

INTERCEDE

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Reflecting on Ramadan's Jewish Roots

By M. L. Rogers

“Forgiveness of sins? I love that thought,” said Ahmed as we sat enjoying our meal at a Midwestern diner. We had been talking about Ramadan, a month set aside for fasting in commemoration of Muhammad’s first revelations from Allah.

During Ramadan, the ninth month in the Muslim calendar, adherents of Islam fast from dawn until dusk. The Arabic word for fasting is *sawm*, which literally means “abstinence.” Throughout the daylight hours of Ramadan, Muslims all over the world abstain from food, drink, and sexual activity, as well as impure thoughts and words. The most devout Muslims may even avoid swallowing their saliva during this month of fasting.

Abstaining from all food and drink during daylight hours can be a challenge wherever one lives, but especially in certain parts of the world. As former Muslim Nabeel Qureshi relates in *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, practicing the fast as a boy in Scotland was very difficult because the sun rose as early as 4:30 a.m. and set as late as 10 p.m. during some times of the year. Therefore, participating in the fast while

living in a place with extended daylight hours would be quite a test of self-denial.

In addition to geographic challenges, Muslims who observe the fast encounter seasonal hardships. The Muslim calendar is based on a lunar year, which has roughly 354 days. The month of Ramadan, therefore, shifts on the solar calendar eleven days per year, causing it to fall on both cooler and warmer seasons during various years. Because it takes about thirty-three years for Ramadan to pass through the solar calendar, a Muslim will experience the spectrum of seasons many times while fasting during his or her lifetime. Needless to say, the longer days and the heat of the summer months make completing this fast quite difficult.

Conversely, the shorter days of winter bring sweet relief. A Muslim friend recently told me, “During one Ramadan in winter, the sun set so early that I forgot to go to the *iftar* meal.” (*Iftar* is the nightly meal during Ramadan when Muslims break their fast.) This year, many Muslims in the West will enjoy milder temperatures as Ramadan is expected to begin on April 23 and end on May 23, depending on the

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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



The ministry of *Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples* was started in 1982. From the beginning, the priority was placed on intercessory prayer. Over the coming years, *Global Initiative* began a prayer movement called *Jumaa Prayer Fellowship*. People who have joined agree to faithfully fast and pray, usually at noon on Fridays. Friday was chosen because it coincides with the day Muslims go to the mosque to do their *Jumaa* prayers.

The visionary founders of *Jumaa Prayer Fellowship* believed the Lord was going to open a great door for evangelism and outreach to Muslims. At the same time, they felt that great victories would come with a price. They recognized that evangelists, missionaries, pastors, and lay people who take the gospel to Muslim peoples might be asked to pay the high price of suffering, persecution, mistreatment, and even death. They also recognized that the intercessors themselves would be called to pay the price of persistence,

faithfulness and dedication, especially since this crucial task of intercession would primarily take place behind the scenes.

Recently one of our team members visited a church to share about the ministry of *Global Initiative*. While staying in the home of a church member, she saw a *Center for Ministry to Muslims (CMM)* was the original name for *Global Initiative*) prayer reminder placed on a window sill (pictured). When asked about the prayer reminder, the lady shared that she had been praying faithfully every Friday at noon for Muslims to come to Christ. The prayer reminder was produced over 15 years ago. It is possible that this wonderful intercessor had intentionally prayed over 750 times for Muslims to come to Christ—and she is just one of over 50,000 *Jumaa Prayer Fellowship* intercessors who faithfully implore the Lord to reveal himself to Muslims. Do you think the Lord would let these prayers go unanswered? No. He has instructed us to pray, and He is always faithful to answer.

The lead article of this *Intercede* issue focuses on the Islamic pillar of fasting. Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset for the entire month of Ramadan. This year, Ramadan begins on April 24 and ends on May 23. Muslims will give up eating food to show their dedication to Allah. We intentionally focus this edition on Ramadan so you will be prepared to pray with understanding and boldness as you wrestle in intercession against the principalities and powers (demonic powers) that are holding over 1 billion Muslims in spiritual darkness. The Apostle Paul reminds us that we are not without help in this task of intercession. The Holy Spirit partners with us: “Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). Friends, this is not the time to lose focus, become discouraged, or draw back. Let us stand united in the great task of intercession as we partner together with laborers in reaching Muslims with the gospel. The Holy Spirit leads in our praying and the results are tangible—the salvation of the souls of men and women.

For information on how to participate in this great task of taking the gospel to Muslim peoples, go to jumaa prayer.org or download the *Jumaa Prayer Fellowship* app.





Muslim World News

Tajikistan: Extremist Songs

A Protestant pastor sentenced to three years in prison for “singing extremist songs in church and inciting religious hatred” has been freed. Bakhrom Kholmatov, 42, was sentenced in July 2017, and has completed his prison term.

Kholmatov was the pastor of the Sunmin Sunbogym (Full Gospel), or Good News of Grace, Protestant Church, and was arrested by the National Security Committee (NSC), who brought his case to trial.

Members of the church claimed they were harassed and tortured by secret police after the arrest of their pastor. Kholmatov, who with his wife, Gulya, has three children, was initially arrested on unspecified charges during an April 2017 raid on his church.

The extremist charges were later brought against Kholmatov after NSC claimed songs based on Bible passages, such as “Our fight is not against flesh and blood”, and “God’s army is marching,” are extremist and call on people to overthrow the government.

Khujand City Administration’s chief religious affairs official, Mukhsin Mirkamolov, said that the court that tried Kholmatov “was not prejudiced against him as a Christian... All religions are equal and free in Tajikistan. He violated the law and was therefore tried.”—*World Watch Monitor*

Turkey: Big Budget Islam

Turkey’s religious ministry, the *Diyanet*, is planning a strategic action plan budget of \$11 billion until the year 2023. The ministry’s budget exceeds that of other ministries by a

large margin. It is responsible for promoting Islamic education, as well as building and funding mosques. The *Diyanet* has projects throughout the world.

Turkey is constitutionally secular, but under the leadership of President Erdogan, has increasingly leaned Islamic. Whereas the *Diyanet* has grown in activities to promote Islam, other religious groups in Turkey are experiencing an uphill battle to practice their faith.

For Christians, there is no legal pathway to build new churches. As a result, many are left to worship through the establishment of associations or foundations. Several Christian leaders have warned that as the government grows the role of Islam in society, the challenges increase for believers to live as Christians.—*International Christian Concern*

Maldives: No Tolerance For Blasphemy

Ahmed Zahir, Minister of Islamic Affairs, has stated there will be no room for blasphemers in the Maldives and that such incidents will be watched and investigated. This comes at a time of public outrage following social media circulation of a video of a Maldivian advocating for the right to leave Islam and defending apostates.

Speaking to *RaajjeMV*, Zahir said occurrences will be closely monitored and blasphemers who attempt to create hatred and disrupt society’s peace will be swiftly identified.

Highlighting the Maldives as a 100% Muslim country, the minister said such incidents will be taken very seriously and that there will be zero-tolerance against Maldivians spreading blasphemy.—*RaajjeMV*

Reflecting on Rama

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sighting of the new moon. Muslims in South Asia, however, will be fasting during the height of heat and humidity.

Because participating in the Ramadan fast is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, many Muslims look forward to this time with great anticipation. Articulating the excitement of this month, another Muslim friend told me, “I feel Ramadan.” This is a jovial time of community celebration, as families gather around the nightly *iftar* meal to reflect on another day of a completed fast. Perhaps more than this, however, Ramadan is a time of spiritual awakening, when dormant religious matters running in the background of Muslims’ lives come to the fore. It is a time to draw close to Allah.

In this month of heightened spiritual sensitivity, many Muslims participate in a *Turawih* ceremony, in which adherents go to a prayer meeting at the mosque every night during Ramadan and hear portions of the Quran read. Because Islam’s holy book is easily divided into thirty parts, a Muslim who attends these ceremonies will have listened to the entire Quran in one month. Some especially devout Muslims even go on an extended prayer retreat, spending day and night of the final ten days of the fast in the mosque reading the Quran and praying, a practice called *itikaf*. The last ten days of Ramadan, which incorporate *Laylat Al Qadr*, or the Night of Power, are considered the holiest part of the fast.

“During *Laylat Al Qadr*, we pray to Allah that our sins will be forgiven,” reflected Ahmed. “It is one of the holiest nights of Ramadan.” The Night of Power is remembered as the night when Muhammed is said to have begun receiving revelations of the Quran from Allah. This special night for Muslims typically falls on the 27th of Ramadan. For many Muslims, the Night of Power and the whole of Ramadan, for that matter, hold the possibility of attaining forgiveness of sins. For people like Ahmed, this is a beautiful thought.

What is the reason for this emphasis on sin’s restitution during Ramadan? There is, of course, the notion that fasting will earn one merit with Allah, thus making forgiveness of sins a possibility. But a deeper reason for its association with sin’s recompense might be revealed by looking at Ramadan’s inception.

After Muhammad took his 200-mile trip to Medina from Mecca in AD 622, he began courting large numbers of followers to his monotheistic fold. While many Medinans ac-



cepted his message, the large Jewish population remained resistant. In order to win them over, Muhammad declared Friday as an official Sabbath and taught his followers to pray facing the holy city of Jerusalem. It was quite important for Muhammad to win over the Jewish population if he was to convince the world that he was the last of a long line of biblical prophets. In addition, Muhammad participated in the Day of Atonement, a Jewish day of fasting and making restitution for sins. Jews celebrate this day on the 10th of the Hebrew month, *Tishri*. During the early years of Muhammad’s time in Medina, he taught Muslims to observe this somber day on the corresponding 10th of Muharram, the first month of the Muslim calendar.

During the Day of Atonement, or *Yom Kippur*, Jewish people fast from sundown one night until sundown the following night. Known as one of the holiest days of the Jewish calendar, Jews imbibe no food or drink during this period, including water. This day of fasting, which falls shortly after the Jewish New Year celebration, is a time for Jews to repent of their sins. According to the Law of Moses, it is to

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be a somber day of fasting and rest (Lev. 23:26-32). This is a day dedicated to seeking Yahweh's forgiveness and being reconciled to Him.

Ultimately, the Jews of Medina rejected Muhammad as a prophet from God. In reaction, the man from Mecca made sweeping changes to his religious practices. Although he kept Friday as a holy day for Muslims, he shifted the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca, and he changed the Day of Atonement into a month-long fasting season during Ramadan. Hence, the Ramadan fast is rooted in a quest for sin's recompense.

The idea of sin requiring atonement or payment is a familiar one in both Judaism and Christianity. Jewish people, on the Day of Atonement, paid for their sins by fasting, offering sacrifices, and abstaining from work (Lev. 23:27-28). In Islam, shadows of this same thinking exist throughout Ramadan, as Muslims seek to follow this all-important Pillar in the hope that forgiveness may be attained through their meritorious abstinence. Unfortunately for Muslims, howev-

er, the expectation of sin's recompense hangs in the balance between their works and Allah's unpredictable benevolence. Insecurity concerning one's eternal standing is only mitigated by the possibility that Allah will live up to the name Muslims emphasize during Ramadan: *Ar-Rahman-ur-Rahim*, which means, "The Merciful and Compassionate." Simply put, the people of Islam have no assurance that their sins are forgiven or that Allah will show them mercy on the Day of Judgment. As one South Asian Muslim told me, "If I ask Allah to forgive me, maybe he will, maybe he won't."

Why is this? In Islamic theology, there is no *payment* for sins, except the performance of works (practicing the Five Pillars). Unfortunately, this leaves many Muslims wondering if their works are ever enough. How could Allah ever forgive them? Some may wonder, knowing their own sin, if Allah could truly be both just and forgiving. Thus, without a payment for sins coming from outside of oneself, Muslims are left wondering what Judgment Day will have in store for them and if the works they bring to the celestial table will be enough to tip the scales in their favor.

As this year's fast quickly approaches, Christians would do well to remember Ramadan's Jewish roots, for the vestiges of a hope for atonement still pervade the Muslim mind. Believers in Jesus should be prepared to answer the nagging spiritual question of their Muslim friend: *how can my sins be forgiven?* The open door to answering this kind of question may never be spread as wide as during Ramadan.

How can a Christian share the Truth about forgiveness? I have found that one of the most effective ways is through sharing Bible stories. Everyone loves a good story, and about 75 percent of God's Word is in narrative form! Furthermore, the Quran refers to many of the same characters that we find in the Bible. Sharing stories of Adam and Eve, for instance, builds a quick bridge with Muslims. The following stories could be shared with Muslim friends to show that sin requires a payment and that God has provided that payment:

- Genesis 3:21: God slaughters an animal and covers Adam and Eve (*Hawa* in Arabic) with the animal skins. From this story, one could emphasize that sin brings shame, but God himself provides the covering for this shame.

- Genesis 22:1-14: Abraham (*Ibrahim* in Arabic) takes his

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son up the mountain to sacrifice him. Before carrying out this act, the angel of the Lord stops him, and a ram is sacrificed in Isaac's place. The focal point of this story is verse 8, when Abraham says to Isaac, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." Christians could emphasize three things from this story: (1) even though Isaac was rescued from the slaughter, a sacrifice still had to be made—a payment was still required; (2) the sacrifice of the ram was substitutionary, that is, in place of the son; and (3) God himself provides the sacrifice.

• Exodus 12:1-32: This is the story of the first Passover, when God tells the people of Israel, who were slaves in Egypt, to slaughter a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts of their homes. Then the Lord will "pass over" the homes of the Israelites but will slaughter all of the firstborn sons of Egypt who do not have the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. Two things could be emphasized from this amazing story: (1) it is the blood of the sacrificial lamb that saves the people of Israel from God's wrath; and (2) this is another picture of substitutionary sacrifice. Imagine how the firstborn son of an Israelite household felt the night of Passover as he sat looking at the cooked lamb on his family's table. He may have been thinking, *I'm sitting here right now because that lamb died in my place!*

After sharing these stories from the Old Testament, the Christian could bring his or her Muslim friend to the story of John the Baptist's encounter with Jesus in John 1:29, when the former says of Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Sharing these stories with Muslim friends like Ahmed shows them why Jesus had to die, that He was the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. The Bible is indeed one great Story—the Story of God saving people from their sins and drawing them near to himself.

As Muslims fast and pray in the hope of finding divine favor and forgiveness throughout this upcoming Ramadan, and in particular during the holiest night of the Muslim calendar, the Night of Power, they must hear from their Christian friends about a different Holy Night that took place long ago. On this night, God's Word did not come down by way of an angel to a man in a cave; His Word came to a stable. God's Message was not one of law and submission, but of grace and redemption. This Word would bring atonement, for the Word himself would be the payment for sins. This is Jesus, the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us, and every Muslim deserves to hear the Truth about forgiveness of sin through the substitutionary death of Jesus.

Prayer Profile: *Hausa in Algeria*

Population: 12,000

Religion: 100% Islam



The Hausa of Algeria are known for being hospitable to strangers. They are involved in trading and agriculture. The Hausa of Algeria are small in number, but belong to the larger Hausa "family" that is spread over several West African countries. The Hausa of Algeria are 100% Muslim and there are no known believers in Christ among them. Their Islamic religious practices are mixed with local traditions. They believe in a variety of spirits, both good and bad. Traditional rituals include making sacrificial offerings to the spirits and to the spirit-possessed. Pray for:

- Long-term laborers to live among them and share the love of Christ
- Faithful intercessors who will stand in the gap for the Hausa of Algeria
- Christian Hausas from outside Algeria to go and share Christ
- Context-appropriate radio programs that will be aimed at Algerian Hausas.

*For additional information about Hausas, please visit: www.joshuaproject.net.



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

Friday, March 6, 2020. Please pray for

...relocation efforts for Ibrahim and Zinabu, who converted from Islam three years ago in Kenya. Muslim militants have burned their house three times.

...Muslim people groups in the Pamir mountain villages of Tajikistan where there are no known believers. Christian “agricultural teams” are developing relationships with the local villagers.

...Global Initiative team members attending and participating in the Europe Diaspora Consultation during March 9-14.

Friday, March 13, 2020. Please pray for

...a full recovery for Hamdi, a new believer in Chad, Africa. Pressured to return to Islam, he was left in the desert to die, but God miraculously caused him to be found. Of Chad’s population of 16 million, 57% are Muslim.

...fifty Christian families in the Punjab province of Pakistan who are sponsoring a church building project. A local Christian reported, “Muslims have threatened that if we continue building the church, they will set our houses on fire.”

...the faith of Christians in Syria—many of whom know what it means to be despised, discriminated against, and attacked for the sake of Christ. Of Syria’s population of 17 million, 89% are Muslim.

Friday, March 20, 2020. Please pray for

...a Global Initiative team member who will teach classes on how to reach Muslims with the gospel in Brazil from March 25 through April 1.

...protection for Malay believers from Muslim backgrounds who follow Jesus in secret. Pray that they would find safe ways to identify and meet up with other believers. Of Malaysia’s population of 32 million, 56% are Muslim.

...Nigerian Christians in Kaduna who state, “We are seeking opportunities to share the gospel with Muslim Fulani herdsmen who have terrorized our communities.”

Friday, March 27, 2020. Please pray for

...a Global Initiative team member who will teach “Church Planting in the Muslim Context” in a European seminary during March 30-April 24.

...the effectiveness of SAT-7 PARS broadcasts via satellite television and the internet to Persian speakers in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.

...a Global Initiative team member who will teach “Exploring Islam” at an Asian seminary during March 27-April 3.

*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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*Jumaa Prayer is now on
Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, April 3, 2020. Please pray for

...*outreach in one of the oldest cities in Morocco*, where workers are finding receptive hearts among Muslims. Many believers in this city are fearful and remain isolated. Of Morocco's population of 36 million, 99.6% are Muslim.

...*Christians in Brunei*. Under Brunei's new Islamic law, Christians are not allowed to share the gospel with anyone.

...*Syrian refugees in Istanbul, Turkey*, who have come to Christ. Many Turkish Christians are risking their lives to provide succor and encouragement.

Friday, April 10, 2020. Please pray for

...*200,000 Turks* who have requested a Bible correspondence course in the last few years. A few months ago there were 400 new contacts in one week requesting the course.

...*the two-thirds of Moroccan women who are illiterate*. Programs like SAT-7's "My School" help address the problem and, at the same time, convey the message of God's love.

...*Muslim viewers as they watch a new Arabic video series* in which several Muslim men study the Scriptures together. The ministry's messaging service connects those interested in Jesus with local or expat Christians.

Friday, April 17, 2020. Please pray for

...*the 2.7 million Afghan refugees* (mostly living in Pakistan) and an additional 2.6 million Afghans who are displaced within the country. Of Afghanistan's population of 38 million, 99.8% are Muslim.

...*Bello, a Fulani Muslim from the west of Niger* who has become a Christian and now feels a call to be an evangelist among his Fulani people. He has started his Bible School studies. Of Niger's population of 23 million, 94% are Muslim.

...*the 1 million Turks in France*. In the last few years, seven Turkish churches have been planted across France.

Friday, April 24, 2020. Please pray for

...*Fatima, a young Muslim woman from the Arabian Peninsula*, who is studying at a European university. She has heard the gospel and fellow students are praying that her spiritual eyes will be opened to the truth about Jesus.

...*Christians in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta* where Islamic vigilante groups have recently increased their activities. Of Indonesia's population of 269 million, 83% are Muslim.

...*Muslims throughout the world* who begin the 30-day fasting month of Ramadan today.

**All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*

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