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ANSWERS & HONOR

Keys to Unlock the Muslim Heart



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Answers and Honor: Keys to Unlock the Muslim Heart

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Special Thanks

We thank the 10/40 Connections Board of Directors, our church partners, financial partners, regional advocates, volunteers, 10/40 team members, personal mentors, family, and friends who have come alongside us and supported us and the work of 10/40 Connections over the past 15 years. God has truly poured out his grace on many nations because of your generosity of time, talents, wisdom, and sacrificial financial gifts. We and others have been blessed because of you.

We also thank our international partners, issue networks, and ministry friends whom we labor with and beside. Jesus shines brightly through you all and we have learned so much by being in relationship with you. We praise God that we have been able to work together in bringing in fruit that will last (and we pray for more!).

Finally, it is our prayer that this eBook will help our brothers and sisters in Christ understand better how to express the truth of God's Word with their Muslim friends. And if a Muslim friend opens these pages, may the brief answers offered here serve as cool water to a parched soul. Know that there are answers to the questions you seek. There is a powerful peace and a strong love that can overwhelm fear and a community of faith that will welcome you as family.





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Introduction

“Why would Allah honor someone who cheats?” Just like that, while riding the subway in Egypt, Chad and Mohammed began a discussion. The Egyptian Muslim soon realized that Chad did not drink alcohol, cheat on his wife, and wanted to help others. From one brief conversation, Mohammed concluded, “I knew you were an honorable man; you must come to my house.” Exiting the subway, Chad met me (Leslie) on the platform and introduced us (I had been riding in the car for females). Mohammed stated, “I am always looking for people with clean hearts to come to my home. We must talk.” We soon began to visit regularly with Mohammed’s family.

Mohammed’s family had seen *The Jesus Film*, but a neighbor borrowed it and never returned it. They also greatly wanted a copy of the Bible, but were not sure how to get one. They had so many questions about faith.

Honor and Answers

Honor and answers... Muslims who seek the truth desire both. Honorable behavior earned us an invitation, and friendly answers paved the way for a good friendship.

The formation of this eBook came initially as a resource for participants in a “Concert of Prayer for the Muslim World” in our hometown of Chattanooga. Ten days prior to the scheduled event, a local Muslim man murdered five military personnel. Suddenly, terrorism was no longer 7,000 miles away. It was here in Chattanooga, and the Church needed to respond well.

We decided this resource should be available to help not only grieving Chattanoogaans but other concerned Christians who desire to know how to pray and share the Good News with their Muslim neighbors.

Does the Christian have an answer for Muslims? Absolutely.

Jesus the Messiah alone offers the peace and honor Muslims desire. Jesus’ eternal kingdom is the one worthy of expanding. Jesus alone will fill the void deep in their souls, remove the anger and hopelessness, clean their dirty heart through his grace and forgiveness, and as the Prince of Peace, welcome them into his holy

house when they die. Jesus wants to do the same for them as He has done for us.

This eBook contains some simple and clear answers that Muslims need to hear and Christians need to share. We realize that by simply answering the five main objections of Muslims, we only scratch the surface. The history and the theology of Islam reaches back 1,400 years. It is one of the world's largest religions and their territory extends into almost every nation. In addition, the many sects of Muslims differ in belief and practice. We obviously cannot address every question, objection, barrier, or bridge. Yet, this eBook gives you a strategic place to begin.

You Can Be a Tool of Honor in God's Hands

In this brief work on this broad subject, we hope that you will learn a few ways to become a powerful object of honor in God's hands. Without fear, you can share Jesus' love and his hope to Muslims. Satan wants to destroy them, but Jesus died and rose again that they might have life. God has given His people many tools to bless the Muslim world if we dare to accept them, including: a godly life, pre-emptive love, and the name of Jesus. All three of these combine to form strong offensive weapons that the Holy Spirit can use to draw the Muslim heart to Jesus.

Years ago, we met a precious couple from Afghanistan. The young woman shared her story. One night she had a dream and saw people following a man dressed in white. In her dream she asked the people, "Who are you following?" The crowd answered, "We are following Jesus." The dream ended but she had no idea who Jesus was, since that was the first time she had ever heard his name. Years later, the young couple sought medical help in India. There, in the ER, with her husband dying and young children at home, the young Afghani woman felt helpless and hopeless.

A woman visiting from Singapore walked over and asked if she could pray for the woman's sick husband. At the end of the prayer, the Singaporean woman prayed "in the Name of Jesus." The woman recognized the name from her dream.

“Excuse me. I heard you say ‘Jesus.’ Do you mind telling me more?”

Eventually her entire Afghani family came to know Christ deeply and though they experienced persecution, they continue to live for the Lord.

How to Engage Muslims

Jesus is the peace, the honor, and the answer that the Muslim world needs. As His followers, our task is to pray for this population of people and learn how to speak to their hearts in a way that makes sense to them.

We and others have found that Muslims repeatedly ask five main questions about the Christian faith. God uses Christians who can address these five issues to unlock the Muslim’s heart and help them find the peace and honor they seek. Before moving into the five obstacles, we encourage you to do the following when speaking with Muslims:

1. Rely on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the ONLY One who can open a Muslim’s mind and heart. Only the Spirit can empower a Muslim with the courage to seek Truth and respond to it.
2. Always pray before speaking with Muslims. Sunni Muslims pray five times a day, and Shiites pray three times a day. Since they are praying, you should be as well! After all, any conversation with a Muslim concerning spiritual matters WILL BE a spiritual conflict. Either they will try to convince you, you will try to convince them, or both. Both Islam and Christianity have evangelistic mandates.
3. Determine the type of Muslim with whom you are speaking. We have found three main types.
 - A. 90% of Muslims are okay with most Christian thoughts, and they love to hear stories of the Bible. For these 90%, keep it simple and build a good friendship. Share meals, visit in their homes, ask how you can pray for them.
 - B. 9% require a logical approach because they have some major misconceptions but they are still open to

discussion. With these, try to move to the main point and avoid contentious side issues.

- C. 1% will come across as obstinate or harsh and may use the Qur'an somewhat aggressively. For these 1%, if you are not prepared, feel free to walk away. However, if you are prepared spiritually and mentally, go for it. Much of the information here would apply to them as well. However, argumentative conversation is not our heart and is beyond the scope of this eBook. These more intense conversations/debates should be very rare.
4. Know your personal testimony and speak up. The undeniable story of your own changed life will make a significant impact on your Muslim friends. Speak about your faith within the first 10 minutes of meeting someone (seriously!) You can discuss your prayer life, something learned in your Bible study, or a favorite Bible verse. These early conversations let them know you are a person of active faith, open to talking about religious topics. Otherwise, they may think you are a "typical" (in their mind), secular, indulgent, entertained Westerner.
 5. Know and answer the main objections of most Muslims. If your friend does not bring up the following points, you don't have to mention them. But in our work with Muslims, a combination of these questions comes up over and over again. Seriously, we would get in a taxi in Egypt, and in a 15-minute car ride, at least three of the Muslim obstacles to Christianity would be stated! Here they are:
 - A. Christians worship three gods.
 - B. The Bible is corrupted.
 - C. Jesus did not die on the cross.
 - D. You are confused about Jesus. (Man, Son of Man, Son of God, God)
 - E. The history and lifestyle of Christians is a bad example.

We pray that you will find the answers you need to share the strong truth that Jesus changes lives. The Good News is truly "good," and for most of the Muslim world the Good News is "new" to them.

One

Barrier 1: Christians Believe in Three Gods

Walking through the market in East Jerusalem, a young Palestinian man invited me into his shop. As I sat to drink a friendly cup of tea, the young man's father walked in and stated bluntly, "Why did you bring in this person who believes in three gods?"

History and Belief

Early Christian heresies made their way across the Arabian Peninsula and confused Mohammed about what Christians believed in the early 7th century. At least one of these heretical groups practiced Maryolatry, the actual worship of Mary. Therefore today, most Muslims believe that Christians pray to the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Mother.¹ They have no concept that the Holy Spirit is God. Muslims believe the Holy Spirit is actually the angel Gabriel.

The strict monotheism of Islam allows no room for the Christian concept of the Trinity – three Persons, one essence. Muslims use the word “*shirk*” which means “associating” others with God. To the Muslim mind, Christians are guilty of *shirk*. *Shirk* is the blasphemous belief that someone can be equal with God or that God can be divided. People who commit *shirk* engage in the worst possible sin which, to them, is sufficient reason for disgust, hatred, expulsion from community, or even death.

When Condemned of “Shirk,” How Can You Respond?

First, **deny**. We as Christians can honestly deny that we believe in three gods. In fact we do NOT believe in three gods. We believe in one God! Often we will quote Jesus’ words in Mark 12:29, “The Lord our God, the Lord is One.” For many Muslims, this answer is sufficient. They just want to know that you are not committing “*shirk*,” and that you find it equally disgusting.

¹ In fact, many Christians do pray to Mary and this further complicates matters.

Second, **call out heresy**. We address the fallacy of the Muslim understanding of the Christian's so-called "family Trinity." No Christian believes that God physically had sex with a woman (Mary), causing Jesus to be born. ABSOLUTELY NOT! This is not what the Bible teaches! It is gross and disgusting to believe such a heresy.

Third, **clarify**. Anyone who thinks Christians believe that God is the Father, the Son and the Mother do not understand Christian beliefs at all, and they should learn the truth.

After such a clear protest, your Muslim friend should understand that you do not worship three gods – because you don't.²

Biblical Passages Revealing Our Belief

It is always good to have a number of verses memorized, or at least know their reference, so you can open a Bible and show your Muslim friend what our Holy Book states. Here are a few passages that emphasize that we believe in only One God.

- Deut. 6:4 *"The Lord our God, the Lord is One."* (As stated previously, Jesus references in Mark 12:29.)
- Isaiah 44:6 *"I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God."*
- Isaiah 44:8 *"Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."*
- Isaiah 45:5 *"I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God."*

These verses can help your Muslim friend understand that both you and our Holy Book agree that Christians do NOT believe in three gods. **The point here is not to explain the Trinity, but to realize the safe, common ground of belief in one God.**

² Certain Western Bible teachers have begun promoting an eternal hierarchy within the Trinity (Father eternally greater than Son and greater than Spirit). Such incorrect teaching seems to reinforce the Muslim idea that we worship three gods who are ranked, rather than co-equal in authority, will, and power which the Nicene Creed stated in the 4th century.

Avoiding Illustrations and Asking Good Questions

With Muslims, one of the worst things to do is to try to approximate the Christian doctrine of the Trinity with a physical object. Yes it's true that an egg has a shell, an egg yolk, and the egg white, but by using this illustration, you just compared Almighty God to an egg. Not a good thing to do. Yes, that could be called "*shirk*"!

In fact every physical illustration falls short. Yes, water is ice, liquid, and vapor. Of course, the sun is light, heat, and rays. And do not even think about equating 3-in-1 shampoos, or a triangle, or three slices of pie, or a hambone with the meat, the fat, and the bone (Not only silly, it's triply offensive!). Perhaps a human who is a dad, a brother, and a son comes close, or a singular person with body, mind, and spirit. God is infinite, and he cannot be properly defined by a finite illustration, so please do not even try!

While you should avoid illustrations, please do ask good questions that help your Muslim friend think about God's character and power. Here are a few good questions that can get the ball rolling.

- Can our finite minds comprehend the infinite God of the universe?
- Because God's ways are above our ways, could he do something that remains mysterious and not understood by humans?
- Is God powerful enough to do anything?
- If God is able to do anything, could he come to the earth and live as a human?
- Who alone can forgive sins? Raise the dead? Display power over nature? Live perfectly without sin? (These last questions, begin pointing toward Jesus.)

These questions begin the process of helping point your Muslim friend to the reality that the one, true, amazing God loves them and wants to know them in a personal relationship. Of course Christians believe in the Trinity, which can be seen in Matthew 28:19-20 "In the name (one singular name) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," and in Luke 3:21-22 at Jesus' baptism (Son is baptized, Father's voice speaks, Spirit descends like dove). But at this point, most Muslims

just want to know that you are not a polytheist, who worships multiple gods, which is what they have been told multiple times during their lives.

Using biblical questions and Bible verses also helps them see that our Holy Book is trustworthy, which brings us to the second barrier.

Two

Barrier 2: Your Bible Is Corrupted

While riding in a taxi in Cairo, the driver peered over to me and stated matter-of-factly, "You know, my friend, I am sorry to tell you that the Holy Book you read...it is broken."

Muslim Misperceptions

Muslims have heard repeatedly that the Bible is corrupted. It has been changed. Perhaps the original Bible was good, but conniving people have modified it. Of course this is not true, and there are many fairly straightforward ways to explain. This misperception comes from the mind of the Islamic teachers who have heard it from others, who heard it from others, who heard it from others. **However, such a teaching does not come from the Qur'an.** In fact, the Qur'an teaches the opposite. The Qur'an teaches that Muslims should ask the "People of the Book" if they have a question.

"If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee." Sura 10:94

Amazingly, the Qur'an here instructs Muslims who doubt to ask Christians and Jews! Those "reading the Book" before you (Muslims) are the Christians and the Jews. Muslims understand that Jews and Christians received God's written revelation, the *Torah* (Old Testament) and the *Injiil* (New Testament), long before the 7th century. What an open door!

When Told the Bible Is Corrupted, How Can You Respond?

Usually, we start by giving a quizzical look when a Muslim friend informs me that God's eternal Word has been changed. Then we ask a few simple questions.

1. *"Really? Who changed it?"*

Of course they have no answer for this because it is not true. Depending on the situation and if we can have fun with the person, we also ask, “Can *I* change the Word of God? Can *you* change the Word of God? *Who* can change God’s Word?” The answer is, no one can change God’s eternal Word. (These questions make God look weak and Muslims don’t want to do that, so these questions hit them in the heart – who really can overpower God’s Word and change it?)

2. “*When was it changed? Where was it changed?*”

Again, they will not be able to answer these impossible questions because the Bible has not been corrupted as they think.

3. “*Was it changed before the time of Mohammed or after the time of Mohammed?*”

This question is a fun one because it causes them to really assess the truth of their statement.

- a. If they say “BEFORE Mohammed,” then we ask them why Mohammed then instructed his followers to inquire from the people of the Book, and why did Mohammed never mention the corruption of the *Torah* or *Injiil*? Actually, the Qur’an gives many verses saying that the Bible is trustworthy and cannot be changed.

Answer: The Bible could not have been changed BEFORE Mohammed.

- b. If they say the Bible was changed “AFTER Mohammed,” then we mention all of the manuscripts and multiple language translations³ that *pre-date* the time of Mohammed. Think

³ Biblical Facts:

- In the 4th century, Constantine ordered Eusebius to make 50 full copies.
- In the 6th century, the Bible was translated and distributed around the world in the 15 most important languages: Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Slavic, Persian, etc. (and possibly Arabic).
- The earliest copies of the New Testament are the *Codex Sinaiticus*, *Codex Vaticanus*, *Codex Alexandrius*, and *Codex Leningrad*. These codices are the basis for modern translations. They all pre-date the rise of Islam. They are in museums and anyone can see them for themselves.

about this, to “change” the Bible, one must change ALL of the copies! This means the entire body of documents, all the texts would have to be collected and destroyed, then one uniform version re-written, re-translated, and re-distributed.⁴ Changing only one language would have little effect.

Answer: The Bible could not have been changed AFTER Mohammed,

You may have nicely stumped your friend, so move forward now using the Bible to make your point. In Matthew 24:35 Jesus says, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*” The Bible promises great punishment for any who attempt to change what is written (see Revelation 22:19). Therefore, any sincere person will agree that God’s word “*will never pass away.*”

Bible Proof and Translations

Most Muslims will be happy and even relieved to know that the Bible has not been corrupted. But just in case you want to dig down further, you can know that the Bible has also been substantiated by the following:

- Archaeology – Biblical locations, names, dates have all been found just as the Bible specifies.
- External sources – Josephus, Philo, and other non-believing historians record the origins of the Christian faith.
- Internal sources – Eyewitness accounts correspond with overall internal consistency in the text (it does not contradict itself).

-
- The Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1948 prove that the Hebrew text was preserved exactly and accurately. The *Isaiah* scroll dated 150 BC was a letter-for-letter duplicate of the 1000 AD copy, which was the oldest existing manuscript (before the Dead Sea Scroll discoveries).

⁴ Qur’anic Facts:

- During Caliph Uthman’s reign the Qur’an was indeed collected, burned, made uniform, and re-distributed. This process did not happen with the Bible.

- Textual manuscripts – The Bible has more manuscripts dating closely to the time it was written than any other piece of ancient literature. No other book in all the world comes close in comparison.⁵

Also, make it clear to your Muslim friend that different translations are not the same as different versions (only if they bring it up). The Bible was written in Hebrew, Greek, and a few parts in Aramaic. All current translations come from these manuscripts. Different translations are NOT the same thing as changing the Word of God. We express that God desires for every person of the world to be able to read his Holy Word in their mother tongue. This truth helps the Muslim to see God’s love for them personally.

Take Note of an Official Hadith

A hadith is a story recorded about the life or words of Mohammed. These stories are not in the Qur’an. We find the following hadith in the collection of stories compiled by Al Bukhari and also Ibn Kathiir. This hadith says that Mohammed had an actual copy of the *Torah* in his hands.

“Two people were caught in adultery and brought before Mohammed. Mohammed said, ‘Bring me the Torah.’ They brought him the Torah and he placed it on a pillow in a high place of respect. Then Mohammed said, ‘I believe in it and in God who sent it.’ The people were then stoned when the verse was read concerning adultery.”⁶

For our discussion here, this hadith contains one major point which leads to two questions. The issue here is not to either legitimate or to call into question the hadith or other traditions, but to move your Muslim friend to actually holding, owning, and reading the Bible for themselves.

The major point is Mohammed possessed a copy of the *Torah* and he trusted the *Torah*. It leads to the simple question, “was the

⁵ Excellent resources for biblical reliability and verification include Normal Geisler, Josh McDowell, Hank Hanegraaff and others.

⁶ *Sahih al Bukhari*, volume 8.809.

copy that they brought to Mohammed a true copy or a corrupt copy?” Presumably Mohammed would not believe in a corrupt copy. Which leads to the second question for your Muslim friend, “Would you like a copy exactly like the one Mohammed had?”

Now could be the time to present your friend with their own Bible!

Two Quick Objections

Many Muslims believe that the *Torah* and *Injiil* originally spoke about the coming of Mohammed. Then Christians and Jews changed it and removed these words about Mohammed. The two passages Muslim often point out concern the coming *Prophet* and the coming *Paraclete* (the Holy Spirit).

1. *The Prophet* – Deuteronomy 18:18

“I will raise up for them a prophet like you (Moses) from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.”

Known as the final prophet of Islam, Mohammed might seem initially to be a logical choice when examining an Old Testament prophecy about the rise of a future great prophet. However, the Prophet of Deuteronomy 18 cannot be Mohammed for many reasons:

- *“a prophet like you (Moses)”* The links between Moses and Mohammed are slim. But the connections between Moses and Jesus are numerous and amazing (i.e. born into trouble, many die at their birth, evil king (Pharaoh/Herod) decrees death, miraculous intervention to save as a child, went into Egypt and came out of Egypt physically, delivered people out of bondage, met with God on a mountain, etc.)
- *“from among their brothers (fellow Israelites)”* means directly from the “sons of Israel” not a distant relative, as in descended from the tribe of Ishmael. The prophet is clearly a descendent of one of the 12 tribes of Jacob.
- Jesus stated that Moses wrote about Him (Luke 24:27 and John 5:46)

- In Acts 3:22 Peter uses this prophecy to speak explicitly of Jesus.

2. *The Paraclete* – John 14:16-17; 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:7-11

This explanation may seem a little complex, but the need for it still comes up occasionally. The Greek word that John uses many times in these three chapters is *paracletos* and means “one called alongside” and the NIV translates it as “the Counselor.” The *paraclete* is the Holy Spirit, the Guide, the Counselor.

Muslims say that the original *Injiil* had the word *pericyltos* which means “Praised One” (synonymous with Mohammed). They have simply heard that the Bible used to mention Mohammed, but now it does not.

For a brief answer, Greek language has actual letters for the vowels, unlike Arabic, which has optional vowel markings that are understood based on context. The word “*P_R_CL_T_S*” must have vowels to have any meaning in Greek. And in John 14, 15 and 16 the Greek vowels spell *paracletos* each time. They never spell *pericyltos*. Thus, Jesus never prophesied about the coming of another prophet named Mohammed.

In addition to the spelling dilemma, the *Paraclete* cannot refer to Mohammed for many descriptive and contextual reasons:

- The *paraclete* will “*be with you forever*” which fits the Holy Spirit much more than Mohammed.
- The *paraclete* “*lives* (‘lives’ is present tense) *with you and will be in you.*”
- The *paraclete* is named as the Holy Spirit in 14:26.
- The *paraclete* will come in the name of Jesus and remind “you” (the disciples) of the things taught by Jesus. This is a promise for the disciples’ generation, not 6 centuries later.
- The *paraclete* is sent by Jesus. Mohammed never claimed this.
- The *paraclete* is the Spirit of Truth, never a name or description of Mohammed.
- Finally, there is no evidence for a corruption or changing of the text. It is simply imagination to think so.

The Bible is reliable and unchanged. No one can change God's Word. When you give your friend a Bible of his or her own, encourage them to start with the Gospel of Luke.⁷ Once your Muslim friend has their own copy of the trustworthy and unfading Word of God, they will encounter the story of Jesus, his birth, his life, and his death, which brings us to the next barrier.

⁷ We usually encourage Muslims to read Luke's Gospel initially because of the many familiar characters, prophets, birth stories, and miracles. Plus, Mark's Gospel starts off with a reference to "Son of God," which can be confusing, and John's Gospel clearly emphasizes the deity of Christ from the very beginning. Luke's Gospel is our preference, but obviously we like them all!

Three

Barrier 3: Jesus Did Not Die on the Cross

“No, no, no! Why do you insist on shaming the Prophet Isa?” my Jordanian barber exclaimed. He had finished cutting my hair (thankfully) and the conversation had turned to why Christians insist that Jesus died on the cross. “It is too shameful, too shameful! You should not say such things. Allah would never allow such indignity to come upon the honorable Isa.”

Same Word, Different Meaning

Sin...both Christians and Muslims use this word, but each has their own meaning. For Christians we understand that sin completely separates us from a holy and perfect God. While we need forgiveness, we cannot, by our own actions, remove our own sin. Therefore we require a Savior who can cleanse us from the stain of sin.

Muslims understand sin to be a mistake (like spilling milk or breaking a lamp) which can be repaired by doing good works. While some sins are larger and require more work to repair, most of the wrong done in life can be balanced out with good deeds. The Muslim belief about sin means that they only need guidance from a prophet to teach them correctly, and therefore they see no need for a Savior to die in their place. They cannot grasp the radical solution of a holy prophet sacrificing himself on a cross to purchase their forgiveness.

Remember that Muslims revere Jesus as a wonderful prophet, just not the “final one” which they ascribe to Muhammed.

Key Qur’anic Verse

In conversations with your Muslim friends, if the subject of the cross comes up and they have a basic knowledge of Islam, they will undoubtedly quote from Sura 4:157-158:

*“And because of their saying, We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger – **they slew him not nor crucified**, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! Those who disagree concerning it*

are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of conjecture; they slew him not for certain, but Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise.”

The key phrase here is “*they slew him not nor crucified.*” With this singular passage Muslims point out that the Qur’an clearly denies the crucifixion of Jesus.⁸ These two verses are seen as absolute proof that Jesus was NOT crucified. If you can learn this verse at least in English, please do so! Master this verse and understand it forward and backward. This one passage is your Muslim friend’s major sticking point for belief in the cross.

When Told Jesus Did Not Die On the Cross, How Can You Respond?

First, you will need to understand their worldview of “simple mistake” sin and the “unnecessary” and shameful cross, as mentioned above.

Second, both the Qur’an and Islamic tradition highly value the prophet Abraham. From the story of Abraham and his son in Genesis 22, we clearly see the concept of atonement and the sacrificial lamb. When you re-tell the story of Abraham and “his son” don’t get stuck on which son it was. Most Muslims believe it was Ishmael, so skip this detail since the main point in the conversation with your Muslim friend is to help them see that God provides through sacrifice. Use hand motions to show the exchange and substitution and how God provided the sacrifice. This story, also found in the Qur’an, provides an incredible bridge for helping explain the need for substitutionary sacrifice!

Third, read Isaiah 53 with your Muslim friend. This powerful prophetic chapter written 800 years before Christ emphasizes the personal nature of sacrifice. The suffering servant considered our sorrows, our crimes, our sins, our well-being, our healing.

⁸ Interestingly, many Muslims believe that Allah tricked the people trying to crucify Jesus and that Allah actually substituted the betrayer Judas instead. That is, people *thought* they were crucifying Jesus, but it was not him. It only “*appeared so unto them.*” But it was actually Judas who died on the cross, presumably as trickery for Judas’ falseness towards Jesus.

The passage allows many questions like “Why did this person die?” “What was the benefit of this person dying?” “Does it seem that this person is alive afterwards?” and “Who was this person?”

Fourth, after examining these two passages, we have found that the very best linking verse between Genesis 22 and Isaiah 53 is John 1:29. “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*”

These two Old Testament passages and this one New Testament verse provide a sufficient basis to begin a discussion of Jesus.

Surprise Equals Shame, Foreknowledge Equals Honor & Power

The Middle East and the Muslim cultures generally operate within an honor/shame framework.⁹ If the enemies of a holy prophet could catch him off-guard and kill him unexpectedly, he would be dishonored and rendered powerless. How degrading and shameful to be captured, beaten, flogged, mocked, spit upon, cursed, stripped naked, and crucified. In the Muslim mind, to suffer such humiliation, would destroy Jesus’ honor and heap upon him great shame! Could God not protect his prophet?

So the questions follow: Was Jesus taken by surprise, and therefore shamed? Was Jesus ignorant and powerless against the schemes of crafty people? What exactly did Jesus say about his upcoming death?

The Bible reveals that not only was the death and resurrection of Jesus foretold by prophets long before his birth, but Jesus himself explained to his followers many times what was to come. Jesus walked purposefully into his death, no one took his life, he laid it down willingly. He predicted his own bodily resurrection. What intentional sacrifice, what majestic honor, what glorious power!

The following are a few of the many passages where Jesus predicts his death and his resurrection:

Matthew 16:21 Jesus explains he will “*be killed and be raised on the third day.*”

Mark 10:32-34 Jesus going up to Jerusalem. “*They will mock him, and scourge him, and spit on him, and kill him. And the third day, he will rise again.*”

⁹ The Western world generally thinks more within a right/wrong or guilt/innocence framework.

Matthew 21:33ff	Parable of the tenants who kill the son of the landowner
Mark 14:48-49	Arrest of Jesus, " <i>Scripture must be fulfilled.</i> "
Luke 22:37	" <i>Numbered with the transgressors</i> " will be fulfilled in (Jesus).
John 3:14	Jesus and Nicodemus, Referred to Moses' staff for healing, " <i>Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.</i> "
John 12:7	Jesus was anointed with perfume " <i>for the day of my burial.</i> "
John 12:20-36	" <i>When the Son of Man is lifted up from the earth, I will draw all peoples to myself.</i> "
John 13:18-30	Jesus predicts Judas' betrayal, " <i>One of you will betray me.</i> "
Luke 24:25-27	" <i>Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?</i> "
Luke 24:45-47	" <i>The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.</i> "

If Jesus were shocked by Judas' betrayal, defenseless to resist the temple guard, unable to answer the Sanhedrin's questions, and powerless to remove himself from the cross, then truly Jesus was weak and the cross was his defeat. Furthermore, if Jesus was unable to rise from the dead, he would be proven a false prophet and a liar. But the intentional choice to enter into such pain, shines an even greater light on the honor of Christ's passion. The dynamic power that overcame death and resurrected Christ's physical body gives hope to the world, since we all live within the valley of the shadow of death.

Qur'anic Passages That Describe the Death of Jesus

While we recommend that Christians use primarily the Bible and their own testimony to share the Good News of Jesus with Muslims, there are a couple of passages that we have found within the Qur'an that can serve as a bridge to help them understand the power of Jesus' resurrection.

Both of the following verses express the fact that Jesus was alive, died, and rose again.

“Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!” Sura 19:33

*“And they schemed, and Allah schemed; and Allah is the best of schemers. When Allah said: O Jesus! Lo! **I am gathering (killing, tawaffa9) thee and causing thee to ascend unto me**, and am cleansing thee of those who disbelieved and am setting those who follow thee above those who disbelieved until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me ye will return, and I shall judge between you as to that wherein ye used to differ.” Sura 3:54-55*

While these two verses do not necessarily answer Sura 4:157-158 (which states *“they slew him not nor crucified”*), they do provide a base for questioning the Muslim thinking that Jesus could not have died. The verses open a door to discuss the resurrection of Jesus. After all, triumphing over death is much greater than simply avoiding death! For Christians, because of the resurrection, the cross is not a symbol of death and shame, but of victory and eternal life.

Because of their honor/shame culture, the cross may still make no sense. But take your time and re-tell the Old Testament stories of sacrifice, re-emphasize that Jesus intentionally offered himself to wipe away the sin of the world, that Jesus the Messiah rose again defeating death. And pray that God will open their eyes and hearts to see their own need for forgiveness which can never be earned by good behavior. By this time, your Muslim friends may be either greatly intrigued or greatly confused. Who is this Jesus after all? This question leads us to the next barrier.

Four

Barrier 4: You Are Confused About Jesus (Man, Son of Man, Son of God, God)

“Sir, I believe you are confused,” the North Indian imam shared with me. “You quote a Bible verse that called Jesus the Son of Man, but I know you think he is the Son of God. So what is he man or God?”

Confusion Reigns About Jesus

While the Qur’an contains numerous references to Jesus, Muslims are clear that he is a respected human prophet, sent by God to guide humanity. However, when Muslims encounter Christian vocabulary they may hear a variety of titles and terms. They have heard him referred to as God, Son of God, Man, and Son of Man. As a result, the vast majority of Muslims remain greatly confused about the identity of Jesus. They may ask, “Which one is he?”

When Questioned About the Identity of Jesus, How Can You Respond?

We try not to add to the confusion by giving too much information. Rather, we try to answer the questions they have while sharing biblical stories that point them on a journey to discover the identity of Jesus.

In our own minds for clarity, we often picture the four titles listed as a four-panel door – Man, Son of Man, Son of God, and God. This helps us understand which aspect they may need to grasp next.

1. Man

Most Muslims are not in doubt that Jesus was Man. So this one is easy. Muslims believe in the historical Jesus.

2. Son of Man

Most Muslims do not understand that the title “Son of Man” was an Old Testament reference to the promised Messiah. Simply explain that “Son of Man means the Messiah.” The Qur’an actually names

Jesus “Isa Masih,” so Muslims usually have no trouble accepting Jesus as Messiah.

One fact you can throw in is that *messiah*, comes from the Hebrew word *meshiach*, which means “anoint or wipe.” In the Old Testament, the prophet Samuel anointed the young boy David by smearing oil on his head, setting David apart to one day rule the nation as king. For our discussion, not only was Jesus anointed and chosen as favored, special, set apart, and kingly; he also came to wipe away our sins. Emphasize this wiping away of sins as a main, blessed job of Jesus, the Son of Man.

3. *Son of God*

For most Muslims, this phrase creates more difficulty. They may express a wide range of emotion – interest, disdain, accusation, or even anger. But the title “Son of God” can usually be understood with prayer and a little conversation. Again, make sure your Muslim friend understands that NO Christian believes that God had sex with Mary and she produced Jesus. Not only is the idea abhorrent to the Muslim, it is also to the Christian. (Phrases like, ‘Mary, Mother of God,’ do not help this effort, but re-enforce wrong thinking.) Remove from their minds that “Son” means physical relationship. In this case it definitely does not.

We have found that the simplest way to explain “Son of God” is to ask a few questions. We have been amazed at the simple logic which makes a clear point, and answers a serious objection presented by Muslims. Plus the following line of questions allows for a certain amount of humor, which serves as a great bridge in understanding. Depending on the person, we can act “unbelieving” or act “shocked” at their answers. We often answer playfully, “No, no, no! It is not possible!”

Here is the fun line of questioning:

- Are you a son (or daughter) of Iraq (or whichever nation)?
- How is this possible?
- Did your mother have a physical relationship with the ground of Iraq?
- This is where we draw out the conversation with fun repetition, until they see that “son/daughter of Iraq” need not mean physical relationship. Eventually they will say

something like, “I was born there, and my origins are from that nation.” Exactly!

Therefore, the title “Son of God” shows that Jesus *came from* God. That is his place of origin!

This line of humorous questioning is usually enough for most people in the beginning. Of course, with this point we are seeking to remove the phrase “Son of God” as an immediate roadblock to understanding who is Jesus. We are not addressing here Jesus’ divine identity. Muslims hear Christians throw around many names for God and you are helping them gain clarity. As the Muslim continues to seek with an open heart, they will find that there is much more to Jesus than coming *from* God!

4. God

While Man, Son of Man, and Son of God can be comprehended with rational logic, this fourth and final clue as to Jesus’ nature, can only be believed with a true step of faith. Accepting the deity of Jesus the Messiah remains probably the single largest hurdle for every Muslim. Therefore, pray that God will reveal himself to them in this area. You cannot win a debate in this area. Remember the concept of “*shirk*”; your Muslim friend will only recognize that Jesus is God by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Not only is this difficult for them; it is dangerous.

Thankfully, since God is the God of revelation and communication and he desires to be known, God reveals himself in the Bible. Some of the clearest evidence comes from Matthew 16, when Peter answers Jesus’ question, “Who do you say I am?” Jesus validated Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God,” saying, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed you by flesh and blood (that is, your own logical mind, or another person), but my Father in heaven.”

Clearly God can reveal his character to individuals, which results in an honest confession and a smiling Jesus. Again, this is one of the direct ways we pray for Muslims, that God would reveal his character and nature, showing them that he loves them.

God also reveals himself in dreams and visions. While living in Egypt, Shahid, one of our language helpers, shared the dream that he experienced which strengthened his faith. Coming from a staunch

Muslim family, Shahid's mother turned him over to the imam when she found a Bible under his mattress. The panel of imams decided to beat Shahid's feet which left him unable to walk for many days. Such a painful penalty while still *seeking* to know truth caused Shahid to seek harder. One night Jesus visited him, bathing his room in white light.

Jesus spoke to him, "Shahid, follow me. I am the true path, walk in it."

Shahid began to follow Christ, because after all, Jesus had personally appeared to him. Later on, Jesus appeared again to Shahid in a vision which helped him overcome fear and realize that Jesus would never leave him. Shahid confessed to Jesus that he would follow him no matter the cost.

Other Means to Clarify Jesus' Identity

Apart from a direct visitation from Jesus in a dream or vision, there remain a number of ways to point toward the reality of Jesus the Messiah as God in the flesh. This next section will give a brief overview of just a few of those ways. It will depend on how much time you have and the interest level of your friend which of the following ways you would use.

Showing your Muslim friend who Jesus is through a heart of concern and compassion towards them is one of the greatest gifts of love and friendship. Once they begin to grasp the full reality of Jesus the Messiah, a light will begin to shine in their eyes that will bring great blessing to them, their entire family, and their community.

Here we will only expand briefly on two ways to clarify the claims of Christ regarding his deity.

1. Biblical Signs of Deity in Jesus

This is our personal favorite way to express who Jesus is because it incorporates a wide range of Scripture and stories across the New Testament. This approach allows a longer and more in depth interaction with the Bible. This broad view of the Gospels helps build a strong biblical foundation of "stories that stick" in the mind and heart.

From this perspective, rather than stating directly, “Jesus is God. That is the truth and you should believe it!” this approach starts with common ground and draws in the person with love and power and truth. It is like a net, with each of the points building on the previous. This way basically encircles the fact that Jesus is God without stating the fact directly. As the Holy Spirit continues to reveal truth, the person can see the beauty of the reward at the net’s center.

A Muslim will agree to the main points since these main points in **bold** below are actually recorded in the Qur’an! The sub-points are all biblical stories.

Virgin birth ***Jesus had a beginning like no other.***

- Jesus born to a virgin
- Prophesied about hundreds of years before birth, and called “Immanuel”

Sinless life ***Jesus had a life like no other.***

- Power to live a sinless and perfect life
- Power to forgive sins

Miracles ***Jesus demonstrated power like no other.***

- Power to cast out demons
- Power to heal sickness – blind, deaf, mute, crippled
- Power to raise the dead
- Power over nature – walk on water, multiply food, calm the storm
- Power/Authority to give new commands of God

Resurrection/Judgment ***Jesus’ death/future is like no other.***

- Power to come back to life
- Alive today and in heaven now
- Certain to return and judge the earth and all people

This approach can be summarized quickly in a conversation, but a true search may take weeks or months of pouring over Scripture. Again, it will depend on how much time you have with your friend as to the best approach to take.

2. Mark 14:62

If you only have limited time or can only use one passage to express the deity of Christ, then Mark 14:62 powerfully encapsulates much truth. While standing on trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest questioned Jesus.

⁶¹But again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

⁶²"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

⁶³The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. ⁶⁴"You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

To start with, Jesus answers the high priest with "*I AM*" invoking the ancient and revered NAME of Yahweh. Previously, Jesus did the same in stating that, "*before Abraham was born, I AM*" (John 8:58) which caused quite an uproar and a near stoning-to-death. But in Mark 14 Jesus did not simply use the name, he further clarified so that his audience of religious leaders would have no doubt as to his self-proclaimed identity.

One of Jesus' favorite titles for himself in the Gospels was "Son of Man." In Matthew 13, Jesus described the Son of Man having angels and a kingdom. In Matthew 24, lightning flashes and the world takes notice upon the arrival of the Son of Man. In Matthew 25, Jesus spoke of the Son of Man coming in glory, with angels and possessing a throne of glory. In Luke 18, the Son of Man judges the faith of all the persons in the earth. In Luke 21, the Son of Man comes on the clouds with power and glory, and people require strength to stand before the Son of Man. Clearly this messianic "Son of Man" possesses something beyond mere human capability.

We have previously equated the title "Son of Man" with "Messiah," which is true and sufficient for an initial conversation with your Muslim friend. But the way that Jesus loaded up the term in Mark 14 gave even greater insight into his identity. Here Jesus alluded to the Old Testament prophet Daniel 7:13-14.

¹³ “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

By linking himself with this passage, Jesus proclaimed to one and all that he/Jesus possessed eternal dominion, glory, and an indestructible kingdom.

Whether or not your Muslim friend understands all of the Old Testament references, the reaction by the Jewish high priest clearly showed that Jesus had just spoken blasphemy. The religious leaders now possessed a theological basis for killing Jesus, who had just fully equated himself with God.

But Wait, There’s More!

Here we have offered just a few ways to explain who Jesus is for seekers of truth. Of course there are many more ways to examine Jesus’ identity including: prophetic passages in the Old Testament, the encounter of Jesus and Nicodemus, comparing Jesus the Word with Qur’anic references to Jesus as the Word, or the “all’s” of Jesus (all power, all authority, all knowledge, all places, all time). But we will leave these for your future study!

Using different titles and terms to describe Jesus can surely be confusing for your Muslim friend. Hopefully this section alleviates some of the conflict. Once a Muslim realizes the identity of Jesus, their understanding greatly helps to overcome the next barrier – the way Christians live and their historical interaction with the Muslim world.

Five

Barrier 5: Christian History and Lifestyle

While living in China teaching English, we attended the Tuesday night English Corner. There Ali (a Uighur Muslim from Xinjiang) angrily approached us. "You Americans are all Christians. Your Christian leaders invade Muslim nations, and your videos show what you Christians really believe!"

For Muslims – No Separation of Church and State, Life and Entertainment

Within the Muslim world, and particularly in nations where Muslims form the majority population, they typically see no separation between the sacred and the secular. Islam dictates how all of life should be lived and governed. Their government decisions generally reflect their religious belief, even to the point of *Sharia* Law which fully merges social issues, politics, banking, sexuality, economy, and business according to the Islamic "path/way," and promotes it as the law of the land. In the same way, Islamic lifestyle and entertainment options either attempt to uphold or at least not oppose their religious belief.

As a result of this unified worldview, Muslims often see Western political decisions as representative of Christianity. Similarly (and sadly), they view Western entertainment and lifestyles as reflecting the Christian belief system.

This section will offer a perspective of historical and personal actions, both of which inform Muslim opinions of Christians and consequently of Christ.

When Questioned About Christian-Muslim History, How Can You Respond?

For a U.S. citizen, 200 years seems practically ancient. After all, our country marks its beginning in 1776 when we declared independence and fought the Revolutionary War. We all know these events happened, and we know it was a long time ago, but most of our lives are not centered on acts from two centuries ago. Contrast

this with the Middle East, whose architecture, languages, customs, and empires span not only centuries but millennia. The patriarch Abraham resided in Iraq, Egypt, and Israel over 3,000 years ago.

The fact that our nation is relatively “new” is neither good nor bad. It’s just the fact. But with this fact comes the realization that other nationalities and religious blocks may have a different type of mental calendar when it comes to memory, as well as long-range planning.

Muslims in general look toward the 7th century for guidance as to their religious instruction, dress, hairstyle, vocabulary, songs, and many other aspects to daily life. Many Muslims can easily name their ancestors from 8-20+ generations. (How many generations can you name?) This respect and recall of the past reveals the source of their inspiration. It also provides a different timeline which in no way approximates the modern U.S. mindset. Here is a rough example of the Middle Eastern mental calendar, along with significant world events.

- Today 2015, current wars in the Middle East, 9-11 attacks
- Last week 1973, Arab-Israeli War, exodus of Palestinians
- Last month 1967, Israel’s Six-Day War, exodus of Palestinians
- Last year 1947, the Holocaust, founding of Israel, exodus of Palestinians
- 10 years ago 1300-1922, rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire
- 20 years ago 1100-1300, the Crusades, Spanish Inquisition
- 50 years ago 700, Origin and early expansion of Islam

This process of re-calibrating the calendar helps us clarify why certain events in the “ancient past” seem so fresh on Muslim minds. Things that happen today are obvious and presently on their minds. Situations from the near past make their mark on their daily lives and are frequent topics of conversation, serving as formational memories. And significant events from a generation or two ago are passed down as valuable life lessons and milestones that shape their worldview.¹⁰

¹⁰ A calendar of this sort simply describes how strongly certain events might inform a current worldview (i.e. Chinese dynasties, Jewish people and the history of Israel,

The calendar provides a framework for understanding the “nearness” and relevance that links Western political and military decisions with the Muslim world. Diplomats and politicians would do well to take such a calendar into consideration.¹¹

In the Muslim mind, not only is history compressed into a much smaller timeframe, because much of the Muslim world does not separate their politics and faith, they (incorrectly) assume the same of other nations. Of course they hear that the United States has a supposed “separation of Church and State,” but either they have no concept of what that means, or they think it a cover up to protect the Christian religion from the West’s political and military aggression.

So how can you respond? The best we have come up with is to say repeatedly, “We are called to pray for our leaders, whether we agree with their decisions or not.” Unless you are a political or military leader, you can usually get around commenting on the world’s political situations.

When the Iraq war broke out in 2003 we lived in Egypt, and at that time we began prayer-walking our street.

“What do you think of the war?” some neighbors would ask antagonistically.

We responded, “Saddam is a bad man. And we don’t like war, but we know that many wars will continue until Jesus returns. Are you looking for Jesus to return?”

Their eyes bugged out as many stammered, “Uh, yes. We are looking for Jesus to return.”

Our neighbors were shocked that we prayed and when we asked for their prayer requests, they stated, “We are now friends. Mr. Bush and Mr. Mubarrak will never come between us.” One well-placed sentence can turn the conversation to Jesus. Did you notice though how they were shocked to hear we prayed? We found that by simply communicating about our devotional life and how God changed us daily, Muslims were intrigued. Some even said, “We had no idea what Christians did in those buildings.” Ouch.

African-Americans and slavery/civil rights, etc.). The point is, memories, traditions, and a collective history can construct a worldview vastly different from our own.

¹¹ This calendar mindset should also inform any peace negotiations that include time-based concessions. For, example, in the recent negotiations with Iran, 5-10 years is merely a blink for a Persian culture that goes back millennia.

Did you notice that in the above conversation we were not trying to reveal pride in our nation or our military? These may be true and right, but we try to move the conversation to an open door to point to Jesus.

When Questioned About the Morality of Christians, How Can You Respond?

Of course pretty much all political decisions made by Western governments are seen as Christian decisions. But sadly, the Muslim world also believes that the entertainment industry represents the Christian West.

Let us clarify. The average Muslim hears and believes that almost every movie and every book reveal the Christian worldview. They believe every music video produced by or starring anyone named Mary, John, Christian, Christina, Madonna, James, etc. is a Christian production. It is unfair. It is not right. It may seem silly to us. But that is the perception. Western exports of entertainment influence the world and inform the world as to the morals of our nation.

While it may be a bit dated, re-runs of the show *Friends* play across the globe. Numerous times, we have heard how these characters are Christians. We have asked incredulously many times, “Why do you believe they are Christians?”

“Because they always say, ‘Oh, my G--.’” In the Muslim mind, the characters show their religious mindset by praying and using the Lord’s name. Their lifestyles therefore, represent Christian values.¹²

With this kind of comment, we usually respond, “Oh, no. God commands us not to use His name like that! Just because someone has a Christian name does not mean they are living by the standards of the Bible.”

Please do not think for a moment that Muslims have it all together morally. They do not. While pre-marital sex and consuming alcohol are forbidden in their honor/shame culture, Muslims feel incredible temptations in so many ways and act upon them. They do

¹² Plus, their names are Rachel, Phoebe, Monica (female character names), and Matthew, Matt, and David (male actual names). Conversations like these really help us decide how to be entertained.

not have the Holy Spirit to help them resist. So many remain trapped in cycles of sin.¹³

So how can you respond? “*Let your light shine,*” says Jesus in Matthew 5:16! We have found that we must often separate ourselves from an American culture that condones and promotes promiscuity, drugs/alcohol, disrespect of parents and elders, materialism, etc. With Muslims, you can share how your faith directly impacts your decisions, your entertainment, your morality, your choices, your spending, etc.

The Muslim belief system basically involves strict adherence to five main rules.¹⁴ These rules unify the Muslim world, yet legalism does not transform. Following Christ involves a deep heart change that includes our attitudes, our motivations, and our actions. Do we truly love God and love others?

Share with your Muslim friend how God continues to shape you. They cannot deny your life transformation! One day while working at a company in Texas with some of our Muslim co-workers, someone made an extreme statement about physical relationships. “All Americans do this-or-that.”

We spoke up and shared, “We didn’t kiss each other until we got married.”

“Really? Well, that’s because you are like us and honored your parents. You followed their rule.”

We said, “No, our parents didn’t have a rule about kissing and there’s actually no rule in the Bible about kissing – though there is about purity and what it means. We both just wanted to bring glory to God in how we lived before and after marriage, with purity as a goal in our relationship.”

Several Muslims responded, “I have never heard of a Christian or an American with values like that.” From our lifestyles, we were able to speak further about the difference Jesus can make in their lives.

¹³ Every alcohol store in the Middle East is owned by a Christian, but their clients include more than Christians! Also, it is a known fact that Saudi men travel to Jordan or Egypt to do the things forbidden in Saudi Arabia.

¹⁴ 1. State the Islamic creed, 2. Pray five times a day, 3. Fast during Ramadan, 4. Give tithes to the poor, 5. Journey to Mecca (*Hajj*), and 6. Struggle or war (*Jihad* – considered optional)

To proclaim the Good News with Muslims, your smile, your kindness, your hospitality, your prayers, your marriage, your choices, and your lifestyle will open doors and give strong validity to your words.

Six

Restored Honor and Hopeful Answers

The taxi driver smiled, "I like what you say and I respect your sincere answers. Thank you for this Bible. I will read it with all my heart, and if I like what it says, I too will follow Jesus." I hopped out of the taxi and walked into my apartment praying for Mr. Mohammed.

Pausing to Count the Cost

Honor and answers...Muslims desire both, and you can help them. Of course the path may not be easy. When a person from Muslim background understands and believes it is time to declare allegiance to Christ, we never rush. Rather, we ask them, "Are you sure? Please consider what this could mean for your relationships and future."

Obviously, anyone who follows Christ should count the cost. But Muslims who turn to Christ, called MBB's (Muslim Background Believers¹⁵), often pay a steep price for their faith. They may lose some things, or everything – job, friends, family, freedom, even their lives. Jesus foretold this situation in John 16:2-3.

"In fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or Me."

If and when your Muslim friend desires to proclaim their trust in Jesus the Messiah, please help them pause and think through their decision. It's part of being a good friend.

The Weighty Blanket

When a Muslim turns to Christ they receive forgiveness, a clean heart, and the indwelling Holy Spirit – all good news. Yet they never make their decision in an isolated vacuum. Muslim culture and life fully surround them. We call it "the blanket of Islam," and it could be

¹⁵ Or BMB's (Believers from Muslim Background). Here we will stick with MBB.

seen as either comforting or stifling, protective or asphyxiating. This “blanket” includes their history, their family, and their theology.

Essentially, by becoming a follower of Jesus a Muslim decides (by default) that the Islamic teaching and worldview of their ancestors is lacking, misguided, or just wrong. With this decision, the historical weight of 1,400 years of culture and multiple generations bears down on them.

Not only the ancient past, but their present community pressurizes them. Life in community is the norm and comfortable, while isolation or ostracism is one of the worst punishments. Their respected father and mother, friends and extended family can all increase pressure on them. Threats of eating meals alone, being disowned by their family, and dishonoring their loved ones strike fear in the hearts of potential seekers.

In addition to the cultural and family weights, the Islamic teaching of apostasy looms like a concrete anchor. For those who turn from Islam (apostasy), the Qur’an teaches that Allah may overlook the offense *if* the family kills the apostate. Such an act will restore family honor and hopefully earn Paradise for the apostate. Did you catch that? Murdering someone for a different belief could earn Allah’s mercy, if God wills it. So how much does the family love that person, enough to kill them? Talk about a massive burden...

Therefore, the combined weights of culture, community, and theology create an incredible burden for any Muslim who comes to faith in Christ. This heaviness means that new MBB’s need a strong community to surround them, work toward life-long friendships, and help strengthen their faith in Jesus.¹⁶ In many ways, the Church must be ready to become the new believer’s family. And due to the powerful communal mentality, bringing whole families to Christ makes this the preferred method if at all possible.

Speaking Up and Suffering

This month, four more Iranian brothers and sisters were arrested for spreading the teaching of Jesus. Silent Christians often

¹⁶ The Bible shows the blessing and power of entire family units turning to Christ at the same time, see Acts 10 and Acts 16. “Whole-family” salvation has proven to be one of the safest and best means for blessing an entire people group.

remain safe. Vocal Christians risk their lives. These four join literally hundreds of other Christians suffering inside Iranian prisons. Prison life is harsh, the guards stern, the food barely edible, the abuse regular, the onslaught to their faith constant. They suffer shame, they may be afraid, and they risk losing hope.

Yet for those who follow Christ through persecution for their faith, Jesus offers some wonderful promises.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:11-12

Our duty is to speak up and intercede for our brothers and sisters who suffer for Jesus, because we will certainly meet them someday in heaven. Also, someday we may be the suffering ones, and we will need and appreciate many people praying for us as well.

Lighting the Fire of Urgency

Much work remains to be done in the Muslim world. Thousands of unreached Muslim people groups exist, and millions of Muslims know next to nothing about Jesus. Around the world the tide of anti-Christian policies, rhetoric, and action swells to new heights. Meanwhile, many of our brothers and sisters face imprisonments, attacks, abuses, and even threats of death for their faith.

Difficulties and trials await those who come to Jesus from a Muslim background, and possibly for those who share with them. May Jesus intensify our love and open wide the doors of opportunity. Your Muslim neighbors will never be reached through apathetic indifference. You must be loving and ready.

As a follower of Jesus, part of your great honor is to present strong and loving answers to your Muslim friends. We must move forth into their world with love revealed in our actions and with truth revealed in our words. We must pray for them to have the courage and wisdom to respond to the Good News of Jesus. After all,

Christ's kingdom conquers and expands through love and truth, rather than "convert, be taxed, or die."¹⁷

Jesus encouraged his followers, "*As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work*" (John 9:4). The daylight of salvation shines now. Even in the face of growing opposition, we can all speak up, remove barriers of belief, use technology to encourage others, pray for dreams or visions, and intercede on behalf of Muslims. But the night is coming, and the Good News is only good for your Muslim friends if they hear it in time.

Answers abound for the sincere questions of your Muslim friends. They can honor their heritage, culture, and ancestors by following Jesus. By befriending Muslims and learning how to address these five barriers, you will serve as a powerful blessing to them and to their entire family.

Your loving actions, your clear testimony, your clean lifestyle, and your fearless friendship will open many doors. And as you pray for your Muslim friends, the Holy Spirit will move – dissolving the objections, removing the obstacles, and revealing the magnificent and loving character of God in order to draw them to himself.

May you, a follower of Christ, engage the nations by allowing God to unlock the Muslim heart through you. And may countless Muslims come to a living faith in Christ and experience true freedom, honor and hope.

¹⁷ These are the three options typically given to Christians by Muslim conquerors.

About the Authors



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