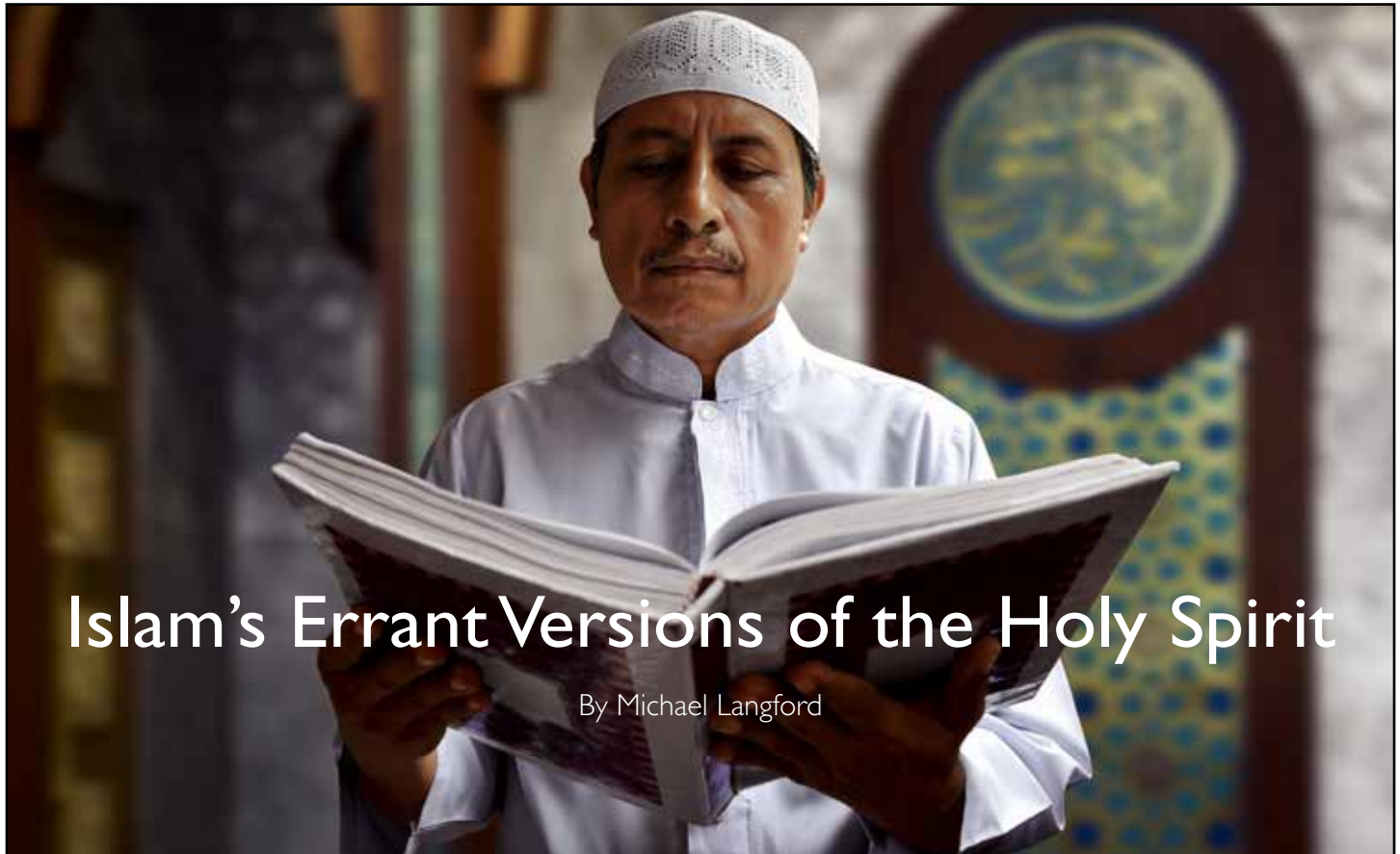


INTERCEDE

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Islam's Errant Versions of the Holy Spirit

By Michael Langford

This article will explore ways Islam diverges from biblical truth about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Understanding these divergences enables Christ-followers to respond compassionately to errant Islamic characterizations of the Holy Spirit, especially the accusation of tritheism—the Islamic claim that Christians worship three gods. While Islam blindly demotes and denigrates the divine personhood of the Holy Spirit, His “function” and work endures.

Islamic thought about the Holy Spirit is mixed. “The Holy Spirit has variously been interpreted as the angel Gabriel, spiritual power, etc. The Muslim concept of the Holy Spirit is far from the third person in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.”¹ Anne Cooper, writing in *The Family of Abraham: Christians and Muslims Reasoning Together*, explains, “There seems to be a good deal of confusion about the Holy Spirit in Islamic theology. The Qur’an distinguishes between the Holy Spirit (*Ruhu’l-quddus*) and the Spirit of God (*Ruhu’llah*). The Spirit of God is a title used for Jesus, while the Holy Spirit usually denotes the angel Gabriel.”² In the end, biblical truth is lost and the matter of properly identifying the Holy Spirit is thoroughly muddled.

L. Bevan Jones points out some confusing contributions of Christians regarding the Holy Spirit—prior to and following the advent of Islam:

The extraordinary veneration known to have been shown by Abyssinian Christians for the Virgin Mary may, conceivably, have given rise to such a notion. But quite recently a further possible source of confusion has been suggested. In Syriac the word *rôhâ*, spirit, is feminine, and some Syrian-speaking Christians used to think of the Holy Spirit as “she”. Indeed, an early apocryphal gospel, called *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, contained the following sentence, referring presumably to the Temptation of Jesus: “Even now did my Mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs, and carried me away unto the great mountain Thabor.” Origen (3rd cent.), and Jerome (4th cent.) are found to quote this sentence, and the gospel was known and used as late as the 9th century. ... [The] idea became widespread, and as late as the 12th century an Egyptian priest was accused of calling the Holy Spirit feminine:

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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Brink

International Director
Global Initiative:
Reaching Muslim Peoples



Recently I reread Nabeel Qureshi's testimony and again was encouraged to know how the Holy Spirit is working to draw Muslims into the family of God. Whether through dreams and visions, or through Spirit-led and empowered witnesses, the Spirit's work is indispensable in the process of leading Muslims to Christ. The Holy Spirit's work convicts, reproves, regenerates, reveals, and directs to truth (John 16:8, 13; Titus 3:5). In the new edition of *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, the Spirit's work is evident in the conversion process as God reveals himself to Muslims:

In God's infinite wisdom and passion, He reveals Himself to people in different ways that are culturally relevant so they can understand who He is, receive Him, and follow Him. In many Muslim cultures, dreams and visions play a strong role in people's lives. Muslims rarely have access to the scriptures or interactions with Christian missionaries, yet God is as passionate about having a relationship with Muslims as He is about having a relationship with you and me (Exod. 34:14 NLT).

The phenomenon of God's revealing Himself through dreams and visions is not limited to any one people, language, or country. People experience revelatory dreams from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia and beyond. It's not just limited to the Arab world. In Persian and Turkish-speaking countries and throughout Africa and Asia, many cultures place a high premium on such dreams. Dreams and visions do not convert people; the gospel does. These seekers begin a personal or spiritual journey to find the Truth. As was the case for Nabeel, the dreams lead them to the scriptures and to believers who can share Jesus with them. *It is the gospel through the Holy Spirit that converts people.*

It is no accident that Islam distorts the main foundations of Christianity—the authority of the Scriptures, the deity of Jesus Christ, and the identity and work of the Holy Spirit. These three foundations of Christianity are necessary for the conversion of an unbeliever.

In the main article of this edition of *Intercede*, the author explains that the work of missions among Muslims is absolutely dependent upon the work and power of the Holy Spirit. As you read, I pray that you will be encouraged to join us in Spirit-led intercession for Muslims and that you will also engage in Spirit-empowered witness to Muslims in your community. Last, I trust that you will consider partnering with Global Initiative as we provide Spirit-anointed training to raise up workers for a great harvest of souls among Muslim peoples. *It is the gospel revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit that converts Muslims to Christ.*



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“He held that there was a feminine quality in the Godhead, and he taught that this feminine quality is proper to the Holy Spirit. He held that the Eternal Word of God is born through all eternity from the Father and the Holy Spirit.”³

Certainly, some early unorthodox “Christian” teachings about the Holy Spirit contributed to the muddle.

The Accusation of Tritheism

For sure, from the genesis of Islam, Christianity is judged guilty of tritheism. John Gilchrist succinctly summarizes this point by offering two relevant quotes:

[The] whole argument of Muhammad was against a system of tritheism, which he believed to be held by the Christian Church of his day. He nowhere says a word which leads us to suppose that he had ever heard of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. His whole attack on the Christian position was based on the supposition that the Church taught that God had entered into physical relations with Mary, and that the man Jesus and his mother were therefore associated with God in worship and adoration. (Gardner, *The Qur'anic Doctrine of God*, 11)

Nothing but the most profound ignorance of the Bible and of the true nature of Christianity can account for the fact that Muhammad evidently believed the Virgin to be one of the Persons in the Holy Trinity. (Tisdall, *The Religion of the Crescent*, 169)

From this misconception come all the Muslim arguments against the Trinity. Tragically, these false assumptions are now institutionalized in Islam's polemical positions regarding the Holy Spirit.

The Nature of the Holy Spirit

The divine nature of the Holy Spirit is nonexistent in Islamic thought. Klaas Brobbel observes, “Muslims usually use the title ‘Spirit of God’ or ‘Holy Spirit’ in a different sense from Christians. They take it to mean a created being, such as the angel Gabriel or Jesus Himself (Qur’an 19:17; 4:171).”⁴ Such dissimilarity is of essence and personhood. “According to the Qur’an, the “Holy Spirit” is created by God, is an angel, and is a prophet in his own right. His task is to deepen the knowledge of the faithful about the divine will for salvation and divine mercy so that they can prepare for

the coming judgment without wavering, remaining steadfast under attack (Sura 58.22).”⁵ Qur’anic material consistently reinforces this category of being: “The word ‘spirit’ is used in twenty places in the Qur’an, and in every case the Muslim believes that it is used of a ‘subtle body’ which has the capacity to penetrate coarse bodies. The angels and *Jinn* [evil spirits] are such subtle bodies, and to speak of *Allah* as a Spirit would, according to Muslim thought, imply that He is a created body.⁶ In the Islamic schema, the created “... angelic Holy Spirit is the angel Gabriel, the angel who announced the birth of Jesus to Mary (Surah 3:40) and brought the Quran to the prophet Muhammad.”⁷ In practical terms, “the Christian preacher must ... recognise [sic] that if he tries to find a place in Islam for the Holy Spirit he must first regard Him as a created angel.”⁸

The One to Come After

Islamic thought about the Holy Spirit has coalesced with belief about their prophet. “Some Muslims claim that Muhammad is the Advocate (Comforter) who Jesus promised in John 14-16. The Qur’an and orthodox Muslim teaching have never said that Muhammad is the Holy Spirit. Still, some modern Muslims do give him this title, since the promised Advocate is called the Holy Spirit.”⁹ Their basis is a single reference.

[In] Surah 61 v. 6, the promised Paraclete of John 16:7 is identified with the prophet Muhammad, and Jesus is supposed to have foretold the coming of the Praised one (*ahmad*). The Christians are accused of having changed the supposed original Greek word *Periklutos* (‘Praised one’) to *Parakletos* (‘Comforter’). Such charges may, of course, easily be refuted by reference to Greek MSS of the New Testament, which were written over a hundred years before the birth of Muhammad (e.g., the Codex Alexandrinus in the British Museum).¹⁰

Few Muslims are exposed to proof texts, but are more likely influenced by two “explicitly pneumatological titles ... used of Muhammad, e.g., *Rōh Al-Quds* (The Holy Spirit) and *Rōh Al-Haqq* (Spirit of Truth).”¹¹ Consequently, their prophet is elevated above the Holy Spirit.

The “Seal” Expropriated

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is called the “seal” of the believer: “And it is God who ... put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, ESV). In addition, Ephesians 1:13-14 declares:

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“In Him you also ... were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.”¹² This title is expropriated by Islam in the twin claims that Muhammad is the “seal” of the Prophets (*Khatimu'n Nabiyæn*)¹³ and the Qur'an is the “seal” of revelation.

Three other factors, no doubt, contributed to the errors developed in Islamic thought related to the Holy Spirit. First, Muhammad was exposed to biblical stories during interactions with Christians and Jews. Anne Cooper suggests:

It was probably the biblical account of the Annunciation that caused Muhammad at a later period in his teaching, if not from the first, to confuse the angel Gabriel and the Holy Spirit. The connection may have been Mary conceiving Jesus by the Holy Spirit coming upon her (Luke 1:35) and the angel Gabriel being sent to announce his conception (Luke 1:31). Whether this is so or not, the two are generally considered to be synonymous [*sic*] in Islamic teaching.¹⁴

Muhammad synthesized stories and ideas from many sources. The sum falls short and again the Islamic understanding of the Holy Spirit is flawed from the beginning.

Second, names that imply high position influenced Islam. William Saal observes, “Muslims identify the Holy Spirit with the angel Gabriel. This popular notion develops out of the names given to the angel in the Qur'an; chief among them is the spirit.”¹⁵ Further, the archangels Gabriel and Michael are given the title *wazir* [“minister”]¹⁶ in numerous Hadith, as in Joseph the government minister next in line to the Egyptian Pharaoh. This title, used across Islamic history, implies the angel Gabriel is next to God.

Third, the pre-Islamic world was abuzz with theological controversies over the nature of Christ and the Trinity. Gerald Bray observes, “It is likely that the Christian theological influence Muhammad and the early Muslims encountered was some form of Monophysitism. ... [It] was their brand of Christianity which in a popular form had influenced the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad rejected the divinity of Christ, but he retained the Monophysite emphasis on the Virgin Birth.”¹⁷ Sam Shamoun states, “The Monophysites did believe in Jesus' humanity. Yet they believed that Jesus' divine nature took over his human nature so that the human

nature ceased to exist.”¹⁸ Muhammad adopted the first half of the position by claiming that Jesus was only a human being. Don McCurry points out that “Muhammad did not have a biblical concept of the Holy Spirit as He is presented in Scripture, but in his effort to win Christians to his cause, he used this idea with which heretical Christians were familiar” (OShaughnessy 1953, 59).¹⁸

The Hot-Button Issue

Christians can expect to be asked, “Do you believe in the Trinity?” This question arises from what Muslims “think” Christians believe.

Next to the doctrine of atonement through Christ's death on the cross, the belief in the Trinity has above all aroused opposition from Islamic scholars. The belief that the same God who has revealed himself in the Old Testament is revealed in Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit is rejected by Islamic theology as irreconcilable with the confession of the unity of God (*tawhid*).²⁰

Given the vitriol, one would expect careful inquiry by Islamic scholars. Rather, Harold Spencer notes, “[No] Muslim book, from the time of the appearance of the Quran until now, contains a true statement of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.”²¹ Accordingly, most Muslims know only Islam's version. Spencer summarizes:

The doctrine of the Trinity is expressly mentioned in Surahs 4 v. 169 and 5 vv. 76 ff. In Surah 5 v. 116 Mary is declared to be one of the Persons of the Trinity (see also Surah 5 v. 19); and in Surah 23 v. 93, Muhammad declared in the interest of his teaching of the Unity (*tawhid*) of Allah: ‘Allah never took a son, nor was there ever any deity with Him;—then each god would have gone off with what he created and some would have exalted themselves over others.’ (See also Surahs 17 v. 44 and 21 v. 22)²²

Clearly, the focus of the Qur'an is a defense of monotheism (*tawhid*). Spencer concludes, “The Quran places in the mouth of the Church a blasphemy of which it has never been guilty.”²³

Recognizing the Rebrand

What are Muslims likely to believe about the Holy Spirit?

ns of the Holy Spirit

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Muslims generally believe the dynamic of the Trinity consists of God the Father's having sexual intercourse with Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was the second member of the Trinity. This union resulted in the birth of Jesus as the third person of the Godhead. Emphasis is placed on the physical. The Holy Spirit is omitted from this list of the three members of the Trinity.²⁴

Although Christians find this belief offensive, Muslims confidently recycle it as truth. The Islamic "rebrand" is their only "consumable".

Such thinking is long established in Islam. "The author of a Sufi work called, "The Perfect Man" (c. 1400 A.D.) asserts that the Christians' Gospel begins with the words, "In the name of the Father, the Mother and the Son."²⁵ This rebrand continues to be peddled by twenty-first century Islam.

Jones again surmises, "[S]ince the *Qur'an* nowhere associates the Holy Spirit with the Trinity, it seems reasonable to hold that, in some way or other, Mary was connected by Muhammad with this doctrine."²⁶ Reasonable perhaps—but only from a purely human standpoint. Anees Zaka observes, "Islam is the religion of the natural man. Qur'anic Islam was well-known to the Reformers and fathers of the faith. Martin Luther (1463-1546) regarded it as God's judgment upon Roman corruption, a rod of correction for our sin, and the religion of the "natural man."²⁷

Therefore, it is impossible for Islam to "get it right" in regard to the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle Paul notes: "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (1 Corinthians 2:14, ASV).

The "Work of the Holy Spirit" in Islam?

Qur'anic references to the work of the Holy Spirit may sometimes "sound" biblical, albeit falsely so. "The Qur'an speaks of the Prophets and other believers as aided by the Holy Spirit (*Rōh Al-Quds*; 2:87, 253; 58:22),"²⁸ and such "aid" or "strengthening" is understood as the revelation of the Qur'an.

Jesus (*Isa*) is unique among Islamic prophets in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit. "According to the Koran [sic], Muhammad believed that Jesus was strengthened by the

Holy Spirit."²⁹ Though noteworthy, his exceptionality does not rise to a Christian understanding.

The Holy Spirit [Sura 2:87. Also, 253; 5:110] ... is identified by *Al-Baidhawi* and other Muslim commentators as the angel Gabriel. Even if this interpretation be allowed, *Gabriel is not mentioned as an agent of revelations to Jesus Christ* [italics added]. He only strengthened Him (provided "Him" implies the Holy Spirit). As to this function of strengthening Jesus, Thomas Hughes makes the follow observation:

The *Jalalan*, *Al-Baidhawi* and the Muslim commentators in general, say this Holy Spirit was the angel Gabriel *who sanctified Jesus and constantly aided Him* [italics added], and who also brought the Koran [sic] down from heaven and revealed it to Muhammad. (*Dictionary of Islam*, p. 177)

Apparently Gabriel is believed to have a *twofold* ministry [italics added] as a messenger of God to the prophets. He brings revelations down to them, but in the singular case of Jesus Christ he only strengthened Him.³⁰

This harmonizes with the agency of revelation to Jesus. "The Evangel (Gospel) which was given Him was reportedly a direct revelation from Allah (Sura 5:46), without any angelic mediation."³¹ No other Islamic prophet received revelations in this manner.

Conclusion

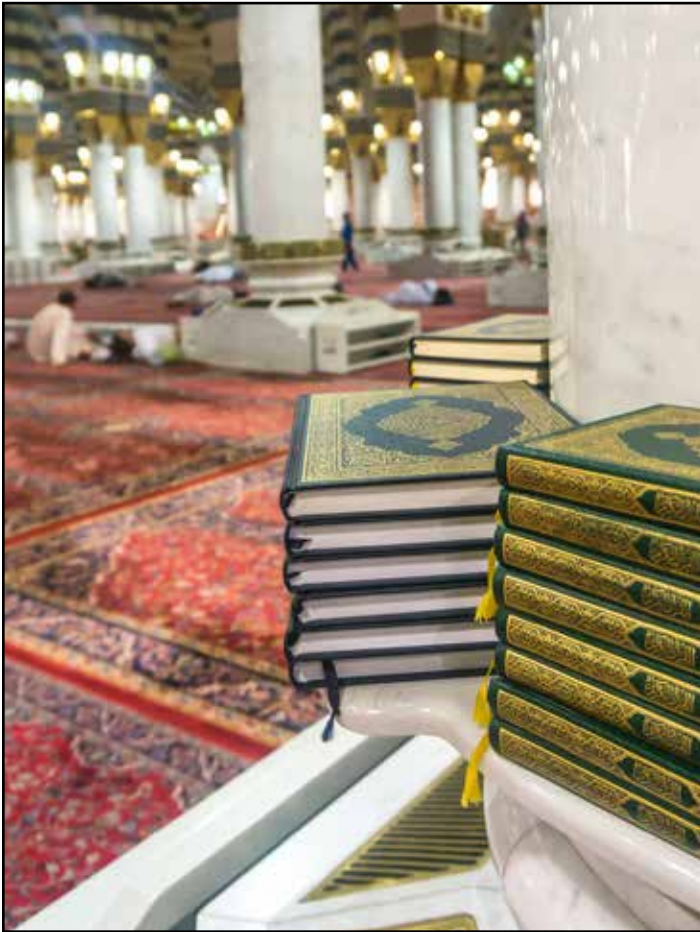
In actuality, a trinity "functions" in the Muslim heart. This is a trinity of their prophet, the Qur'an, and the Hadith (traditions) literature. Muslims flatly deny deification of their prophet, yet love him above all. Thus, their prophet supplants the "place" of "the Father" in their heart. In Islam, the word of Allah became a book. In Christianity, the Word became flesh. Thus, their holy book supplants the "place" of Christ in their heart. Finally, Hadith literature shows a Muslim how to apply the guidance of the Qur'an. In Islam, the traditions of Hadith direct Muslims into "Muhammadlikeness". In Christianity, the Holy Spirit leads Christ-followers into Christlikeness.

It is to be noted that without a proper understanding of "why Muslims believe as they do," we may subject ourselves

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to unnecessary frustration. We urge readers to equip themselves with a basic knowledge of Islam, walk in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, and respond compassionately to their Muslim neighbor.

¹ "Holy Spirit," Answering-Islam: A Christian-Muslim Dialogue, accessed September 17, 2016, www.answering-islam.org/Index/H/holy_spirit.html.

² Anne Cooper, comp., *In the Family of Abraham: Christians and Muslims Reasoning Together* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: People International, 1989), in the World of Islam CD-ROM (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping International, 2000), 10870.

³ L. Bevan Jones, *Christianity Explained to Muslims: A Manual for Christian Workers* (Calcutta, India: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1938), in the World of Islam CD-ROM (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping International 2000), 5153.

⁴ Klaas Brobbel, *Christian Witness Among Muslims* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1994), 85.

⁵ Paul Varo Martinson. *Islam: An Introduction for Christians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), in the World of Islam CD-ROM (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping International 2000), 5992.

⁶ H. Spencer, "Islam and the Gospel of God: A Comparison of the Central Doctrines of Christianity and Islam, prepared for the use of Christian workers among Muslims," 3-4, Answering-Islam, accessed September 6, 2016, www.answering-islam.org/Books/Spencer/God/chap1.htm.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁹ Brobbel, 85.

¹⁰ Spencer, "Islam and the Gospel of God," 3-4.

¹¹ World of Islam CD-ROM, 6936.

¹² Ibid., 7298.

¹³ Ibid., 8888.

¹⁴ Ibid., 10870-1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8238.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3265.

¹⁷ Gerry Redman, "An Explanation of the Unipersonality of Christ for Muslims," Debate.org.uk, accessed September 17, 2016, www.debate.org.uk/debate-topics/theological/hypostatic_union/#a4.

¹⁸ Sam Shamoun, "Is 'the Holy Spirit' Only Another Name for the Angel Gabriel?" 3, *Answering-Islam*, accessed September 17, 2016, www.answering-islam.org/Shamoun/gabriel.htm.

¹⁹ Don McCurry, *Healing the Broken Family of Abraham: New Life for Muslims* (Colorado Springs, CO: Ministries to Muslims, 2011), 250.

²⁰ World of Islam CD-ROM, 5995.

²¹ Spencer, "Islam and the Gospel of God," 5.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ World of Islam CD-ROM, 7903.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jones, *Christianity Explained to Muslims*, 5153.

²⁷ Anees Zaka and Diane Coleman, *The Truth About Islam: The Noble Quran's Teachings in Light of the Holy Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2004), 22.

²⁸ World of Islam CD-ROM, 6735.

²⁹ Tim Matheny, "Reaching the Arabs: A Felt Need Approach," 1981, in the World of Islam CD-ROM (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping International, 2000), 6130.

³⁰ Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq, *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1980), in the World of Islam CD-ROM (Colorado Springs, CO: Global Mapping International, 2000), 1115.

³¹ World of Islam CD-ROM, 1142-1143.



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Friday, January 4, 2019. Please pray for

...former Muslim Nadji in Iran, who chose to follow Jesus upon reading John 14:6—"I am the way, the truth and the life." Nadji says, "Iranians are hungry for the truth. As long as I am alive—I want to be a part of getting the Scriptures into the hands of Iranians."

...Nigerian believers to have boldness and endurance in the face of deadly violence at the hands of Boko Haram and other Islamic extremists embedded among nomadic Fulani tribesmen.

...Dina, who had to hide her new faith in Jesus from her Muslim Kurdish family. Her father had mercy—and sneaked her out of the house with only the clothes on her back and her passport.

Friday, January 11, 2019. Please pray for

...the Spirit of God to powerfully sustain Kenyan Christians who are afflicted by Al-Shabaab militants. Of Kenya's population of 50 million, 4.3 million are Muslim.

...the "House of the Gospel" church in Taterstan, Russia. Attendance has reached 1,000—and many Muslims have come to Christ. Government regulations threaten to close the church. Of Taterstan's population 3.8 million, 33% are Muslim.

...Palestinian Christians in Gaza who face daily harassment and discrimination in the Hamas-controlled territory. Of Gaza's population of 1.8 million, 98% are Muslim.

Friday, January 18, 2019. Please pray for

...Samer, a joyful follower and witness of Jesus in Bangladesh. His business is being threatened by a Muslim political leader who is extorting Samer for money while police turn a blind eye. Pray for protection for Samer and his family.

...a Christian-run school in Beirut, Lebanon. Pray that the Lord will soften the hearts of the children's parents [mostly Muslims] toward the gospel.

...internet teams reaching out through social media in a 98% Muslim North African country. They are finding more seekers than there are team members to do follow-ups. Ask the Lord to protect team members meeting with seekers.

Friday, January 25, 2019. Please pray for

...the needs of 40 pioneering church-planting couples, serving in Muslim communities of Indonesia.

...Elam Ministries in their effort to give newly translated Persian-language Bibles to every house church attendee in Iran.

...Malaysian converts from Islam. Courts recently ruled that Christians converting from Islam must get permission from a sharia court, effectively leaving converts open to being prosecuted for apostasy.

*I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and
thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV*



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Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, February 1, 2019. Please pray for

...several Syrian Muslims families who have settled long-term in a famous university city in England. Ask the Lord to anoint Christian workers who are attempting to communicate the truth about Jesus to them.

...the growing demand for Bibles from former Muslims in Syria. Of Syria's population of 18 million, 89% are Muslim.

...Rustram, a former Muslim from Tajikistan. After a personal experience with the Lord Jesus, he now works as a Tajik Bible teacher for a satellite network. Of Tajikistan's population of 9 million, 96% are Muslim.

Friday, February 8, 2019. Please pray for

...malnourished children in Yemen due to the ongoing conflict. Of Yemen's population of 28 million, 99.6% are Muslim.

...Uighur Muslims in China. Around a million have been placed in "education camps" for months. The government says it is reacting to terror attacks. Pray for relief for innocent Muslims caught in the purge and for opportunities for witness.

...38 Iraqi Christian women still held by ISIS sympathizers. In August, 2014, these women were kidnapped in Iraq.

Friday, February 15, 2019. Please pray for

...the Lord's favor on distribution plans for a media project that placed the Jesus Film in a Saudi Arabic dialect.

...victims of war and drought in the Darfur area of Sudan. Some of the most vulnerable people are those who have left Islam to follow Christ—a decision which often means they lose their job, are evicted from their home, and can no longer educate their children.

...Safe houses in Iran that serve as havens for women (and their children) who convert without their husband's permission. Pray especially for Atena, the coordinator of this ministry.

Friday, February 22, 2019. Please pray for

...Muhammad and Huda, converts from Islam who are serving as church planters in Syria. Currently they are holding Bible studies with several Muslim families in a major city of Syria.

...Bible distribution in Eritrea. Neera, a new convert from Islam, said, "Only the words of God make me joyful. Now I have hope and understand that God has a special plan for me." Of Eritrea's population of 5.1 million, 46% are Muslim.

...Christians who have been displaced in northern Cameroon, due to attacks by Boko Haram Islamist terrorists. Of Cameroon's population of 24.5 million, 32% are Muslim.

**All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*

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