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## To the Ends of the Earth: Reaching the Somali People with the Gospel

Ruth Cope

### Introduction

The Somali people are one of the most unreached people groups on the face of the planet, with 99.88% adhering to Islam according to the Joshua Project.<sup>1</sup> Historically, they have been very hostile to the gospel, with conversion to Christianity punishable by death. The World Watch List cites Somalia as the third most difficult country in which to follow Jesus, preceded only by Afghanistan and North Korea.<sup>2</sup> The intent of this article is to peel back the iron curtain of Islam and go beneath the surface of the religious history of the Somali people. It is widely held that “Somali” and “Muslim” are synonymous - to be Somali *is* to be Muslim. However, history suggests a different story. This article will assess the religious history of the Somali people in order to identify why Christianity never took root among this people group while Islam was wildly successful in its missionary endeavors. A plan will then be presented for reaching these historically severe and hard-hearted people with the good news of Jesus the Messiah.

### Ethnographic Survey and Religious History



The ruins of Masjid al-Qiblatayn (Arabic: **مَسْجِدُ الْقِبْلَتَيْنِ**),  
Also known as Labo-Qibla mosque,  
Photo credit: Walter Callens. Wikipedia CC BY 2.0

The Somalis are a Cushitic, pastoralist, and largely nomadic people group inhabiting the Horn of Africa. There are approximately 24 million Somalis worldwide, primarily in Somalia and Somaliland, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti<sup>3</sup>. Islam was introduced to Somalia in the 7th century by Arabs from across the Red Sea,<sup>4</sup> and evidence suggests that all Somali clans were Islamized by the 16th century.<sup>5</sup> The exact details of Islam’s entrance into Somalia are fuzzy, but one notable detail is the presence of the Mosque of the two-mihrab (Masjid al-

Qiblatayn) in the Somali port city of Saylac. One niche faces Jerusalem and the other faces Mecca, indicating that the mosque must have been built before the

<sup>1</sup> Joshua Project, *Somali People*.

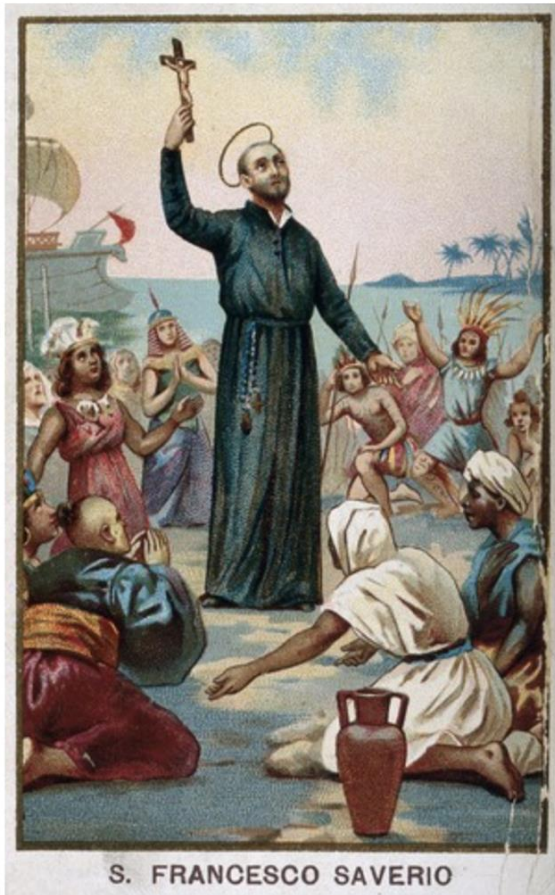
<sup>2</sup> Open Doors USA, *World Watch List*.

<sup>3</sup> Joshua Project, *Somali People*.

<sup>4</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, “*The History of the Somali Peninsula*,” 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ali Abdirahman Hersi. “*The Arab Factor in Somali History*,” 141.

direction of the Qibla was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca in 624, thus exhibiting a very early presence of Islam in Somalia.<sup>6</sup>



S. FRANCESCO SAVERIO

Saint Francis Xavier surrounded by Africans and Asians while holding a crucifix  
Photo credit: Welcomecollection.org, Public domain

Prior to the rise of Islam, Somalis adhered to an ancient religion known as Eebbe Waaq, a complex polytheistic belief system.<sup>7</sup> However, strong evidence also suggests pre-Islamic monotheistic religion in the region, such as the Yibr clan who claim direct lineage from the Hebrews who migrated out of Egypt during the Exodus.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, very early Arab sources indicate a Christian presence in Somalia beginning in the 10th century, describing the port city of Saylac as a Christian city with a small minority of Muslim Yemeni merchants who lived peaceably with their Christian neighbors.<sup>9</sup> Saylac later accepted Islam, but Christianity appears to have had a sizeable foothold in the region for several centuries. Further evidence of pre-Islamic Christian presence among the Somali people comes from a fascinating account from St Francis Xavier of a visit paid to the island of Soqotra, off the coast of Northern Somalia.

In a letter dated 20 September 1542, he wrote to the Jesuit headquarters in Rome about his encounters with inhabitants of

that island. They claimed to be converts of St. Thomas, and seemed to be totally illiterate and without any Scriptures. Their “priests” were also illiterate, but were able to do their daily prayers from memory, despite the fact that they were in a language they did not understand. They had totally forgotten the sacrament of baptism, but had Lenten fasts... St. Xavier remarked several times how proud the Soqotrans were of being Christian.<sup>10</sup>

There remains one Somali clan, the Carab Maxamed Saalax, who trace their genealogy to Soqotra; but this clan and the inhabitants of the Island now identify as

<sup>6</sup> Abdullahi, “*The History of the Somali Peninsula*,” 14.

<sup>7</sup> Islamic History Institute, “*The History of Pre-Islamic Somalia*.”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ben I. Aram, “*Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage*,” 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

Muslim.<sup>11</sup> Apart from written evidence, archeologists have discovered ruins of Somali tombs that are marked with crosses.<sup>12</sup> Ben Aram makes a solid argument that on the basis of these written records, archaeological data and Judeo-Christian symbolism still active in traditional Somali culture, “both Judaism and Christianity preceded Islam to the lowland Horn of Africa.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Aweis Ali’s extensive work on Christian history among the Somali people has led to the conclusion that “For many people, “Somali” and “Christian” are oxymoron, but history is littered with enough evidence that this assumed oxymoron is one big fallacy.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite this fascinating history of pre-Islamic Somalia, the fact remains that today Somalia is nearly 100% Sunni Muslim. Somalis are traditionally adherents of Sufism, with Sufi orders appearing as early as the 10th century and “rapidly becoming a revitalizing force.”<sup>15</sup> At one time most Somalis were at least nominal members of a Sufi order.<sup>16</sup> The Sufis gained ground rapidly in Somalia because of their unilateral devotion to Allah and passion for preaching his word. However, this mystical, ascetic, typically (though not exclusively) non-violent branch of Islam in Somalia has been obscured by the rise of the Al-Qaeda backed terrorist organization Al-Shabaab. The emergence of Al-Shabaab led to a shift in the larger Somali expression of Islam due to Al-Shabaab’s zero-tolerance policy for religious minorities. Among those minorities, or *kafir* - infidels - are both Christians and Sufis; making both groups valid targets for attack. Sufi practices such as saint veneration are considered idolatry under Wahhabism, the “austere form of Islam that Al Shabaab embraces.”<sup>17</sup> As Al-Shabaab gained ground in the early 2000’s, they began to effectively stamp out Sufism by targeting Sufi holy sites and religious leaders, since “their practices go against the insurgents’ strict interpretation of Islamic law.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the arc of religious history among the Somali people emerges - ancient Somali peoples perceived the invisible attributes of God, his “divine nature and eternal power” as displayed through the things He has made (Romans 1:20) and responded by developing the *Eebbe Waaq* system of worship. Then, very early in Somalia’s history, perhaps as early as the Hebrew Exodus, the revelation of the one true living God, YHWH, made its way to the Horn of Africa. Later on, the gospel of this God become flesh in the person of Jesus Christ reached Cushitic peoples and established a foothold in the region as evidenced by early Christian archeological findings. However, in these early years Islam also became a powerful force that swept through the Arabian Peninsula and made its way across the Red Sea to the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Aweis A. Ali, “A Brief History of Christian Missions in Somalia,” 1.

<sup>15</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, “Religious Orders and the Cult of the Saints,” Somalia: A Country Study.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: “Somalia: Situation of Practitioners of Sufism in Mogadishu.”

<sup>18</sup> Abdi Sheikh, “Shabaab Rebels Destroy Grave and Mosque in Mogadishu.”

Horn of Africa, perhaps as early as the Prophet Muhammad's first Hijrah (migration) from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE.

Islam quickly overtook Somalia, and in less than 800 years the entire country was fully Islamized, to the point that most Somalis will tell you they have always been Muslim. The Somalis embraced a Sufi variety of Sunni Islam, with most Somalis belonging to a Sufi order. However, in recent years the Wahhabi ideal took root and the extremist terrorist organization Al-Shabaab swept through Somalia, leaving few traces of Sufi mysticism in its wake. Presently, Somalia is 99.88% Muslim, which is one of the highest percentages of adherence to Islam anywhere in the world.<sup>19</sup> However, not all Somalis are the jihadist fundamentalists that the present-day media makes them out to be - the Sufis are experiencing a revival of sorts, coming back into the light and gaining strength once again.<sup>20</sup>

### **Missions History and Openness to the Gospel**

The idea that Christianity is the white man's religion exported to Africa recently is a vast misconception that is deeply detrimental to missionary efforts across the continent. Africans must recognize that "the Christian presence in Africa is almost as old as Christianity itself."<sup>21</sup> Such is true among the Somalis as well - archeological evidence suggests that Christianity predates Islam by quite a substantial margin in the Horn of Africa, stripping the argument "to be Somali is to be Muslim" of its validity. It is speculated that Christianity remained in Somalia as late as 1500 until Islam overtook and became the religion of the nation.<sup>22</sup>

The history of Christian missions among the Somali people after the widespread takeover of Islam begins in full force in the year 1881, when the Roman Catholic Church opened an orphanage near Berbera. This Catholic Mission remained in the region for many decades and produced a number of vibrant disciples of Christ. Other notable missionary efforts include the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church, who arrived in the southern town of Kismayo in 1896, the Mennonite Mission, who set up efforts in Mogadishu in 1953, and the Sudan Interior Mission, who entered Somalia the following year.<sup>23</sup> All of these organizations were eventually kicked out of the country, but continued their efforts to reach Somalis from nearby Nairobi, Kenya, or Jigjiga, Ethiopia. A number of missionaries during this time frame were martyred for their witness of Jesus Christ, to the point where it was speculated in the early 20th century that there were more missionary graves in Somalia than there were missionaries.<sup>24</sup> Aweis Ali calls these four organizations the "Magnificent Four" and

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<sup>19</sup> Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History," 109.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Bowers, "Nubian Christianity: The Neglected Heritage," 3-23.

<sup>22</sup> Aram, "Somalia's Judeo-Christian History," 20.

<sup>23</sup> Aweis A. Ali, "A Brief History of Christianity in the Somali Peninsula," 70.

<sup>24</sup> Aweis A. Ali, "The Greatest Missionaries to the Somalis: The Heroes of 1881 to 1981," 73.

states that “the progress of the Somali Church is directly linked to the missionary work of the Magnificent Four.”<sup>25</sup>

Missionary efforts in Somalia came skidding to a halt in 1991, when the Somali government collapsed and initiated a decades-long civil war from which the nation is still recovering. While all Somalis have suffered, Christians in particular have paid with their lives as they became “the target of a Muslim Holy War.”<sup>26</sup> Persecution of Christians escalated again in 2009 when Somalia adopted Sharia law.<sup>27</sup> Under Sharia, apostasy is punishable by death. The political instability of Somalia combined with religious fervor of the militant group Al-Shabaab makes Somalia one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a Christian, let alone a missionary.

Today, a number of missions agencies have a presence in Somalia and Somaliland, though their work is highly secretive and they function exclusively under the guise of humanitarian relief and aid work. However, missionaries can live and work with much more openness in the neighboring countries of Kenya and Ethiopia. Of the world’s 24 million Somalis, nearly half are found in Eastern Kenya and Eastern Ethiopia.<sup>28</sup> This is a wide-open door for the gospel, because Ethiopia and Kenya are both considered Christian nations where government restriction on missionary activity is minimal - in fact, even missionary work visas are attainable! Thus, there are a number of vibrant efforts to reach the Somalis based in these neighboring countries.

One of the most exciting recent developments in missions effort among the Somali is the rising presence of Kenyan, Ethiopian, and Somali believers, including a number of believers from a Muslim background, who are being trained and sent as missionaries to the Somali people throughout the Horn of Africa.<sup>29</sup> These anointed, spirit-filled African missionaries are being sent to places that a Westerner could never set foot in and are seeing enormous success as they labor quietly, faithfully, and steadily without large ministry platforms or international attention. There are many advantages to training and sending African missionaries, such as the greatly lessened cultural barriers that they face, the relative ease of obtaining work permits in difficult to access locations, and the greatly reduced budgets - five to ten African missionaries can be sent on the same budget that a single American missionary typically raises! It is an exciting hour in missions history as the baton is being passed to indigenous laborers who will likely be the ones to sprint to the finish line.

In terms of openness to the gospel, to say the Somali people are difficult to reach is an understatement. There are immense obstacles which prevent Somali people from being open to the gospel, including the deep tribal identity that is virtually inseparable from Islam, the adoption of Sharia law making conversion punishable by death, and

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<sup>25</sup> Ali, “A Brief History of Christianity in the Somali Peninsula,” 70.

<sup>26</sup> Aweis A. Ali. “A Brief History of Christian Missions in Somalia,” 57.

<sup>27</sup> US Library of Congress, “Somalia: Sharia Law.”

<sup>28</sup> Joshua Project, *Somali People*.

<sup>29</sup> Specific details are omitted due to the sensitive nature of their work.

the rise of militant Islam which has targeted Christians and other minorities. The combination of these factors, plus the high cost that missionaries must pay to make the gospel known among Somalis, makes one wonder whether it is possible at all to reach this people group.

However, this question “Can the Somalis be reached?” has already met its answer - “I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number from **every** nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9, emphasis added). It is not a question of *whether* the Somali people will be reached with the Good News but *when*. It is only a matter of time - and of great, great sacrifice. Biblically, there are two clear prerequisites before Jesus returns to the earth to establish His kingdom in righteousness and justice - the gospel must go forth to every nation and *then* the end will come (Matthew 24:14), and the full number of martyrs must be filled up (Revelation 6:11). It is no coincidence - these two things are deeply interconnected. The blood of the saints will be spilled as they spread to the ends of the earth proclaiming His name, and so it will be among the Somalis. Aweis Ali states that “despite the relentless persecution Christians in Somalia face, there is no evidence it has slowed down the numerical growth of the Somali church. Tertullian may have been right when he said, ‘The oftener we are mowed down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.’”<sup>30</sup>

### **The Most Effective Missions Movement in Somali History**

If it is true that Christianity preceded Islam in Somalia, the question lingers - why was Islam so effective in their missionary efforts in Somalia while Christianity died out? Why did Christianity not take root among the Somalis?<sup>31</sup> The fact that there are only several hundred known Christians in Somalia today indicates that Christian missions has largely been unsuccessful.<sup>32</sup> However, there is one missions movement in Somalia’s history that was wildly successful - and that is the Islamic missionary efforts which succeeded in converting the entire nation to Islam, taking over the preexisting Cushitic Sky God cult and the presence of pre-Islamic Judaism and Christianity. Ali Abdirahman Hersi’s extensive work on the Islamization of Somalia sheds light on the factors causing Islam to gain such extensive ground. The first notable element is the prevalence of itinerant, traveling missionaries. There was no formal, organized missionary effort within Islam at the time, so Islam was propagated to the Somalis primarily by Muslim merchants, who “doubled wherever [they] went as a peddler of both divine and profane merchandise.”<sup>33</sup> This is significant because it made Islam accessible to people everywhere - wherever the merchant traveled, his message went with him.

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<sup>30</sup> Ali, “A Brief History of Christianity in Somalia,” 59.

<sup>31</sup> Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian History,” 23.

<sup>32</sup> Open Doors, *Somali People*.

<sup>33</sup> Hersi, “The Arab Factor in Somali History,” 112.



The second major factor in the Islamization of the Somalis was power encounters. There are numerous, nearly identical stories proceeding from several corners of the Cushitic world of Sheikh Yusuf's interaction with a pagan magician.<sup>34</sup> This prolific legend tells of the two men going head-to-head to prove who had true power from on high. The magician performed a miraculous feat of passing through a mountain without either tunnel or door. On his third pass through the mountain, Sheikh Yusuf called down power from Allah and trapped his enemy inside the mountain for the rest of eternity. Thus, all the people were converted to Islam - "paganism was vanquished and Islam triumphed."<sup>35</sup> Miraculous demonstrations of power were a significant factor in Muslims changing allegiance from their previous faith to Islam.

In addition to itinerant preachers and power encounters, it is notable that the bulk of Islamic missionary work among Somalis was done by Somalis themselves. After Islam's initial entrance, many young Somalis began to travel to North Africa and Yemen for education. Upon their return, they went about as nomadic priests and missionaries.<sup>36</sup> This is significant because it indicates that the people took early ownership of Islam as their own and thus took up the mantle of propagating the faith among their own people. It was not viewed as a foreign religion, and Somalis themselves felt responsible to proclaim the message to their brethren.

Lastly, these indigenous, itinerant missionaries displayed great persistence in the work of spreading Islam to the furthest reaches of Somali territory. The Islamization of the Somali people was a "long, slow process spanning a period of seven centuries."<sup>37</sup> The Islamic missions effort in Somalia did not cease until inhabitants of every village, town, and nomadic camp could be called true Muslims. This shows that the baton of missionary work was passed successfully from generation to generation, older missionaries training younger ones and effectively keeping the fire burning even as centuries slid by.

It was not until the 15th and 16th centuries that military force became a factor in the conversion of the Somali people. Prior to the conflict with Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Christians, Islam's advent in the Horn of Africa was very peaceful. When conflict began occurring, Somalia received aid from their Muslim brothers in Yemen, an event which solidified their Muslim identity, their ties with the Arab world, and their fierce opposition to Christianity.<sup>38</sup> This indicates that, unlike some other Muslim nations, the Somali people accepted Islam entirely voluntarily and were not the product of forced conversions.

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<sup>34</sup> I. M. Lewis, "Sharif Yusuf Barkhadle: The Blessed Saint of Somaliland," 75.

<sup>35</sup> Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History," 128.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>38</sup> Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History," 140.



Sheikh Uways Bin Muhammed Al Barawi  
Photo credit: Somali Spot

Additionally, a few takeaways can be derived from the spread of the Qadiriyya Sufi order. By the time this order rose to the height of its popularity, Islam already had a strong foothold, so it could be seen as more of a reform movement than a missionary movement. That said, many things can be learned from the dissemination methods of one of its most prominent sheikhs, Sheikh Uways Bin Muhammad Al Barawi. As a result of his influence, the Qadiriyya order became the largest Sufi order in East Africa, and not only that, but its influence extended to every level of East African Muslim society.<sup>39</sup>

Uways' influence was so vast due in part to the fact that he considered his movement to be 'pan Muslim' and thus attracted followers from every walk of life - "Whether pastoralist or townsman, farmer or fisherman, members were attracted to the Qadiriyya regardless of socio-economic status or clan/ethnic affiliation."<sup>40</sup> His primary modes of disseminating his message were itinerant traveling/preaching, through which he gained a massive following and widespread respect, and his prolific poetry. Many people heard the message of the Qadiriyya through his edited compilation of poetry, which included poems from the order's leaders connected to simple lessons, stories of miracles and power encounters, and hadiths of the Prophet.<sup>41</sup> This compilation was meant to instruct the masses, and was designed to be recited to illiterate populations. The significance of this is that Uways made his teachings accessible to the masses - not just the learned elite, but to all people everywhere, regardless of education or status.

The purpose of this survey of the spread of Islam among the Somali people is to extract principles and best practices for how the good news of Jesus Christ may make its home among a people who have been hardened to its message for many centuries. The spread of Islam among the Somali people was profoundly successful, while Christianity made an early entrance but soon sputtered out and faltered completely. What did Islam do correctly where Christian missions has failed, and how can future generations of Christian missionaries learn from this history?

<sup>39</sup> Scott Reese, "The Best of Guides: Sufi Poetry and Alternate Discourses of Reform in Early Twentieth Century Somalia," 54.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 56-57.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 58-59.

## Moving Forward: Reaching the Somali People with the Good News

The good news for those endeavoring to make the name of Jesus known among Somalis is that we know the end of the story - it is written and will come to pass that Jesus will receive worship from every nation, tribe, and tongue. However, because God has decreed it does not mean it will be accomplished on its own, independent of human involvement. God loves to work together in partnership with his people - of course he could simply snap his fingers and finish the Great Commission in the blink of an eye, sending dreams of Jesus to every Muslim on the planet, but he doesn't work that way. In fact, even miraculous revelation like dreams and visions almost always must be accompanied by the *explanation* of what has been seen - and if a Christian is not doing the explaining, the Imam will certainly come up with his own plausible answer!

Drawing on the 'best practices' of the spread of Islam in Somalia, there are three major components of an effective plan to reach the Somali people for Christ. The first and most important is raising up and sending out indigenous laborers. This is likely why Islam was so successful in its takeover of Somalia, very early on the role of the missionary was passed from foreigners to Somalis themselves. Though Somali believers are few in number, the gospel of our Lord was spread to the nations of the earth beginning with only 12 men. Certainly a few hundred Somali believers, if equipped and empowered, are more than enough to reach their brethren with the gospel. An effective missions endeavor among the Somali people will have indigenous Somali believers at its *core*. Somali believers from across the world should be mobilized to *pray, give, and go* - joining together to intercede with fervency and purpose, supporting financially those who go, and raising up an army of Spirit-empowered and fearless ones who will take the gospel to their own people, overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, loving not their lives even unto death (Revelation 12:11).

The anointing and power of the Holy Spirit is the second crucial element in reaching the Somali people with the gospel. Stories of miracles and power encounters were central to the advent of Islam in Somalia, it is only human nature to pledge allegiance to the power that has demonstrated itself as ultimate. It is high time that the name of Jesus be clearly demonstrated as the name that is above every other name - greater than the name of Allah, greater than the name of Muhammed. The Somali people need a witness that will not shy back from power encounters. For far too long Christian missions among the Somali has taken place in secret - although the repercussions will be substantial, the gospel will not go forth in power until it is brought out from under the proverbial basket and allowed to shine its light unto all men (Matthew 5:15). Laborers among the Somali people must be filled with the Holy Spirit and ready to engage in power encounters, combatting the power of the evil one with the light, love and truth of Jesus, no matter the cost.

The final essential element of an effective plan to reach the Somali people with the gospel is a means of presenting the gospel message that is accessible and contextual. In the same way that Sheikh Uways propagated the message of the Qadiriyya order through poetry that was accessible to the masses, the vehicle of Discovery Bible Study is a powerful tool for communicating the truth of the gospel in narrative form. It can be done by anyone, anywhere, and at any time. It does not require programs, funding or equipment. It is simple enough for a child and complex enough for a Sheikh. It is malleable and flexible, it can be done in a living room or a coffee shop; with one person or twenty, with the wealthy and influential or with street children and beggars.

Muslims are very open to Discovery Bible Study when they are confronted with the fact that they themselves claim to believe in four holy books - the *Taurat* (Torah), *Zabur* (Psalms), *Injil* (Gospels), and the Quran. Yet when asked, hardly any Muslims have ever read these “former books” as the Quran calls them (Sura 4:136). The Quran instructs Muslims to read and obey the “former Scriptures.” How can they claim to obey something they have not read? This simple realization is more than sufficient to invite most Muslims to read the Prophet Stories together. Furthermore, Discovery Bible Study done in the context of family groups or existing social structures is a way that many missionaries are seeing family groups come to faith together - thus lessening persecution and providing the necessary support structures to enable perseverance. Thus, a simple plan for reaching the Somali people for Christ is as follows:

1. Recruit as many Somali believers as possible as missionaries. Recruit other Cushitic (Ethiopian, Kenyan) believers as well to serve as “Barnabases” to their Somali counterparts.
2. Train the missionary recruits in the principles of Church Planting Movements and Discovery Bible Study. Training should be no longer than 6 months and take place in Nairobi, Kenya; a safe place for open Christian activity. Training should be concise, direct, and extremely hands-on; focusing on Discovery Bible Study, disciple-making, church planting (reproducing house church model), and prayer.
3. Send the missionaries two by two to all the major Somali territories of Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti, tasked with itinerant work in the surrounding villages.
4. During training, missionaries will be taught basic business skills in order to start small self-supporting businesses like tailoring, barbershop/salon, selling vegetables, etc. Missionaries may also be subsidized by churches, etc for the first two years while businesses are being established.

5. Regional support and training hubs are established, which may be manned by Western missionaries, though Westerners are not front-line workers. Workers gather at the regional hub quarterly for training, counseling, fellowship, and any other needs.

Though simple, the power in this plan for reaching the Somali people with the gospel is actually *in* its simplicity. Looking to the book of Acts, the only essential ingredient for the spread of the gospel is *willing vessels*. The good news of our Lord was entrusted into the hands of 12 unlearned men, and the world has since been turned upside down. A successful missions endeavor among the Somali people does not require extravagant programs, productions, funding, stadiums, or strategies. It simply requires a few faithful laborers who are willing to put their hand to the plow and not look back. Statistically, the only way to finish the task of the Great Commission is by the slow, seemingly small work of person-to-person discipleship - this method actually multiplies exponentially over time and is, in the long run, far more successful than mass evangelism.<sup>42</sup> It seems foolish from the outside, but thankfully we serve a God who loves to use the foolish, weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Cor 1:27).

### Conclusion

This article has surveyed the task remaining in the work of gospel proclamation among the Somali people. A look at the religious history and historic missions efforts among the Somali people has made it clear that to “make disciples of all nations” (Mat. 28:19) is certainly not an easy feat. The road behind is littered with sacrifice and the road ahead demands an even greater cost - it is no small thing to consider the state of Christian missions while staring in the face of a nation with one of the highest percentages of adherence to Islam in the world coupled with violent hostility to Christianity. Jesus’ command; however, doesn’t say, “Make disciples of all nations *except* the ones that try to kill you.” On the contrary, Scripture is very clear that the proclamation of the gospel in the nations actually goes hand in hand with the shed blood of the saints (c.f. Mat. 24:14, Rev. 6:11).

The fact that all but one of Jesus’ disciples died bloody deaths similar to their Master should tell us something about what it means to follow in the footsteps of a crucified King. And yet, the future is not bleak - that crucified King didn’t stay in the grave! Though the proclamation of the gospel among the Somali people may yet require the lives of many martyr-witnesses, the end of the story is exploding with abundant joy, life, and glory greater than we can conceive. The cost will be great, but the reward greater - and thus we march onward, carrying this gospel of the Kingdom to the farthest reaches of the earth; to the least, the last, and the lost, singing as we go - “You are worthy of it all! Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus!”

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<sup>42</sup> Missional Challenge, “*Disciplemaking: Addition vs. Multiplication.*”

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### About the author

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## By Grace You Have Been Saved The Grace of God Revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Si Fry

Islam clearly teaches that people will be judged according to their deeds: “The scales on that day will be just. Those whose weights are heavy (*with good works*), it is they who are winners. But as for those whose weights are light it is they who have lost their souls.”<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere the Quran says, “Those whose scales are heavy (*with good works*) it is they who are successful. But those whose scales are light, those are they who have lost their souls; in Hell they will dwell forever.”<sup>2</sup> Surah 2:81-82 says: “Indeed, whoever commits misdeeds and becomes besieged by his iniquities – these are the inmates of the Fire, wherein they will dwell forever. And for those who believe and do righteous deeds – these are the inhabitants of Paradise, wherein they will dwell forever.” In Islam one is judged by their deeds and, in the Mercy of Allah, if one’s good deeds have a heavy enough weight Paradise awaits otherwise it is the fires of Hell. Thus, salvation is through Allah’s mercy<sup>3</sup> and good works.<sup>4</sup> Chapman writes, “Islam is a complete way of life. It tells man about the purpose of his creation and existence, his ultimate destiny . . . and most importantly, it provides him with guidance to lead a balanced and purposeful life which will enable him to avoid the Hellfire and be rewarded with a place in Paradise in the life after death.”<sup>5</sup>



Therefore, the good news of the gospel of Jesus can seem scandalous to those who turn to Christ from an Islamic background. For whilst the Bible is clear, all of humanity (both Christian and non-Christian) will be judged for their works,<sup>6</sup> it is not good works that save someone. Galatians 2:16 says, “Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

<sup>1</sup> Surah 7:8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Surah 23:102-103.

<sup>3</sup> Surah 3:129.

<sup>4</sup> Surah 98:6-8.

<sup>5</sup> C. Chapman, *Cross and the Crescent*, IVP 2003, 77.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 2:5-8, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 9:27, John 5:29.



Ephesians 2:8-10 wonderfully declares:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Salvation from hell's fire which the Bible is clear all mankind deserves (see Romans 3:9-20 and Ephesians 2:1-3) is not the product of man's work but God's grace. In fact, Jesus once summed up all the works God requires as, "That you believe in him whom God has sent."<sup>7</sup> Just to make the point crystal clear at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation it tells of the great day of judgment when the living and the dead will be judged "according to what they have done," (everyone's good and bad works examined by the almighty); but those thrown into the lake of fire were not those whose life was not good enough, but those whose "name was not found written in the book of life."<sup>8</sup>

In truth the Bible is clear mankind is born dead in their trespasses and sin, under the power of the devil and by nature children of God's wrath (see Ephesians 2:1-3). With "every intention of the thoughts of *man's* heart was only evil continually."<sup>9</sup> This does not mean that humanity is as bad as it can be, but it does mean that everything about mankind has been corrupted and stained by sin. The Apostle Paul says, "that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh,"<sup>10</sup> and, "That those who are in the flesh cannot please God."<sup>11</sup> The Prophet Isaiah laments, "we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment."<sup>12</sup> So before God there is no way that humanity on their own merit could ever be anything other than rightly condemned as guilty, as even our best deeds are stained by sin.

However what man could not do for God (make themselves acceptable), God did for man, through the man Christ Jesus. "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all."<sup>13</sup> Jesus the only person to be sinless (see Surah 19:19, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15 and 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5), who freely in love chose to die on the cross (see John 10:11-18), to save all who believe in him and put their hope not in their own deeds, but in the Lord Jesus' life, death and resurrection (see Romans 10:9-13). Through putting one's faith in Jesus that person's sins get placed on Christ and he bears God's punishment for them on the cross (see 1 Peter 2:24); they then receive the free gift of Christ's righteous life being accredited to them before God (see Romans 3:21-26, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Philippians 3:9).

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<sup>7</sup> John 6:29.

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 20:11-15.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 6:5.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 7:18.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 8:8.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 64:6.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5-6.

Thus, the Bible is very clear good works cannot save anyone from hell as they will never be good enough, they are always tainted by sin. The only way for anyone to be saved is through putting one's hope and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. This act of faith in the Gospel of Jesus is what makes a person right with God (see Romans 1:16-17), justified before the throne of heaven (see Romans 4:22-5:1), wonderfully adopted into the family of God (see Galatians 4:4-7), and secures the believer's place with God in the age to come (see Ephesians 1:13-14). That is the glorious truth that is encapsulated in those words, "By grace you have been saved through faith." Theologian J.I. Packer says, "The word grace thus, comes to express the thought of God acting in spontaneous goodness to save sinners: God loving the unlovely."<sup>14</sup>

So generous, so amazing, so gracious is the gospel of Jesus it always leads the sinful nature within to cause a person to think, "well if that is true why don't I just believe in Jesus and then live how I want, committing all the sins I want as I will be saved by God's grace?" Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones notes,

The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will rebound all the more to the glory of grace.<sup>15</sup>

However, the Apostle Paul who himself was accused of this (see Romans 3:8) answers this emphatically, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"<sup>16</sup> The book of Jude warns, "For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert that grace of God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."<sup>17</sup> The Apostle John explains, "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God."<sup>18</sup> So the gospel of grace means that a Christian will be forgiven if they were to indulge their sinful nature and keep on sinning, however through that same grace they receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who engenders the desire to please God and empowers them to put the sinful nature to death (see Romans 8:13-15). As Terry Virgo notes, "Grace does a thorough job. The grace of God gets you out of sin; it does not encourage you to remain in it."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> J.I. Packer, *18 Words*, Christian Focus, 2007, 94.

<sup>15</sup> T. Virgo, *God's Lavish grace*, Monarch Books, 2004, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 6:1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Jude 4.

<sup>18</sup> 1 John 3:9.

<sup>19</sup> T. Virgo, 2004, 51.

No wonder the most well-known Christian song is 'Amazing Grace' by the ex-slave trader John Newton, which beautifully declares:

*Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.*

*Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieve, how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come; tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.*

Declaring the wonderful truth that it is the grace of God released through the gospel that leads us to salvation, saves us and leads us through this life into life eternal. Famous 19<sup>th</sup> century preacher Charles Spurgeon writes, "Faith is the channel of salvation...grace is the fountain and source of even faith itself. Faith is the work of God's grace in us. . . we are saved through faith, but salvation is by grace."<sup>20</sup> Later he writes, "The saints shall persevere in holiness, because God perseveres in grace. ....From the effectual call of his grace the Lord never turns."<sup>21</sup> Oswald Sanders would add, "The perseverance of the saints is possible only because of the perseverance of God."<sup>22</sup>

God's grace bestowed through the gospel of Jesus brings the hopelessly condemned sinner out from under God's righteous judgement, into fellowship with God, not just as saved sinners, but as sons and daughters (see John 1:12-13, John 11:52, Romans 8:15, Galatians 3:25-26, Ephesians 1:5) co-heirs with Christ (see Romans 8:17, Galatians 3:29, Ephesians 2:6). No wonder clever people have produced the acronym for 'Grace' as:

- **G**od's
- **R**iches
- **A**t
- **C**hrist's
- **E**xpense

Ephesians 1:3 reveals that through the work of Christ, the Father has, "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." The believer gets every spiritual blessing not through any good works or righteous deeds done by them, but by them coming to Christ. That is how amazing God's grace is which he has lavished upon us.<sup>23</sup>

So having outlined the amazing truth of how God's grace, dispensed through the gospel of Jesus, freely bestows God's favor on those who turn to Christ as their Lord

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<sup>20</sup> C. Spurgeon, *All of grace*, Ichthus Publications, 2014, 31.

<sup>21</sup> C. Spurgeon, 2014, 85.

<sup>22</sup> O. Sanders, *Spiritual Maturity*, Moody Publishers, 1994, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Ephesians 1:7-8.

and Savior; I now want to look at the word grace in more detail, before moving on to show how it flows out of who God is himself, before closing with how God's grace is supposed to define who the disciple of Jesus is.

## Grace

Outside the Bible the use of the word 'Grace' in the English language is rare apart from as a women's name or as a title of respect for various dignitaries ("Your Grace"). Theologian Wayne Grudem defines grace as, "God's favour freely given to those who don't deserve this favour."<sup>24</sup> The late J. I. Packer aptly says, "Grace is God's undeserved favour, His unmerited love."<sup>25</sup> William Hendriksen wonderfully declares, "God's grace is his active favour bestowing the greatest gift upon those who deserved the greatest punishment."<sup>26</sup>

Harper Bible Dictionary defines grace as, "The English Translation of a Greek word 'Charis' meaning, 'That which brings delight, joy, happiness, or good fortune.'" The Septuagint (LXX) employs this word to translate the Hebrew root meaning favour."<sup>27</sup> Charis comes from the "Greek root word 'Char' that indicates things which produce wellbeing."<sup>28</sup> "The LXX uses the word charis 190 times."<sup>29</sup> The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology notes, "The New Testament employs the term charis 155 times, mostly in the Pauline letters (100 times)."<sup>30</sup> J. I. Packer highlights, "All of Paul's letters open and close with a prayer of grace, and grace is prominent in most of the other New Testament letters."<sup>31</sup> J. I. Packer goes on to say, "In the New Testament, 'grace' is a word of central importance - the key word...of Christianity....This one word 'grace' contains within itself the whole New Testament theology."<sup>32</sup> "The thought of grace is the key that unlocks the New Testament."<sup>33</sup> Grace is that important!

However, grace is not just limited to the New Testament, Walter Elwell says,

Grace is one of the distinctive features of the religion of the Bible. No other system of religious thought, past or present, contains an emphasis on divine grace comparable to that of the Bible.... Grace is the dimension of divine

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<sup>24</sup> W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, IVP, 1994, 200.

<sup>25</sup> J. I. Packer 2007, 93.

<sup>26</sup> W. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary Thessalonians, The Pastorals and Hebrews*, Baker Books, 1957, 370.

<sup>27</sup> P. Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Harper and Row, 1985, 357.

<sup>28</sup> C. Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology v2*, PeterNoster Press, 1982, 115.

<sup>29</sup> C. Brown 1982,116.

<sup>30</sup> Brown 1982,118.

<sup>31</sup> J. I. Packer, 2007, 91.

<sup>32</sup> J. I. Packer, 2007, 91.

<sup>33</sup> J. I. Packer 2007, 92.

activity that enables God to confront human indifference and rebellion with an inexhaustible capacity to forgive and to bless. God is gracious in action.”<sup>34</sup>

New Bible dictionary states, “Grace involves such subjects as forgiveness, salvation, regeneration, repentance, and the love of God. These are the grace words which do not contain the word grace.”<sup>35</sup> The New Bible dictionary goes on to explain how the Greek word ‘Charis’ carries the meaning of forgiveness, steadfast love (Hebrew – Hessed) and mercy.<sup>36</sup> No wonder Elwell notes, “The doctrine of divine grace underlies the thought of both Old Testament and New Testament.”<sup>37</sup>

What a colossal amount of truth that is encapsulated in that little five letter word ‘Grace’. This truth led the writer Philip Yancy to famously declare, “Grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less.”<sup>38</sup> Hallelujah.

### **Grace flows out of who God is**

It is important to realise that the Bible is crystal clear that whilst God does choose to be gracious in action,<sup>39</sup> this is not an alien attitude that he begrudgingly adopts to appear benevolent! Grace flows out of who God is.

When God reveals himself to Moses he declares his name,

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty....”<sup>40</sup>

God does not try to be gracious, he is full of grace, and it naturally flows out from him into all he does. Douglas Stuart in his insightful book on Exodus writes on God proclaiming his name that he is declaring “His character and essence.... What he is like and what he expects his people to be like.”<sup>41</sup> Ross Blackburn notes, “It is difficult to overestimate the importance of *these* verses. They are the longest and most complete description of the Lord’s character to be found in Scripture, and canonically later Scriptures frequently return to them.”<sup>42</sup> In the previous chapter of Exodus God tells Moses what he will do and chooses to reveal a little about himself before the famous Exodus 34:6-7 declaration. What God discloses in Exodus 33 is his grace

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<sup>34</sup> W.A. Elwell, *The Marshall Pickering Encyclopaedia of the Bible v1*, Marshall Pickering, 1988, 898.

I.H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer and D. J. Wiseman, *New Bible Dictionary 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* IVP, 1996, 433.

<sup>36</sup> A. R. Marshall, 1996, 433.

<sup>37</sup> W. A. Elwell, 1988, 898

<sup>38</sup> P. Yancy, *What’s so amazing about grace*, Zondervan, 1997, 71.

<sup>39</sup> W. A. Elwell, 1988, 898.

<sup>40</sup> Exodus 34:6-7.

<sup>41</sup> D. Stuart, *The New American Commentary Exodus Vol 2*, B&H Publishing, 2006, 705.

<sup>42</sup> W. R. Blackburn, *The God who makes himself known*, IVP, 2012, 153.

and mercy; “I will make my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”<sup>43</sup>

As one would expect, God’s character is perfectly displayed through his Son Jesus Christ, as he “is the radiance of the glory of God the exact imprint of his nature.”<sup>44</sup> No wonder then that the first thing the Apostle John wants people to understand about Jesus is that he was full of grace and truth:

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.... And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Ramsey Michaels’ commenting on John 1:14-18 notes how John by linking being full of grace and truth to Moses is echoing the Sinai encounter with God. Yet at Sinai Moses was not allowed to see the face of God for it was too glorious, yet Jesus reveals this glory.<sup>46</sup> Grace flows out who Jesus is as he is himself full of grace. William Hendriksen comments, “The limitless supply...indicated by the words ‘his fullness’ would seem to suggest a limitless outflow: grace upon grace.”<sup>47</sup> Randolph Tasker noted, “Grace and truth cannot be separated from him in whom they are embodied.”<sup>48</sup> On this Elwell would add, “Divine grace becomes embodied in the person of Jesus Christ who demonstrates visibly the dynamic nature of God’s grace....God’s grace manifested in Jesus Christ makes it possible for God to forgive sinners.”<sup>49</sup> As the Apostle Paul writes in Titus 2:11, “The grace of God has appeared.” The theologian John Stott is quick to note that by using the Greek word ‘Epephane’ for the appearing of grace Paul is very much linking grace with the incarnation of Christ. “God’s saving grace given us before the beginning of time, has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior.”<sup>50</sup>

It is worth briefly noting that God is so gracious in nature that the entire world enjoys what the theologians call his ‘Common Grace.’ Sam Storms explains that, “Common grace includes all undeserved blessings that natural man receives from the hand of God: rain, sun, prosperity, health, happiness, natural capacities and gifts, *and* sin being restrained from complete dominion.”<sup>51</sup> Common grace includes God’s restraining of evil (see Genesis 20:6, Romans 13:1-7, 2 Thessalonians 2:7), delaying the day of judgment (see Acts 17:30-31, 2 Peter 3:9-10), blessing and sustaining of

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<sup>43</sup> Exodus 33:19.

<sup>44</sup> Hebrews 1:3.

<sup>45</sup> John 1:14-17.

<sup>46</sup> R. Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, Eerdmans, 2010, 82-90.

<sup>47</sup> W. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary John*, Banner of Truth, 1976, 89.

<sup>48</sup> R. Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries John*, IVP, 1983, 49.

<sup>49</sup> W. A. Elwell, 1988, 899.

<sup>50</sup> J. Stott, *The message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, IVP, 1996, 192-193.

<sup>51</sup> The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/goodness-god-common-grace/>

the earth (see Genesis 8:21-22, Matthew 5:44-48, Acts 14:16-17), and the good gifts, emotions and actions he graciously grants humanity at large (see James 1:17, Luke 6:33-36, Romans 2:14; Ecclesiastes 3:10-13). So, all people experience God's common grace because of the height, width, and depth of his glorious grace.

God however is so good, so gracious, loving and kind that his common grace to all overflows into 'Saving Grace' to all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is what this article is focusing on. The Gospel Coalition defines God's saving grace as the "unmerited favor of God that reconciles sinners through Jesus Christ."<sup>52</sup>

Thus, grace flows out of who God is, he is gracious in action because he is gracious in his nature. Yancy notes, "Grace teaches us that God loves because of who God is, not because of who we are."<sup>53</sup> God's grace pours out through his Son Jesus Christ into the lives of all who put their faith in him.

### **God's grace defines who we are**

God's grace that has been poured out into the lives of every Christian begins to define who they are. The Apostle Paul beautifully describes this work of grace in Titus 2:11-14:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Wow, that is the work of the grace of God in the lives of all who turn to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Due to Paul's use of the present participle 'training us' Philip Towner notes, "The past appearance of God's grace is seen to be presently effective."<sup>54</sup> Hendriksen writes,

Grace Trains. The verb used in the original is from the same stem as is the noun 'pedagogue.' A pedagogue leads children step by step. Thus, grace too, gently leads and guides us. The grace of God trains us in order that we may live consecrated lives, while we are waiting for the blessed hope.<sup>55</sup>

Jerry Bridges beautifully states, "Salvation is by grace and sanctification is by grace."<sup>56</sup> God's grace that saves, forgives, and justifies the believer, also sanctifies them too. This is all part of his amazing eternal plan as the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:9 God has "saved us and called us to a holy calling not because of our

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/saving-grace/>

<sup>53</sup> P. Yancy, *What's so amazing about grace*, Zondervan, 1997, 280.

<sup>54</sup> P. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, Eerdmans, 2006, 747.

<sup>55</sup> W. Hendriksen, 1957, 371-372.

<sup>56</sup> J. Bridges, *The discipline of Grace*, Navepress, 1994, 73.

works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” Salvation and sanctification are all thanks to God’s grace.

Far from encouraging the disciple of Jesus to feel free to sin, William Barclay notes on Titus 2:11-14, that the passage’s “whole stress is the miracle of moral change which Jesus Christ can work.”<sup>57</sup> John Calvin writes, “The revelation of God’s grace necessarily brings with it exhortation to a godly life.”<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere Calvin would add, “For it is most certain, that where the grace of God reigns, there is also this readiness to obey.”<sup>59</sup> For grace goes further than just exhorting us to live for God, it “includes the idea of divine power which equips a man to live a moral life.”<sup>60</sup> Bridges aptly says, “God’s grace does not make our effort unnecessary, but rather makes it effective.”<sup>61</sup> By the grace of God the Holy Spirit is working on us to conform us to the image of Christ (see Romans 8:29), transforming us from one degree of glory to another (see 2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Bridges says, “Spiritual transformation is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit, He is the Master Sculptor.”<sup>62</sup> Michaels’ notes when commenting on John 1:14-18 that the believer draws upon Jesus’ grace and truth and this includes the gift of the Holy Spirit as a grace gift; the Spirit has the power to put to death the sinful nature and transform the believer into the image of Christ.<sup>63</sup>

Like a tadpole that has now turned into a frog can no longer breathe water it needs air, Christians are called to live a life that pleases God, no longer breathing in the murky water of sin. However, there is a very brief time where the tadpole can still breathe in the water and breathe air, but the former method of breathing becomes increasingly difficult until it is impossible. Likewise, for those who are in Christ, this life is that very brief time where we still can live in sin or live for God, but where there is genuine work of grace the former should become increasingly difficult because of the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work. In the sovereignty of God, the disciple of Jesus must take an active part in partnering with the Holy Spirit to put to death (mortify) the sinful nature and live for God. That is why the Apostle Paul can write in Romans 6:11-14:

So, you also must consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for

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<sup>57</sup> W. Barclay, *The letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, Saint Andrews Press, 2000, 256.

<sup>58</sup> J. Calvin, *New Testament 2 Corinthians and Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, Eerdmans, 1964, 373.

<sup>59</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Eerdmans, 1997, 262.

<sup>60</sup> I. H. Marshall, Millard A.R., Packer J.I. and Wiseman D.J. *New Bible Dictionary 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* IVP, 1996, 433.

<sup>61</sup> J. Bridges 1994, 133.

<sup>62</sup> J. Bridges 1994, 11.

<sup>63</sup> R. Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, Eerdmans, 2010, 89.



righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Douglas Moo on his excellent commentary on Romans notes “What we were ‘in Adam’ is no more; but, until heaven, the temptation to live in Adam always remains.”<sup>64</sup> “In union with Christ we have been made dead to sin and alive to God; it remains for us to appropriate (v11) and apply (v12-13) what God has done for us.”<sup>65</sup> “Paul argues that the law could never curb sinning; and the reign of grace, far from encouraging sin, is the only means by which sin can truly be defeated.”<sup>66</sup> It is not justification by faith and sanctification by struggle, “Paul asserts in this passage the inseparability of justification and sanctification as provided for equally in Christ.”<sup>67</sup> Terry Virgo writes, “Grace does not drop the standard and fudge issues. Grace does not tell us to forget about righteousness because God has changed the rules and accommodated our weakness, turning a blind eye and making do with compromising Christians. In stark contrast, grace liberates, grace instructs, grace calls us higher and enables us to live an altogether different life flooded with gratitude and revelation and enjoyment of the presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>68</sup>

A true understanding of God’s grace far from ever leading people into the two common errors of thinking one is free to engage in any sin they want (antinomianism), or that God has saved them by grace but now they have to maintain their own righteousness by their own works (legalism).<sup>69</sup> God’s grace sets us free to respond to God, fills our hearts with gratitude, replaces our fears with confidence, thrills us with motivation to see God’s habitation built.”<sup>70</sup> Charles Swindoll notes that, “‘Cheap grace’ justifies the sin not the sinner. True grace on the other hand justifies the sinner not the sin.”<sup>71</sup> By ‘Cheap grace’ he means wrong teaching or understanding of grace. God’s grace enables the believer to defeat sin and live as one set free from its power. Tasker notes that God gives Christ’s followers, “Grace to meet every need that arises.”<sup>72</sup>

More than just enabling the believer to live holy lives defeating sin and be forgiven when they fall into it (see 1 John 1:8-9), the grace that has flowed out from God into their lives should also flow through the Christian into the life of the church<sup>73</sup> and world around them (see Acts 20:24, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 4:5-6, 1 Peter 3:7). True children of their heavenly Father called to represent what he is like to the world around (see Ephesians 5:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:20, 1 John 3:10).

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<sup>64</sup> D. Moo, *The Epistle of Romans*, Eerdmans, 1996, 375.

<sup>65</sup> D. Moo, 1996, 380.

<sup>66</sup> D. Moo, 1996, 356.

<sup>67</sup> D. Moo 1996, 359.

<sup>68</sup> T. Virgo, *God’s Lavish grace*, Monarch Books, 2004, 117.

<sup>69</sup> J. I. Packer 2007, 99.

<sup>70</sup> T. Virgo, *God’s treasured possession*, IVP, 2021, 92.

<sup>71</sup> C. R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, Word Publishing, 1996, 46.

<sup>72</sup> R. Tasker 1983, 48.

<sup>73</sup> W. A. Elwell 1988, 899.

The disciples of Jesus having received grace in Christ should themselves be gracious, freely forgiving others' sins as they themselves have been forgiven (see Matthew 6:12). Elwell writes, "Finally God's grace manifested in Jesus Christ makes it possible for God to cause believers to reflect his grace in their character and relationships."<sup>74</sup> Paul Barnett commenting on the teaching in 2 Corinthians 8 says, "The grace of God is his attitude of unconditional kindness shown toward us. . . . God's invisible 'grace' however, is also made visible and concrete in the 'grace' God gives to members of churches, specifically their 'faith,' 'speech,' 'knowledge,' and 'love'...and *in* sacrificial, freely given, generosity."<sup>75</sup> Terry Virgo adds, "Generosity is one of the key characteristics of a grace filled person."<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusion

So the amazing grace of God, made available through the gospel of Jesus Christ to all who call on his name as their Lord and Savior, freely bestows: forgiveness from sins (see Ephesians 1:7), acceptance and access into the throne room of heaven (see Ephesians 3:12), the righteousness of Christ (see Romans 3:21-22), justification before the judgement seat of God (see Romans 4:25), salvation from the wrath to come i.e. hell (see 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10,), the sealing of God's Holy Spirit within them (see Ephesians 1:13), a guarantee of their place in the age to come (see Ephesians 1:14), and adoption into God's family (see Ephesians 1:5).

God's grace goes further still, beyond all these amazing one-off exchanges; it perseveres with the believer throughout this life mortifying their sinful nature and sanctifying them to live for God (see Titus 2:12). Transforming them into the glorious image of Christ from one degree of glory to another (see 2 Corinthians 3:18, until they die and go to be with Jesus or Christ returns bring the good work God started in them to completion (see Romans 8:28-30, Philippians 1:6).

If this were not beyond what mortal man could ask or imagine, God in his grace is still not done because in the age to come the Almighty intends to spend eternity showing "the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."<sup>77</sup> Hallelujah.

Why? How? Because God is full of grace in his essence and action. Thus, grace cannot but flow out of who he is into all he has made. For those he has called, for all who bow the knee to Jesus in saving faith, God's grace should increasingly define them in their essence and action too.

Oh, the wonder of the magnitude of the truth, that is too deep for our tiny minds and hearts to ever plumb the depths of what is revealed in the statement:

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<sup>74</sup> W. A. Elwell 1988, 900.

<sup>75</sup> P. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans, 1997, 391.

<sup>76</sup> T. Virgo, 2004,144.

<sup>77</sup> Ephesians 2:7.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”<sup>78</sup>

The only truly appropriate response to truth of the fact we have been saved by grace is for us to worship God and praise his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in Christ.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10.

<sup>79</sup> Ephesians 1:6.

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## Why Does the Qur'an Refer to the Gospel rather than the Gospels?

Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman

### Introduction

Muslims will often claim that the Gospels in the Bible cannot be the Gospel that the Qur'an talks about. One of their arguments is that the Qur'an refers to only one Gospel as a book, but the Bible contains four Gospels. How can one book equal four? The Qur'an refers to The Gospel (الإنجيل) twelve times, but it never once refers to the Gospels (الأنجيل). Why does the Qur'an always refer to the Gospel in the *singular* rather than in the *plural* since we have four Gospels in the New Testament? This article attempts to answer that question.

### The Gospels in Arabic

First, we need to remember that the neither the Gospels nor any sizable part of the New Testament was available in writing in the Arabic-language during the lifetime of Muhammad. Sidney H. Griffith writes that “very few traces of Christian texts in Arabic prior to the rise of Islam have so far come to light.”<sup>1</sup> Instead, “the Bible circulated orally in Arabic.” During church services, church leaders would read Scripture in Aramaic/Syriac and then tell the congregation in Arabic what the Scriptures meant.<sup>2</sup>

The oldest known Arabic manuscript of the Gospels is Vatican Arabic Manuscript 13. The date for that manuscript is the 9<sup>th</sup> century, roughly 200 years after the death of Muhammad. This manuscript contains parts of the Gospels and fourteen letters of Paul.<sup>3</sup>

### Oral Transmission of Information About Jesus

*Surat-ul-Anbiyaa* 21, verse 105, comes close to giving a direct quote from the Bible: “And We have indeed written in the Psalms, after the Reminder, that My righteous servants shall inherit the earth.”<sup>4</sup> But otherwise, the Qur'anic use of the Bible is more

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: the Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 15. See also p. 24. On p. 46-53, Griffith provides convincing arguments—to my mind—that modern scholars such as Anton Baumstark, Irfan Shahid, and Hikmat Kachouh, have been unable to demonstrate that the Gospels existed in the Arabic-language during the lifetime of Muhammad.

<sup>2</sup> Griffith, 2, 53. For an example of a possible pre-Islamic use of the Bible in the Arabic-language, see the Damascus Psalm fragment. It is written in Arabic using Greek letters rather than Arabic letters. Ahmad Al-Jallad, *The Damascus Psalm Fragment Middle Arabic and the Legacy of Old Hīgāzī*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> For more information and to see photographs of the manuscript, go to Project Vaticanus Arabicus 13 - dhCenter (dhcenter-unil-epfl.ch).

<sup>4</sup> English translation quotations of the Qur'an in this article come from *The Study Quran*. Seyyed Hossein-Nasr, editor-in-chief, N.Y.: HarperCollins, 2015.

“paraphrases, allusions, and echoes than quotations in any strict sense of the word.”<sup>5</sup>

The Qur’an makes numerous references to Jesus and his Gospel. Sometimes these passages show a limited degree of familiarity with stories and sayings from the four Gospels. Sometimes the Qur’an appears to contradict the four Gospels.<sup>6</sup> And sometimes we read extra-biblical information, such as the story of Jesus creating a living bird from clay (*Surat-ul-Ma’idah* 5:110). However, all these references to Jesus and the Gospel are oral; they came from what Muhammad heard (Muslims would say he heard these things from Gabriel), not from what he read.<sup>7</sup>

### **Qur’anic Testimony About the Gospel**

The first written book in the Arabic language appears to have been the Qur’an. Sometime after that, Jews and Christians made their own Arabic translations of the Bible. In Muhammad’s lifetime, when the Qur’an was given to the earliest Muslim community, what did Muhammad and the Qur’an mean by the word “Gospel” (الإنجيل)?

The Qur’an indicates that Gospel is a book from God. *Surat-ul-Imran* 3:3 says, “He [God] sent down the Book upon thee [Muhammad] in truth, confirming what was before it, and he sent down the Torah and the Gospel.”

This Gospel was given to Jesus. *Surat-ul-Ma’idah* 5:46 says, “We [God] gave him the Gospel.” The next verse says that this Gospel was also given to the disciples of Jesus so that they might “judge by what God has sent down therein.” These verses indicate that the Gospel is a book which contains Jesus’ divinely inspired sayings. The Qur’an never claims that the Gospel was abrogated or was taken from the earth back to heaven. Rather, followers of Jesus are told, “You stand on naught till you observe the Torah and the Gospel, and that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord.” (*Surat-ul-Ma’idah* 5:68). The first part of the verse shows that the true Gospel was with followers of Jesus within Muhammad’s lifetime and they should follow it. (Even if it was not available in the Arabic language, the followers of Jesus

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<sup>5</sup> Griffith, 55-56.

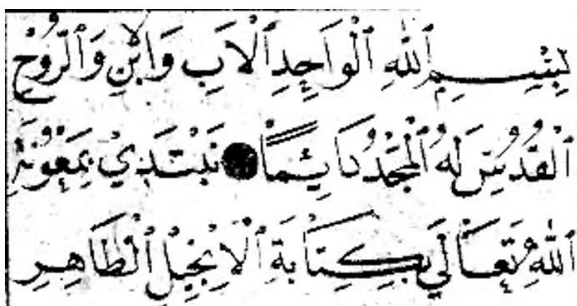
<sup>6</sup> Several important verses of the Qur’an have multiple interpretations in classical *tafsir* (commentaries), where the text of the Qur’an may not actually contradict the Bible. In certain places, it can be argued that it is only popular *tafsir* (interpretation) of those verses that contradicts the Bible.

<sup>7</sup> There were apocryphal gospels—gospels that were never accepted as part of the New Testament—that contained stories that are partially like information about Jesus in the Qur’an, but the differences are greater than the similarities. For example, one rejected gospel tells of Jesus creating twelve clay birds and making them fly away. (See the “Infancy Gospel of Thomas” in Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2003). This idea of creating life is expanded in the “Arabic Infancy Gospel,” which said that Jesus when he was seven years old made figures of all sorts of animals from clay, and made them walk, fly, and feed. (See J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 103). There is no evidence that any of these apocryphal gospels existed in the Arabic-language or were available in the Hijaz during Muhammad’s lifetime. If there was any influence from these apocryphal gospels on the Qur’an, it would have to be through storytelling.

would be able to know the Gospel and follow it, based on Aramaic/Syriac texts and oral interpretations into Arabic.) The second part of the verse, “that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord,” is problematic for followers of Jesus. To obey this command, they must either interpret the Qur’an to agree with the Gospel, or they must interpret the Gospel to fit with common interpretations of the Qur’an and reject basic teachings of the Gospel. Rather than finding ways to interpret the Qur’an to fit with the Gospel, most followers of Jesus choose to simply reject or ignore the Qur’an.

But the four Gospels contain more than the sayings of Jesus. The Qur’an also relates some of the things Jesus did. In *Surat-ul-’Imran* 3:49, we read that Jesus said, “I will heal the blind and the leper and give life to the dead by God’s leave.” The Qur’an also mentions other things Jesus did. Therefore, the Qur’an demonstrates that the Gospel contains both the sayings of Jesus and his actions. Jesus himself becomes the embodiment of the Gospel.

### The *Diatessaron* as a Single Gospel Book



First page of Mussai Borg, Arabic Diatessaron Manuscript  
File credit: Public Domain

Mystafa Akyol makes some interesting comments in response to the question, why does the Qur’an refer to a single Gospel: “Some of the early Muslim exegetes of the Qur’an found the solution in suggesting that the Qur’an’s ‘gospel’ merely refers to the whole New Testament, as the Qur’an’s ‘Torah’ might be a reference to the whole Old Testament. Some western scholars

rather suggested that the Qur’an was referring perhaps to the *Diatessaron*, the ‘gospel harmony’ compiled by Tatian, a second-century Christian theologian.... Yet we don’t have any evidence of being it used in the time and milieu of the Qur’an.”<sup>8</sup>

Who was Tatian, and what was his *Diatessaron*? How does this have anything to do with the Islamic concept of a single Gospel? The rest of the article will address these questions.

The name “*Diatessaron*” means “out of four,” since it takes sections from all four Gospels in the Bible and attempts to rearrange them in chronological order to tell the story of Jesus. When two or more Gospels related the same event, Tatian included the text of only one.

<sup>8</sup> Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*. N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press, 2017, 145.



Tatian was born in “the land of the Assyrians” sometime between A.D. 110 and 120 - roughly ten or twenty years after the death of John the Apostle. The “land of the Assyrians” could refer to either Syria or Assyria.<sup>9</sup> He traveled to Rome where he became a disciple of Justin Martyr. Justin was a famous defender of the Christian faith to pagan Roman authorities. After Justin was executed for his faith, Tatian was accused of heresy and returned to the East sometime around A.D. 172.<sup>10</sup> Eusebius, who died in A.D. 339, accused Tatian of being the founder a sect called Encratites. According to Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Encratites proclaimed “abstinence from marriage” and “introduced the abstinence from things called animate.”<sup>11</sup> Encratites rejected marriage and eating meat as being too worldly.

Even though Tatian was seen as a heretic among churches in the West of the Roman world, he was held in high regard in the East. McCarthy writes, “Tatian’s ascetic religious ideals would have been fairly typical in the Eastern Church.”<sup>12</sup> Many churches in the East honored Tatian, and they used his *Diatessaron* “in its Syriac form towards the end of the second century in the Edessan Church” through the mid-fifth century. “The Syrians called it the *Evangelion Da-Mehallete*, “the Gospel of the mixed,” since it used passages from all four Gospels. In a document from around A.D. 400, we read that “many people assembled daily and came together for prayer and for the reading of the Old and New Testaments, and the *Diatessaron*.”<sup>13</sup> Ephrem, who is held in the highest honor among Syriac Christians, wrote a commentary on the Gospels, using Tatian’s *Diatessaron*.<sup>14</sup>

The *Diatessaron* was the Gospel used by hundreds of Syriac churches for almost three centuries. time went on, fewer churches relied on the *Diatessaron* as they gained access to the four Gospels. Finally, Rabulla, bishop of Edessa (A.D. 411-435), ordered all churches to have a copy of the four Gospels, and the *Diatessaron* faded out of existence.

Today we have no copies of the *Diatessaron* in Syriac. We have Ephrem’s commentary on parts of the *Diatessaron*. We have a Latin copy in Codex Fuldensis. And we have an Arabic translation made several centuries after the death of Muhammad. The text of the *Diatessaron* has been modified over the years, so that it cannot be fully restored to the original. If that is the case, then why talk about the *Diatessaron* in relation to the Qur’an’s use of the term “Gospel” (الإنجيل), always in the singular, never in the plural?

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<sup>9</sup> Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 3.

<sup>10</sup> McCarthy, 4.

<sup>11</sup> *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop of Cesarea in Palestine*. Grnd Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955,166.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> McCarthy, 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> See Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron*.

### Conclusion—One Gospel, Four Books

For more than two centuries, when Christians in the East spoke of *the Gospel as a book*, they often meant the *Diatessaron*. I would suggest that the singular term “Gospel” (الإنجيل) found its way into the Hijaz because of the popularity of the *Diatessaron* in Syriac churches. Even after the *Diatessaron* was no longer in use, I would suggest that the term “Gospel” as a book came to refer to all four Gospels.

We have no evidence that either the *Diatessaron* or the four Gospels were available in Arabic during Muhammad’s lifetime, but people talked about the Gospel and its contents. When they discussed the life and sayings of Jesus, they would have called this the “Gospel.” They were taking their knowledge out of what they knew “of the four” and shared it with one another.

Today when Muslims talk about a single book called “Gospel” as opposed to the four Gospels, it probably represents a misunderstanding of how the term “Gospel” found its way from the Syriac churches to the Hijaz. The “Gospel” truly is a book—a book encompassing the four Gospels.

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## About the author

Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman is a pseudonym. He has worked among Muslims for over 30 years. He earned an MA in Islam and an MPh in Sociology of Religion. He is the author of 19 books and booklets which have been published in seven languages. A major Christian publisher printed over 90,000 copies of one of his works. The author can be reached at [info@somaliBiblesociety.org](mailto:info@somaliBiblesociety.org)

## Understanding Conversion<sup>1</sup>

Abdikamil Mahmoud “Abdi Walalo”

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“Conversion is a human’s response to the work of God.”<sup>2</sup> This is a simple definition that needs to be unpacked. The human response is to “turn from other ways to become followers of God, who revealed himself to us incarnate in Jesus Christ, as the Lord of their lives.”<sup>3</sup> In the context of this research, the focus is on believers in Christ from a Muslim background, therefore, we need to unpack the believers from Muslim background (BMB) response to the work of God. Conversion is a complex process according to Strahler:

The conversion of Muslims who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is a process that develops over a period of time, through phases with a cognitive and an affective dimension made up of specific properties (or layers) on a continuum, and influenced by significant factors in the form of causal and intervening conditions, resulting in consequences for the convert in the form of transformation as well as in relationship with the community.<sup>4</sup>

These definitions of conversion are informative; from them we learn that conversion is an affirmative response to the work of God as proclaimed in the gospel message. We also learn that it is a process that develops over a period; this negates the perspective that a conversion is simply an event. This process is relationally and contextually influenced. It entails conceptualization through acquiring knowledge and information about Christ, which impacts the BMB emotions and attitudes towards Christ. The results of the conversion process are considerable changes in the BMB as well as in the relationship of the BMB with the community.

Ahmed Haile’s, the late prominent Somali Christian, conversion experience involved experiencing the generous kindness of Christians, persistent personal study of the Bible, change of attitude towards the Quran and Christians, openness to accept the Gospel message and eventually choosing to follow Christ. At the point of deciding to follow Christ, a missionary prayed that God would come into Haile’s heart and guide him to the truth. And this is Haile’s testimony, “At that moment the Holy Spirit opened

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<sup>1</sup> This article was adapted from the author’s MA thesis, “*The Contribution of First-Generation Believers from A Muslim Background (BMBS) to Mission Work among Predominantly Muslim People.*” Bethany Global University. Canter for Graduate Studies. Chapter 2, (Bloomington, Minnesota), December 2021.

<sup>2</sup> G. T. Smith, *Transforming Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 4.

<sup>3</sup> D. H. Greenlee, *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way*. (D. H. Greenlee, Ed.) (Waynesboro, Georgia, USA, Authentic, 2006), loc 272.

<sup>4</sup> R. Strahler, *Coming to Faith in Christ - Understanding Conversion* (Nairobi: Life Challenge Assistance, 2010), 26.

my heart to the truth of Jesus Christ. With eagerness I began the study of the Bible...not as [a] cautious observer but as a believer.”<sup>5</sup>

This conversion experience sets a backdrop for our understanding of BMB’s conversion to Christ. In Haile’s conversion experience, we see his interaction with missionaries allowed him to experience a generous kindness and exposure to God’s Word. We can also see in this conversion experience the impact on the cognitive and affective dimensions of Haile’s worldview through persistent personal study of the Scriptures, as well as a change of attitude towards the Quran and Christians. This study’s review will seek to understand conversion of BMB by examining literature on the cognitive, affective and social areas of conversion. As Greenlee rightly says, “conversion...at its core is the transformation of worldviews.”<sup>6</sup>

Hiebert’s “Dimensions of Culture” diagram is informative (Fig. 1:1), as it depicts that worldview being made of beliefs, feelings, and values. Experiences are the main inputs in the formation of a worldview, whereas decisions are influenced by worldviews to determine a person’s behavior. Conversion of BMBs needs to be understood from the perspective of their worldviews, because “conversion at its core is the transformation of worldviews.”<sup>7</sup>

### THE DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

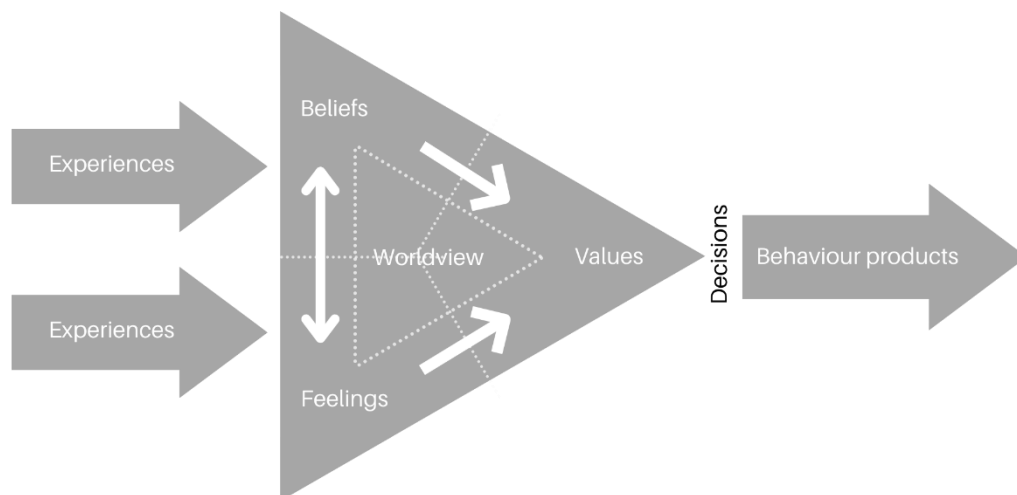


Figure 1:1: Dimensions of Culture.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A. A. Haile, *Tea Time in Mogadishu*. (D. W. Shenk, Ed.) (Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA: Herald Press, 2011), 33.

<sup>6</sup> D. Greenlee, *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah or Something in Between*. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), loc 2636.

<sup>7</sup> D. H. Greenlee, *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way*. (D. H. Greenlee, Ed.) (Waynesboro, Georgia, USA: Authentic, 2006), loc 279.

<sup>8</sup> P. G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 26.

From the perspective of worldviews and using Hiebert's 'Dimensions of Culture' graphic, conversion can be described to consist of change in one's belief, feelings, and values. The changes in worldview are from being exposed to the gospel, whereas the outcome of these changes is a decision to follow Christ, and a change of behavior.

### Cognitive Level

The cognitive change of worldview "is a new way of viewing reality,"<sup>9</sup> and come from conviction and an increase in knowledge.<sup>10</sup> In the BMB's conversion experience the change in knowledge about the Christian faith includes a change in knowledge about the Bible, about Christ, and about Christians. Additionally, this will include change in convictions about the Christian faith at large.

Little writes of a female laborer who reached out to Muslim women in her context, that in her approach she greatly emphasized impacting knowledge and conviction. "She met and befriended women and shared the gospel with them, she would take months, sometimes years, in regular discussion and Bible study with them before they finally chose to follow Christ. She was insistent that they understood the gospel fully, and that they knew and understood what it would mean to be a disciple of Christ following their conversion before she invited them to become a disciple of Christ."<sup>11</sup>

One can identify this sister's assumptions of how being immersed in knowledge prepares BMB for the challenges they will face – i.e., counting the cost of following Christ prepares BMB for the reality of persecution. This sister's knowledge-based approach to evangelism has been widely practiced by various laborers in the Muslim world. As Farah points out, "Early one-dimensional evangelical models of conversion tended to be overly cognitive."<sup>12</sup> Their focus is on the cognitive dimension of receiving the Gospel, and the implication of the concept that conversion comes through knowledge has resulted in evangelistic tools such as:

1. Comparing the Quran and the Bible, 'Your Book and My Book'<sup>13</sup>
2. Discovering the message of the Bible, 'One God, One Message'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> D. H. Greenlee, *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way*. (D. H. Greenlee, Ed.) (Waynesboro, Georgia, USA: Authentic, 2006), loc, 278.

<sup>10</sup> R. Strahler, *Coming to Faith in Christ - Understanding Conversion* (Nairobi: Life Challenge Assistance, 2010), 51.

<sup>11</sup> D. Little, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History and Seasoned Practices* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 26.

<sup>12</sup> W. Farah, Adaptive Missiological Engagement with Islamic Contexts. *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 2018 Winter), 14.

<sup>13</sup> G. Nehls, *Your Book and My Book: A Topical Comparison of the Qur'an with the Bible* (Nairobi: Life Challenge Assistance, 2015), 1.

<sup>14</sup> P. D. Bramsen, *One God One Message* (Canada: ROCK International, 2007), 1.

### 3. The message of Jesus, 'The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus'<sup>15</sup>

The existence of these tools attest to Farah's assertion, "how we conceive [i.e., understand] conversion determines how we do evangelism."<sup>16</sup>

Focusing on the cognitive dimension in our evangelism has yielded fruit; indeed, there are BMB who have come to faith in Christ through reason. Myers attests to this in her report of Mahamud's, a Somali seeker, conversion, that he was convinced through teaching and reading the New Testament, that Jesus was the Messiah and decided to follow Him.<sup>17</sup>

Knowledge-based approaches to evangelism can be laborer-centric and not recipient-centric. The laborer determines the knowledge that the seeker needs and presents this knowledge from the laborer's perspective. This is well captured in Ahmed's frustration as reported by Jabbour, "My paradigm or lens through which I look at reality is not primarily that of guilt and righteousness like yours, but that of shame and honor, clean and unclean, fear and power. When I talk with you it feels like you are laying a guilt trip on me. Does your message have anything to say to me about my shame, my defilement, and my fear."<sup>18</sup>

These voiced frustrations help us to be aware of the potential pitfalls of knowledge-based evangelism. While it is prudent to emphasize knowledge, "for it is by knowing the truth we are set free" (John 8:32, paraphrased), truth must be learned in context. Lillias, a Christian ministering to people in Algiers, had a special bond with the people she was serving, and this "provided her with an extraordinary insight into their unique character and mentality and became the basis for developing the ever more effective ways of communicating to them [the] essentials of the Christian faith."<sup>19</sup> We can see that her approach to evangelism was knowledge-based but it had the added advantage of factoring in her context.

This balanced, knowledge-based approach helps the laborer address Islamic misconceptions of the Christian faith and Muslim attitudes towards Christians. Some of these misconceptions include that the Bible is corrupt<sup>20</sup> and that the Trinity means

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<sup>15</sup> J. R. Cross, *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus* (3a ed.). Canada: GOODSEED International, 2007), 1.

<sup>16</sup> W. Farah, *Adaptive Missiological Engagement with Islamic Contexts*. *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 2018 Winter), 14.

<sup>17</sup> R. Myers, *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia* (Moreland: Acorn Press, 2016), p. loc 1240.

<sup>18</sup> N. T. Jabbour, *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008), p. loc: 409.

<sup>19</sup> M. H. Rockness, *A Passion for the Impossible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Discovery House Publishers, 2003), 381.

<sup>20</sup> N. T. Jabbour, *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008), p. loc: 509.

three gods,<sup>21</sup> while others are influenced by historical and current injustices perpetrated by people considered to be Christians, or that Christianity is simply wrong.<sup>22</sup> The conversion process of BMBs that is mainly influenced at the cognitive level of worldview has many strengths and provides the BMBs with solid foundations for facing future challenges in their walk with Christ.

The cognitive approach is not greatly emphasized in emerging contemporary methods of evangelism to Muslims. In methods such as Disciple Making Movements (DMM), the emphasis is on inductive Bible studies and toward sharing what one knows immediately after they know it.<sup>23</sup> This creates an environment where knowledge of scripture is shared widely and quickly. In the context of BMBs in the Horn of Africa, some conversions are because of knowledge acquired through DMM models.

### **Affective Level**

The affective dimension of conversion has to do with attitudes and feelings. Strahler points out that in the process of conversion a Muslim typically experiences a change in their intensity of spiritual interest, and in their attitudes to Islam, to Christ and the Gospel, and to Christians.<sup>24</sup>

### **Attitudes to Islam**

The BMBs attitude towards Islam changes from one of absolute admiration to indifference, or becomes increasingly negative.<sup>25</sup> Islamic convictions that were previously unchallenged and unquestioned begin to be questioned by the BMBs. Islamic answers to life questions such as the meaning and purpose of life, and life after death, begin to be abandoned and replaced by the biblical answers to these questions. Haile's account captures this: even though he was secure within the house of Islam, he was unsatisfied with the answers he received from the Quran.<sup>26</sup>

### **Attitudes to Christ and the Gospel**

Questions surrounding the identity of Christ through comparative studies begin to emerge and an increasing appreciation for Jesus develops. This is a significant change of attitude, from highly esteeming Muhammad to beginning to highly esteem Jesus. Knowledge about Christ highlights that He is not simply a prophet; He is the

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<sup>21</sup> A. A. Haile, *Tea Time in Mogadishu*. (D. W. Shenk, Ed.) (Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA: Herald Press, 2011), 119.

<sup>22</sup> N. T. Jabbour, *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008), p. loc: 509.

<sup>23</sup> D. Greenlee, *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah or Something in Between*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), loc 3178.

<sup>24</sup> R. Strahler, *Coming to Faith in Christ - Understanding Conversion* (Nairobi: Life Challenge Assistance, 2010), 51.

<sup>25</sup> R. Strahler, *Coming to Faith in Christ - Understanding Conversion* (Nairobi: Life Challenge Assistance, 2010), 51.

<sup>26</sup> A. A. Haile, *Tea Time in Mogadishu*. (D. W. Shenk, Ed.) (Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA: Herald Press, 2011), 25.



Savior of mankind, and is the central message of the entire scripture. Knowing Christ challenges a BMB to respond to Him and follow Him.<sup>27</sup>

### **Attitude to Christians**

Knowledge about the Christian faith touches on how Christians live and worship, and what Christians believe. Hawaa's, a Muslim seeker, conversion account entails exposure to the Scriptures, to Christians and Christian life, to first generation BMBs like Mahamud, and to Mahamud's persecution.<sup>28</sup> Her conversion account illustrates the multiple experiences BMBs go through in their journey to Christ. Some of these experiences bring about changes in the BMBs conviction through knowledge.

### **Intensity of spiritual interest**

Nabeel Qureshi's life story captures his growing hunger for God. His journey to faith began with little spiritual interest but as he got exposed to Christians and the Scriptures his interest in God grew.<sup>29</sup> In another example, the Javanese people turned to Christ as an act of rebellion and protest. However, as they became exposed to the Scriptures their spiritual interest increased.<sup>30</sup> In yet another example, Sheikh Fuad, a Muslim seeker, could not resist wanting to read the Scriptures, so he went to a stranger's house at night to ask for a Bible. This introduced him to a time of regularly learning from the Scriptures. His spiritual interest grew, and this is demonstrated by him taking a Bible with him.<sup>31</sup>

A BMBs exposure and knowledge about the Christian faith and Christ lead to their acceptance of the Christian faith. Myers provides an account of this, "Mahamud had been a regular attendee at a meeting run by SIM and he confided in some of the missionaries that he had become convinced, through Warren Modricker's, SIM Director, teaching and reading the New Testament, that Jesus was the Messiah and had decided to become a follower."<sup>32</sup> Mahamud's conviction that Jesus was the Messiah came through acquiring knowledge about Christ from the Scriptures.

As BMB's are exposed to the Gospel, their Islamic convictions are impacted. The Gospel makes considerable 'truth claims,' such as: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). This verse introduces BMBs to the new reality of being a child of God because of their faith in Christ. Also, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes

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<sup>27</sup> D. Greenlee, *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah or Something in Between* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), loc 3019.

<sup>28</sup> R. Myers, *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia* (Moreland: Acorn Press, 2016), p. loc 1268

<sup>29</sup> N. Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 17

<sup>30</sup> W. Farah, *Emerging Themes in MBB Conversions* (International Journal of Frontier Missiology, 2013), 15.

<sup>31</sup> R. Myers, *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia* (Moreland: Acorn Press, 2016), p. loc1269.

<sup>32</sup> R. Myers, *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia* (Moreland: Acorn Press, 2016), loc] 1238.

to the Father except through me” (John 14:6) - this verse teaches BMBs that (among other things) Jesus is the only way to God!

The hope proclaimed from an Islamic perspective pales in comparison to the hope in Christ revealed in the Scriptures. Islamic answers to life questions, such as meaning and purpose of life and life after death are deserted, and begin to be replaced by the biblical answers. Haile states, “Although I was secure within the house of Islam my study of the Quran did not answer several perplexing questions within my young mind...”<sup>33</sup> Concepts of grace, mercy and sin take on new meanings, as well as concepts on worship. Exposure to Jesus and the Bible leads BMBs to a new understanding of righteousness and sin, and a desire to be holy.<sup>34</sup> This triggers considerable worldview changes, such as being more concerned about doing what is right in the eyes of God, rather than the family’s honor.

The BMBs attitude towards Islam changes from one of absolute admiration to indifference, or becomes increasingly negative.<sup>35</sup> Islamic convictions that were previously unchallenged and unquestioned begin to be questioned by the BMBs. Islamic answers to life questions such as the meaning and purpose of life, and life after death, begin to be abandoned and replaced by the biblical answers to these questions. Haile’s account captures this: even though he was secure within the house of Islam, he was unsatisfied with the answers he received from the Quran.<sup>36</sup> Again, and in summary, as BMBs approach Christianity their attitude towards Islam change from absolute admiration to indifference, or it becomes negative,<sup>37</sup> and Islamic convictions that were previously unchallenged start to be questioned. Through comparative studies, questions surrounding the identity of Christ begin to emerge and an increasing appreciation for Jesus develops. This is a significant change of attitude, from highly esteeming Muhammad to beginning to highly esteem Jesus. Knowledge about Christ highlights that He is not simply a prophet - He is the savior of mankind, the central message of the entire scriptures. As Muslims begin to know Christ better, it challenges them to respond and follow Him.

To balance the idea that gaining knowledge is key to Muslims becoming convinced to turn towards Christ, voices such as Ahlstrand’s are worth listening to: “Very rarely do people change their religious belonging because they are intellectually convinced by the arguments of the proponents of the new religion.” Strahler adds that usually they convert because they find an attractive atmosphere in the new group and only

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<sup>33</sup> A. A. Haile, *Tea Time in Mogadishu*. (D. W. Shenk, Ed.) (Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA: Herald Press, 2011), 25.

<sup>34</sup> T. Green, Identity Issues for Ex-Muslim Christians, with Particular Reference to Marriage (St Francis Magazine, 2012 August), 8(4), 24.

<sup>35</sup> R. Strahler, *Coming to Faith in Christ - Understanding Conversion* (Nairobi: Life Challenge Assistance, 2010), 51.

<sup>36</sup> A. A. Haile, *Tea Time in Mogadishu*. (D. W. Shenk, Ed.) (Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA: Herald Press, 2011), 25.

<sup>37</sup> R. Strahler, *Coming to Faith in Christ - Understanding Conversion* (Nairobi: Life Challenge Assistance, 2010), 51.

later...do they learn about the doctrines and give their assent to them.<sup>38</sup> Farah illustrates this by highlighting the political motivation of the Javanese people turning to Christ in large numbers: “two million Muslims in Java converted to Christianity in the 1960s. Initially, this began as a protest against tribal and village Muslim leaders in the aftermath of a massacre of communists by fellow Muslims; many of the converts had communist family members who had been killed by Muslims.”<sup>39</sup>

### Social level

The social level of conversion deals mainly with identity. On the social level, conversion involves changes in the ways people relate to their families, friends, and community, and to other Christians. Greenlee categorizes BMB's identity into corporate, social and core layers.

He then defines these layers: the corporate layer is the way the larger society views the BMB's community, the social layer is the way the BMB is viewed within his own community, and the core layer is the individual identity of the BMB.<sup>40</sup> Ideally the change at the social level in the conversion process of BMBs would be a shift towards a Christ centered identity.

A significant question, as reported by Jabbour, is “If I converted to Christianity, my support system in life would be completely demolished. I would become, as it were, homeless and without family. How would I live?”<sup>41</sup> In the African context, the social level is significant because of kinship. Mbiti rightly points out that, “it is kinship that controls social relationships between people in a given community.”<sup>42</sup>

In the context of BMBs in the horn of Africa, kinship is central in all social relationships; social identity is superior to one's individual identity. “To be a Somali is to be a Muslim.”<sup>43</sup> This is the prevailing social identity in the horn of Africa. If one walks away from Islam, they get the derogatory title of *Murtad* from their community. “*Murtad* is a term used to refer to someone who has left Islam for another

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<sup>38</sup> R. Strahler, *Coming to Faith in Christ - Understanding Conversion* (Nairobi: Life Challenge Assistance, 2010), 48.

<sup>39</sup> W. Farah, *Emerging Themes in MBB Conversions* (International Journal of Frontier Missiology, 2013), 15.

<sup>40</sup> D. H. Greenlee, *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way*. (D. H. Greenlee, Ed.) (Waynesboro, Georgia, USA: Authentic, 2006), loc 1955.

<sup>41</sup> N. T. Jabbour, *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008), p. loc: 451.

<sup>42</sup> J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Second ed.) (Jordan Hill, Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1989), 451.

<sup>43</sup> I. Abdur-Rahman, “*Ramadan and Somali Believers.*” *Somali Bible Society Journal*, Volume I, Issue 1. Version 2, December 2020, 25.

worldview”<sup>44</sup> BMBs in the Somali context “are often considered by their community to be betraying their kin as they opt for private and unprecedented paths of living”<sup>45</sup>

Through exposure to the gospel and interaction with scripture the BMB is confronted by a fundamental choice of “leaving everything and following Christ.” Peter and his companions, the sons of Zebedee, met Jesus, they heard Him teach, they had a front-row view of the miraculous capture of the fish. Peter recognized the greatness and holiness of Jesus as well as his sinfulness, and received the invitation to follow Him. Until this encounter they were simple Galilean fishermen, but with this encounter Jesus called them to follow Him and to be fishers of men (Luke 5:1-11). First-generation Somali believers have encountered this Jesus, and with this encounter a shift is triggered from the prevailing social state, “where kinship is the foundation of social cooperation,” to Jesus and following Him being the foundation of everything.<sup>46</sup>

In the historical context of BMBs in the Horn of Africa, believers often referred to themselves as Christians. We read from Myors that Daud, Mahmoud and Hawaa had recently become “Christians.”<sup>47</sup> Haile was known to the Islamists as a Christian;<sup>48</sup> also Ali, another Somali church leader,<sup>49</sup> and their contemporary believers were openly known as Christians. These BMBs suffered greatly because of their social identity. Many subsequent groups of believers have opted to hide their faith for fear of the consequences, and this has resulted in a lack of recognition and impact within their communities.<sup>50</sup> Other BMBs have opted to have one leg in the church and one leg in the mosque as Haile writes,

I recognize that some of my friends continue in both worlds after believing in Christ. They tried to keep a foot in both communities, the mosque, and the church....I think that these believers struggled with a confusing identity, both personally as well as in their relationship with the Muslim community.<sup>51</sup>

The social level in the process of conversion of BMBs has resulted in a great discourse about contextualization. A major outcome of this discourse is what

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<sup>44</sup> Warraq, *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), p. loc 3816.

<sup>45</sup> F. Thoresen, *A Reconciled Community of Suffering Disciples* (Broadway, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2014), 151.

<sup>46</sup> F. Thoresen, *A Reconciled Community of Suffering Disciples*, (Broadway, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2014), 123.

<sup>47</sup> R. Myors, *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia* (Moreland: Acorn Press, 2016), loc 1329.

<sup>48</sup> A. A. Haile, *Tea Time in Mogadishu*. (D. W. Shenk, Ed.) (Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA: Herald Press, 2011), 112.

<sup>49</sup> A. A. Ali, *Understanding the Somali Church* (Nairobi: KenPro Publications, 2021), 85.

<sup>50</sup> F. Thoresen, *A Reconciled Community of Suffering Disciples* (Broadway, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2014), 154.

<sup>51</sup> A. Haile, *Tea Time in Mogadishu*. (D. W. Shenk, Ed.) (Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA: Herald Press, 2011), 37.

missiologists refer to as the ‘C-Scale’ to describe BMB fellowships.<sup>52</sup> The C-scale is a range to describe various levels of contextualization. C1: Traditional church using a language different from the mother tongue of the local Muslim community. C2: Traditional church using the mother tongue of the local Muslim community. C3: Contextualized Christ-centered community using the mother tongue and some non-Muslim local cultural forms. C4: Contextualized *Isa* (Arabic for “Jesus”) centered community using the mother tongue and biblically acceptable socio-religious Islamic forms C5: Community of Muslims who follow *Isa* yet remain culturally and officially Muslim. C6: Secret or underground Muslim followers of *Isa* with little or no community.<sup>53</sup>

Commenting on the C scale, Woodberry writes, “C3 to C6 groups tend to be formed by BMBs”<sup>54</sup> The C scale has generated a rich dialogue about identity, and in many ways is a response to the social level of BMBs conversions. There are two sides of this dialogue represented by those that say one cannot be called a disciple of Christ unless conversion has taken place - by this they mean one must openly identify with Christ - whereas the other side would say a person’s social identity is not as important as their core identity.<sup>55</sup>

### Summary – Understanding Conversion

Adjusting our perspective on conversion and appreciating such an adjustment’s necessity and conversion’s complexity will go a long way in effectively engaging the Muslim world with the gospel, as well as effectively discipling first-generation BMBs. For a believer from a Muslim background, experiencing the work of God through Christ on the cross leads to a change of worldview. These changes occur in various dimensions, both within the BMB and in his relationship with the community. There are factors one can observe in conversion, and Smith gives us three key observations on conversion: conversion is necessary, it is an act of faith, and conversion needs to be both radical and comprehensive (i.e., affecting the whole of our beings).<sup>56</sup> Greenlee points out four major factors bringing Muslims to Christ, “the reading of scripture, the lives of Christians, some experience of the power of Christ and observing Christian worship.”<sup>57</sup>

A believer’s post-conversion discipleship is directly impacted by their conversion process. Little poses a critical question, “how much does an accurate understanding

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<sup>52</sup> J. D. Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Pasadena, USA: William Carey Library, 2008), 284.

<sup>53</sup> J. D. Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Pasadena, USA: William Carey Library, 2008), 294.

<sup>54</sup> J. D. Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Pasadena, USA: William Carey Library, 2008), 297.

<sup>55</sup> D. Little, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History and Seasoned Practices* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 306.

<sup>56</sup> G. T. Smith, *Transforming Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 78.

<sup>57</sup> D. Greenlee, *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah or Something in Between* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 78.

of the gospel and salvation prior to believing influence the discipleship experience following conversion?"<sup>58</sup> Our understanding of conversion in its various dimensions is critical to our missiological engagements.

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<sup>58</sup> D. Little, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History and Seasoned Practices* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 27.

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### About the author



Abdi-K Mahmoud is married to Laura, his best friend and a fellow partner in the ministry; they have 3 children: Shamsa, Zeenat and Nabeel. Abdi is engaged in challenging but fruitful ministry in the East African Coast under Bethany Gateways. Abdi has a missional and a pastoral heart. The Lord uses him in a mighty way to advance the Kingdom of God in the Muslim World. Abdi is a chartered certified accountant with a BTh and an MA in Education. The author can be reached at [walalodinho@gmail.com](mailto:walalodinho@gmail.com).

## Getting to Know Jesus Through His Names and Titles

Stephen Thompson

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“You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in you” - Augustine

### Introduction

To be effective in sharing Jesus among Muslims it has been said you need to have a good Christology; a good understanding of who Jesus is and why he came to Earth. In this article I wanted to look at Jesus as God’s Word who entered our humanity. God created this world and humanity so that they might live in union, in relationship with Himself. This was to be a relationship of worship and fellowship. The coming to Earth of Jesus, the eternal Word of God, was an important part of God’s plan. His plan was to help us find union, or deep and intimate relationship with Himself. Understanding Jesus and his names and titles and Jesus as the Word of God are essential for beginning and deepening this relationship.

Discussing the names of Jesus and why he came to Earth are more productive than trying to defend his God nature or the Trinity. The names and titles of Jesus are important in describing who He was and is and why he came to Earth. Christians and Muslims believe in one God. However, if we think of that one God as being a single individual like you or me, we get into problems. God is one but he is one God and his substance or essence is the God substance or essence which is not the material substance from which we humans are made. The Bible describes God as Spirit (John 4:24). this means he is not limited by the material world we live in. He can move through walls (Luke 24:36) and he can live in human beings as he did in the Lord Jesus (John 1:14) and he does in us as the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). God being Spirit puts him in another dimension which is unseen and at this time we do not fully understand. Saint Paul describes God as living in “unapproachable light” which no one has seen or can see (1 Timothy 6:16).

### Christ or Messiah

The name Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus is the English name and title for Jesus. Christ comes from the Greek word Christos (χριστός) meaning the Messiah or the anointed one (Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ or mashiah). Messiah is a type of title for Jesus. He is not just titled Messiah but is “the Messiah” signifying his uniqueness. In the Old Testament, the children of Israel anointed those chosen for the office of priest, prophet or king. They were “messiahs” or anointed ones.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is one case of Cyrus, a pagan king, being called messiah or the anointed one, Isaiah 45:1



There was a promise of an eternal priesthood of Aaron (Exodus 40:12–15), the New Testament author of the book of Hebrews sees this priesthood as fulfilled in the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 4 and 6). God promises to Moses a prophet like Moses himself from among the twelve tribes of Israel who were brothers (Deuteronomy 18:15-21). God would put his words in the mouth of this prophet and he would not need an angel to give him the words to speak. Matthew in the order he arranges his gospel portrays Jesus as this second Moses as he goes into the desert for his temptations and later goes up a mountain to give the beatitudes, a type of new law (Matthew 5). Jesus himself says he was predicted in the Law of Moses (Luke 24:27 and 44).



The kings of Israel and especially Saul and David were anointed or chosen by God. After the death of David, Israel started to hope for another king like him who would restore Israel to its former glory. As the nation split into two and came into hard times it began to doubt that this would happen. After the exile Zerubbabel took the leadership of Judah and was a descendent of David; however, he did not become another David. So, this expectation was put even further into the future.<sup>2</sup> God’s covenant with David was that his throne would be established

forever (2 Samuel 7:16). The angel Gabriel promises Mary that her son (Jesus) would be given the throne of his ancestor David and would reign forever (Luke 1:32-33). Jesus said he was a king but his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). For the Christian, Jesus should be the king to control our hearts and lives.

Many prophecies in the Old Testament point to or relate to Jesus. Many of the Psalms can be interpreted in their immediate context but they also have a deeper and future significance. The Messiah is not mentioned by name but New Testament writers applied many verses to Jesus as the promised Messiah. Particularly the kingly psalms or royal psalms (for example 2, 72 and 110) were not fulfilled in any of the actual kings of Israel but in the Messianic expectation.<sup>3</sup> There is an important Psalm, Psalm 22, which is understood to be about the sufferings of the Messiah. The suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is understood as the Messiah even in some Jewish sources. However, for the Christian, it was clearly fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> D. H. Wallace, Messiah in The concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Editor Walter A. Elwell, Baker Book House 1991, 310.

<sup>3</sup> Christ in the Psalms found in The Lion Handbook of the Bible, Lion publishing 1973, 329.

<sup>4</sup> The Messiah Would Be the Suffering Servant, <https://jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/messianic-prophecy/the-messiah-would-be-the-suffering-servant/> (accessed April 13, 2022).

## Jesus, the Savior



The angel told Joseph to name Him Jesus “for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21 ESV). The original Aramaic<sup>5</sup> name for Jesus was *Yeshua* which comes from the Hebrew *Yehoshua* meaning “the LORD is salvation.”<sup>6</sup> This is the same as Joshua in the Old Testament. The English word “Jesus” and the Muslim name “*Isa*” appear to come from the

Greek *lésous* (Ἰησοῦς).<sup>7</sup> For example, *‘Isa* (*Ciise* in Somali) appears to come from *lésous* (without the genitive or possessive ending - *ous*). The Amharic *Iyesus* (ኢየሱስ) appears to be a direct transliteration from the Greek. Arab Christians typically don’t use *‘Isa* but *Yasue* (يسوع); this also appears to be a transliteration.<sup>8</sup> Based on this study of the name I would suggest the *‘Isa* (*Ciise*) in the Somali/Muslim context is as good as any name. What is important is the meaning. Jesus came as Savior. He came to save his people from their sins. John the Baptist (*nabi Yaxye*) extends this sacrifice of Jesus to all peoples, “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29 ESV)”

Was Jesus only the prophet and savior for the Jews? Surah 3:49, *And an apostle Unto the children of Israel with this message: verily have come unto you with a sign from your Lord,...* Surah 43: 59, *...him We favored, and him We made an example unto the Children of Israel.* Then in the Bible in Matthew 15: 24 Jesus is recorded as saying this: “*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (ESV). Also in Matthew 10:5-6 when he sends out the twelve “*Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (ESV). The other gospels mention nothing about only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” The other gospels do not include these statements. However, both Mark and Luke are primarily written to Gentile or non-Jewish believers. John writes to explain Jesus’ mission and purpose.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The language of the Jews at the time of Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> From Strong’s concordance, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3091.htm> (accessed March 18, 2022)

<sup>7</sup> Strong’s, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2424.htm> (accessed March 18, 2022)

<sup>8</sup> Ibrahim A.S., Should Christians Use the Quranic Name of Jesus in Arabic Bible Translations? 2021 <https://jenkins.sbts.edu/2021/07/15/should-christians-use-the-quranic-name-of-jesus-in-arabic-bible-translations/> (accessed March 18, 2022)

<sup>9</sup> NIV study Bible introductions, <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/> (accessed April 18, 2022).

NIV Study Bible says that one of Matthew’s purposes was to convince the Jews that Jesus was their Messiah.<sup>10</sup> In Matthew 15 the Lord Jesus is speaking to a Gentile woman and he goes on to heal her child. John also records Jesus as saying, “*And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd*” (John 10:16 ESV). It took a while for the disciples to catch on that they were called to go to the nations. Consider the story of Peter in Acts 10 and 11. Saint Paul states: “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*” (Romans 1:16 ESV). Early church traditions talk about Peter being crucified upside down in Rome, so he clearly moved outside his Jewish comfort zone.

The Lord Jesus clearly understood his mission to be as the Savior. His justification for associating with the sinners and outcasts of his society was that those who were sick needed a doctor (Matthew 9:12). He was there to save them. When the short tax collector, Zacchaeus, sought Jesus out and Jesus found him and shared a meal with him; the tax collector repented. Jesus says this: “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10 ESV). The rich young ruler would not be saved by keeping the law or his wealth but by following Jesus, Matthew 19:16-22. A religious Pharisee who came to Jesus at night, Nicodemus, needed to be born again in order to see or understand the kingdom of God. He would be born again when he put his faith in Jesus and his work on the cross. “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life*” John 3:14-15 (ESV). “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” Mark 10:45 (ESV).

### Son of Man



A couple of other important titles for Jesus are Son of Man and Son of God. Jesus popularly called himself “the Son of Man.” In the context of the Old Testament there are two places where the “Son of Man” appears. One of them is the prophet Ezekiel. Whenever God talks to Ezekiel, he calls him “son of man.” Ezekiel was a mere creature as opposed to God.<sup>11</sup> So was Jesus calling himself a prophet when he used the term “son of man” or “the Son of Man?” The other example is in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 7 there are two

<sup>10</sup> Intro to Matthew, <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-matthew/> (accessed April 18)

<sup>11</sup> G. R., Beasley-Murray, Ezekiel, New Bible Commentary (Third Edition), IVP, 1970, 667.

figures, one is “the Ancient of Days” and the other is “the Son of Man.” The Ancient of Days is a picture of God and he gives the Son of Man dominion or rule over all the peoples of the world and it an everlasting or long reign.

*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14 ESV.*

Muslims can rejoice when they understand the term “the Son of Man” as referring to Jesus as a human and prophet. However, Jesus seems to more strongly refer to himself as that king of Heaven and judge.

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Matthew 25:31-33 ESV.*

## Son of God



We turn to Jesus as “the Son of God.” Note he is not just a son of man or a son of God. He is “the Son of Man” and “the Son of God.” There are many prophets (“sons of men”) and all of us can claim to be children of God but only one is “the Son of Man” and “the Son of God.” He is unique. In the gospel accounts “the Son of God” seems to refer to two aspects of who Jesus was. He was the Messiah and he came from Heaven. We have Peter’s confession as recorded in Matthew’s gospel. *Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* Matthew

16:16 ESV.

This relates to the covenant with David that God would be the father to David’s descendants and he would be God’s son; “*I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.*” 2 Samuel 7:14. Similarly Psalm 2:12 “*Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*” The Messiah would be known as “the Son of the most high God” (Luke 1:32).

Also, in the gospel accounts he is the Son of God because he came from Heaven, John 8:23 ESV. He said to them, “*You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.*” Because the Lord Jesus came from Heaven he has a special relationship with God in Heaven and is called the Son of God or “the one and only Son of God” (John 3:16). The words “one and only” or “only begotten” (KJV) come from the Greek *monogenes* which is correct in the KJV but its meaning can be confusing. God did not have relations with a woman and produced a son but that he was unique, “one and only.” Jesus was unique in his claims to do similar works to the Father (for example John 5:19). The Son of God title can point to his God nature. This is seen in the book of Hebrews particularly where he is greater than the angels and Moses and of an everlasting priesthood. This priesthood was not the physical one of the tribe of Levi but an eternal one rather like Melchizedek (Hebrews 5).

## Word of God

λόγος

Jesus, the Word of God, is God’s ultimate communication or bridge with and to humanity. This is the name for Jesus in both the Bible (John 1:1-18) and the Qur’an. The concept of “the Word” or *logos* (Greek λόγος) is perhaps the most important concept when considering who

Jesus is. The Greek stoics and the Jewish philosopher *Philo* considered the *logos* as divine reason, or principle through which natural creation comes into existence or grows. John 1 and the creation story are similar in that God creates through his Word.<sup>12</sup> For John this divine principle or word becomes a human being this is unique to John and not in *Philo*. The Word, whom we can clearly understand as the Lord Jesus, is God. As He becomes a man, he is God’s ultimate revelation of who he is and how he wants to be among his people. When we think about “word” in English we think about communication. In Jesus, God is communicating with us and even more than that he is dwelling with us.

“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*” John 1:1 ESV .

“*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him*” John 1:10 ESV.

“*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” John 1:14 ESV.

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<sup>12</sup> D. Guthrie, John, New Bible Commentary (Third Edition), IVP, 1970, 930.

*“No one has ever seen God; the only God [or the only One], who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known”<sup>13</sup> John 1:18 ESV.*

God created us for his glory and for relationship with Himself. Many debate the Genesis 1 account of creation, was it six literal days or more? Is it accurate to modern science? However, I believe that scholar John Walton is right when he says it is not about creation but rather God creating a temple for himself and a creation that would worship Him and interact in relationship with Him. Humankind was created in his image.<sup>14</sup> As the narrative continues, God through his interactions with the children of Israel and other nations in the Old Testament is teaching humanity about himself. He is a holy and just God and yet his mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22, 23). He particularly values the individuals who seek relationship with Himself, for example, David in the Psalms (Acts 13:22 “a man after my heart”). Jesus as the Word of God enables us to become more intimately involved with God and in relationship with Him. We move from just being his slaves to worshipping and relating to Him as a friend.

*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants [or slaves] for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. John 15:12-15 ESV.*

## Conclusion

So the titles and names for Jesus and predictions about his coming in the Old Testament tell us a lot about who he was and God’s plan to communicate with humanity. There are other names for Jesus, such as “lamb of God,” but they are related to the names we have looked at here. A Hindu man was standing next to an ant hill and said to himself “How can I tell these ants not to be afraid of my shadow?” “I can only do it by becoming an ant.” After Jesus died on the cross, to reconcile God’s justice and wrath with his abundant love and mercy he ascended back to

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<sup>13</sup> Consider also this verse in Greek - <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/john/1-18.htm> (accessed April 25).

<sup>14</sup> Consider some of the articles by John Walton. [https://biologos.org/resources?refinementList%5Bauthors.post\\_title%5D%5B0%5D=John%20Walton&page=1](https://biologos.org/resources?refinementList%5Bauthors.post_title%5D%5B0%5D=John%20Walton&page=1) (accessed April 19) and [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=john+w Walton](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=john+w Walton) (also accessed April 19).

Heaven. In Heaven he reigns and intercedes for us (Hebrews 7:25). As he went through the same humanity we exist in we know he understands us (Hebrews 2:18).

He is God in Heaven whom we can picture as understanding us and interceding for us because of his humanity.

There are some verses on the end times (eschatology) which indicate there will be a time when Jesus is no longer needed as king and intercessor.

*Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* 1 Corinthians 15:24- 26 ESV.

However, in Revelation 21 God almighty and the Lamb (Jesus) are pictured as the light for the eternal city, the New Jerusalem.

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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).



## Jesus Gives Life to A Clay Bird?

Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman

### Introduction

In this article I would like to reflect on a miracle attributed to Jesus in the Qur'an. It is the story where Jesus molds a clay bird and breathes life into it. What should followers of Jesus Christ do with the story? Avoid talking about it? Dismiss it as foolish story? Or use it constructively?

### The Qur'anic account

عيسى

Beginning with *Surat-ul-'Imran* 3:45, we read of a conversation between Mary and angels concerning the birth of Jesus (*al-Masih 'Isa*). The angels told Mary not only the message Jesus would proclaim but also some miracles Jesus would perform. According to verse 49, one of Jesus' miracles will be to create a living bird from clay. This verse has Jesus saying, "I will create for you out of clay the shape of a bird. Then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird by God's leave."<sup>1</sup>

A similar account is given in *Surah-ul-Ma'idah* 5:110. On the Day of Judgment when God gathers his messengers together, he will address Jesus, saying,

O Jesus son of Mary! Remember My Blessing upon thee, and upon thy mother...and how thou wouldst create out of clay the shape of a bird, by My Leave, and thou wouldst breathe into it, and it would become a bird, by My leave; and thou wouldst heal the blind and the leper, by My Leave; and thou wouldst bring forth the dead, by My Leave..."

### Apocryphal gospels tell a different story

Nowhere in the four Gospels do we read of Jesus doing this. There is a somewhat similar story in *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, an apocryphal book which was written long before Muhammad was born. We read this in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*:

When this boy Jesus was five years old he was playing at the crossing of a stream, and he gathered together in pools the running water, and instantly made it clean, and gave his command with a single word. Having made soft clay, he moulded from it twelve sparrows. And it was the sabbath when he did

<sup>1</sup> All Qur'anic quotations are taken from *The Study Quran*. Seyyed Hossein-Nasr, Editor-in-Chief. N.Y. HarperCollins, 2015.

these things. And there were also many other children playing with him. When a certain Jew saw what Jesus was doing while playing on the sabbath, he went at once and told his father Joseph, 'See, your child is at the stream, and he took clay and moulded twelve birds and has profaned the sabbath.' And when Joseph came to the place and looked, he cried out to him, saying, 'Why do you do on the sabbath things which it is not lawful to do?' But Jesus clapped his hands and cried out to the sparrows, and said to them, 'Be gone!' And the sparrows took flight and went away chirping.<sup>2</sup>

Did the Qur'an borrow from this apocryphal infancy gospel? I believe not. There are too many differences between the two accounts to show a direct borrowing:

1. The infancy gospel is full of details in story form. The Qur'anic account contains no story.
2. The infancy gospel has Jesus performing this miracle when he was five years old. The Qur'anic account says nothing about his age. In fact, if we use the four Gospels as a reference, all the other miracles mentioned in the verses quoted were performed when Jesus was an adult. Therefore, it is likely that the clay bird miracle should be seen happening when Jesus was an adult.
3. The infancy gospel has Jesus giving life to twelve birds. The Qur'anic account has Jesus giving life to only one bird.
4. The infancy gospel specifies which kind of birds were given life; they were sparrows. The Qur'an does not specify which kind of bird; it is simply "a bird."
5. The infancy gospel has Jesus bringing the birds to life by clapping his hands together and shouting "Be gone!" The Qur'an has Jesus breathing life into the bird.
6. The infancy gospel has Jesus creating life by his own power. The Qur'anic account says Jesus will do this "by God's Leave."
7. The infancy gospel uses this story to attack continued observance of the Sabbath. The Qur'anic account says nothing about the Sabbath.

Even though the infancy gospel existed before the birth of Muhammad,<sup>3</sup> we have no evidence that it made its way into the Hijaz in any language within Muhammad's lifetime. *What seems to be a reasonable assumption is that the infancy gospel and the Qur'anic account both come from a common oral source.* Muslims would say the oral source was from angels. Non-Muslims would suggest the oral source was through human storytelling.

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<sup>2</sup> J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 75-76. This passage is taken from the "Greek A" text. The "Greek B" text is shorter and somewhat different. The apocryphal *Arabic Infancy Gospel* enlarges upon the clay birds miracle. It has a seven-year-old Jesus make "figures of all sorts of animals of clay, and makes them walk, fly, and feed." See Elliott, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>Elliott, 69.

### What should the disciples of Christ do with the story?

Should disciples of Jesus Christ refer to the clay bird miracle when discussing their faith with Muslims? Can it be helpful? Some Muslim scholars have seen an extraordinary connection between the ability given to Jesus and the power reserved only for God. We read the following comment on *Surah-ul-Ma'idah* 5:110 in *The Study Quran*,

His creating live birds out of clay birds, healing the *blind* and the *leper*, and raising the dead...are extraordinary in that they suggest powers usually reserved for God: God is the one who heals in 26:8; He is the raiser of the dead throughout the Quran; and the creation of birds from clay and bringing them to life by breathing upon them is exactly parallel to God's creation of the human being (15:26-29; 32:7-9; 38:71-72). The verse repeatedly makes clear, however, that all these powers are done by God's leave (*by My Leave*) and so are ultimately His."<sup>4</sup>

When looking at the Qur'an, has God ever shared all these powers with any other prophet? The answer is no. These verses show a harmony of power and authority between Jesus Christ and God that Muslims and Christians may choose to explore further together.

### Jesus' many miracles

I am sure some Christians will say, "If it is not recorded in the Gospels, I don't want to talk about it." But it is good to remember that Jesus did many things the Gospels never record. The last verse of the Gospel of John tells us, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25)<sup>5</sup>

Let me give you a particular example of miracles that lack details. In John 2, we read that Jesus turned water to wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. John records, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him." (John 2:11) It sounds like this was the first miracle Jesus ever performed. Then Nicodemus visits Jesus at night in John 3, and he tells Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do *these signs* that you do unless God is with him." (John 3:2) Notice that Nicodemus was aware of multiple signs/miracles. Then in John 4 we read that Jesus heals an official's son. John records, "This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee" (John 4:54).

Notice that in John 2, Jesus performed his *first* sign/miracle in Cana and then in chapter 4 he performed his *second* sign/miracle in Cana. Between those two chapters Nicodemus talks of multiple signs/miracles Jesus has done. Does John 2

<sup>4</sup> *The Study Quran*, 334.

<sup>5</sup> All Bible quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

refer to Jesus' first miracle ever, or does it refer to his first miracle in Cana? The text of John make it sound like the miracle of water to wine was Jesus first miracle in Cana, not his first miracle ever!

The earliest known "Gospel harmony" called *Diatessaron*, which was compiled by Tatian, places the visit of Nicodemus from John 3 after Jesus cursed the fig tree, shortly before he was crucified.<sup>6</sup> Why did Tatian place Nicodemus' visit so much later than it appears in the Gospel of John? Probably it was because Tatian was trying to fit Nicodemus' words into a chronological narrative when Nicodemus said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do *these signs* that you do unless God is with him." He assumed Nicodemus must have visited Jesus long after Jesus' *second miracle* in Cana. But modern harmonies of the four Gospels list Jesus first miracle in Cana, then the visit of Nicodemus, and after that the second miracle in Cana.

### **A parable?**

Did Jesus actually create a living bird from clay? If he did, what was the purpose? One Muslim scholar suggested this was a parable. Muhammad Ali, the former leader of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, wrote,

To understand the significance of this passage it is necessary to bear in mind that the chief characteristic of Jesus' speeches is that he spoke in parables and preferred to clothe his ideas in allegorical language. If this is kept in mind, there is no difficulty in interpreting this passage. The first of the statements in this passage speaks of the making of birds and breathing into them. It is perfectly intelligible if taken as a parable, but quite incomprehensible as a statement of fact....So what is meant here is that Jesus, by breathing a spirit into mortals, will make them rise above those who are bent low upon the earth, and the apostles of Jesus, who were all men of humble origin (which is referred to in the word *dust* in the parable), whose thoughts had never risen higher than their own humble cares, left everything for the master's sake and went into the world by the command of the master preaching the truth.<sup>7</sup>

### **Jesus teaches with a different clay miracle in the gospel of John**

There is one final miracle I would like to mention. In the Gospel of John 9, Jesus heals a man blind from birth. We read in verses 6-7, "[Jesus] spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So, he went and washed and came back seeing." What had Jesus done with the mud? Some suggest Jesus made new eyes from mud for the blind man. Ephrem's in his commentary on

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<sup>6</sup> Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 248-250. See also the Roberts-Donaldson translation of the Arabic *Diatessaron*, Cliff Lee printing, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> English Translation and Commentary of Chapter 3 [Section 5] of the Holy Quran (by Maulana Muhammad Ali) (aaiil.org)

this passage writes that Jesus “fashioned the eyes with the clay.” McCarthy explains that the Syriac word for *fashioned* “which is used here alludes to the idea of ‘re-creation’ in Jesus’ action.”<sup>8</sup> Then later Jesus explained the miracle. He said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind” (Verse 39).

### Final thoughts

If Jesus used the miracle of making clay eyes for the blind man to teach a spiritual lesson, is it possible to do something similar with the clay bird story? Although the Gospels say nothing about creating a living bird from clay, it seems to me that it can still be a fruitful starting point in discussions with Muslims. It is usually necessary to start with what the other person believes and move the discussion from there. Even if you don’t accept their assumptions, you can ask, “If you believe this is true, what are its implications?” But - you will have to decide for yourself what to do with the story. There are many possibilities.

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### About the author

Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman (pseudonym) has worked among Muslims for over 30 years. He earned an MA in Islam and an MPh in Sociology of Religion. He is the author of 19 books and booklets which have been published in seven languages. A major Christian publisher printed over 90,000 copies of one of his works. The author can be reached at [info@somaliBiblesociety.org](mailto:info@somaliBiblesociety.org)

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<sup>8</sup> McCarthy, 258.

## Book Review

Reviewed by Rev. Aweis A. Ali, PhD,  
Editor-in-Chief of the Somali Bible Society Journal  
Mogadishu, Somalia.

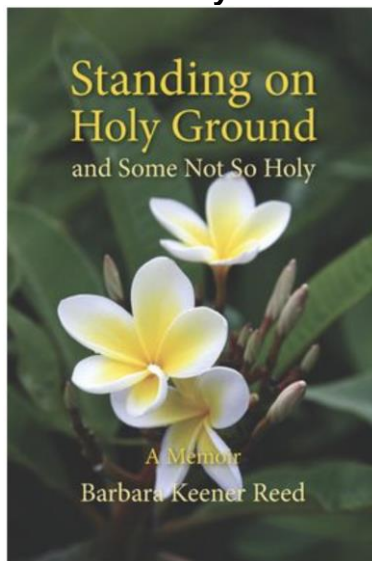
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Reed, Barbara Keener. *Standing on Holy Ground — and Some Not so Holy: A Memoir*. Lancaster: Pennsylvania. Self-published, 2021. 294 pages. ISBN 978-1-60126-781-8. [Paper back on Amazon: USD 15](#).

### Brief Introduction

Barbara Keener Reed (b. 1935), a missionary to Somalia, graduated from the Lancaster General Hospital School of Nursing, since renamed Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences. She later earned a certification in psychiatric and mental health nursing and also studied chaplaincy, family therapy and practice, marital and premarital counselling and poetry.

### Brief Summary



*Standing on Holy Ground — and Some Not so Holy* is an informative memoir about a courageous Christian couple, the author and her late husband, Harold, and their four children who made their home in Somalia, one of the most challenging countries for a Westerner to live in. While the Reeds helped many Somalis and others in East Africa with education, healthcare and income generating projects, the author states the goal for writing this memoir with a classic Mennonite humility, “Although we may not be remembered for illustrious deeds, I do not want Harold’s and my ‘library’ to pass into oblivion when I follow him to meet my Maker.”<sup>1</sup> Here the author alludes to the African proverb, that when an old person dies, a library burns down.

The Reeds departed for Somalia with two children on 10 October 1961 and embarked on outstanding mission work in Islamic Somalia with Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (EMBMC).<sup>2</sup> They later ministered in other countries in Africa, Europe, and in the USA. The author, a farmer’s daughter, proved to be a gentle leader and support while Harold, who

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<sup>1</sup> Page 1.

<sup>2</sup> EMBMC, now known as Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM), 450 N. Prince St. Lancaster, PA 17603.

studied theology and education, was a versatile administrator and was also proficient in the trades.

Ministry in Somalia was not a smooth ride. The government had become upset when a few Somali Christians distributed Christian literature in front of a mosque in the capital, and though the government eventually reversed the decision, it directed the Somali Mennonite Mission (SMM) to cease all work in 1962. 14 years later, the government officially and permanently closed the mission, having already nationalized all mission property some time before. During their time in Somalia, the Reeds lost family members back home and one Canadian co-worker in Mogadishu who was stabbed to death. Harold faced a death threat and the author was almost electrocuted when an old washing machine malfunctioned, and she received a strong electric shock.

### Analysis

*Standing on Holy Ground — and Some Not so Holy* is the life story of a veteran missionary couple and their four children – both of their missionary days as well as life thereafter. Harold, an educator, and the author, a nurse, served in Somalia over a 14 year period and eventually transitioned to other world areas to continue their ministry. While the author served as a missionary, she also taught English and sewing. In the early years of her ministry, the author wondered how she qualified to serve in cross cultural settings considering herself “Only a female, only a farmer’s daughter, only a Mennonite.” This mental script held her back for many years until she eventually broke free to exercise her God given talent.

Some of the life-threatening challenges the author faced in Somalia include receiving a near-fatal electric shock. She became unconscious and unresponsive, received CPR and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, and recovered from the near-electrocution. The author also experienced an unexpected loss in July 1963 while in Somalia, when both of her parents were killed in a car accident. Another unfortunate incident was when one of Harold’s students threatened him with physical harm. The threat by this troubled student came shortly after Merlin Grove, a co-missionary with the Reeds, was stabbed to death in Mogadishu and his wife critically injured. The student visited Harold at home and said, “I’ll make your family a widow and orphans!”<sup>3</sup> but later apologized to Harold and became a follower of Christ.

The Reeds’ commitment to serve the Somali people was deep rooted that even the 1969 military coup could not shake their resolve. The Reeds were in the US for furlough when the 21 October revolution took place, but they still decided to return to Somalia with their children despite the counsel of friends and family who advised them not to go back. When an acquaintance whose husband served in Somalia with the State Department strongly advised the author not to return the children to Somalia, she still kept her plan to return with the children; “there was no other

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<sup>3</sup> Page 82.

plan.”<sup>4</sup> The Reeds once again demonstrated their courage and conviction that the safest place for them and the children was where God wanted them to be.

The Reeds were not allowed to openly preach the gospel in Islamic Somalia but living a Christ-like life could not be censored. The Reeds entertained guests, practiced hospitality and sacrificially served the Somali people. They quickly won the hearts and the minds of the Somali people who acknowledged them as deeply religious people who lived a godly life. The author recognizes that some Muslims live exemplary lives and is impressed by their emphasis on submission to God and their disciplined fasting, when they annually fast from food and drink from sunrise to sunset for thirty continuous days.<sup>5</sup> The Reeds and Somalis honored each other; a mutual honoring which opened the door for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The author states “When we were resident in Somalia, women were much slower to inquire about matters of faith and to consider the invitation of Christ. Being fewer in number among the Christian believers was an obstacle for establishing Christian homes.”<sup>6</sup> The author also acknowledges that it takes a longer time for Muslims to follow Jesus, as they take longer to count the cost. She also gives examples of violent persecutions, including martyrdom, which some local Christians faced in the hands of Muslims. One of the reasons fewer Muslim women follow the Lord in Somalia could be that they cannot tolerate or evade persecution as the men can more easily do.

When the Somali government nationalized the Somali Mennonite Mission (SMM) properties in 1973, Harold and a lay leader approached a Roman Catholic Father in Mogadishu asking him if he could allow them to use the Catholic Cathedral for services. The Father made available to them a space they could freely worship. This is another example of the Reeds’ reaching out to others and their gift in interpersonal relationships. Eventually, the Somali government asked the Reeds to leave Somalia in November 1974. The author writes, “Even now after almost a half century later as I consider the event of our departure, I am moved to tears. *Such is the grip, the impact that Somalis and Somalia had – and have – on us.*”<sup>7</sup> The Reed’s “hearts will forever beat for Somalia and her people.”<sup>8</sup>

While *Standing on Holy Ground — and Some Not so Holy* was published in 2021, decades into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, traces of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century worldview are visible, such as when the author describes a popular guest house in Nairobi as “popular among

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<sup>4</sup> Page 117.

<sup>5</sup> Page 111.

<sup>6</sup> Page 112.

<sup>7</sup> Page 163.

<sup>8</sup> Page 166.



African [church leaders] and missionaries of varied denominations and nationalities....”<sup>9</sup> The problem with this perception is that there are in fact African missionaries in Kenya and in many other countries in Africa, a continent of 54 sovereign states. The author also states that the Somali regions of “Somaliland and Puntland seceded from the republic but have not been granted recognition by the international community.”<sup>10</sup> While it is accurate that Somaliland declared its secession from Somalia in 1991, Puntland never claimed any secession and remains firmly in the Republic Somalia.

Harold was officially diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in 2008, and after extended care passed away in 2017 at age 83.

### Conclusion

*Standing on Holy Ground — and Some Not so Holy* is a beautifully written book which is beneficial to anyone interested in missions, Islamic ministry, cross-cultural studies and anthropology. This is a must-read book, not only for those interested in the Somali people but for anyone with a global world view. This book achieves its stated goal and Harold’s and Barbara’s “library” will not pass into oblivion when her earthly time comes to an end.

While the Reeds experienced many challenges and blessings during the course of their marriage and ministry, one of the most touching parts is how the author served her husband from the day he was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and until the day he died. The author’s dedication to her ailing husband who lost his memory and speaking ability is the most commendable thing a spouse could do for their ailing partner. The author’s Christian faith was the guiding light for the sacrificial love she bestowed upon her husband at the time he needed her the most.

The book narrates in a cohesive manner the upbringing of the Reeds, their education, children and career as missionaries who ministered in several countries in three different continents. It is without a doubt that the Reeds’ Mennonite heritage contributed to their ministry success in countries of different cultures. The Reeds’ integrity and work ethic, a classic Mennonite tradition, appealed to so many local people in each country they served in.

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<sup>9</sup> Page 167.

<sup>10</sup> Pages 191-192.

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### Interview 1: Brother Fuzzy

info@fuzzyandfiona.com

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**Question:** Introduce yourself, giving your name, your marital status, where you are from, and your Somali ministry experience.

**Answer:** My name is “Fuzzy,” I am married to “Fiona.” We are from America. I have been working in the Horn of Africa since 2015, spending the most time in Somaliland. The Lord has given me three places of focus, all within the Horn of Africa. Our heart is to see a disciple-making movement in all three areas; until we can get into all three places, our goal is to focus on language and cultural learning and to serve the Somali body as best we can.

**Question:** How long have you been in the ministry?

**Answer:** I started full-time ministry in 2013 and then shifted my focus to ministry in the Horn of Africa in 2015.

**Question:** What is your educational background?

**Answer:** I graduated high school in 2005. I have taken Discipleship Training School, School of Frontier Mission, Leadership Training School, and School of Business through Youth With a Mission or YWAM.

**Question:** What do you do for recreation?

**Answer:** I enjoy spending time with my wife, learning more about the Lord, and playing video games.

**Question:** What is your current role in ministry?

**Answer:** Currently, my wife and I are considered a “field team”, which means we work on the mission field in the Horn of Africa.

**Question:** What do you believe to be your paramount gift for ministry?

**Answer:** I tend to find myself in positions of pioneering, discipling others, and being invited to advise others in challenging situations. Some would say these skills would fall under an “Apostolic gifting.”

**Question:** Does your present situation in ministry fit your personal gifting?

**Answer:** I believe so, and I am thankful to be used by the Lord in this way.

**Question:** What are you finding to be the main challenges in relating to the Somali people?

**Answer:** Somali culture is quite different from American culture! It has taken me years to understand the little bit that I do of tribal differences and how much that influences Somali culture as a whole. Language is also something that has proven to be a challenge that I work toward diligently so that I will be able to share the gospel in the people's heart language; until then, they'll hear it in my broken and pieced together Somali.

**Question:** What encouragements have you experienced in your work among the Somalis so far?

**Answer:** I have met several Somali believers who have paid a costly price for their faith. When I talk with them, I am encouraged and know that my time here is not wasted even if I may not get to see many Somalis coming to faith or have the language to share the gospel in-depth; I know that through them, the gospel will continue to spread.

**Question:** What are the main challenges of the Somali ministry?

**Answer:** Gaining sustainable access to the region has been a big challenge. The Islamic culture around integrity has dramatically influenced many beliefs and behaviors in every and all social structures within Somali society. The lack of integrity affects all relationships, from friends, neighbors, co-workers all the way up to the police and government officials, causing suspicion and distrust of one another, and especially toward foreigners.

**Question:** What would you do differently if you had to start the Somali ministry all over again?

**Answer:** I have learned so much over the years, most of which I learned the hard way, but that is not always a bad thing! If I had to start over, I would probably network with Somalis a little differently.

**Question:** Could you mention a few of your missionary heroes? What is special about each of these missionaries?

**Answer:** Moravian Missionaries sold themselves into slavery to share the gospel.

St. Patrick started as a slave in Ireland who went back as a missionary to the people who enslaved him after gaining freedom.

Brian H. was a YWAM missionary who saw a discipleship movement in Asia. While there, his infant son died, he and his family stayed on the mission field and continued to see the movement thrive.

Emily Foreman is a YWAM missionary whose family served in North Africa. Islamic extremists killed Emily's husband. Emily and her family have continued to minister

there and have been able to speak forgiveness and reconciliation to the men who attacked and killed her husband.

**Question:** What would you tell a missionary who is new to the Somali ministry?

**Answer:** Do the whole job, not just half! Do the practical part of the ministry as well as share the gospel.

**Question:** What else could you share with the readers of the SBS Journal?

**Answer:** I think that Somalis have the most significant potential of any people group because they're naturally aggressive and chatty. When you tie that to God's redemption in their life, you automatically have "Grade A" evangelists. Their hard lives make it easier to count the cost of living and dying for the sake of their Lord and Savior. I believe the Somalis are crucial to seeing every people group reached and the Great Commission being fulfilled. Once the body is well established among the Somalis, the whole world will see, and because of the nomadic nature of Somalis, every tribe will know Jesus and bring Him Glory.

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## Interview 2: Brother Albert

albert@rtws.info

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**Question:** Introduce yourself, giving your name, your marital status, where you are from, and your Somali ministry experience.

**Answer:** My name is Albert. I am a Dutchman. I'm married and my wife and I have three children, who are all teenagers. My experience with the Somali ministry started in January 2018. In April of that same year, I travelled to the CMP (Camel Milk Partnership) conference where I met my Somali brothers and sisters for the first time. Since then, I have had the honor of working with Somali brothers and sisters.

**Question:** How long have you been in the ministry?

**Answer:** I have worked with Middle East Concern since 2017. Before that I worked part-time with another ministry that also focused on supporting Christians in persecution situations.

**Question:** What is your educational background?

**Answer:** I studied law: business and civil law. I worked as a lawyer for an insurance company, but the work was not satisfying to me on a deeper level. I believe that God gave me a strong sense of justice and a heart for brothers who experience discrimination and marginalization due to following Christ.

**Question:** What do you do for recreation?

**Answer:** Almost every week I play football (soccer for the American reader). I also love to maintain our garden, have fellowship with friends, and go camping with friends and family.

**Question:** What is your current role in ministry?

**Answer:** I'm responsible for MEC's work in a couple of countries in the MENA Region, including Somalia. What we seek to do is provide assistance to brothers and sisters who are marginalized, discriminated against or persecuted for their faith. Our assistance can consist of practical support (such as financial aid or advocacy), equipping people (e.g., training on how to respond to persecution and interrogation, IT security, etc.) or encouraging people (through talking and praying with them and mobilizing prayer in our network). Besides these responsibilities in the Region, I'm in touch with politicians in a couple of countries in Europe to raise awareness of the situation of Christians in the MENA Region and to advocate for specific cases (if authorized by the victim, the family and/or the church).

**Question:** What do you believe to be your paramount gift for ministry?

**Answer:** God gave me a strong sense of justice and the desire to stand up against injustice in a very practical way. Around ten years ago I felt the calling to serve brothers and sisters around the world who are confronted with injustice when they choose to follow Christ. These brothers and sisters are discriminated against and persecuted for believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Light.

**Question:** Does your present situation in ministry fit your personal gifting?

**Answer:** Yes, it does. In my current capacity, I have the privilege to meet, stand alongside, collaborate and support brothers and sisters who despite opposition or even persecution choose to follow Christ. I also get to work with those who have the gift and boldness to share the gospel in environments not open to the gospel.

**Question:** What are you finding to be the main challenges in relating to the Somali people?

**Answer:** I haven't encountered challenges amongst the Somali people with which I collaborate. We are brothers and sisters, which creates a natural bond and connection. Of course, I'm not based in the Somali Region where cultural differences could make it difficult to become part of society or where certain cultural barriers could sometimes cause misunderstandings in communication.

**Question:** What encouragements have you experienced in your work among the Somalis so far?

**Answer:** I admire the strength and resilience of Somalis with whom I have worked. These are people, who despite very difficult circumstances, don't give up. They persevere and stay where they are because of their heart for their people. They are very much focused on Jesus and the fact that everyone needs Jesus to be saved.

**Question:** What are the main challenges of the Somali ministry?

**Answer:** Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially unacceptable in the Somali context. This is due to radical Islam and the fact that Somali ethnicity and clan culture are strongly intertwined with Islam. A Somali is supposed to be a Muslim. This results in the fact that conversion leads to family and societal ostracization and life-threatening danger. Another result is that traditional church-life simply is not possible.

Disunity and distrust among Christians, including amongst Somali Christians, harm the advance of the gospel and the growth of the church. It is of utmost importance that different ministry groups learn to trust each other and collaborate as brothers and sisters should.

**Question:** Could you mention a few of your missionary heroes? What is special about each of these missionaries?

**Answer:** Corrie ten Boom. In the Netherlands during the second world war, she and her family helped approximately 800 Jewish people escape from the Nazis. In 1944, they were betrayed and arrested. Corrie and her sister, Betsie, were transferred to the same concentration camp. Her sister passed away in the camp and her last words to Corrie were, "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still." Betsie also said, "God will give us the love to be able to forgive our enemies." After the war, God used Corrie in a fantastic way to testify about giving thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 15) and about forgiving our persecutors as God has forgiven us as well.

Brother Andrew was a Dutch missionary, and the founder of Open Doors that I also admire. He saw the needs of believers in communist countries and was responsible for smuggling millions of Bibles to countries where the Bible was considered a forbidden book. The ministry later turned into a global organization supporting the persecuted Church. Brother Andrew is a wonderful example of someone who stepped out of the boat because God called him to do so. He chose not to be led by fear but to follow his Master.

**Question:** What else could you share with the readers of the SBS Journal?

**Answer:** In the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has made travelling challenging. This meant that I wasn't able to meet my Somali brothers and sisters in person for quite some time now. God willing, I will travel for meetings with Somali brothers and sisters soon. It is so important and encouraging to meet people in person. I'm really looking forward to it!

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### Interview 3: Mike Neterer

neterer@protonmail.com

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**Question:** Introduce yourself, giving your name, your marital status, where you are from, and your Somali ministry experience.

**Answer:** My name is Michael “Mike” Neterer, married to Sara. I’m originally from Indiana State in the US, but we met at Bethany Global University where we got married in 1992. We’ve lived in Minnesota, in the Minneapolis-St Paul Twin Cities area ever since. It was in 1998 that I had my first Somali English student as I was teaching “English for Work” for newly arrived refugees. By 1999 and 2000, most of my students were from Somalia. I began praying for them and doing my best to understand their language, culture and history.

**Question:** How long have you been in the ministry??

**Answer:** It was in 1999 that I asked the Lord if we could go back (since we had served a student internship in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) to Central Asia, Afghanistan actually, where I knew the needs were so great. (Now that I remember, it was actually on a visit to Peshawar, Pakistan, that I met my first Somali! She was the adopted daughter of a Swiss German medical doctor who showed us generous hospitality.) Anyway, when I prayed in 1999, the Lord spoke and said, “Look across the street!” When I climbed to our upper balcony and looked across Lake Street in South Minneapolis, the view I have is of the Hamdi Somali Restaurant. That’s how the Lord called me to serve Somalis. I’ve been seeking to serve the Lord by serving Somalis ever since then.

**Question:** What is your educational background?

**Answer:** I have two master’s degrees. The first is from Concordia University St Paul in Organizational Management. If you’d like to read my “Capstone” paper/thesis, I can send it to you. It’s titled “Love Our Somali Neighbors” (2010). My second master’s degree is from Dallas International University in Language and Culture Studies. My thesis is titled, Somali Jiiddu Language Development: A Seventy-Year Journey, 1951-2021.

**Question:** What do you do for recreation?

**Answer:** For fun, or to relax, I like to work in my back yard with my fruit trees and small garden. I like to take my sons fishing in beautiful Minnesota lakes. And I love to take my wife on travels. If we get the chance to celebrate a special wedding anniversary, we’ve enjoyed going somewhere warm during the cold MN winter.



**Question:** What is your current role in ministry?

**Answer:** I am learning and discovering how to respond to the needs and opportunities in South Somalia. I am trusting the Lord to lead step-by-step and trusting you as my brothers and sisters to give me advice and support. Somehow, I want to figure out how to leverage language development (dictionary work, literacy primers/grammars in “minority” or indigenous languages) into practical development in areas like agriculture, business, education and health care – especially for maternal care.

**Question:** What do you believe to be your paramount gift for ministry?

**Answer:** Probably one of my strongest gifts is in the area of faith - trusting God to do what seems humanly impossible. With that faith, I try to exercise the gift of encouragement. I also enjoy connecting people who are like-minded or working in similar callings.

**Question:** Does your present situation in ministry fit your personal gifting?

**Answer:** Yes, but I’m asking God for co-laborers and partners because I’m feeling quite alone so far.

**Question:** What are you finding to be the main challenges in relating to the Somali people?

**Answer:** One big challenge is how distracted they often are, and overwhelmed by the challenges of everyday survival, especially with repeated threats of violence. It’s hard to keep communication flowing and hard to stay focused on projects that are interrupted by frequent tragedies.

**Question:** What encouragements have you experienced in your work among the Somalis so far?

**Answer:** Honestly, I get at least small encouragements literally every day, and often larger encouragements weekly and monthly. I clearly see God’s hand of blessing on what we are doing. I have promised, and with God’s help, I will never give up until we see the breakthrough, we have all hoped for. One of the biggest encouragements I’ve received was being so warmly welcomed in Somalia on my visit in 2015, and the growing/deepening relationships since then.

**Question:** What are the main challenges of the Somali ministry?

**Answer:** As I look back, there has been a “hammering” from the enemy of huge heartbreaks. The death of Yaqub Mohamed, who invited me into ministry, was especially hard on me. There have been so many people I love who have died. Also, there have been too many who have given up the faith, or stepped back from ministry for various reasons. I think our common enemy, Satan, has been effective in

stirring up doubt and division in some cases, and outright onslaught of sickness, accidents, and violent persecution in other cases. However, his days are numbered! and let's remember that Satan's resources are limited! He can only spread so thin! With the multiplication of Spirit-filled witnesses in so many places, the enemy will be confused and overwhelmed. Do you believe this?

**Question:** What would you do differently if you had to start the Somali ministry all over again?

**Answer:** I would have loved my older brother Yaqub better by being more vulnerable with him about my weaknesses and struggles. I think this would have given him more reason to also be vulnerable with me. Rightly, I deferred to his wisdom as an older brother. And also, it was good to trust his decisions as a Somali who knew his culture and history better than I ever will. However, I should have loved him enough to hold him accountable to the Word of God. We should have been more intentional about Bible study, prayer and accountability to obedience to what God is saying.

**Question:** Could you mention a few of your missionary heroes? What is special about each of these missionaries?

**Answer:** Growing up, one of my heroes was the fearless champion Brother Andrew who smuggled Bibles into the Communist world. After the Soviet Union collapsed, I loved how he would go to visit Hamas leaders to share the gospel with them. I liked how he challenged us Western Christians, "If you love the Jews, then one of the best things you can do for them is share the gospel with Muslims."

Since I've been working with Somalis, my heroes are those working with Somalis because it requires a special boldness and bravery and tenacity. I love how the Mennonites worked more than 50 years and continue to pray and nurture relationships. I really respect the pioneering work of Warren and Dorothy Modricker, longtime SIM missionaries to the Somalis. Pastor Ahmed Ali Haile is also one of my heroes. Honestly, all of you in the work today are heroes to me!

**Question:** What would you tell a missionary who is new to the Somali ministry?

**Answer:** If you love Somalis, then you need to be ready to "fight" with them toe-to-toe in verbal testing. I would tell them that Somalis are tough, and they like to test their friends and enemies. So, don't back down. You've got to fight for the truth and fight for the relationship. Do it with a smile, do it with joy and do it with passion. The only way you lose, is if you give up! :-)

**Question:** What else could you share with the readers of the SBS Journal?

**Answer:** I am so proud of the Somali Church how you are growing not only in numbers but in maturity, especially unity through forgiveness and humility. It seems 2020 was a good year for the Somali Church and things continue to get better in

spite of, or likely because of, the severe testing of persecution. I love you and I stand with you.

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#### Interview 4: Ryan Shiel

Ryanshiel@gmail.com

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**Question:** Introduce yourself, giving your name, your marital status, where you are from, and your Somali ministry experience.

**Answer:** My name is Ryan Shiel. I am married to Samantha. I am from South Africa and have been working with Somali people since 2018.

**Question:** How long have you been in the ministry?

**Answer:** I started to learn the Somali language in 2019, and so I have been learning the language for 3 years to date.

**Question:** What is your educational background?

**Answer:** My first degree is in accounting, and my second degree in Theology.

**Question:** What do you do for recreation?

**Answer:** I enjoy reading.

**Question:** What is your current role in ministry?

**Answer:** I am currently still learning the Somali language in the hopes of becoming fully fluent.

**Question:** What do you believe to be your paramount gift for ministry?

**Answer:** I do see myself, by God's grace, evangelizing the Somali people.

**Question:** Does your present situation in ministry fit your personal gifting?

**Answer:** Learning the language and culture, at a very deep level, is essential and foundational to the work of evangelism and church planting. I see myself currently as a student of the language.

**Question:** What are you finding to be the main challenges in relating to the Somali people?

**Answer:** I think it depends on whether one is talking about Somali believers or Somalis in general. I think apart from the darkness that covers the land, and the vice of Satan holding the entire nation in bondage to himself, I find the biggest challenge is me, my sin, and my slow progress in sanctification, that is becoming like Christ.

**Question:** What encouragements have you experienced in your work among the Somalis so far?

**Answer:** I have experienced very little encouragement to be honest. I do think things are far darker than they seem, and what is portrayed in Somali Christians also deeply disturbs me.

**Question:** What are the main challenges of the Somali ministry?

**Answer:** As I had mentioned earlier, my sin and lack of Christlikeness deeply disturbs me. I do not have the long-suffering of Christ. I find my heart much in love with this world rather than Christ and I think these things more than anything else trouble me. The deception of Islam grieves me deeply, and the pride of man also greatly saddens me.

**Question:** What would you do differently if you had to start the Somali ministry all over again?

**Answer:** I would probably spend half of my day in prayer and studying God's Word.

**Question:** Could you mention a few of your missionary heroes? What is special about each of these missionaries?

**Answer:** My personal favorite is David Brainerd. The life of Brainerd is a vivid picture of what a Christian is; his poverty of spirit, his sinfulness, his love for Christ, etc. These things all come out very clearly in the life of this ordinary sinful, struggling saint. He has profoundly impacted my life.

**Question:** What would you tell a missionary who is new to the Somali ministry?

**Answer:** I would ask him about his prayer life, his time in God's Word and his personal discoveries of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would also ask him about his sin, whether he meets qualifications for ministry according to 1 Timothy 3 and his relationship with the local church. Once these requirements are fulfilled, I would highly urge him to spend the first 4 years doing nothing else but becoming fluent in the language and knowing Jesus Christ deeply by communing with Him.

**Question:** What else could you share with the readers of the SBS Journal?

**Answer:** I am not sure who is reading the journal, whether it be brothers from the west or Somali brothers. Two things that are worth mentioning: the love of money is very dangerous, and I believe many young believers who start off well are getting ensnared in money and the love for this present world, and therefore losing their first love.

The second, that there is not a healthy Somali church is very disturbing. As in the days of Israel, so we have it among Somali brothers. "In those days there was no

king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Judges 21:25 ESV This is largely due to lack of accountability and the existence of wholesome churches. Everyone is a minister of the gospel (by virtue of him being a believer) and everyone does as he wants. There is money from the West to feed this unhealthy cycle, and so it repeats itself. I really long for Somali brothers to be hard working ordinary people in society, who are happy to submit to a local church and be instructed in the Word, corrected by the Word and built up by the Word of God that they might be conformed to the image of Christ.

## 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.

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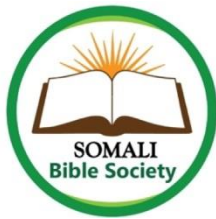
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