessed 26 October 2021)

³³ <https://navigators.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Attributes-of-God-v2.pdf> (accessed 24 October 2021)

³⁴ Lewis G.R., God attributes of in *The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (W.E. Elwell, editor), Baker Book House, 1991, p.197.

³⁵ Tozer, A.W., *The Pursuit of God*, Christian Publications , Inc., 1948, p.13 “ God is Person and as such, can be cultivated as any person can.” Tozer’s book is a classic and must read.

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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 the people with water and agricultural projects. Later they lived in Addis Ababa where he managed the *Codka Nolosha Cusub* radio programme, ran a discipling programme and was an elder at the International Evangelical Church. At present Stephen and Rachel live in a multicultural suburb in Auckland, New Zealand. Stephen has a bachelor degree in agricultural science, MA (English Bible) and a DipGrad (religious studies and social anthropology).

The Righteousness of God

Andrew Johnston, PhD

In this short paper I will be looking at the subject of the righteousness of God. First, we will consider the character and nature of God Himself. Righteousness is not merely one of His characteristics or attributes. It is who He is; it is one of His names. Second, we shall consider why this presents a problem to us. Ever since the Fall, human beings have been inherently sinful and, therefore, separated from a righteous and holy God. Third, we will consider God's solution to the problem – Himself! He, through His Son, Jesus Christ, becomes our righteousness.

Part 1 – God is Righteous

What is God like? What sort of person is He? How is the Christian God, the God of the Bible, the God who is Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – different from all other “gods”. The American theologian Wayne Grudem in his ***Systematic Theology*** gives us an extensive list of the different attributes of God. God is (in no particular order): Spirit, Invisible and everywhere, All-knowing, All-powerful, Wise, Truthful, Good, Love, Merciful, Gracious, Patient, Holy, Peace, Jealous, Wrathful, Righteous and Just.

What does it mean that God is a righteous God? In both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the words for righteous and just are from the same word group. Moses describes God as “A faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright He is” (Deuteronomy 32:4). The idea is that God is a judge, indeed, He is the supreme judge of all. As judge of all He is supremely fair and equitable. There is no bias, twistedness or distortion of justice in Him. He will always do what is right. We see this in the story of Abraham and his intercession for Sodom. Sodom is a city full of sin and rebellion against God. However, because his nephew Lot is living in Sodom with his family, Abraham begins to pray and to intercede for Sodom. He asks God if He will spare judgment against Sodom if there are 50 righteous people in the city.

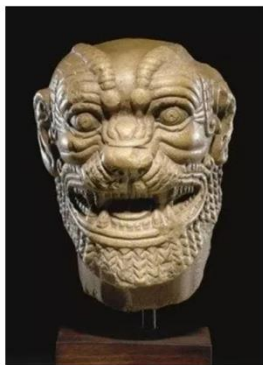
God hears Abraham's prayer and agrees that if 50 righteous people can be found then Sodom will be spared. Abraham, spared on by God's mercy, continues to pray and eventually God agrees to spare Sodom if only 10 righteous people can be found. In this context Abraham makes a very important declaration – “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right” (Genesis 18:25).

Because God is judge, the supreme and ultimate judge of the whole earth, then He will, as this ultimate judge, always act righteously or justly. See how, in this story, the concepts of righteousness and justice are extrinsically bound together.

Because God is the creator & we are His creatures we have no right to argue with God or challenge His justice and righteousness. This is not only where Abraham lands when he is making his representations in “the court of Heaven”. It is where Job finds himself at the end of his story. Job was a righteous man, one who was “blameless and upright, who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). Nevertheless, unspeakably awful things happened to Job. He lost everything except his own life. His whole family died, he was reduced to poverty and he became chronically sick. God had allowed Satan to test Job, fully confident that Job would not curse God in his suffering as Satan claimed he would. Did this mean that God was unjust or unrighteous because bad things had happened to a good person? By no means! In fact, God specifically underlines His righteousness, His justice as judge of all the earth at the end of the story:

“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty... Will you ever put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?” (Job 40:2 & 8).

Jonah dares to question God’s justice and is severely rebuked by the Lord as a result. God calls Jonah to preach judgment against the city of Nineveh. Jonah not only did not obey God, he actively disobeyed. He ran in the opposite direction. He was not happy with God at all. He knew that if he preached judgment and Nineveh repented then God, as a God of mercy, would spare Nineveh. That was the last thing Jonah wanted. He, as a good Jew, was well aware of the terrible sin of this capital city of the evil empire of Assyria. He wanted them punished. He preferred his justice to God’s justice.



Pazuzu, King of the demons in Assyria and Babylon.
Photo credit: *Classical Wisdom*

A few years ago, I visited the Assyrian section of the British Museum in London. As I walked through reconstructions of the gates of Nineveh, I had more than a little sympathy with Jonah. I was surrounded by demonic carvings of idols and false gods. I don’t think I have ever experienced the presence of evil so powerfully. But our idea of justice is not God’s. His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). We are clay jars and He is the potter (Romans 9:20-21). We have no right, therefore, to question Him or resist His perfect justice.

Part 2 – The Problem of Sin

The problem of sin dominates the Bible story from Genesis to Revelation with the exception of the first two chapters of Genesis and the last two chapters of Revelation. God created human beings without sin, without shame and reflecting His glory. Adam and Eve, reflecting the fact that they were made in God’s image, were righteous like their creator. Tragically, the story quickly descends into rebellion against God. Adam and Eve disobey God by taking of that which God had specifically forbidden. From that point on in the history of the human race, there is a separation between a holy and righteous God and sinful human beings. The rest of the Bible narrative is the story of God’s intervention to restore this broken relationship.

Shortly after Adam and Eve messed up, God in his grace and mercy dresses them in animal skins, covering their shame (Genesis 3:21). Right from the start, we are pointed to the day when an innocent will be sacrificed to deal with the sin of the human race. Fast forward then to the end of the story. In Revelation 19:8 we, the bride of Christ, the people of God, are clothed in “the finest of pure white linen” (Revelation 19:8) as a beautiful bride prepared for her bridegroom. Sin is no longer simply covered. It has been removed forever through the blood of the Lamb.

Lots of people imagine that the Old Testament is a story of God’s law and the New Testament is a story of God’s grace. Hence, they see the Old Testament God, like the Protestant reformer Martin Luther (see below) did, as a God who primarily is a God who, because He is righteous, judges our sin. Thus, the righteousness of God is something to be feared. Then we get to the New Testament and God is finally revealed as a God of grace, a God who forgives our sin through Jesus.

This is not a very helpful way of viewing things. Scripture flows together as one whole story. In Genesis 15:6 we have one of the most important verses in the whole Bible:

“And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.” Being made right with God is on the basis of our trust in him, not on the basis of our performance. Paul makes much of this in his letter to the Romans, especially in chapter 4. Paul points out that it was faith that counted Abraham as righteous, not his keeping of the Law and, in particular, circumcision. Circumcision was a mark of the covenant, that is, a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous (Romans 4:11).

Much of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) is about how Israel as the people of God relate to a God who is a righteous God. Israel is called to be holy. Nowhere is this better seen in the book of Leviticus:

“You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:1). Leviticus is a book full of laws and regulations about every area of human life and how humanity relates to God. There are sections about offerings to God in worship and about the worship and work of priests and mediators between God and the rest of humanity. There are chapters about which animals God’s people can eat and should definitely not eat. There are parts about purity – childbirth, skin diseases, clothing, skin diseases and houses. There are regulations about bodily discharges, sexual practices and, most importantly, about atonement for sin, that is, how a holy God makes provision for forgiveness through animal sacrifice. No one can read the book of Leviticus without realising that God is a holy God and therefore, as human beings, we need to tread carefully in His presence.

The high point of the book of Leviticus is chapter 16. Here God shows Israel how a righteous judge deals with sin so that He can live in relationship with His people. Sin cannot merely be excused. It must be paid for. Aaron, the high priest, takes two

goats. One goat is killed and its blood is sprinkled over the mercy seat, the golden covering of the Ark of the Covenant, the box which contained the 10 Commandments. As the blood was sprinkled, sin was “atoned for”. This means that the righteous anger of a holy God, the supreme judge of sin is placed not on Israel but on the goat. Theologians call this “penal substitution” – there is a legal penalty paid by the goat for the sins of the people.

The second goat has hands laid on it by Aaron and the sins of Israel are transferred onto the goat as it is cast out into the wilderness. This goat is the “scapegoat”. Of course, all of this points forward to Jesus. He is both the greater high priest and the two goats all rolled into one. He makes a sacrificial offering of His own life as God both executes His justice upon Jesus in our place and He bears our sin and is therefore cast out of the camp. The writer to the Hebrews has much to say on this subject (see Hebrews 4:14-16, 9:11-14, 10:11-14 & 13:12-13).

Israel’s story does not make for happy reading for most of the Old Testament. She has become the people of God. She is intended to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Time and time again she failed to live in the good of what God had provided for her. She was rebellious and disobedient in the desert and spent 40 years more than she needed to in the wilderness. Israel descended into idolatry at Mount Sinai, building a calf idol with the gold they had taken from Egypt and then refused to believe the promises of God when the 12 spies checked out the land flowing with milk and honey. Even when she entered the Promised Land of Canaan, she failed to drive out all the other nations and, consequently, fell into idolatry, copying the worship of the people groups around her. By the time of the book of Judges, Israel got into a vicious circle of sin, idolatry, judgment, repentance, restoration and then sin and so the cycle repeats. Judges like Gideon and Samson look to restore righteousness to the nation but are themselves very imperfect saviours.

The high point of Israel’s history is the reign of King David, “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). David’s reign, despite his adultery with Bathsheba, is surely the moment in the whole of the Old Testament when God’s people live in right relationship with Him. However, within a generation Israel has backslidden in idolatry as Solomon marries foreign wives that lead him astray. At the end of Solomon’s reign Israel is judged and divided into two. From there, things go from bad to worse.

The northern kingdom is conquered by the Assyrians in 722BC and Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, the southern kingdom, is conquered by the Babylonians in 587BC.

Despite this sordid and sorry tale, Scripture is full of prophetic promises. God promises that Israel will have a new covenant, a new heart and a new spirit (see Jeremiah 31:33-34 & Ezekiel 36:22). One of the greatest of these promises comes in Jeremiah 23:5-6:

“For the time is coming,”
says the Lord,
“when I will raise up a righteous descendant
from King David’s line.
He will be a King who rules with wisdom.

He will do what is just and right throughout the land.

⁶ And this will be his name:

‘The Lord Is Our Righteousness.’
In that day Judah will be saved,
and Israel will live in safety.

Part 3 – God’s solution: Jesus

The joy of the promised new covenant is not simply that God is righteous or that He calls His people to be righteous. Rather, He promises that He will be our righteousness. Another promise comes in Habakkuk 2:4, a passage that the Apostle Paul quotes in Romans 1:17, “The just / righteous person will live by faith” (Romans 1:17). All of this is, of course, fulfilled in Jesus.

In Christ, the righteousness of God is not a standard to be lived up to. It is an imputed righteousness, a righteousness which is credited to our account on the basis of what Christ has done. For much of the history of the Christian Church this wonderful truth that I am declared righteous because of what Jesus has done and thus the justice / righteousness of God is satisfied was lost. So often the Church has confused the work of justification with the process of sanctification. I am justified / declared righteous by God based on what Christ achieved on the Cross.

“He was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5) and this was the central core of God’s righteousness and justice: -

“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him; He has put Him to grief.” (Isaiah 53:10). Sanctification, the process of me being transformed to become more and more like Jesus is a lifelong work of the Holy Spirit that occurs after I have been justified.

To fully understand the joy of knowing that the Lord is our righteousness, it may be helpful to journey with Martin Luther in his world-changing discovery of justification (made / declared righteous) by faith. Luther had spent the whole of his adult life up until the moment he is describing (he was probably about 35 years old when this happened) believing and living like his salvation was very much dependent on his “good works”. Only when God saw him trying his very hardest and best would God give him grace through which he might become righteous. However, no matter how hard he tried, Luther knew it was not good enough. Hence, he came to understand God first and foremost as judge and God’s righteousness as an unattainable standard. Hence, he was doomed to eternal punishment. The Gospel was not Good News it was actually bad news! It was only when he realised, through reading Romans 1:17, that he was declared righteous / justified on the basis of faith in what

Jesus had already done, did he know that he had peace with God. Heaven's justice and righteousness have been met in Jesus.

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardour for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1:17, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus, I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [the] merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. (Martin Luther writing in 1545 describing his conversion experience 25 years earlier)

For Luther, this is the very essence of the Gospel that he had rediscovered. He called this "the great exchange" on the basis of 2 Corinthians: -
"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus takes our sin and punishment and in exchange we receive His perfect righteousness. The story of Jacob and Esau helps us understand what is happening. Jacob wears the clothes of the son his father loves to receive the blessing of the father. Of course, in Jacob's case, the whole thing is a trick, a con, made possible because his father is almost blind. For us, there is no trick. Heaven's justice has been fully meted out on Jesus at the Cross. He willingly bore our sin and shame so we might, in exchange, receive His perfect righteousness.

This sounds almost scandalous to our ears. Paul writes: -

“And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Romans 4:5)

Ungodly people, people like you and me, are “counted righteous” on the basis of what someone else (Jesus) has done by the judge of the whole universe who executes perfect justice and is completely righteous. But that is, indeed, the scandal of the Gospel. And just as sin dominates the landscape of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation so too does justification by faith. Abraham is counted righteous on the basis of his faith in God long before he was circumcised in obedience to Him. Similarly, we too are declared righteous on the basis of what Jesus has done long before we do anything in obedience to Him. God is righteous and, through Jesus, we get to share in His righteousness.

In conclusion, the righteousness of God, far from something to cause fear in our hearts, is a glorious opportunity for overflowing worship. To restore us to Himself and to make us righteous as He is righteous, God became man. This God-man died a substitutionary death, the death of a redeeming lamb. His righteousness is now our righteousness through faith in His glorious sacrifice.

About the author



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Distinctive Features of the Joseph Story in The Qur'an

By Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman



Somalis, like other Muslims, honor Joseph. Many have been given his name: Yusuf. Joseph holds a distinctive place in the Qur'an, even though he is mentioned in only three places. This article looks at the way the Qur'an deals with all references to Joseph, particularly the surah that bears his name. It then examines similarities to and differences from the biblical story. Finally, it considers Jewish legends about Joseph and how they relate to *Surah Yusuf*.

In *Surat al-An'am* 6:83-84, Joseph is listed among ten well-known Old Testament persons. Verse 83 says, "We [God] raise in degrees whomsoever We will."¹ Then verse 84 says that God guided each one, and therefore each one was rewarded for doing good. This verse tells nothing of Joseph's story; it only hints that Joseph, like his great-grandfather Abraham, was raised in degrees. The phrase "raise in degrees" refers specifically to Abraham—and by implication, to Joseph and the others who are listed along with him. "Raise in degrees" may refer to degrees of provision and power in this life, or degrees of knowledge and wisdom, or degrees of prophethood.²

In *Surat al-Mu'min* 40, starting with verse 23, we read that God sent Moses to Pharaoh "with Our signs and a manifest authority." Pharaoh threatened to kill Moses, but "a believing man from the House of Pharaoh" accepted the "clear proofs" Moses brought (verse 28) and warned the people against rejecting the message of Moses or they would face God's terrible judgment (verses 30-33). He then said, "And Joseph brought you clear proofs before; yet still you were in doubt regarding that which he brought unto you, so much so that when he perished, you said, 'God will not send a messenger after him.' Thus does God lead astray whosoever is a prodigal doubter." (verse 34). Joseph's "clear proofs" are sometimes thought to be his ability to interpret dreams, or his argument that there is only one God (*Surah Yusuf* 12:39-40). The people of Egypt thought that God would not send a messenger (*rasul*) to the Egyptians after Joseph died, but they were wrong; Moses was now standing before them, and he, like Joseph, brought "clear proofs."

Now we come to *Surah Yusuf* (Surah 12). This surah is a lengthy narrative, retelling the story of Joseph that is found in Genesis 37 and 39-47, adding some details, changing some, and leaving out others. It is "the longest and most continuous single

¹ All Qur'anic quotations are taken from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, editor-in-chief, *The Study Quran*. New York: HarperOne, 2015. All biblical references are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL: 2001.

² *The Study Quran*, page 371.

narrative in the Quran.”³ Like other parts of the Qur’an, the story is told as though God himself is speaking. Verse 3 says, “We [God] recount unto thee the most beautiful of stories, though before it thou [Muhammad] wert among the heedless.” Various explanations have been given why it is “the most beautiful of stories”:

- It is an entertaining story told in a beautiful manner with eloquent language.
- It provides a beautiful example of the difficulties and benefits of living morally when confronted with temptation.
- It deals with numerous aspects of life, from the mundane to the spiritual.
- *The Study Quran* says, “Perhaps more than any other Quranic narrative, the story of Joseph has supplied material for an astonishing array of artistic, literary, and spiritual works in the Islamic tradition.”⁴

But most importantly, the story of Joseph serves the same purpose as stories about other prophets in the Qur’an. They are all meant to encourage Muhammad. His experience is not unlike their experiences. When other prophets were given a message from God, they endured hardships, rejection, and persecution, but God did not forsake them. The story of Joseph encouraged Muhammad to believe that he would eventually succeed in his work and that he too would be raised in degrees, like Joseph was raised. Verse 110 explicitly mentions this emphasis: “Till, when the messengers despaired and thought they were deemed liars, Our help came unto them, and whomsoever We willed was saved.”

When *Surah Yusuf* was revealed to the Muslim community, it was a difficult time for both Muhammad and his followers. They suffered abuse at the hands of the pagans of Mecca. “The most beautiful of stories” was meant to encourage them. Later, Muhammad and his followers completed the *hijrah*, the migration to Yathrib (*Medina al-Nabi*) where they escaped persecution and established the Muslim community (*ummah*).

We return to verse 3 in *Surah Yusuf*, where it says, “We [God] recount unto thee the most beautiful of stories, though before it thou [Muhammad] wert among the heedless.” What does the phrase “before it thou wert among the heedless” mean? It means that before this surah was revealed, Muhammad was unaware of the full story and its implications. He may have heard stories about Joseph from Jews during this late Meccan period, but the surah claims he was not yet aware of the full story as described here nor its implications for himself and the early Muslim community. Verse 7 gives an additional purpose for the story. It says, “Certainly in Joseph and his brothers there are signs for the inquiring.” These “signs” include moral lessons to be learned, especially lessons concerning envy and lust. The story also reminds the reader that God ultimately is in control of the future. When compared with the biblical account, *Surah Yusuf* in most cases follows biblical chronology as well as the order of dreams. But there are also quite a few distinctive features to the Joseph story.

³ *The Study Quran*, page 589.

⁴ *The Study Quran*, page 590.

Some are minor. Others are not. Now we will look at these differences, marked by italics:

- *None of the brothers of Joseph are mentioned by name in this surah.*
- *Joseph tells only his father the dream of the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down to him. His father then tells him not to reveal this dream to his brothers. (vss.4-5) In the biblical account, Joseph tells the dream to his brothers. (Genesis 37:9-11)*
- *When Joseph was approaching his brothers, “One brother said, ‘Slay not Joseph, but cast him into the depths of the well, that some caravan might pick him up...’” (verse 10) The biblical account offers a different reason for casting Joseph into the well. Reuben told his brothers not to kill Joseph, but to cast him into a pit (well), planning “that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.” (Genesis 37:22) Reuben did not expect Joseph to be taken by a caravan.*
- *The brothers asked Jacob to “Send him [Joseph] forth with us tomorrow, to frolic and play. We shall surely be his keepers.” (verse 12) Before Joseph went with his brothers, Jacob said, “I fear that the wolf may eat him, while you are heedless of him.” (vs. 13) In the biblical account, Joseph’s father Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers; his brothers did not ask Jacob to send Joseph with them. (Genesis 37:12-20) There is no mention of Jacob fearing that an animal would eat Joseph if he was allowed to visit his brothers.*
- *When the brothers put Joseph into the well, God reveals to Joseph, “Verily thou wilt inform them of this affair of theirs, when they are unaware.” (vs. 15) In the biblical account, there is no indication that Joseph understood why God allowed this to happen. It is only near the end of the story, when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, that Joseph showed that he understood God’s purpose. He told his brothers, “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.” (Genesis 45:7-8) After his father’s death, Joseph told his brothers, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” (Genesis 50:20)*
- *When the brothers returned to their father without Joseph, it says: “And they brought forth his shirt with false blood. He [Jacob] said, ‘Nay, your souls have seduced you in this matter. Beautiful patience! And God is the One Whose help is sought against that which you describe.’” (verse 18) In the Qur’anic account, Jacob grieves for the loss of Joseph, but he does not fully believe that Joseph was killed; he holds out hope that Joseph is still alive. (Al Baidawi*

surmised that Jacob did not believe his sons, because the shirt was bloody but not torn.)⁵ In the biblical account, Jacob is not optimistic. When Jacob saw the torn robe, he said, “It is my son’s robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.” (Genesis 37:33)⁶

- *The Qur’an says that Joseph was discovered in the well when a caravan passed by; he was not sold by the brothers: “And then a caravan came along and sent their water carrier, and he let down his bucket. He said, ‘Good news! Here is a boy!’” (verse 19)* In the Biblical account, Joseph was not abandoned in the well and then discovered by a caravan. Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it that we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites... And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver” (Genesis 37:26-28).
- *After Joseph was sold to Potiphar in Egypt, the Qur’an records, “The man from Egypt who bought him said unto his wife, ‘Give him honorable accommodation. It may be that he will bring us some benefit, or that we may take him as a son.’” (vs. 21)* There is no biblical reference that Potiphar thought he might adopt Joseph as a son.
- *Potiphar’s wife tries to seduce Joseph. This surah makes clear that Joseph was tempted, even though he resisted the urge: “She indeed inclined toward him, and he would have inclined toward her, had he not seen the proof of his Lord.” (vs. 24)* The Bible is silent concerning whether Joseph was seriously tempted with the offer of illicit sex or not.
- *The Qur’an fills in details about the attempted seduction by Potiphar’s wife and Joseph’s escape. She locked the doors. (vs. 23) Joseph fled and they raced to the door. She tore Joseph’s shirt from behind. Then they encountered her master at the door.” (vs. 25)* In the biblical account, there is no reference to a locked door. Neither is there a reference to the shirt being torn from behind, although it could be inferred from the fact that “he fled out of the house.” (Genesis 39:13) It is assumed that he did not flee while facing her.

⁵ George Sale, *The Koran or Alcoran of Mohammed with Explanatory Notes and Preliminary Discourse*. London: Fred Warne and Co., n.d., page 189.

⁶ Although the Bible does not explicitly say that Jacob held out hope that his son Joseph was alive, there is a hint of this in Genesis 42:36. Jacob says, “Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more...” (ESV Bible) Robert Alter comments on this passage: “Jacob’s equation of Joseph and Simeon with the verb ‘is no more’ teeters ambiguously between two possibilities: either he gloomily assumes that Simeon is already as good as dead, or, despite his protestations of grief, he clings to the hope that Joseph, like Simeon, is absent, not dead.” (Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: a translation with commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, p. 245.)

These details do not contradict the biblical account. But the statement that Joseph and Potiphar's wife "encountered her master at the door" disagrees with Genesis. According to Genesis 39:13-18, after Joseph fled from the house, she accused him to the men of the house, and "Then she laid up his [Joseph's] garment by her until his master came home.

- *The Qur'an adds the following details: "Some of the women of the city said, 'The viceroy's wife sought to lure her slave boy from himself! He has filled her with ardent love. Truly we consider her to be in manifest error.' So, when she heard of their plotting, she sent for them, and prepared a repast for them, and gave each of them a knife. And she said [to Joseph], 'Come out before them!' Then when they saw him, they so admired him that they cut their hands and said, 'God be praised! This is no human being. This is naught but a noble angel!'" (vss. 30-31) The Bible records that "Joseph was handsome in form and appearance," but it says nothing about other women being so enthralled with his beauty that they cut their hands when admiring him.*
- *The Qur'an explains why Joseph was cast into prison after Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of attempted rape. He asked to be put in prison to escape attempted seductions: "He said, 'My Lord! Prison is dearer to me than that to which they [the women who saw Joseph] call me. If Thou dost not turn their scheming away from me, I shall be inclined toward them and be among the ignorant.'" (vs. 33) "Then it occurred to them, after they had seen the signs [indications of Joseph's innocence], that they should imprison him for a time." (vs. 35) The biblical account simply says, "As soon as his [Joseph's] master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, 'This is the way your servant treated me,' his anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison..." (Genesis 39:19-20) The most obvious reading of the biblical text would suggest that the master's anger was kindled against Joseph, but that is not said explicitly. It is also possible, as the Qur'anic passage implies, that the master's anger was kindled against his wife for her foolish behavior, and that he put Joseph in prison to separate her from Joseph and to silence rumors about her behavior. This is a case where there is no obvious contradiction; rather, it is an alternative interpretation.*
- *The dreams of the king's cupbearer and baker are summarized in a single verse (36). Interestingly, the Qur'anic order of these two dreams follows the same order as that found in Genesis 40.*
- *Joseph preached that there is only one God to the prisoners before he interpreted the dreams of the cupbearer and baker. (verses 37-40) There is no mention of this in Genesis.*

- *When the king's cupbearer was released from prison and restored to his position, he was supposed to mention Joseph to the king. "But Satan caused him to forget to make mention to his lord. So, he remained in prison for several years." (verse. 42).* There is no mention in Genesis that Satan caused the cupbearer to forget Joseph.
- *The king had two dreams which are summarized in a single verse. (43) The Qur'anic order of these two dreams once again follows the same order as that found in Genesis 41.*
- *Here the story temporarily breaks with biblical chronology. In the Qur'an, the chief cupbearer listened to the king's dream. Then the cupbearer went to Joseph in prison and learned the interpretation of the dream. After that he returned to tell the interpretation to the king. Finally, the king asked for Joseph to be brought to him. (vss. 43-50) In the Genesis account, the king sent for Joseph, and Joseph personally gave the king the interpretation of the dreams (Genesis 41).*
- *In the Qur'anic story, when the king asked for Joseph to be brought to him, Joseph refused until his innocence concerning Potiphar's wife was proven. The Qur'an says, "So when the messenger came to him [Joseph], he said, 'Return to your lord and ask him, 'What of the women who cut their hands? Surely my Lord knows well their scheming.' He said, 'What was your purpose when you sought to lure Joseph from himself?' They said, 'God be praised! We know no evil against him.' The viceroy's wife said, 'Now the truth has come to light. It was I who sought to lure him from himself, and verily he is among the truthful.'" (verses 50-51) After this, Joseph appeared before the king. (verse 54) There is no mention of this in Genesis.*
- *We read in the Qur'an: "And the king said, 'Bring him [Joseph] to me, that I might reserve him exclusively for myself.' Then when he had spoken with him, he said, 'Truly this day thou shalt be of high rank and trusted in our presence.' He [Joseph] said, 'Set me over the storehouses of the land. Truly I am a skilled keeper.'" (vs. 55) In the Qur'anic story, Joseph asks to be set over the storehouses rather than the king suggesting it. In the Genesis account, it is the opposite: "And Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find a man like this, in whom is the spirit of God?' The Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne shall I be greater than you.'" (Genesis 41:38-40)*

- *In the Qur'an, there is no mention of Joseph storing up food during the seven years of plenty or distributing food during the seven years of famine before the brothers came.*
- *When the famine forced Joseph's brothers to go to Egypt to buy food, the story is somewhat different from the Genesis account. After they bought food in Egypt, they returned to Jacob and said, "The measure has been withheld from us," referring to the 11th load of food that would have been Benjamin's, if he had gone with them the first time. (verse 63) The brothers said to Jacob, "Now we can provide for our family, and keep watch over our brother, while we get another camel-load—these are meager rations!" (verse 65) Genesis makes no mention of the 11th load, nor that the rations were meager.*
- *Jacob finally agreed to send Benjamin along with his other sons to Egypt to buy more food. Jacob told his sons, "I will not send him [Benjamin] forth with you till you give me a solemn pledge before God that you will surely bring him back to me, unless you are surrounded.' So when they gave their solemn pledge, he said, 'God is Guardian over what we say.' (verse 66) And he said, 'O my sons! Enter not by one gate, but enter by separate gates.'" (verse 67) Commentators say they were to enter separate gates to avoid the evil eye of envy, since the brothers were all very handsome. Genesis makes no mention that the brothers were commanded to enter the city by separate gates.*
- *When Joseph's goblet—called "the goblet of the king"—was discovered in Benjamin's bag, and Benjamin was accused of theft, the brothers said, "If he has stolen, a brother of his has stolen aforetime," referring to Joseph stealing something in the past. (verse 77) According to tradition, this is a "reference to Joseph, who, when he was younger, is said to have stolen an idol from his maternal grandfather, and destroyed it, lest it be worshipped..."⁷ In Genesis, there is no mention of Joseph ever having stolen anything.*
- *The brothers returned to Jacob without Benjamin or Reuben, the oldest son. (verses 80-82) Then they made a third trip to Egypt. (verses 87-88) At that time Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. (verse 90) Genesis only records two trips to Egypt by the brothers.*
- *Joseph sent his brothers to tell Jacob that he was alive, and that the family should all come to him in Egypt. To prove to his father that he was still alive, Joseph told his brothers, "Take this shirt of mine and cast it upon my father's face; he will come to see." When the brothers began their journey from Egypt, their father said, "Truly I sense the scent of Joseph, if you think me not*

⁷ See *The Study Quran*, page 609.

senile!” (verses 93-94) Jacob was blind. But “when the bearer of glad tidings came, he cast it [the shirt] upon his face and he was restored to sight.” (verse 96) Neither the shirt, nor the scent, nor Jacob’s blindness are mentioned in Genesis.

- The Qur’an says that when the family arrived in Egypt, Joseph “drew his parents close to himself...and he raised his parents up to the throne.” (vss. 99-100) But according to Genesis, Joseph’s mother had died long before that time when she was giving birth to Benjamin. (Genesis 35:16-18)

The Qur’an concludes the story of Joseph by saying, “It is not a fabricated account; rather it is a *confirmation* of that which came before it, and an *elaboration* of all things, and a *guidance* and a mercy for a people who believe.” (verse 111) A close reading of *Surah Yusuf* leads us to raise a question: *How should we view the parts of this surah that are elaborations on the Genesis story?* Sometimes the surah adds details to the Genesis story without contradicting the Bible, but sometimes this surah disagrees with Genesis in details.

To answer this, we need to examine Jewish Midrash and Aggadah (also spelled Haggadah). Midrash literature are ancient rabbinic interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, sometimes containing stories. Aggadah are ancient interpretations of the Hebrew Bible in narrative form. The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably.⁸ Long ago Jewish teachers examined details of the biblical text with a desire to make the stories more dramatic, more interesting. Sometimes the Bible left questions from the reader unanswered, such as where Cain got his wife, and the storytellers answered these questions by filling in details. Sometimes they even created details that seemed to contradict the plain meaning of the scripture narrative, such as when they made Jacob seem especially honorable by fooling his brother Esau.

You can find many of these Midrash/Aggadah in four volumes of *The Legends of the Jews* by Louis Ginzberg.⁹ I wish to mention a few of these Jewish legends about Joseph. They help us see that the Qur’an was not alone in elaborating and interpreting distinctive features of this story. Many of these legends existed before Muhammad was born. Some legends may have been influenced later by the Qur’an itself. But there was definitely a sharing back and forth of legends between Jews and Muslims. Muslims called such legends that existed outside the Qur’an, *Isra’ilyyat*.¹⁰

⁸ Midrash and Aggadah - Biblical Studies - Oxford Bibliographies

⁹ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. (The set includes seven volumes, the last three being notes and sources for the legends.)

¹⁰ Ibn Katheer especially used many of these legends in his *Stories of the Prophets*. See the edition translated by Husain Maqbool, Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing house, 2011. Ibn Katheer also referred to the Bible extensively, even though he wrote, “Those who ‘bear a heavy burden’ are those who turn away from the Qur’an and follow some other source for guidance.” (page 256) Where he found the Bible and these legends to suit his purposes, he used them; where they seemed not to fit with the Qur’an, he rejected them.

In *Surah Yusuf*, Jacob thought his son Joseph was still alive. A Jewish legend taught the same thing. Ginzberg summarized the legend this way: “It is a law of nature that however much one may grieve over the death of a dear one, at the end of a year consolation finds its way to the heart of the mourner. But the disappearance of a living man can never be wiped out of one’s memory. Therefore, the fact that he was inconsolable made Jacob suspect that Joseph was alive, and he did not give entire credence to his sons.”¹¹ “Jacob even suspected that Joseph was in Egypt. His prophetic spirit, which forsook him during the time of his grief for his son, yet manifested itself now and again in dim visions...”¹²

We saw in *Surah Yusuf* that Joseph was seriously tempted by Potiphar’s wife. We read the same in a Jewish legend. Ginzberg writes that Joseph came from work, and Zuleika had made herself beautiful to tempt Joseph when they were alone. “Then Zuleika stood before him suddenly in all her beauty of person and magnificence of raiment, and repeated the desire off her heart. It was the first and last time that Joseph’s steadfastness deserted him, but only for an instant.” He fled from the house. “But hardly was he outside when the sinful passion again overwhelmed him, and he returned to Zuleika’s chamber... Sobered again, Joseph started to escape from his mistress, but Zuleika caught him by his garment... Joseph ran out leaving a piece of his garment in the hands of Zuleika.”¹³ (In the *Babylonian Talmud Seder Nashim*, more details are given as to how far Joseph was willing to let his temptation lead him.)¹⁴

We saw in *Surah Yusuf* that women of the city cut their hands as they admired Joseph’s beauty. Ginzberg writes that Potiphar’s wife invited women to her home for a banquet. She gave them oranges and knives. She “then ordered Joseph to appear, arrayed in costly garments, and wait upon her guests. When Joseph came in, the women could not take their eyes off him, and they all cut their hands with the knives, and the oranges in their hands were covered with blood, but they, not knowing what they were doing, continued to look upon the beauty of Joseph without turning their eyes away from him.”¹⁵

We saw in *Surah Yusuf* that Potiphar did not believe his wife was innocent or that Joseph was guilty. Once again, we see something similar in the Jewish legends. Ginzberg writes that when Potiphar and his wife were intimate together, she insisted that Joseph be punished for his lewd attack against her. Then, “God opened the mouth of Zuleika’s child, a babe of but eleven months, and he spoke to the men that were beating Joseph, saying, ‘Why do you quarrel with this man? Why do you inflict such evil upon him? Lies my mother doth speak...’” and the baby went on to tell what really happened.¹⁶ “Potiphar himself was convinced of Joseph’s innocence and

¹¹ Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 2, page 29.

¹² Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 2, page 80.

¹³ Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 2, pages 53-55.

¹⁴ George Sale, *The Koran*, page 190.

¹⁵ Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 2, pages 50-51.

¹⁶ Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 2, page 57.

when he cast him into prison, he said to him, 'I know that thou art not guilty of so vile a crime, but I must put thee in durance, lest a taint cling to my children.'"¹⁷

We saw in *Surah Yusuf* that the cupbearer forgot Joseph, and Joseph stayed in prison for several years more. Ginzberg writes, "Properly speaking, Joseph should have gone out free from his dungeon on the same day as the butler [cupbearer]. He had been there ten years by that time, and had made amends for the slander he had uttered against his ten brethren. However, he remained in prison two years longer. 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord,' but Joseph had put his confidence in flesh and blood. He had prayed the chief butler to have him in remembrance when it should be well with him, and make mention of him unto Pharaoh, and the butler forgot his promise, and therefore Joseph had to stay in prison two years more than the years originally allotted to him there. The butler had not forgotten him intentionally, but it was ordained of God that his memory should fail him." (Ginzberg 2:63)

We saw in *Surah Yusuf* that the brothers entered the Egyptian city by separate gates. Ginzberg writes that Joseph accused his brothers of being spies. He said, "If it be true that ye came hither to buy corn, why is it that each one of you entered the city by a separate gate?" The brothers replied, "We are *all* the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and he bade us not enter a city together by the same gate, that we attract not the attention of the people of the place."¹⁸ The brothers later said, "Two brothers take care not to enter a house of mirth and festivity together, that they be not exposed to the evil eye, but we were all caught together in one place, by reason of the sin which we committed in company."¹⁹

What can we say of the other additions and changes to the Joseph story in the Qur'an? They may be related to Midrash/Aggadah that has not yet been found. *Surah Yusuf* is in many ways a type of Aggadah, but from an Islamic perspective.

This "most beautiful of stories" can be examined from a multitude of perspectives. This paper has looked at only one perspective: the interactions between the Bible, Jewish Aggadah, and the Qur'an.

¹⁷ Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 2, page 58.

¹⁸ Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol 2, page 83.

¹⁹ Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. 2, page 102.

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The Dichotomy of Isa and Christ

Owen Mudford

Introduction



Jesus Christ is one of, if not the, most studied and significant person in history. This is seen through the effect he has had on society, religion, law-making and academia for the past two millennia and is widely accepted by those of 'faith' and seemingly secular organisations alike.¹ The historical nature of Jesus' life is also widely concluded to be accurate by most of academia. However, this does not mean that an identical picture of Jesus of Nazareth is accepted by all. The purpose of this essay is to analyse the Jesus that is spoken of within the Qur'an; compare this to traditional Christian doctrine of the person of Christ, and alongside historical sources put forward an argument for this viewpoint. This analysis will then be applied to Christian ministry when evangelising to Muslims.

The Origins of the Qur'an

The Qur'an is the primary authority for the Muslim life; recited in the 7th Century AD by the Prophet Muhammad.² For Muslims it consists of the precise words of God conveyed to the Prophet, unmodified by character, personality or any other means [Q15:9-17].³ Orthodox Islamic history states that this occurred over twenty-three years with Muhammad memorising the words and others writing them on pieces of papyrus, flat-stone, leather, wooden boards and any other material available.⁴ Most Muslims also believe that Muhammad was illiterate, meaning that the Qur'an was mainly passed on through the oral tradition.⁵ It was not until after Muhammad's death in 632AD that the first caliphs started to collate the texts and write them down into a definitive edition.⁶ This edition was made up of 114 sūras that are placed, for the

¹ Steven Ward, "Who's Biggest? The 100 Most Significant Figures In History | TIME.Com", *TIME.Com*, 2018, <http://ideas.time.com/2013/12/10/whos-biggest-the-100-most-significant-figures-in-history/>.

² William E Shepard, *Introducing Islam* (London: Routledge, 2014), 65.

³ Shepard, *Introducing Islam*, 65.

All Quranic quotations (unless specifically referenced) are taken from: Richard Bell, *The Qur'an - English Translation* (London: T&T Clark, 1960).

⁴ Shepard, *Introducing Islam*, 66.

Some polemicists would argue against this, suggesting that archaeological findings would point towards the Qur'an being created later under the time of Uthman ibn Affan. – See Jay Smith, *An Historical Critique Of Islam's Beginnings* - Jay Smith, video, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zd9lluUjPs0>.

⁵ Richard Bell, *Introduction To The Qur'an* (London: University Press, 1953).

⁶ Shepard, *Introducing Islam*, 66.

majority, in order of length as opposed to thematic arrangement or even probably in order of revelation.⁷ Further teachings, words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad were then collected into other works called Hadith and Sunna, held second only to the Qur'an in terms of divine inspiration.⁸

Teachings in the Qur'an on the person of Jesus

Jesus, or Īsā, is one of the key figures in the Qur'an.⁹ He appears in fifteen sūras and ninety-three verses; usually characterised through honorific titles such as "example" [Q43:57-59], "Word from [Allah]" [Q3:45], and "Spirit from [Allah]" [Q4:171]. As one reads the Qur'an, it becomes increasingly clear that there are evident differences to the Jesus found in the New Testament. It is worth stating that there are some parts of the Qur'anic Jesus that emulate the biblical narrative: he is sent from God [Q3:50], he performs miracles [Q3:49], he teaches and he is involved with the events that we read about within the passion narratives of the Gospels. However, even within these similarities there are large differences to the gospels of Jesus in the Bible. Differences between the Qur'anic and biblical Jesus can be largely summed up in three key points: his role and status, his teachings and miracles and his death on the cross.

It is worth noting that from this point within this article I shall use 'Isa' as shorthand for the Qur'anic Jesus, whilst simply using Jesus to denote the biblical figure.

Jesus the Prophet

The largest and most significant difference is Isa's identity as a prophet, rather than the Son of God.¹⁰ Sūra 19:31 shows Muhammad quoting Isa directly, stating his role as a prophet, which is then followed by an emphatic statement about Allah's lack of offspring [Q19:35-37]. The fact that these verses are placed next to each other clearly show the desire of the author to allow no doubt within the reader's mind to his viewpoint on this area of debate. It is not clear historically if Muhammad is writing against Christians, or merely against Arabs who were stating Jesus' divinity at the time of writing.¹¹ It seems clear though, that this must have been a belief within the region and so Muhammad is stating clearly that this is not of Allah.

⁷ Āyā: "Verse, especially a verse in the Qur'an" - Netton, A Popular Dictionary Of Islam, 45.
Sūra: "Chapter of the Qur'an..." - Netton, A Popular Dictionary Of Islam, 238.

⁸ Netton, A Popular Dictionary Of Islam, 90.

⁹ The name for Jesus in the Qur'an is Īsā. Accepted by many to be from the Syriac name Yeshu, which is itself derived from the Hebrew Yeshua. - Geoffrey Parrinder, Jesus In The Qur'an (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013), 16. However the name Īsā has no definition nor is found in any writing or inscription before its use in the Qur'an - Jay Smith, Comparing Jesus Christ (God) Of The Bible With 'Isa Of The Qur'an - Jay Smith (Pt 1/3), video, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfdID6m1RE0>.

¹⁰ Maulvi Hafiz Muhammad Idris as quoted in: K.D.W Anand, "The Christ Of The Quran", Indian Journal Of Theology 7, no. 2 (1958), 56.

¹¹ George Fry, "The Quranic Christ", Concordia Theological Quarterly 43, No. 3: 207-221 43, no. 3 (1979), 211.

Isa's prophethood is highly revered within the Qur'an.¹² He was given the Injil to convey to all people, confirming what was taught was in the Torah and foretelling the coming of Muhammad.¹³ There are some intricacies, though, that upon greater research raise questions. In some verses, Isa is named alongside other 'prophets' such as Moses and Isaac, suggesting that the writer is trying to show the reverence that Isa is given is akin to all other prophets of Allah [Q2:136] and he is no different to them.

On the other hand there are certain other verses that show Isa as the chosen servant and 'truer' prophet.¹⁴ This is first seen through the miraculous nature of his birth which parallels the biblical account of the virgin birth [Q19:19-22, Luke 1:31-32].¹⁵ Isa is the only prophet to be created outside of the natural order, the first human since Adam, and many scholars believe that this was incorporated into the Qur'an by Muhammad from the Christian tradition.¹⁶ Secondly, Isa is set apart from all other prophets, as the Qur'an seems to recognise that Isa was without sin, describing himself as being made "blessed" [Q19:31], using the Arabic word *mubaarak*, a word that is not attributed to any other human, however is used to describe things that the Qur'an considers to be perfect, such as the Qur'an itself [Q6:93, Q6:156], and the site of the first house of prayer [Q3:96].¹⁷ The figure of Isa stands apart from Muhammad, and all other prophets, on this subject whom are not without sin [Q40:55, Q48:2, Q47:19]. Shiite tradition would look to counter this as their traditions hold to the sinlessness of all prophet's named in the Qur'an due to Allah's mercy upon them [Q12:53], however I believe that this promotes further theological issues:

Firstly, the difference between an appeasement and sinlessness. When we discuss the nature of sinlessness, the bar must be the lack of sin – not sin that has been overlooked. Whilst prophets such as Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq (Isaac), Musa (Moses), and Dawud (David) may have their sins overlooked through the mercy of Allah this proves the fact that their sin existed in the first place. This is highly different within the figure of Isa. The use of *mubaarak* and the parallels between its use on the Qur'an, the true eternal word existing in physicality for all time with Allah, demand Isa to be different. The perfection accorded to the Qur'an means that it could never be demeaned or defiled in sin, therefore neither can a human who is blessed accordingly. Secondly, the larger theological issue that this promotes is the ease with which Allah disregards the sin of his people, and that his people seem to be unaware. There does not seem to be any part within the Qur'an that suggests that any of his divine prophets were aware of their sinless status or even the need to

¹² Parrinder, Jesus In The Qur'an, 16.

¹³ Marianne Farina, "What Do Muslims Think Of Jesus?", U.S. Catholic 81, no. 9 (2016): 49. Injil – A proto-gospel that was given, that worked in accordance to the Qur'an – Netton, A Popular Dictionary of Islam, 122.

¹⁴ Idris as quoted in: Anand, The Christ Of The Quran, 56.

¹⁵ Anand, "The Christ Of The Quran", 57.

¹⁶ See 'Origins of the Biblical and Qur'anic Jesus', 18.

¹⁷ Samuel Green, "The Perfect Man", Answering-Islam.Org, 2004, <https://www.answering-islam.org/Green/perfect.htm>.

exist as such. Even Muhammed, the final prophet who brought all of Allah's promises to fruition did not claim to be sinless and perfect as one might see the word that he brought – the Qur'an. All of these facts beg the question as to why this characteristic is solely given to Isa, and my only answer can be that this was taken from the existing Christian tradition as Muhammed assembled his recitation.

Teachings and Miracles

Within Islamic teachings one of Isa's key roles was to bring the Injil - the good news.¹⁸ For the Christian, this may immediately bring to mind the *euangelion* – the good news of salvation. It may even highlight words that Jesus read from the great Isaiah scroll whilst in the temple:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” – **Luke 4:18-19**

With this parallel, one could assume there are many similarities to the teachings of 'Īsā' and of Jesus (NT); and, like the New Testament, the healings of Jesus are affirmed in the Qur'an. He gives sight to the blind, heals lepers and even to raises people from the dead [Q3:44-45, Q5:11].¹⁹ However, this is the only similarity between the accounts. Though Isa is said to bring the good news [Q3:43], this is very different to the soteriological good news that is spoken of in the Bible. Instead, this Jesus denies his deity [Q5:72-73], the trinity [Q4:169], and predicts the coming of Muhammad. The teachings of Isa promote monotheism - one God, Allah, who is eternal and single. This is essential in the Muslim tradition, the doctrine of Tawhid.²⁰ Allah is intrinsically unknowable, and his will is such that it allows for contradictions as he is sovereign to decide what is so and what is not. Muslims would argue that this is only possible with a single will, which removes the possibility of trinity.²¹ This stands apart from the Bible, in which Jesus confirms his divinity and Trinitarian role both publicly and privately. This is seen within many passages but most clearly in John 14:9 where Jesus openly states he is the image of the invisible God, incarnate [Colossians 1:15,19].

The Conspiracy of the Cross

One of the largest differences between Isa and Jesus, however, is whether or not he died on the cross. The teaching of the Qur'an is clear; Sūra 4:156-157 has four key statements on the matter:

¹⁸ Jay Smith, Comparing Jesus Christ (God) Of The Bible With 'Isa Of The Qur'an - Jay Smith (Pt 1/3), video, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfdID6m1RE0>.

¹⁹ Parrinder, Jesus In The Qur'an, 84-85.

²⁰ Parrinder, Jesus In The Qur'an, 39.

²¹ Norman L Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, Answering Islam (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002),

1. The Jews believe that they had killed Isa
2. Allah reveals that they did not; Isa was neither killed nor crucified
3. There was someone who looked like Isa who died in his place
4. Allah took Isa up into heaven (ascension) until the day of Judgement

These four statements are very important as they not only conflict with the biblical narrative but also are essential to understanding key Islamic doctrines.

The first statement is significant as the Qur'an highlights Jewish involvement with the death of Isa. Though the bible confirms that the Jewish leaders plotted against Him, the Qur'an leaves out all Roman influence over the events. There are two main reasons for this to be the case.

Firstly, the literary style of the Qur'an is not the same as the Bible. The Bible describes places, people, events and emotions within a narrative structure which means that there are very few periods of biblical history for which we do not have narrative context. Though we have other genre contained within the book, and sometimes the narrative format different due to time-specific literary choices; there are very few sections of biblical history for which we do not have accounts of the time. The Qur'an, on the other hand, speaks of events within a form of 'rhymed prose' which combines the poetic and the narrative throughout and removes the teachings from their historical context making them into 'eternal truths'. This is in large part to the giving of the word to Muhammed directly from Allah rather than the way that the spirit is described to have inspired the writers of the Bible. The Qur'an does not contain extended narratives such as found in Genesis, the Gospels, etc, but rather gives shorter bursts of information about a given figure, leaving out dates, context etc.

Secondly, when discussing the 'people of the book'; the Qur'an is often trying to make a wider theological point about the corruption that has taken place within Judaism and Christianity and the need for Islam.²² I believe that stating the Jewish involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus is a way of the writer reminding Muslims that those who state that Jesus was the Messiah and God incarnate were also of the same people who caused his death.

This Sūra then goes on to state that Jesus did not die but was replaced with a facsimile who died in his place.²³ This is the key difference between the narratives of the two books, and is what brings the largest impact on the proclamation of the New Testament and further church history. Jesus avoiding the cross is key within Islam as firstly it shows Allah is true to his word that his sovereignty would not allow his prophets to suffer [Q3:183], and secondly as there is no need for the death of Jesus

²² The People of the Book Ahl al-Kitab – "The name initially referred to the Jews and Christians whose scriptures like the Torah and Gospel were completed in Muslim belief by the Islamic revelation of the Qur'an" - Netton, A Popular Dictionary of Islam, 22.

²³ F. S Coplestone, Jesus Christ Or Mohammed? (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000), 39.

as an atoning sacrifice.²⁴ The Islamic understanding of salvation does not provide a need for atonement either individual or corporate, but only the mercy of Allah on a devout individual.²⁵ This doctrine of sin is fully opposed to the doctrine that we see within scriptures such Romans 3:23, 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8-10.

Christian Doctrine of Christ

It has been said that the Jesus of the Qur'an differs from the Biblical Jesus not in essence, but only in terms of description.²⁶ Hopefully it is clear already that this cannot be the case and will only become clearer as I unpack the traditional Christian Doctrine of Christ and what impact this has on the teachings of the Qur'an.

Pre-Eminence and Deity

The largest difference between the Jesus of the New Testament and the Jesus found in the Qur'an is his claim of divinity and eternal nature as a member of the Trinity.²⁷ Jesus' claim is clear in passages such as the aforementioned John 14 where he describes himself as God incarnate to his disciples, showing to humanity a physical embodiment of what the Father is like [John 14:9]; however, also showing the nature of equality within the trinitarian godhead [John 14:10-11]. This claim of divinity can be found within the other three gospels [Mark 2:3-10, Matthew 28:19] as Jesus does the work of the Father in bringing forth the Kingdom of God. All of these statements stand opposed to the words of the Qur'an which declares that Jesus never claimed to be divine [Q5:116-117].²⁸ Therefore Isa's lack of divinity is one of the linchpins of the Qur'anic Jesus; proof of the deity of Jesus Christ of Nazareth greatly limits the authority of the Qur'an, the words of the Prophet Muhammad and the doctrine of Islam.²⁹ Consequently I will later provide an argument for the deity of Christ using both Bible and Qur'an, consider their historical provenance, and combat arguments made by Muslim polemics.

Teachings and Miracles

There are many teachings and miracles of Jesus found within the Bible that are never mentioned within the Qur'an's account of Īsā. This is not surprising upon closer inspection of the genre and purpose of each of these scriptures and their subsequent books within. The gospel accounts are intended to be close to the biographical genre, informing the reader of the works of Jesus and his death and

²⁴ Emir Caner and Ergun Mehmet Caner, *More Than A Prophet* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 63.

²⁵ Marianne Farina, "What Do Muslims Think Of Jesus?", *U.S. Catholic* 81, no. 9 (2016): 49.

²⁶ Thomas Zatel, "Jesus At The Mosque: Reading The Qur'anic Accounts Of The Death Of Jesus From A Christian Perspective", *Asia Journal Of Theology* 29, no. 1 (2015): 149.

²⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2007), 543.

²⁸ Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One: Allah Or Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 213.

²⁹ The doctrine of Islam comes primarily from the Qur'an as the verbatim words of Allah, unchanged in any way. It is completely trustworthy and accurate and so cannot be proved to be false. Otherwise Allah himself is false as he gave the word to Muhammad. Jesus cannot be the divine son of Allah as the Qur'an states it to be so [112:1-4]. See William E Shepard, *Introducing Islam* (London: Routledge, 2014), 65-68.

resurrection.³⁰ There is a theological bias in the writing with each author relating different events to show diverse aspects of Jesus' character and life. However, each gospel is framed within a narrative structure. This is not the case with the Qur'an as the nature of prose recounts Allah's description of events or statements of past prophets and their greater theological implications for the Muslim believer. Jesus' teachings seen within the gospels are diverse in many ways, some are revelations for his disciples, some are teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures [Luke 4:14-22], some seem to be instruction on ways of life for those who believe in him [Matthew 5:3-10]. However, they all speak of the power, sovereignty and coming Kingdom of God. Jesus shows who God is, what must be done for salvation, and then what a life 'in Christ' should look like. He uses miracles as signs and wonders to show this to a greater extent by commanding nature to show the omnipotence of God, healing people as a sign of the physical and spiritual healing of the Kingdom and driving out demons to show that God has complete dominion over Satan and the demonic.³¹

Jesus is the embodiment of the Kingdom of God, as King. This is one main area of Jesus' ministry that Islam does not manage to counter, or even comment on, due to a lack of belief in his divinity. The Qur'an speaks of Isa bringing the Injil for the people, which was then corrupted before Muhammad brought the final prophecy. However, the Islamic teachings fail to mention the growth of the church and the supernatural signs and wonders that occurred after the death of Jesus [Acts 2: 1-47]. The Isa of the Qur'an cannot be the same Jesus who taught the apostles, as it is their legacy that we see from the 1st Century onwards, 600 years before the coming of Muhammad, and the Jesus whose teachings they cite cannot be the Īsā of the Qur'an.

Death and Resurrection

The second most important difference of the Islamic and Christian doctrine of Christ is his death and resurrection, which is key to the Christian faith. This importance is highlighted when the apostle Paul laments the false teaching against this, as he believes it to be one of the most damaging heresies that the early church faced [1 Corinthians 15:12-28].

The doctrine of sin is clear within orthodox Christianity, that the fall of Adam and Eve brought sinful nature into man and also the affected creation [Romans 8:18-22].³² Within the Qur'an the same sinful act occurs [Q2:33-37]. However, the resulting sin does not fall on the descendants of Adam, thus there is no doctrine of original sin in Islam.³³ This is important as it removes the need for atonement; Allah decides who will be with him in paradise, no matter their sin, the antithesis to the Christian teachings seen in Romans 3:23 and 6:23.³⁴

³⁰ For further study see: Richard A. Burrige, *What Are The Gospels?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

³¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 356.

³² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 493.

³³ Farina, "What Do Muslims Think Of Jesus?", *U.S. Catholic* 81, no. 9 (2016): 49.

³⁴ Qureshi, *No God But One...*, 40.

The Bible is clear within these passages that the fall of humanity means that all humans are born into sin and cannot themselves become right with God. For this to be undone each human must both have to die, and then continue living - an impossibility. Except, the bible says that it is not impossible; that Jesus physically died without any sin and was bodily resurrected. Therefore, when Christians believe and die with Christ, they too rise bodily with him [Romans 6:8]. If the Qur'an is correct however, and this death and resurrection did not take place, then a Christian's "faith is futile and you are still in your sins" [1 Corinthians 15:17]. The historical death and resurrection of Jesus has been part of Christian belief since the first biblical writers in the first century wrote their eyewitness accounts; it has also been written about by non-biblical historical writers as an event that has shaped history.³⁵ For the Qur'an to argue against this, there must be substantial evidence behind Muhammad's assertions, as both accounts claim to have divine inspiration.

Summary

The impact that Īsā has on the proclamation of the NT can be detrimental to the Christian faith. If his statements and actions are true, the Bible cannot be infallible but in fact must be leading people away from the true faith. The traditional acceptance of the Qur'anic Jesus must mean the end of the Christian faith as salvation would be a falsehood. Similarly, if the biblical teachings of Jesus and his death and resurrection are seen to be historically accurate then it must show the Qur'an's infallibility, along with showing the need for Muslims to believe in Jesus, repent and be baptised. The two figures of Jesus cannot exist alongside each other, and both be true, as it is blasphemy to lower the Jesus of the Bible to solely the role of human prophet, and it is blasphemy to state that Allah had begotten a son. However, through closer study on the origins of the Qur'anic Jesus, I am going to argue that the impact that Īsā has on the Bible is limited due to the unreliability of the Qur'an as a historical source.

Origins of the Biblical and Qur'anic Jesus

The differences between Biblical and Qur'anic Jesus' are vast and doctrinally significant for millions around the world. I have already highlighted many of these differences, however for the impact of the Qur'anic Jesus to be measured and evaluated, the source of these doctrines must be observed.

The source for the Jesus of the Bible can be traced back to the period in which he lived. There are multiple gospel accounts by eyewitnesses which speak of his life, ministry and death.³⁶ These are well known and have been critiqued throughout history by scholars, both western and Arabian. There are also the letters of Paul, who was not with the disciples during Jesus' lifetime.³⁷ However, there is also extra-biblical documentation on the person of Jesus as a historical figure within the period which fits the biblical narrative. For example, Tacitus, writing in the late 1st Century, speaks of the founder of the Christian religion who "suffered the extreme penalty

³⁵ See 'Origins of the Biblical and Qur'anic Jesus', 18.

³⁶ Mark L Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 518.

³⁷ Strauss, *Four Portraits...*, 38.

during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate".³⁸ Josephus, the Hebrew historian in the late 1st Century, wrote about the death of Jesus, of John the Baptist and of Jesus' brother James.³⁹ There is also a section of his works in which he speaks about the death and resurrection of Jesus in more detail, but there are doubts as to whether this section was later edited by Christian scholars as there is no evidence Josephus ever converted to Christianity.⁴⁰

A recently discovered Arabic translation of the Testimonium may be the key to finding the pre-edited writings, however. In this copy, Josephus speaks of the wisdom of Jesus and his teachings, followed by his death by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate and his disciples claim of a resurrection, which is more likely to be the true account.⁴¹

All these extra-biblical documents corroborate the biblical account of a historical death of Jesus, and his disciples' claim that he was resurrected.⁴² From there the argument for divinity and resurrection of Jesus rests on the faith of the individual, however these documents show the historical validity of the gospel narratives and the Biblical Jesus.

The writings in the Qur'an, on the other hand, do not come from eyewitnesses of Jesus, or even from those who spoke to eye witnesses; therefore, the description of Jesus must come from one of two sources; divine inspiration or existing teachings of Jesus that differed from the biblical narrative.

The former would argue that Jesus upon his apparent death by the hand of the Roman and Jewish authorities was then deified by his disciples and the resurrection was falsified. However, Allah knew that this was not the case. He then unveiled the truth to Muhammad 700 years later to correct this. I do not believe this theory is likely. Firstly, for the resurrection to have not occurred, but the disciples to spread this falsehood there must have been either mass hallucinations or deception.⁴³ These arguments have been put forward many times before as alternatives to the resurrection. However, as Lane-Craig shows this is highly unlikely for many reasons.⁴⁴ Secondly this would suggest that Allah allowed this idolatry to occur, and the church to grow, for almost a millennium before sending a prophet to bring the truth. From my reading on the character of Allah, this idolatry is unlikely to have gone

³⁸ Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44, trans. Moses Hadas, A.J. Church and W.J. Brodribb, *The Complete Works Of Tacitus* (York: Random House, 1942), 380-381. See also - Sextus Julius Africanus, *Chronographiae* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2007) for Thallus' account.

³⁹ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* trans. William Whiston, *Josephus: Complete Works* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1963), 379.

⁴⁰ Strauss, *Four Portraits...*, 39.

⁴¹ Strauss, *Four Portraits...*, 40.

⁴² Strauss, *Four Portraits...*, 518.

⁴³ Craig, *The Son Rises: Historical Evidence For The Resurrection Of Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2000) 102- 106.

⁴⁴ For greater study on the alternative arguments of the resurrection and their critiques see: Craig, *The Son Rises...* Or Andrew Wilson, *If God Then What?* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012).

unpunished for that long as Allah states it to be unforgiveable [4:48]; how much more so for the idol to be one of his prophets? Within Islamic tradition, for Allah to allow one of his prophets to die would be to allow his very nature and power to be questioned – how much more for one of his prophets to be deified for over half a millennium?

The latter theory, I believe, makes more sense when approaching the Qur'anic Jesus. This figure has been created from existing teachings on Jesus that differed from the biblical narrative that can already be found within the Arab world at the time of Muhammad. For this argument to be true, first we must put to one side the argument of divine inspiration as the sole impetus behind Muhammad's creation of Islam and accept the adoption of other religious stimuli into the writing of the Qur'an.

There are quite a few areas concerning the narrative of Isa that can be found to mirror Pseudo-Christian doctrines that the early church deemed to be heretical and not in accordance with the canon of scripture. For example, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries the heretical doctrine of Monarchianism was adopted by some clergy. This taught that there was only one God, the Father, who existed alone and had no offspring.⁴⁵ This relegated Jesus to being a man only and the Holy Spirit as the power of the Father made manifest on earth. This heresy became popular within the Syrian region, being taught by Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, and would have shaped how many Syrians, including the desert peoples, saw the Christian faith.⁴⁶ It is highly likely that within the oral tradition this would have spread throughout the Middle East and is very similar to the doctrine of Allah that we see within the Qur'an [Q4:171, Q19:34].⁴⁷

However, this view of Monotheism is close not only to Islam, but also to traditional Judaism. Therefore, we cannot say that Muhammad framed the Qur'anic Jesus on these principles. However, we can infer that this style of thinking shaped Muhammad's doctrine on who Jesus was, along with other stories about Jesus which were denounced by the councils but were told by the desert traders and are found in Apocryphal Gospels. For example, Jesus' cradle miracle [Q3:41, Q5:109, Q19:29-33], can be found within the Infancy Gospel of James, a gospel that was likely to have been written from stories of Syrian traders around the 5th Century; Jesus creating birds from clay [Q3:49, Q5:11] appears within the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, a gnostic gospel written around the 150CE.⁴⁸ Neither of these gospels were accepted by the councils of the church fathers due to their late writing and deviation from the biblical narrative. On further literary study it is also clear that the styles of these writings do not match the time of the other gospel writers but the later style of gnostic writings.⁴⁹ Similar to the doctrines of Monarchianism, these narratives would

⁴⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Church History: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 142.

⁴⁶ Ferguson, *Church History...*, 142-143.

⁴⁷ Fry, "The Quranic Christ", *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 43, No. 3: 207-221 43, no. 3 (1979), 211.

⁴⁸ J. K Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 68.

⁴⁹ Elliott, *The Apocryphal...*, 441.

have likely been passed down the trade routes and framed the Meccan view of Jesus.

These are only some of the examples that western scholars and polemicists believe are the true source of the Qur'anic Jesus.⁵⁰ The deviations of the Qur'an from the traditional history of Jesus are too similar to these other early Pseudo-Christian works for these to be coincidences. One may argue that they were around because they held truth, and this was what Allah showed through the Prophet Muhammad. However, there is no historical proof to suggest this is the case, as the closest documents we have to the historical person of Jesus hold closer to the biblical account than they do the Qur'anic version.

Argument for the Deity of Christ

Now that I have shown that the historical precedent of the Qur'anic Jesus is likely to have come from different sources, most of them discredited before Islam was created, I now need to show why the proclamation in the New Testament of the deity of Christ is true and important for Theists and Atheists alike.

As mentioned earlier, there are many examples where Jesus shows an awareness of his own divinity. These examples come during the time of His ministry, unlike the infancy claims of the Qur'an or the Nag-Hammadi Gospels.⁵¹ This is down to the great truth unveiled in Philippians 2:6-8 which speaks of Jesus voluntarily giving up omniscience and his omnipresent nature, so to be found in the likeness of a human. To what extent the child Jesus was aware of his divinity at that point is unknown, but I believe the scriptures point towards his awareness of the nuances found in the scriptures and that knew how those scriptures testified about him [John 5:39, Luke 2:49-50].

By Luke 4, on the other hand, there is a definite awareness of his divinity and relationship with the Father. Having been baptised and declared to be God's Son [Luke 3:21], then tempted in the wilderness overcoming Satan in a way Adam failed [Luke 4:1-13], Jesus opens the scriptures and confirms who he is in the temple [Luke 4:18]. Jesus shows himself to be the Messianic figure spoken of by Isaiah, the same figure whom Isaiah states will be born of a virgin [Isaiah 7:14] and called Immanuel, 'God with us'. This open declaration of divinity so early in Jesus' ministry shows to all that he is fully aware of the statement he is making about himself. Therefore, the reader of scripture must decide for themselves whether Jesus is who he claims to be.⁵² Many have discredited Lewis' 'Trilemma' due to the lesser known fourth 'L' that they say he leaves out, and that is that the 'legend' of the Christ of Faith does not

⁵⁰ For further information see : Jay Smith, An Historical Critique Of Islam's Beginnings - Jay Smith, video, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zd9lluUjPs0>.

⁵¹ Elliott, The Apocryphal..., 441.

⁵² For further study into the decision as to what decision must be made from Jesus' statements see : What Are We to Make of Jesus? In C. S Lewis, God In The Dock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970). Or C. S Lewis, Mere Christianity (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952), 55-56.

mirror to the historical Jesus of Nazareth, as indeed I have formerly argued for the Qur'anic Jesus.⁵³

I personally, on the other hand, believe that there is sufficient evidence in historical sources to show that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified under Pontius Pilate due to his claim of divinity, and that an empty tomb three days later led to his disciples preaching his resurrection and starting the church.⁵⁴ Therefore, I believe that Lewis' three possibilities are the only alternatives for the character of the biblical Jesus.⁵⁵ It is hopefully clear from my introduction and the respect in which Jesus is held throughout the world, including his nature as a Prophet in Islam, that the claim of lunacy is weak. Similarly, though Jesus could have been a liar, the motivations behind this are unlikely as all testimonies claim that he did not look for money, sex or power. This becomes even less likely at the point of his arrest and death where Jesus could have renounced all claims of divinity and the messianic title. Therefore, I believe that it is clear that Jesus was God incarnate, pre-eminent member of the Trinity, and atoning sacrifice.

Application within Christian Ministry

The impact that Islam has had on the Christian World has been highly significant. This is particularly clear in Africa, where Islam has spread from the North-East land bridge and converted 47% of the population.⁵⁶ It is also clear in cities such as Jerusalem which acts as a microcosm for the greater Middle Eastern province where Jewish, Christian and Islamic influences push against each other for control and authority. Even within the UK, where less than 5% of the population would class themselves as Muslim, Islam has an increasing impact on culture, and consequently, UK Christianity. The challenge for Christians is to love Muslims and build relationships of trust and humility with them, whilst also sharing the gospel in a way that shows a knowledge of the Qur'an and the truth of who Jesus really is.

Polemicists such as Jay Smith are fond of stating that debating with Muslim believers over their views on the Qur'an is not the job of the 'normal Christian'.⁵⁷ I would argue that this is incorrect. I understand the rationale behind the statement - not all Christians should feel it is their duty to learn Arabic, understand the Qur'an and the Hadith fully, and to approach Muslims for eloquent debate on their doctrine - however I believe that 1 Peter is clear as to the duty of the Christian in giving "a defence of the hope that is inside you" [1 Peter 3:13-17] and the figure of the Islamic Jesus is a clear threat to the hope of salvation. With this in mind, I believe that every

⁵³ Justin Taylor, "Is C.S. Lewis's Liar-Lord-Or-Lunatic Argument Unsound?", The Gospel Coalition, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/is-c-s-lewiss-liar-lord-or-lunatic-argument-unsound/>.

⁵⁴ Shlomo Pines, *An Arabic Version Of The Testimonium Flavianum And Its Implications*, (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1971), 16.

⁵⁵ Mere Christianity (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952), 55.

⁵⁶ Shepard, *Introducing Islam*, 60.

⁵⁷ Jay Smith, *Comparing Jesus Christ (God) Of The Bible With 'Isa Of The Qur'an* - Jay Smith (Pt 1/3), video, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfdID6m1RE0>.

Christian who is building relationships with those of an Islamic background should have a basic understanding of Islam and why the faith that Muslims profess is different to Christian faith. This then can lead to many deeper fruitful discussions, all in “gentleness and respect” [1 Peter 3:15].

The subject of this essay is also important in the confidence that it gives to the Christian believer; that their beliefs are not built on blind faith but on logical arguments, historical sources and most importantly a resurrected saviour who has conquered death. Within a culture where some argue that all religions lead to the same God, and that the Biblical and Qur’anic Jesus are the same; the Christian should be confident that what Jesus says in John 14:6 is true. This confidence should be with every Christian as they look to fulfil the commission given to them by Jesus to “go and make disciples of all nations” [Matthew 28:19], no matter their current religion or culture.

For pastors within the local church this is even more important as they teach their congregations the truth about who Jesus is. I believe there is a large demand within most local churches for further teaching into apologetics and theology, not just those who pay for further theological training.

It is also important to always recognise that for Muslims who accept the Biblical Jesus there is often a cost. Nabeel Qureshi writes about the cost of leaving Islam: “family, friends, job, everything you’ve ever known and maybe even life itself”. For many who read this article, you have already taken this step, you have got to a point where you realised the value of the truth of who Jesus is, who he is not, and all that he has done for you. This is the beauty of the gospel and what we long and hope for, for our Muslim brothers and sisters.

Conclusion

The impact that the Qur’anic Jesus can have on the proclamation of Jesus in the New Testament is a great one. Paul is clear within 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus’ divinity, death and resurrection are of the utmost importance to salvation; as I have demonstrated throughout this essay, the Qur’an seeks to remove each of these from history and without them we are most to be pitied [1 Corinthians 15:19].

However, the Qur’anic claims are greatly reduced in impact by their historical weaknesses. Firstly, due to textual variations, lack of verifiable evidence and the dating of the discovered manuscripts, it seems to me highly unlikely that the Qur’an can claim to be textually unchanged throughout history and perfect in every way. Secondly, the figure of Jesus within the Qur’an cannot be held alongside the biblical Jesus, his origins from gnostic writings and pseudo-biographical works cannot stand against the biblical and extra-biblical documentation with which it disagrees. What the apologetic discussion around the Dichotomy of Isa and Jesus shows, is the necessity of Christians to be well-versed in the bible and always looking to strengthen their defence of the eternal hope that they have.

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About the author



Owen Mudford is the Media Worker at Christ Church Hailsham and Operations Manager of Life Bridging Works, a charity that works to help local churches reach the unreached in the Horn of Africa. He married Catherine in April 2021 and together they are passionate about all God is doing in the Horn and worldwide. He recently finished his degree where he specialised in Cross-Cultural Theology and is involved in interfaith discussions with Muslim academics across the UK, his heart is to see all Muslims come to the knowledge of who Christ really is. He hopes to start Postgraduate studies soon looking into this topic.

Persecuted Without Cause

Dennis Dyvig

Introduction

This paper is not intended to make light of any persecution! A large part of my life is spent ministering to, with, and for persecuted believers. As much as possible I desire to stand with persecuted believers, my brothers and sisters in Christ.

My point is this: Is what is presented to Muslims as Christianity, REALLY Christianity? Or is it a watered-down, confused mixture of religious beliefs that in the end will not save them and get them to heaven. Persecution is not the issue. Truth and heaven are the issues.

My search revealed the meaning of this phrase, *persecuted without cause*, or similar phrases, occur more than 20 times in the Bible. Generally, it refers to hatred, suffering, or persecution without cause. It usually means someone suffers who does not deserve to suffer. It applied to Jesus. In John 15:25 Jesus said *they hated Me without a cause*. (NAS95) It means Jesus did nothing that would justify His being hated by anyone. He quotes Psalms 35:19.

In each case of hatred there *actually* is some cause or reason, but perhaps not justified when viewed from a true and accurate perspective. Jesus claimed to be God and He was right. His statements of truth earned hatred from those who had not yet come to the truth to be saved.

We could assume that each case of persecution also flows from some form of hatred or anger or fear. Thus, each case of persecution does have some cause, but in Jesus' case the cause was not legitimate. He was in the truth. His persecutors were not.

The Reasoning

My cause in writing this paper is not to expound upon the unjustified hatred and persecution Jesus received. My purpose is to help us think about whether all the persecution of today is really like Jesus' was. Nor am I suggesting that if Christians were humbler and wiser, they might avoid persecution. While that may be true in some situations, that is not my cause in writing this paper. Above all, I clearly am not making light of any persecution that has occurred or does occur now or ever, whether it had a cause or no cause.

About ten years ago I met an MBB (Muslim Background Believer) who ran from her family and her country, an Islamic state, because of persecution. She was related to powerful people back home and they (especially her brother) threatened to kill her

for becoming a Christian. The problem was that most true Christians would not consider she really had become a Christian. She had adopted a belief that was perhaps halfway between Islam and Christianity. She denied the Deity of Christ. She denied salvation by faith in Jesus' substitutionary death. She denied that a Christian's future was in heaven. Heaven was reserved for a select 144,000 super-believers. For more than a year we prayed, taught, and urged her (and later her husband as well) to accept the Gospel. Eventually they both did (I think).

That was ten years ago. They eventually left Africa and we lost contact with them. A few months ago, she re-established contact. She explained how her husband had recently died mysteriously in Europe and she suspected poisoning. That was REAL persecution and for a REAL cause. She and her husband had become REAL Christians, so to be persecuted for being Christians now was understandable and was even worth it. Her mom and three sisters on another continent have also received the gift of salvation through and from Jesus Christ, and are in hiding too, having received serious threats against their lives. That is persecution **with** a cause. These people had all come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, as far as I can tell. I have met all but one of these persecuted believers. I believe their faith is genuine, and their persecution is based on their faith in The Truth, Jesus and His sacrificial death on the cross for them, and for all people.

Jesus said, "*Yet when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith?*" I believe true faith must be based on the truth! That may seem obvious, but unfortunately it isn't obvious to all who claim to be Christians. I believe a substantial number of persecuted Christians are not really Christians if measured by Biblical teaching. I believe the scriptures are very clear that a Christian is not a Christian because they are no longer a Muslim. I believe there are many who were formerly Muslim, who **say** they are now Christian, but in reality, their current faith is much closer to Islam than to true Christianity. They aren't Christians.

In 2 Thessalonians 2 we read:

2Th. 2:1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,

2Th. 2:2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

*2Th. 2:3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come **unless the apostasy comes first**, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,*

2Th. 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

2Th. 2:5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? (NAS95)

Paul is saying that in the end times many who claim to be God's people, Christians, will have departed from God's truth, the gospel.

Peter also refers to this end time departure from the truth:

*2Pet. 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers **among you**, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.*

*2Pet. 2:2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them **the way of the truth** will be **maligned**; (NAS95)*

Peter clearly states the issue about end time apostasy is related to two main points:

1. **Who** is Jesus? Answer: He is *The Master* (The Lord). Jesus Christ is the true God, in no way less or lower than the high God of the universe. Jesus IS the High God of the universe!
2. **What** did Jesus do? He *bought them*. He bought us. Jesus' sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross is Jesus buying people and thus removing them from a position of being lost, guilty, hopeless, and helpless, heading for an eternity of suffering, unless their belief changes to The Truth.

Paul put the gospel in two words: **Christ crucified**. (1 Cor. 1:23, NAS95)

Christianity is not a culture. Christianity is a belief, a foundational belief, upon which, for the true Christian, every other belief and behavior is based. True Christianity is in fact the most foundational belief of all beliefs. True Christianity is THE TRUTH!

True Christianity is not a culture, but true Christianity will result in a change of individual behavior, and potentially a change in that individual's culture, depending on how many from that culture do become true Christians. Changing a culture is not Christianity. An individual's change in belief to God's definition of Who He is and what He requires to relate to Him and receive His blessings is indeed true Christianity.

Personal salvation is in essence the same as Christianity. Someone who is not truly saved, not truly born again, not truly redeemed, not truly forgiven is not a Christian no matter what he may think or what may call himself. A person has not become a Christian until his belief is turned away from all other religious teachings and turned to Jesus and His death on the cross. Salvation is the result of a change in one's belief from whatever religious belief he grew up with (or later adopted) to accepting the truth of the gospel, unmixed with other teachings or beliefs. This is true repentance—a change in one's **belief** from his previous belief to what he has now learned is the truth—i.e., God's definition of Who He is and what He requires.

Human nature is against what God says is the truth. People often **say** they believe in God and love Him and serve Him, but by Biblical teachings what they say is not true.

Peter warns of people who deny the Lord, and they are within (the church). They probably will not deny that Someone named Jesus lived on earth about 2000 years ago. They may, however, deny important truth about Who Jesus really is. More commonly people deny that Jesus bought them. Instead, they go about seeking to buy their own salvation by religious good works and/or religious personal sacrifices. None of these religious sacrifices will buy them or buy their salvation. Only Jesus' sacrifice of all of Himself is adequate payment to buy our eternal forgiveness and salvation and passage to heaven.

Human nature therefore breeds persecution of those who do accept (not deny) that:
1. Jesus is the Lord Who . . . 2. bought them, by His death on the cross.

Not only do people automatically tend to deny Jesus and the cross. Satan also is working towards that same goal:

2Corinthians 4:4 *in whose case the god of this world has **blinded the minds** of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (NAS95)*

Notice that in 2 Corinthians 4:4, above, (and elsewhere throughout the Bible) Christianity is an issue of the mind (belief) rather than of lifestyle (behavior or obedience).

Apostasy is a departure of belief away from the truth of the gospel to anything different. If a person does not believe the gospel, he does not believe The Truth, God's truth. He is apostate.

Persecution with cause is when true believers are persecuted because they believe the truth that Jesus is Lord and that His death on the cross bought them and bought their salvation. The New Testament states clearly that Jesus' death on the cross is the only way for any person's salvation to be bought, to be paid for adequately. All religions, apart from the true gospel, propose other means to purchase salvation, either replacing or adding to the purchase Jesus made by His death on the cross. Any belief that does not see the death of Jesus as the only way to salvation, the only payment adequate to secure personal salvation, is apostasy. Examples of this are: 1. Religious leaders requiring others to confess their sins (often publicly) for forgiveness of those sins. 2. Any teaching that requires a person to sacrifice themselves or their money (tithing) or comfort (giving up personal privileges) or time (church attendance, prayer, etc.) to receive salvation.

Sin is wrong. Praying is good. Giving to others is good. Meeting together as a church is good. But requiring any of these for salvation is false teaching and is simply wrong and terribly evil and eternally dangerous. All these payments or sacrifices will fall infinitely short of paying for your salvation. Only the infinite Jesus giving His infinite life on the cross is adequate payment for any person's infinite (eternal) salvation. Persecution without cause is then any persecution that springs from . . .

- Calling yourself a Christian, or
- Adopting “Christian” culture, or
- Taking a Christian name, or
- Receiving water baptism, or
- Leaving your previous religion, or
- Going to church, or
- Anything else similar . . .

. . . but not accepting that **only** Jesus’ death will succeed in giving you salvation.

The lady mentioned earlier was for several years “persecuted **without** cause,” but now she is true Christian and is thus now “persecuted **with** cause.” Previously she was persecuted as though she were a Christian, but she wasn’t really a Christian. Now she is. I have met more than one who came out of Islam but did not really enter into true Christianity, by God’s definition of Christianity. They said they were Christians but weren’t. They had missed the essential truth that, if believed, would have made them true Christians.

Do people go to heaven by leaving Islam? Do people get God’s blessing by merely **saying** they are Christians? Does changing your name to a “Christian” name gain you any merit or benefit with God? The answer to all these questions is NO!

It is tragic that people suffer for being a Christian when in fact they aren’t a true Christian, by God’s definition. It is even more tragic that people think, or hope, that God has accepted them and will bless them and allow them into His heaven, when in fact they are wrong. Their failing to reach heaven will be far more painful and lasting than any persecution ever suffered here on earth.

Being persecuted without cause is bad enough, but missing heaven when a person wrongly THOUGHT they were a Christian is infinitely worse!

So, this brings us to the real issue of this discussion, this paper:

1. Are you, the reader of this paper, sure that you are a true Christian? Being persecuted as a Christian does not mean you are really a Christian.
2. Are you, the reader of this paper, sure that the Christianity you are presenting to others and hoping they will accept is the real Christianity explained in the Bible?
3. Are you living “the Christian life” but not really a Christian?
4. Have you made self-sacrifices that may bring you praise from people, but in the end are not accepted by the true God?
5. Are you suffering persecution and rejection needlessly?
6. Have you left your family and society but are not really a true Christian?
7. Do you think or hope you are going to heaven but in reality, are not?

Does this apply only to Muslims who turn to Christianity? No! Of course not! In my work I often travel by Uber (taxi). Several of my drivers have told me they were

pastors. I have then said, “Good, then you can tell me how a person goes to heaven!” But many so-called pastors can’t explain the gospel by God’s definition as revealed in the Bible. I have been blessed to speak at evangelistic meetings where pastors and priests have turned from their “Christianity” to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and received salvation!

In Jesus’ day His greatest opposition came from religious leaders. While they did not call themselves Christians at that time, they did think and claim to be God’s true people. Jesus said they weren’t! Jesus’ strongest condemnation, and perhaps only condemnation, was of these religious leaders who claimed to be “in the truth” but were not! In fact, Jesus rebuked them for not going to heaven themselves, and blocking others from gaining eternal life. He used the words “enter in” to refer to entering salvation and/or heaven itself.

Conclusion

Jesus came to earth to save people. His teaching was to show people how they could be saved. His miracles testified to His deity in order to convince people to accept His message as the truth of God instead of false teaching like many of His predecessors. His death on the cross was for one reason—to provide the free gift of salvation for all who had previously thought they could reach heaven in a different way, which actually was an erroneous way.

In John 4:10 Jesus lays out His simple pattern for becoming a true Christian. He says to the woman at the well she needed to know (believe as true) two things, then she needed to do one thing and He would give her salvation. Jesus said she needed to accept that salvation is a gift, and cannot be earned or bought by any personal effort or action. Secondly Jesus said she needed to accept that He was Jehovah (the true God, He takes the Name I AM for Himself). If she believes (accepts) those two truths, then all that remained was to ask Him for that gift, salvation. Here He calls salvation “living water” and later He calls it “eternal life,” and He says He will **give** it to her IF SHE ASKS!

Religions are about what people THINK they are required to do for their idea that they call God. True Christianity is about Who Jesus is and what Jesus did for us.

All who are true Christians ought to be doing evangelism. All of us who are doing evangelism must be sure the gospel we are presenting to others is really the gospel! Much of what is presented as Christianity is not Christianity. Only God knows, but I think the majority of the people in the world who **say** they are Christians are **not** Christians. I think I am saying that based on the Bible, not based on my personal ideas. There are many who are true Christians, but even more who are not. I think true Christians are less than half of those who say they are Christians. I believe that is what Jesus meant when He said, in *Luke 18:8b* “... when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

Jude instructs us to “*Contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all handed down . . .*” (NAS95) That’s what I am doing. I encourage you to do the same.

About the author



Dennis and his wife, Susan, were born in Iowa, USA in 1948 and 1952. They both grew up on farms. Sue was saved at an early age, but Dennis was not saved until age 22. The Gospel was new and wonderful to him! He had been baptized as a baby and grown up in a church. He called himself a Christian but had no idea what the Bible said about how to become a Christian.

For 33 years, he served as a missionary pilot here in Africa. He flew evangelists, pastors, teachers, Bible translators, etc. around east, central, and southern Africa. Dennis has flown into several locations in Somalia, but never Mogadishu. Sue was trained as a nurse. She serves people they know and love in various practical ways, as well as evangelism and discipleship. Dennis and Susan both are volunteers and have had no guaranteed salary for 45 years. God was and is faithful to meet all their needs! The author can be reached at ddyvig@gmail.com.

The Privilege of Prayer for those in Christ

Si Fry

Introduction: The Islamic religious and cultural background to prayer

תפילה
صلاة

In Islam after the Shahada – testifying to the oneness of Allah and the prophethood of Mohamed; the second pillar, and the main one that daily Islamic life is built around, is the Salah – Prayers. 5 times a day the Muslim is called to face the Sacred Mosque in Mecca according to the Quran (see Surah 2:144+149), or more precisely the Kaaba within it; performing set prayers between certain specific times (see Surah 4:103).

Prayer should be done in Arabic,¹ in a clean space free from impurities and likewise the body must be ritually cleaned (Wudu) before praying in the presence of Allah (see Surah 5:6).² The ritual cleaning of the body does not have to be repeated throughout the day only after certain bodily functions happen in between prayer times, which require you to be made ritually clean again.³ The worshipper's attire is also specified – for men from the naval to the knees at least must be covered and women the whole body except the face, hands and feet.⁴

After the worshipper has performed the set prayers which involve the whole body following set motions that the Imam will lead the congregation in (if corporately gathered). Then they are free to raise their hand and bring *Du'a* – requests, petitions and supplications which whilst Arabic is recommended it is not considered necessary. *Du'a* in practice are also made upon entering a home, in the home and elsewhere.

Ladies who attend prayers with groups of men should stand behind the men, and they should not perform the prayers during their menstruation or whilst post-natal bleeding occurs.⁵

The set prayers that need to be performed 5 times differ slightly from each other and are known as Fard Prayers and are compulsory. These prayers are said to clean the worshipper from sin as a bath cleanses the body from dirt and are the first thing you will be quizzed about on judgement day.⁶ In fact it is actually seen by some as a

¹ Umar 2011:18

² Al-Tomer 2019:18

³ Umar 2011:14

⁴ Umar 2011:15

⁵ Al-Tomer 2019:24

⁶ Umar 2011:9-10

major sin to miss Fard prayers,⁷ unless you're a women who is menstruating or bleeding.⁸ There are also additional set prayers that are recommended (*Wajib*) or the prayers that Mohamed performed (Sunnah) along with other lesser prayers (Nafl) that can earn extra rewards with Allah. These come before and/or after the set *Fard* prayers. In fact, all but the last category (*NafI*) are considered sinful to miss by some Muslims.⁹ Where possible prayers should be done corporately together.¹⁰

Thus, in Islam prayers need to be performed in a clean space, by a clean person, who is dressed appropriately (different for men and women), in the right language, facing the right direction, at the right times each day. These prayers should be a group activity where possible with different positions for men and women. The prayers not only help shed sins, they are considered part of one's righteous deeds to go in their favour on judgement day if done well and potentially judged sinful if missed or performed irreverently. It is with this religious and cultural backdrop that the many Somalis who have turned/are turning to Christ find the privileged position the Christian has in praying to God.

The difference Christ makes to prayer

Despite being sometimes misunderstood by those in Islam; prayer, whilst viewed and performed differently is a key part of life as a Christian. Famous 19th century theologian J.C. Ryle said, "Prayer is the very life breath of true Christianity."¹¹ 19th Century preacher Charles Spurgeon when asked what was more important as a Christian, to read the bible or prayer answered it by saying, "What is more important; breathing in or breathing out?"¹² Respected 20th Century expository teacher Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones said, "Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees, he comes face to face with God . . . therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man's true spiritual position."¹³ Well known 21st Century evangelist J John says, "Personal prayer lies at the very heart of walking with God – prayer is the means by which we begin, maintain and develop our relationship with God."¹⁴

One becomes a Christian through a prayer of surrender, confessing that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (see Romans 10:8-11). By recognising that Jesus is Lord, they are acknowledging that he is the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God to rule over God's people including over your life [for more on this see article by Owen Mudford, pp 29-44]. Likewise to acknowledge God raised Jesus from the dead, one is also accepting, as the bible elsewhere teaches elsewhere; "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that

⁷ <https://myislam.org/the-4-types-of-prayers-in-islam/>

⁸ Umar 2011:15

⁹ <https://myislam.org/the-4-types-of-prayers-in-islam/>

¹⁰ Umar 2011:44

¹¹ Ryle 1997:229

¹² <https://jonathanhayashi.com/20-charles-spurgeon-quotes-that-changed-my-life/>

¹³ Lloyd Jones 2009:361-362

¹⁴ John 2002:135

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures and that he appeared to . . ." [1 Corinthian 15:3-5].

For the Christian, their sins have been dealt with once for all by Jesus' death on the cross (see Romans 6:10, Hebrew 10:10, 1 Peter 3:18), because of the Lord's sacrifice the Christian is made righteous before God not by his/her own efforts but the completed work of Christ (see Philippians 3:9, Romans 3:20-26). [For more on this see the article by Andy Johnston, pp 11-17] Faith in Jesus is the straight path that leads one off the road of the misguided, those under God's anger, onto the path of those blessed, those who receive God's grace and mercy (see Acts 13:8-12).

Therefore, there is no need for the Christian to perform ritual cleaning before coming into God's presence, because Jesus' sacrifice on the cross has made them clean before God (see John 15:3, Hebrews 10:19-23). Likewise, it does not matter what one wears (either male or female) as they are clothed with the righteousness of Christ (see Galatians 3:27, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Isaiah 6:10). In truth the only way one gets access to God is through the Lord Jesus Christ, not by any inherent righteousness or ritual cleansing performed by oneself (see John 14:6, Acts 4:12).

Proverbs 15:29 says, "The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous." As Romans 3:9-20 along with many other Scripture verses make clear the whole human race is unrighteous, something the Quran agrees with (see Surah 16:61). Only in Jesus – the sinless one (again the Quran also agrees with this, see Surah 19:19), is someone made righteous and can approach God in prayer. Christians often finish their prayers in Jesus' name, knowing that it is through him and in line with his will that prayers get heard and answered (see John 14:13-14, 16:23-24). It is also why both men and women in Christ have equal standing and come to God on the same basis and in the same way, this is also true across racial and social divides too; all come to God through Jesus and are equally valued because of him (see Galatians 3:25-29).

Before Jesus came to earth, the presence of God was seen as dwelling in the Temple in Jerusalem, even though it was acknowledged that God fills the highest heaven, prayers could be directed towards it (see 1 Kings 8:27-30). However, with Jesus, God came in human form and dwelt amongst us (see John 1:1-3, 14, 18, Philippians 2:6-7, Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus engaged in every area of life (yet without sin). Upon his death on the cross the curtain in the temple that separated the most holy place from the rest of the temple, symbolising the barrier between where God dwelt and unclean human beings, was ripped in two (see Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45). Through Jesus people can not only have access to God (see Ephesians 2:18), but God through his Holy Spirit actually comes and makes his home in them (see John 14:15-24). His people become a living Temple (see Ephesians 2:18-22, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Therefore, thanks to Jesus, God is always with his people through his Spirit's presence in them. The Spirit helps the believer to pray and prays for them (see

Romans 8:26); and if that is not enough: Jesus himself is in heaven at the right hand of God his Father interceding for each and every Christian (see Romans 8:34). Influential pastor Nicky Gumbel writes, “When we pray the whole Trinity is involved. . . He is our loving Father and we have the extraordinary privilege of coming into his presence and calling him ‘Abba’ . . . ‘Daddy.’ . . We have no right in ourselves to come to God but we are able to do so through Jesus. . . We find it hard to pray, but God has not left us alone. He has given us his Spirit to live within us and help us pray.”¹⁵

So, prayer to God for the Christian can and should happen anywhere, whether they or the place they are in is clean or dirty. This is possible as what makes them acceptable to the Master of the day of Judgement is not some external righteousness or ritual, which before God none of us possess or are good enough to perform, but an internal one freely given through faith in Jesus (see Romans 4:1-13). Paul and Silas prayed and worshiped in a Philippian prison that would have been full of blood, urine and excrement (Acts 16). Jesus himself prayed from the cross where he most likely would have been stripped naked, covered in blood and filth.

There is no need for the Christian to face a certain direction to remind them of God or focus on a place that is the centre of our religion; for the living God who is Lord of the whole world; through his Spirit lives in the Christian thanks to Christ (see Acts 17:24-28, John 14:15-23). Jesus, nor the disciples commanded or set the tradition of praying in a certain direction, even though Jews for centuries traditionally prayed towards Jerusalem (see Daniel 6:10).

The focus of God, who is the Lord of Worlds, since the time of Christ it would appear rather than being fixed on one place that represented the presence of God or the centre of the religion (at that time it was in Jerusalem), has shifted onto those who through Christ carry the presence of God outwards from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (see Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus wants people from every ethnic group to be saved through the gospel (see Matthew 24:14), indeed there will be people from every tribe, tongue and language worshipping God (see Revelation 7:9-10). God wants people from all languages worshipping him, and as he created all the languages, he understands them and is happy to receive prayer and praise in them all. For the One we are called to worship and call on for help is not concerned about the language or the location, but that the person worships God with all their heart, soul, strength and mind (see Luke 10:27) and this is most easily done in one’s mother tongue, their heart language. Famous 17th Century writer John Bunyan, best known for his book written in prison ‘Pilgrims Progress’ says, “The best prayers often have more groans than words.”¹⁶ Timothy Jones notes in his book ‘The art of prayer’, “The most profound prayer is often the simplest because it arises from deep within.”¹⁷ For the Christian it is more about

¹⁵ Gumbel 1994:88-90

¹⁶ Jones 2006:39

¹⁷ Jones 2006:41

honest communication of the heart to God than the language or words used to communicate this.

Nowhere in Scripture is the Christian encouraged to pray in a particular language (apart from arguably a heavenly one 1 Corinthians 12-14); or adopt a particular culture for that matter (1 Corinthians 9:20-22). Rather they are to adapt in order to make it easy for many to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that Jesus most likely would have read the Old Testament in Hebrew, spoke in Aramaic and yet the New Testament was written in Greek - the most universally known language at the time. Christians therefore tend to pray in the language that they can most effectively express their prayers to God, and if others are present, one that the majority can understand. Those who God enables to speak in tongues of angels are also encouraged (primarily on their own) to speak to God in this language too (see 1 Corinthians 14:13-19), but there is not time to go into this now.

For the believer whilst prayer may involve the body by looking up to heaven, lying prostrate, kneeling or raising of the arms; the actions of the body is secondary and often in response to what is being prayed, or the emotional state of the person praying. Theologian Wayne Grudem explains, "When we truly pray, we as persons in the wholeness of our character are relating to God as a person, in the wholeness of his character."¹⁸

Finally, the bible does not set times that a Christian must pray. Regular patterns can help but they are not obligatory, nor add anything to ones right standing before God which can only come through faith in Jesus Christ not by any works of ours (see Ephesians 2:1-10). John Wesley the famous evangelist and founder of the Methodist Movement recommended every one of his ministers read 18th Century writer William Law's book, 'A serious call to a devout and holy life.' In this book Law recommends prayers in the early morning, 3rd hour of the day, 6th hour of the day, 9th hour of the day and evening prayers, as well as regular intercessory prayer for others. For some Muslim Background Believers (MBB) this may be a helpful pattern to follow as they are accustomed to setting aside five times a day to pray; as long as they recognise that this does not add to their righteousness or take away from it if they miss some prayer times. Jesus is our righteousness (see 1 Corinthians 1:30). Some Christians copy the Jewish custom of praying three times a day, as the early church document the Didache would seem to encourage as it exhorts its readers to pray the Lord's prayer 3 times a day, this pattern has helped many.¹⁹

Jesus modelled and clearly expected his disciples to make time to pray, so much so that it shaped how they developed the early church (see Acts 6:1-7); however ultimately according to the bible, "There is no need to pray at a specific time, in a fixed way or using an unchanging set of words."²⁰

¹⁸ Grudem 1994:376

¹⁹ Staniforth 1987:194

²⁰ John 2002:137

So having made it clear that the Bible teaches outside of Christ no one can approach God at all; however, in Christ the Christian (both male and female) can come to God through Jesus at any time, any place, anywhere, using any language, facing any direction, wearing any clothes they choose (or none at all – if not inappropriate for modesties sake), and finally whether they are clean or unclean physically speaking. Let's look briefly at what the Bible teaches about prayer and the privileged position the Christian is in.

Christian Prayer

There are many good books on prayer looking at the great prayers of the Bible, the development of prayer, praying through the Psalms, others look at the prayer life of Jesus. Popular writer Phillip Yancey notes, "The gospels record just over a dozen specific prayers by Jesus, along with several parables and teachings on the subject.

We can also safely assume that Jesus prayed in private, for when the disciples asked for instructions on prayer Jesus said they should seclude themselves. . five times the Gospels mention Jesus' practice of praying alone. Like most of us, Jesus turned to prayer in times of trouble. . . Jesus often lifted up prayers for others. . . When alone, Jesus relied on prayer as a kind of spiritual recharging. . Jesus' prayers intensified around key events. . He prayed as if it made a difference, as if time devoted to prayer mattered every bit as much as time he devoted to caring for the people."²¹

For the sake of time though, I will look at the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray when they asked him to teach them how to pray (see Luke 11:1), and then briefly consider praying continually. I will not spend time looking at the different types of prayers or words used for them, other than just briefly to quote 1 Timothy 2:1 which says, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people." Four different Greek words are used, which famous reformed theologian John Calvin explains, "Prayers is the general Greek word for every kind of prayer, and supplication where specific things are asked for. Intercession is usually the word Paul uses for our prayers for each other . . .there is nothing difficult about the meaning of thanksgiving."²²

Terry Virgo, the founder of Newfrontiers, says about the disciples' question to Jesus on prayer, "There was no one better to ask and there was no better answer than the one given. . . His plan was to provide us with a structure to help us concentrate better when we prayed. The phrases weren't meant to be mindlessly repeated, but treated as headings that we could expand ourselves."²³ Respected Pastor Pete Greig in his book, 'How to pray,' notes, "The Lord's prayer which is just 31 words long in the original language and also originally rhymed. . . Arch Bishop Justin Welby says, 'the Lord's prayer is simple enough to be memorised by a small children, and

²¹ Yancey 2006:68-69

²² Calvin 1998:36

²³ Virgo 2004:98

yet profound enough to sustain a whole lifetime of prayer.”²⁴ So let us consider this prayer now:

The Lords Prayer – Matthew 6:5-13

⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,
¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.”

Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 5:5-6 that for the Christian, whilst corporate prayer is modelled in scripture and even encouraged in the wording of the Lord’s prayer (“Our, . . . us”), the primary purpose of it is to connect with God in heaven. Nicky Gumbel says “Prayer is the most important activities of our lives. It is the main way we develop a relationship with our Father in heaven. . . It’s a relationship rather than a ritual. It is not a torrent of mechanical or mindless words.”²⁵

Prayer is not about impressing others (or praying with others) but connecting with God, who knows what we need and is not impressed with clever words or phrases uttered mindlessly (v7-8). William Law states, “We readily acknowledge that God alone is to be the rule and measure of our prayers; that in them we are looking wholly unto him, and act wholly for him, that we are only to pray in such a manner, for such things and such ends, as are suitable to his glory.”²⁶

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed by your name

Incredibly, wonderfully, amazingly because of Jesus life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven; the Christian can approach the living God, the creator of the universe and Lord of Worlds, the one who holds everything in His hands, as their

²⁴ Greig 2019:19

²⁵ Gumbel 1994:88

²⁶ Law 2013:1

heavenly Father! Terry Virgo says, “Jesus didn’t teach us to pray, ‘our master in heaven.’ That is because God doesn’t want us to relate to him as slaves. He isn’t looking for dutiful obedience to a set of rules. He is looking for a loving relationship with his children. It will involve discipline but that discipline will be motivated by the Spirit and spurred on by love.”²⁷

Through faith in Christ Jesus the Christian is adopted into God’s family (see Ephesians 1:3-6), counted as one of his children (see Roman 8:9-17). God’s Holy Spirit is at work within the Christian causing him/her to be able to cry out to God as, “Abba! Father!” (See Romans 8:15). ‘Abba,’ being the Aramaic word for Daddy or Papa, which Jesus used in the garden of Gethsemane (see Mark 14:36). As adopted sons and daughters, “Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence,” [Ephesian 3:12 NLT]. Not arrogantly, or presumptuously but as Jesus himself taught, respectfully and reverently, knowing we are loved and will be heard by the Almighty. The writer of Hebrews encourages those in Christ with these words, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” [4:16]

This truth is beyond what anyone could ever expect or earn, but it is revealed in scripture as God’s free gift for all who believe in Jesus. Lloyd Jones says, “Do you know that the true essence of prayer is found in the two words in v9 ‘Our Father.’”²⁸ Terry Virgo says, “Once we draw near God as Father he wants us to worship him.”²⁹ Which is exactly where the Lord Jesus takes us next, “Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name.” Jesus reminds his followers that whilst they can approach God as Father, he is in heaven as the ruler of heaven and his name is to be hallowed – made holy. He is to be worshipped and adored. So, Christians come in prayer to their heavenly Father who loves them, whom they know they have access to thanks to Jesus and begin by worshipping him and thanking God for who he is, what he has done and is doing around the world, declaring his greatness, as his beloved people who stand in awe of his awesomeness.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

The believer next prays God’s kingdom would come on the earth as in heaven. That God’s will in terms of things that please God and bring him worship would be done here on earth. The Christian, through prayer, is playing their part in praying into God’s eternal purposes that they have the joy and privilege of being involved in [for more on this see my article in Somali Bible Society Journal volume2 June 2021]. Wayne Grudem explains, “In prayer God allows us as creatures to be involved in activities that are eternally important.”³⁰

²⁷ Virgo 2004:104

²⁸ Lloyd Jones 2009:368

²⁹ Virgo 2004:107

³⁰ Grudem 1994:377

William Law says, “earnestly beseeching *God* to forgive the sins of all mankind, to bless them with His providence, enlighten them with his Spirit, and bring them to everlasting happiness, is the divinest exercise that the heart of man can be engaged in.”³¹ Nicky Gumbel writes, “Prayer not only changes us but changes situations.”³² Popular speaker Stormie Ormartian says “Prayer not only affects us, it also reaches out and touches those for whom we pray.”³³

The Christian’s prayer is not only heard by their Father in heaven, but heaven answers them with God’s divine power as implied by Revelations 8:1-5. Commenting on Revelation Morris writes, “That means more potent and more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in the world, more powerful than anything else is the power of prayer set ablaze by the fire of God and cast upon the earth.”³⁴

Finally, praying your kingdom come and your will be done allows the one praying to surrender their life and plans afresh to the will of God and building his Kingdom. Just like Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:36 they are praying, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” Disciple making movement leaders David and Paul Watson advise, “Prayer isn’t about twisting God’s arm to get him to do what you think he should. It is about aligning your heart and mind with God.”³⁵

Indeed, there are situations and tragedies that God allows to happen in life that leave us confused, saddened and even broken, that we have to reverently accept as part of our cross that we will have to bear this side of eternity. The living God knows our thoughts feelings and motives (see 1 Corinthians 4:3-5, Hebrews 4:12-13), he is not indifferent to them so we must bring all these feelings before our heavenly Father who loves us and ultimately say, ‘your will be done in and through my life.’ Well known Pastor Rick Warren says, “You must be honest with to God, sharing your true feeling, not what you think you ought to feel or say.”³⁶ Knowing for some situations and tragedies there will be no answers we understand this side of eternity as famous writer CS Lewis wrote, “When I lay these questions before God I get no answer. But rather a special sort of ‘no answer.’ . . . As though *God* shook His Head not in refusal but waiving the question. Like, ‘Peace, child; you don’t understand.’”³⁷

³¹ Law 2013:256

³² Gumbel 1994:91

³³ Ormartian 1995:19

³⁴ Morris 1992:118

³⁵ Watson 2014:84

³⁶ Warren 2002:107

³⁷ Dunn 1994:57

Give us this day our daily bread

Just before the Lord's prayer in v8 Jesus tells his followers that, "Your Father in heaven knows what you need before you ask him." Then towards the end of Matthew 6 in v25-34 Jesus reminds his followers not to be anxious about the practical things of life – what we will eat, drink and wear – God knows about them and will provide them for his people. Jesus closes that section by encouraging his followers, "To seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." The Christian is called to trust God for his/her needs, finding their contentment in Christ, so that along with the Apostle Paul they can say,

"In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through *God* who strengthens me." [Philippians 4:12-13]. Therefore, it may seem unnecessary, or even a lack of faith in God to come to him with the requests (Du'a if you like), but it is not as Jesus encourages us to do so. 19th Century theologian J.C. Ryle explains, "We are here taught to acknowledge our entire dependence on God for the supply of our daily necessities."³⁸ Wayne Grudem says, "Prayer expresses our trust in God and is a means whereby our trust in him can increase."³⁹

Terry Virgo writes, "'bread' includes physical, emotional and spiritual needs. At the beginning of the day we can look ahead and tell God how we'd like him to help us. At the end of the day, we can look back and thank him for the way he's answered our prayers".⁴⁰ As stated earlier, prayer for the believer is about a relationship with God, it is about intimacy with our heavenly Father who like any good father loves to not only provide what his children need but give them gifts that please them too. That is why Jesus taught us to ask, seek and knock in our prayers to God (see Matthew 7:7-11) here He finishes by saying, "If then you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

Note, it is good things not necessarily everything we ask for, as our heavenly Father knows what is good for us and what isn't and some of the requests we make to God whilst we may think them advantageous, he knows they are not. Sometimes God's answer is no, and he will make that clear to us in time if our hearts remain soft and we truly keep praying, "Your will be done." Other times he wants the Christian to persist in prayer and keep seeking him over this issue (see Luke 11:5-13, 18:1-8). Whilst we trust in God's sovereignty to bring about everything in his perfect timing often in these cases of persistent prayer God is actually doing a good work in the person praying's heart through the waiting (see Psalm 27:14, 38:15)! Theologian William Hendriksen explains it this way, "What God demands is that his people persevere in opening their hearts to him."⁴¹

³⁸ Ryle 1993:40

³⁹ Grudem 1994:376

⁴⁰ Virgo 2004:122

⁴¹ Hendriksen 1979:817

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors

The Christian having been washed clean by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross (see Ephesians 1:7, Romans 5:9), is now encouraged to daily confess their sins to God. The image Jesus used when trying to wash Peter's feet in John 13:11 is most apt, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean." This side of eternity as we go through life we fall into sin (sometimes accidentally, sometimes deliberately) that offend God, hurt others and ourselves, likewise others wrong us (accidentally and sometimes on purpose).

It is important to emphasize here as Lloyd Jones explains so eloquently, "Nothing is quite so fallacious as to think of sin only in terms of actions, and as long as we think of it in terms of things actually done, we fail to understand it. The essence of the biblical teaching on sin is it is essentially a disposition. It is a state of heart."⁴² A state of heart that is set against God, it is proud, rebellious and self-governing and therefore independent from God. Yet one becomes a Christian by humbly recognising our rebellion and need for a saviour and therefore they surrender their life to the Lordship of Christ. Whilst this is a one off act of surrendering to Jesus (see John 5:24, Acts 2:38-39, Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 1:13-14), the outworking of this should impact and bring into line every thought, decision and action (see 2 Corinthian 10:5-6, Philippians 2:12-13, Hebrews 12:14). When sinful actions, words, thoughts and motives are committed, then one should quickly repent of them.

Jesus calls those who are his to seek daily forgiveness before God and before God offer others the same spirit of forgiveness they have received from God. Interestingly it is around these two areas of seeking forgiveness and giving forgiveness to others that Jesus gives very strong warnings of what he expects of his true disciples; implying you are not really a Christian if you do not do these.

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." 1 John 1:8-10

"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:14-15. See also Matthew 18:21-35 where it makes it clear that God expects his people to forgive others not just externally but, "From your heart."

Theologian John Stott explains, "This certainly does not mean that our forgiveness of others earns us the right to be forgiven. It is rather that God forgives only the penitent and that one of the chief evidences of true penitence is a forgiving spirit. Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offence against God,

⁴² Lloyd-Jones 2009:338

the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling.”⁴³

Thus, Christians should regularly come to God and seek his forgiveness for the things they have done wrong that they are aware of and ask God to do a check of their own heart and deal with any wicked ways in them they are not aware of (see Psalm 139:23-24). It also enables them to state their forgiveness of those who have wronged them before God and ask his help in this area when they are struggling to genuinely forgive from the heart. There is not time to look into the forgiveness of others here, as this particularly for some things is a process that happens over time with the Holy Spirit’s help. Sometimes he enables people to feel supernatural love and offer immediate forgiveness from the heart; but often it is a process that God, in his grace, allows us to take time to work through properly, this phrase helps remind us of that destination.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

The final part of the Lord’s prayer is more about protecting the Christian from yielding to future sin than it is about protecting us from other peoples’ or demons’ malicious plans. Famous theologian Augustine of Hippo said the meaning of the line is best understood as, “We are conscious of our own weakness, and desire to enjoy the protection of God, that we may remain impregnable against all the assaults of Satan.”⁴⁴ Calvin writes, “Whoever implores the assistance of God to overcome temptations acknowledges that, unless God deliver him, he will be constantly falling.”⁴⁵

For the Christian there is great peace in knowing that God is sovereign over our lives and therefore everything that comes our way he has a purpose in (see Genesis 50:19-20, Proverbs 19:21, Acts 2:23). Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” However, this does not mean that we accept everything that comes our way, God wants us to exercise our faith in seeking him through prayer to deliver us out of trouble (see 2 Corinthians 1:10-11), to seek him for peace in our land (see 1 Timothy 2:1-4), and yet also trust him when he allows us to go through various afflictions which will come along (see 2 Corinthians 1:6-7, 2 Timothy 3:12).

Even in temptation the Christian can be sure that, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” [1 Corinthians 10:13]. So, thanks to God’s loving Fatherly care for the Christian, they need not fall into sin when temptation comes their way. The problem of temptation then is not that God tempts us or allows us to be tempted beyond our ability, but as James writes, “Let no one say when he is

⁴³ Stott 2008:149-150

⁴⁴ Calvin 2007:304

⁴⁵ Calvin 2007:304

tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." [James 1:13-14]. The problem is with us, as Jesus makes clear with his disciples in Matthew 26:41 "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Thus, the Christian in prayer is recognising the human hearts proclivity to sin and daily is to seek their heavenly Father for help not to give into sinful temptations that come along and to deliver them out of any evil that comes their way, either from the devil, the world or indeed from their own sinful heart within. Calvin writes on this verse, "We are in danger from the devil and from sin, if the Lord does not protect and deliver us."⁴⁶

This daily request to God will find its ultimate fulfilment once Christ returns and ushers in the eternal age to come where we will be given imperishable resurrection bodies that live on a renewed earth, where there is no evil and no sin (see 1 Corinthians 15:42-49, Philippians 3:20-21, Revelation 21:3-4+27). Yet, this side of eternity the Christian prays this recognising their complete need for God's help to keep them on the straight and narrow path he has called us to (see Psalm 25:4-14).

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever, Amen.

Tradition adds these words to the end of the prayer the Lord taught. Whilst they are a very fitting end to the pray as it finishes with praise, something J John encourages,⁴⁷ and I personally often include them; it is not actually there in the original texts of God's word and therefore not incumbent upon the Christian to use them. Even the word Amen, is just an ancient Hebrew word from the Old Testament meaning, "Yes. I agree. So be it."⁴⁸ Whilst the Christian does not have to finish prayers with 'amen', if they choose to do so, as the majority of Christians do, they are aligning themselves with how through the ages and indeed covenants (Old and New) the saints of God have chosen to close their prayers and affirm the prayers of others. However, though it is good if corporately gathered to verbalise our prayers and let others know we are agreeing with them in prayer; it is important to remember the all seeing and knowing God knows when one has finished praying and when they actually truly are agreeing with another person's prayer whether the word 'Amen' is used or not!

Praying without ceasing

Before I bring this paper on the privilege of prayer to a close it seems prudent to briefly cover the call to 'pray continually' as several New Testament passages encourage believers in.

⁴⁶ Calvin 2007:305

⁴⁷ John 2002:141

⁴⁸ Greig 2019:200

- Ephesians 6:18, “Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.”
- Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
- Colossians 4:2, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
- 1Thessalonians 5:16-18, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Thus, for the Christian, whilst it is important to take time out to pray each day, they are also called to continually be praying to God as they go about their daily lives. William Barclay writes, “Prayer must be constant, intense and unselfish.”⁴⁹ Rick Warren helpfully says, “Friendship with God is built by sharing all your life experiences with him. ‘Praying without ceasing’ means conversing with God while shopping, driving, working, or performing any other everyday tasks.”⁵⁰ Yes, even when going to the toilet! As Jesus is clear it is not bodily functions that make us unclean before God, but the evil that comes out of our heart (see Matthew 15:10-20); and if God has chosen to dwell in us through his Holy Spirit, then he is with us all the time anyway. Therefore, arguably it is a good use of that and any other time to pray to our heavenly Father.

Conclusion

Prayer for the Christian is essentially as Wayne Grudem puts it, “Personal Communication with God.”⁵¹ Prayer is about coming to our heavenly Father who loves us, praising him, seeking his heart and surrendering our lives to do his. It is about talking to the One who knows us intimately, perfectly, supplying our needs before we even submit them into his loving hands. Seeking his forgiveness when we have messed up, and his help for us to offer the same grace to others who have hurt us. Prayer is seeking him for future grace to enable us to stand strong for him in what lies before us.

Essentially by praying we are recognising God for who he really is, bringing ourselves voluntarily under his Lordship and asking his help in our daily lives so that we have all we need and live in such a way that brings glory to him. For the Christian it is not a duty to be performed but a privilege to be enjoyed as we spend time communing with our heavenly Father. Grudem says, “Prayer brings us into a deeper fellowship with God, and he loves us and delights in our fellowship with him.”⁵² It is a lifestyle not a schedule. Peter Greig advice on prayer is, “Keep it

⁴⁹ Barclay 1974:218

⁵⁰ Warren 2002:99

⁵¹ Grudem 1994:376

⁵² Grudem 1994:377

simple, keep it real, keep it up.”⁵³ James Houston says, “The life of prayer is a call to exchange the less important for the more important.”⁵⁴

When Christians pray, we bring joy to God’s heart and glorify his name as we can only come to the Father in prayer, through Jesus Christ his Son by the power and help of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ Thus, the whole Godhead is involved in the process of helping God’s people relate to God as he had always intended from the beginning.

What a privilege the Christian (both male and female) has, thanks to Jesus, to be able to pray to God as their heavenly Father who loves them. The Christian can pray anytime, anyplace, anywhere, in any language and in any situation and state they may be in. Whilst this is true for all Christians; what wonderful freedom and special significance these truths have for those who come to Christ from an Islamic background.

Why not finish this paper by spending time to pray to God now just as you are?

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Annalena Waa Aar (Annalena the Lioness): A Poem

Aweis A. Ali, PhD

Annalena Tonelli (02 April 1943 – 05 October 2003) was an Italian lawyer, educator and healthcare worker. She was a larger than life social activist who crisscrossed the



The late Annalena Tonelli
Photo credit: Wikipedia

Somali peninsula setting up schools and health care centers. Annalena was awarded the prestigious UNHCR's Nansen Refugee Award in June 2003.¹

Annalena was shot and killed in her tuberculosis hospital compound in Borama, Somaliland, by an alleged Islamist gunman. This martyrdom ended the life of one of the most prominent humanitarian workers in the Horn of Africa; Annalena served the Somali people for thirty-three years. I composed this Somali poem to immortalize her memory in the Somali psyche.

Annalena Waa Aar	Annalena the Lioness
Annalena Tonelli Inantii Ilaahoo Baqdin aan aqoonoo Soddon iyo saddex sano Ayay Bariga Africa Soomaali u adeegtoo Hiil iyo hooba U hurtay nafteedii Jacaylkeenna awgiis Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye	Annalena Tonelli The daughter of God Was fearless For thirty-three years She served the Somalis In East Africa She gave and supported us She sacrificed her life Because she loved us Annalena the lioness Has aided us all
Annalena-deenu Forli ayay ku dhalatoo Nabad iyo caano Iyo cimilo suubban Ehel iyo axsaab jecel	Our Annalena Was born in Forli ² Peace and milk A good weather Loving friends and relatives

¹United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2003-04-15). "Italian Woman Wins Nansen Refugee Award for Work in Somalia." <https://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=3e9c172d7&query=annalena%20tonelli> (accessed 31 October 2021).

²Forli, Italy, is a Northern Italy municipality situated in Emilia-Romagna city. Forli is the capital city of the province of Forli-Cesena.

<p>Iyadoo intaas heli Eebbe yaa u yeeroo</p>	<p>She had all these God called her</p>
<p>Soomaalida u baahan In ay garab istaagto Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p>	<p>To support the Somalis Who needed her help Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p>
<p>Annalena ugub bay Weligeed ahaydoo Reer ma ay lahaynoo Soomaali oo idil Ubadkeedi weeyaan Waana sababta ay abid Ay noo difaacdo Addin iyo afkeedaba Uunku nooga baqayay Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p>	<p>Annalena never had Any biological children She was not married But all Somalis Are like her own children This is the reason She always defended us With word and deed Other people knew this Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p>
<p>Annalena hiilkeed Ma buunbuunin aniguye Xasuuqii Wagalla ee Ay askarta Keenya Soomaalida Wajeer ay Arxandarro u laayeen Iyadaa ka gubato Gurmad wayn u fidisoo Arap Moi ka eri Keenya Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p>	<p>I am not exaggerating How Annalena assisted us The Wagalla massacre³ When the Kenyan soldiers Massacred en masse The Somalis in Wajir Without any mercy She aided the victims Moi expelled her from Kenya Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p>
<p>Annalena hiilkeed Haddiii ay tacliin tahay Cunto iyo cabitaan Ama caafimaad guud Sharci iyo aqoontiis Innaga baahideeneey Ay haqabtireeysay Lacag innama waydiin Abaal iyo warkiis daa Annalena waa aar</p>	<p>Annalena supported us With education With food and water With healthcare With legal defense She met our needs Everything we needed She did not ask for money She did not demand thanks Annalena the lioness</p>

³Wagalla massacre was an inhumane butchery of about 5,000 ethnic Somali Kenyans in Wajir Country by the Kenyan army on 10 February 1984. President Daniel arap Moi unceremoniously expelled Annalena Tonelli from Kenya. Annalena was the only Kenya-based expatriate who openly aided the victims of the massacre and sought justice for them. The President of the Republic resented Annalena's advocacy for the victims.

<p>Way noo adeegtaye</p> <p>Annalena ila arag Rachel Jones buug ay Uga hadashay aarka Aan ka tiriyay maansadan Inkastuusan koobayn Howlihii ay qabatay Ama noloshi aarkaas Waa qoraal iftiimiyay Qiimihii ay lahayd Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p> <p>Annalena awood badan Mid aan waaban iga dheh Cadceed iyo cudurba Amnigoo xumaada Iyadoo la weeraro Afduub lagu kaxaystana Marna kama ay waabin In ay noo adeegtee Miyaan Eebbe soo dirin? Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p> <p>Annalena hooyadeen Waqooyi Bari kuma ekayn Xamar kaba adeegtay Itaal intay u helaysay Ma iloobin Markana Ka furtay iskuulo Ka aflaaxday arday badan U hiilisay Beledweyn Dhibaataana ku aragtay Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p> <p>Annalena ildheeridi Cuduro aad u halis badan Qaaxadu ay tahay mid Aydhis uu ka mid yahay Yay daryeel u fidisoo Iskuul kuwa dhegaha li'i</p>	<p>Has aided us all</p> <p>Learn Annalena with me In the book by Rachel Jones⁴ She wrote about the lioness This poetry is for that icon The book does not cover Everything she did Or the life of that lioness The book illuminated Her importance to us Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p> <p>Annalena the powerful She was decisive No heat or illness Or worsening security Or attacks against her Or that hostage taking Could even stop her From assisting us Is she not Godsent? Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p> <p>Annalena our mother She served beyond Northeast⁵ She served in Mogadishu To the best of her ability She did not forget Merca She opened schools there Many students graduated She supported Beledweyn Though she suffered there Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p> <p>Annalena was farsighted Some deadly diseases Like tuberculous And AIDS as well She treated them all She opened in Borama</p>
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⁴Rachel Pieh Jones. *Stronger Than Death: How Annalena Tonelli Defied Terror and Tuberculosis in the Horn of Africa*. Plough Publishing House, 2019.

⁵Northeast Kenya encompasses the Somali Region of Kenya

<p>Wax ay ku barten Ay ka fulisay Borama</p> <p>Illaa iminkuu furan yahay Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p> <p>Annalena-deennii Waxaa dilay ardaal wayn Al-Shabaab uu soo diray Siday ilo ay sheegeen Ummad aad u badan buu Doqonkaas indhaha tiray Ma in dhiig la daadshaa Eebbe loogu dhawaadaa Ibliis yaaba hagayee Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p> <p>Annalena iminkadan Aakhirey jirtaayoo Way shahiidday iyaduye Eebbe yay la joogtaa Innagaa agoon aho Hooyadeen la aasaye Anfariir ku nooloo Uur xumo la joognee Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p> <p>Annalena inantaadi Eebow waan tebaynaa Iyadoo kaleetaan Ebid noo imaanine Haddii adi ad doonto Amarkaaga ay tahay Annalena oo kale Noo soo dir Eebow Harjad aan illownee Annalena waa aar Way noo adeegtaye</p>	<p>School for the deaf So they could be educated</p> <p>That school is still open Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p> <p>Our Annalena Was killed by an idiot Sent by Al-Shabab⁶ According to some sources That murderous idiot Has blinded a nation Once cannot please God By shedding innocent blood But Satan was leading him Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p> <p>Annalena right now Is in the Here-After She is indeed a martyr She is with God But we are orphans Our mother is dead We are still bewildered We are living with heartache Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p> <p>We miss Annalena O God, she is your daughter No one like her Has ever come to us If it is your will If that is what you want Send to us, God Someone like Annalena So we can be reinvigorated Annalena the lioness Has aided us all</p>
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⁶Al-Shabab is a violent Somalia based Islamist group

About the author

Aweis A. Ali, PhD, is a missiologist, a poet, and an authority on the persecuted church in the Muslim world with special expertise on the Somali Church. He came to the Lord in Mogadishu in 1986 through the SIM ministry. Aweis was a co-pastor of a house church in Mogadishu, Somalia, in mid 1990s when 12 of its 14 members were martyred for their faith.⁷ Aweis, an ordained elder, has been ministering in the Muslim world since 1993; he has lived and served in world areas that include the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa and the United States. Aweis earned a B.Th. degree from the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa; an M.Div. degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri; and a PhD from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. Aweis' PhD thesis is titled, "Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia." Aweis is the author, editor or translator of 10 books and a dozen articles. He is the founder and the Series Editor of the annual *Maansada Masiixa* (Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry.) Dr. Aweis can be reached at amazingwisdom@gmail.com.

⁷ The names of the martyred believers from the Medina House-Church are: Liibaan Ibraahim Hassan, Ahmed Ayntow Gobe, Saleban Mohamed Saleban, Isma'el Yusuf Mukhtar, Mohamed Aba Nur, Ali Kusow Mataan, Mohamed Abdullahi Yusuf, Nurani Madey Madka, Khalif Dayah Guled, Bashir Mo'alim Mohamud, Prof. Haji Mohamed Hussein, and Mohamed Sheikdon Jama.

A Call for Papers (CFP)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

The *Somali Bible Society Journal* is a biannual online publication that accepts any papers that contribute to the understanding of the Somali Church, its history, mission, and ministry. The *SBS Journal* also publishes interviews, book reviews, and poetry. No particular footnoting or bibliography style is required as long as the author is consistent in their chosen writing style. Because of the Somali ministry's nature, authors can use their real names if they wish or pen names when there is a security concern.

The length of the papers is negotiable but a minimum of 2,500 words are recommended. Longer papers are appreciated. Papers must be single-spaced, and Microsoft Word. Papers are accepted throughout the year. The authors are encouraged to send an abstract of about 250 words before sending a complete paper. If your paper is already completed, we would still consider it for publication. The author should send 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.

The *SBS Journal* does not republish already published papers. Please do not send any paper that is being considered by another publication. The *SBS Journal* contributes to the literature development of the Somali Church. Your paper could inspire, strengthen, and encourage the persecuted but growing Somali community of faith worldwide. Your sacrifice of submitting quality papers to the *SBS Journal* will become the Somali Church's everlasting heritage.

The SBSJ is the official Journal of the *Somali Bible Society* (SBS). SBS is fully registered and represents Somali Christians in the Somali peninsula and beyond. The SBS is a non-denominational and not for profit parachurch organization. Please email your abstract or complete paper to any of the below email addresses.

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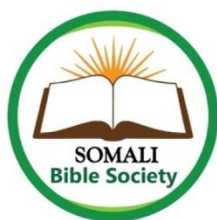
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ISSN: 2709 -4332 (online)

Somali Bible Society Journal
Volume II, Issue 2, December 2021
Published by the Somali Bible Society
Mecca al Mukarama St
Mogadishu, Somalia
www.somalibiblesociety.org/sbs-journal/
Info@SomaliBibleSociety.org
Editor-in-Chief: Rev. Aweis A. Ali, PhD