God is working His purpose out

1. What is God's purpose?

- **What is the purpose of the church?**

John 17 tells us we are a called and sent people.

"As you have sent Me into the world, so have I sent them into the world." (Jn. 17:18)

- **What is the fundamental task of the church both universal and local?**
  - To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom by word and by demonstration
  - To teach and nurture new believers
  - To respond to human need by loving service
  - To seek to transform unjust structures society
  - To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

- **Is God working His purpose out in the Muslim World?**

Islam is one of the greatest challenges to the church. "Systems" often collapse not from the periphery slowly inwards, but from the centre/core outwards.

- God's work requires our faith.
- Effective faith is rooted in the promises of God.

The Promises of God for Arabia

Arabia is the cradle and heartland of the Muslim World. We have the assurance of an abundant harvest **because of the testimony of God's Word**. God's promises are always fulfilled and His worldwide promises don't exclude anyone from any people group or region of the world. The Bible tells us many false prophets will arise and deceive many, but it doesn't for a moment allow that the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus will divide the peoples of the earth only ruling some of them and leaving the rest in the bondage of the Evil One.

"In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself <u>all things</u>, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His Cross." (Col. 1:20)

"The Father loves the Son and has given <u>all things</u> into His hands." (Jn. 3:35)

"God has exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name ... far above all rule and authority and power and might and dominion and above <u>every name</u> that is named not only in <u>this world</u> but also in that which is to come." (Phil. 2:9; Eph. 1:21)

"That at the name of Jesus <u>every tongue</u> will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:11)

At the moment we may see the Muslim World growing in influence and triumphing in places, but the future belongs to the Lord Jesus! We proclaim:

"Who is it that overcomes the world, except the one who believes Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 Jn. 5:5)

So the divinity of the Lord Jesus, denied by Muslims, decides the destiny of all worldly kingdoms.

Some general Old Testament promises relating to worldwide mission

Many believers fail to realise the number and importance of God's promises in the **Old Testament** about the future. Here are some:

Genesis 12:3 – God's promise to Abraham: ***"And I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you … and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."***

Genesis 18:17-18: ***"The Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?' "***

Genesis 22:18: ***" …. and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."***

Genesis 26:4: ***"I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed …."***

Genesis 28:14: ***"Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed."***

Numbers 14:20-21 – This is after Moses has interceded for the people who had rebelled against God: ***"The Lord replied, 'I have forgiven them as you asked. But as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth … ' "*** God goes on to say that none of the people will enter the land of promise except Caleb and Joshua.

Isaiah 2:2 – Isaiah was speaking of the mountain of the house of the Lord: ***"… the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow to it and many peoples shall come and say, 'Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord … that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.' "***

Isaiah 2:18: ***"… And the idols shall utterly pass away."***

Jeremiah 3:17: ***"At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord and all nations shall gather to it and to the presence of the Lord … and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart."***

Daniel 7:13-14: ***"I saw in the night visions and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came One like the Son of Man and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and His Kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed."***

Joel 2:28: ***"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh …."***

Jonah Chapters 3 and 4 – when the evil and cruel people of Nineveh repented:

3:10: ***"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God relented of the disaster He had said He would do to them and He did not do it."*** He relented because He loves all He has made.

4:11: ***"And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons*** (often interpreted as young children) ***who do not know their right hand from their left and also much cattle?"***

Micah 5:4-5: ***"He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God…. And they shall dwell secure, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth. And He shall be their peace."***

Habakkuk 2:14: ***"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."***

Zephaniah 2:11: ***"The Lord will be awesome against them;*** (those who taunted and boasted of their gods in their pride) ***when he destroys all the gods of the land. The nations on every shore will worship Him, everyone in his own land."***

Haggai 2:6-7: ***"For thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in and I will fill this house with glory' says the Lord of Hosts."***

Zechariah 9:10: ***" …. and He shall speak peace to the nations; His rule shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth."***

Zechariah 14:9: ***"And the Lord will be King over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be One and His name One."*** (implying a universal, true monotheism)

Malachi 1:11: ***" 'For from the rising of the sun to its setting My name will be great among the nations and in every place incense will be offered to My name and a pure offering. For My name will be great among the nations' says the Lord of Hosts."***

The Great Commission, given by Our Lord Jesus, was based on these tremendous Old Testament promises. For example: Acts 1:8, ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."*** (See also Mt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:25; Luke 24:46-47 and John 20:21)

For a very long time all the nations of the world have been in God's plan! Is it not remarkable that many of these Old Testament promises are grouped around the names of countries in the Middle East that are now the heartlands and strength of the whole Muslim World?

Acts 15:18 (KJV): ***"Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world."***

So it cannot be true that these worldwide promises to ***"all nations"*** do not involve Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and the seven countries in Arabia – the core and heartlands of Islam. They too must be included in God's plan of redemption! Is there not a special blessing for the lands that border Israel when the Lord shall comfort His people and restore all her waste places? Isaiah 19:24-25 says:

"In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria (Northern Iraq) ***and Assyria will come into Egypt and Egypt into Assyria and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth,*** (!) ***whom the Lord of Hosts has blessed saying, 'Blessed be Egypt My people and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.' "*** (Is. 19:24-25)

As portrayed in the New Testament, the Muslim World is in no better condition and no worse condition than the rest of the world. The needs of both are the same and we have the same duty to share the Gospel with all Muslims and all peoples everywhere. We have the same promises of God's blessing on our work of witness. Muslims too are ***"without excuse"*** (Rom. 1:20, 32), ***"without hope"*** (Jn. 3:36, Eph. 2:2), ***"without peace"*** (Is. 58:22), ***"without feeling"*** (Eph. 4:19). ***"They have become callous."*** They are ***"without Christ"*** (Rom. 13:13-14) **as are all the peoples of the world**. Our responsibility towards them is no less and, more importantly, neither is the power of God's love to win them.

The rock of **the Sonship of the Lord Jesus** is the major stone of stumbling and rock of offence to our Muslim friends. But on this very rock the Lord Jesus is building His church (Mt. 16:18 – see context). So it is the Deity of the Lord Jesus that is the foundation of all churches.

"And the foundation of God stands secure." (2 Tim. 2:19)

Writing on this subject, a worker in North Africa said: "Blessed be God, we are not left to carry on this warfare on our own, ***'He who sent me is with me'***, says the Master and He who sends His servants

now is surely with them for the promise stands, ***'Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age'.***" (Mt. 28:20).

In our efforts to see men, women and children saved, we are dependent on the power of the Spirit of God; for no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit. But if those of us in our home countries are conscious of this, those who work among Muslims realise it even more intensely. At home in England we contend mostly with indifference, but in the Muslim World there is deep-rooted prejudice – and in many cases **hatred** – towards the Lord Jesus as the Son of God. But the battle is not ours, it is the Lord's and we are but instruments to carry out His words and purposes. The Holy Spirit has been sent from the Father, ***"To convict the world of sin"*** (Jn. 16:8) Should we not expect that **if** there is a nation, a race or a religion on earth more inaccessible than another, more adverse to the Gospel, more hardened against its teachings, then **that is the place** where the Lord Jesus will show, ***"the immeasurable greatness of His power?"*** (Eph. 1:19) by calling out many from their midst as 'chosen vessels' to bear His name to others of their people? I believe in this 21st century, He is doing just this.

Specific promises for the Peoples of Arabia and the Desert Lands near Palestine

There is no land and no people – with the exception of Palestine and the Jewish people – that bears such a close relationship to God's covenant promises as Arabia and the Arabs. The promises of an abundant spiritual harvest for the Kingdom of God in Arabia are many, definite and magnificent!

These promises group themselves around seven names that have been identified with the Arabian Peninsula from time immemorial:

- **Ishmael**
- **Kedar and Nebaioth**
- **Sheba, Seba**
- **Midian and Ephah**

There are many promises concerning the desert. The people in Palestine referred to the "desert" or wilderness as the Sinai and what is today northern Arabia – part of Syria, Iraq and Jordan – i.e. under the Fertile Crescent – as well as the Arabian Peninsula. We will look at some promises from Isaiah and Ezekiel. They speak of the land and plants but refer to the people of the land.

Isaiah 35:1-2: ***"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like a crocus. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it and the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God."***

Isaiah 40:3: ***"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.' "***

Isaiah 41:18-20: ***"I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the Cedar, the Acacia, the Myrtle and the Olive. I will set in the desert the Cypress, the Plane tree and the Pine together. That they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it."***

Isaiah 43:19: ***"Behold I am doing a new thing; now it springs up, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."***

Isaiah 51:3: ***"For the Lord comforts Zion; He comforts all her waste places and He makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song."***

Ezekiel 34:25: ***"I will make them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods."***

Ezekiel 47:8-9: ***"And he said to me, 'This water flows towards the eastern region*** (i.e. the Dead Sea) ***and goes down to the Arabah*** (south of the Dead Sea to Aqaba) ***and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea the water will become fresh … so everything will live where the river flows.' "***

Specific promises given to the Children of Ishmael

In order to understand the promises given to the sons of Ishmael, we first need to understand the relationship of Ishmael to the Abrahamic covenant and the place Ishmael occupies in God's plan for the nations as outlined in the book of Genesis.

Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, seems to have occupied a prominent place in Abraham's household and she appears to have had a deep inward participation in the faith of the God of Abraham. She was probably added to the family of faith during Abraham's stay in Egypt and she probably occupied the same position towards the female servants that Eliezar of Damascus did towards the male servants. It is when she was driven into the desert by the jealous harshness of Sarah, that we have the first revelation of God concerning Ishmael and his children. It was both a promise and a prophecy:

Genesis 16:7-15: ***"The Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness – the spring on the way to Shur ..... and he said, 'Hagar, servant of Sarah, where have you come from and where are you going?' She said, 'I am fleeing the presence of my mistress Sarah'. The Angel of the Lord said to her, 'Return to your mistress and submit to her.' The Angel of the Lord also said to her, 'I will surely multiply your offspring so they cannot be numbered for multitude.' And the Angel of the Lord said to her, 'Behold you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael*** (meaning 'God hears') ***because the Lord has listened to your affliction. He will be a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him and he will dwell over against all his kinsmen'. So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, 'You are a God who sees me', for she said, 'Truly here I have seen Him who looks after me'. Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi (the well of the Living One who sees me). The well lies between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore Abraham a son and Abraham called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael."***

Shur is in the desert area in the north of the Sinai Peninsula not far from the Mediterranean Sea. It is on the road between lower Egypt and Canaan. Possibly Hagar thought of going home to Egypt. Today the well is called 'Ain Qudeirat. It is in the Negev in Israel.

It is clear from the context that the Angel of the Lord and the Lord Himself are identified here as the same person – a theophany – a manifestation of God that is tangible to human senses – a visible appearance of God in the Old Testament. The Angel speaks for God in the first person (Gen. 16:10) and attributes the experience to God directly. (Gen. 16:13)

Why should this "Angel" first appear to Hagar? He spoke to her four times. Clearly, when Hagar was harshly treated and found herself a lonely fugitive in the desert, God showed her His mercy and His personal care. Lange suggests the following in his commentary:

"The Angel of the Lord, as Christ who was to come through Isaac, had a particular reason for assisting Hagar, since she, for the sake of the future Messiah, is involved in this sorrow."

Some commentators suggest that Hagar was truly astonished that she had seen God and remained alive. Some translations translate Beer Lahai Roi: *'The God who allows Himself to be seen'* and the well as: *'The well of seeing alive'.*

So the first appearance of the Angel of the Lord is to a woman – an outcast and a fugitive. Can we see in this person and His appearance in this way, an anticipation of the incarnation and its crowning wonder in the Man, the Lord Jesus? We were once outcasts and fugitives from God's presence, but were given to see God in the Lord Jesus and not to die but to live and indeed to find true life in Him.

There is a lovely incident in the ministry of the Lord Jesus where an outcast had his eyes opened so he could see. We read (Jn. 9:35-38), ***"Jesus heard they had cast him out and having found him said, 'Do***

you believe in the Son of God?' He answered, 'Who is He that I may believe in Him?' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen Him and it is He who speaks to you.' He said, 'Lord I believe!' And he worshipped Him."

In any case the special revelation and the special promise were given not only to Hagar but to her descendants as well. The Lord Jesus, if we may so express it, outlines the future history and character of the children of Ishmael as well as their strength and glory. He also gives them a great spiritual promise in the God-given name, Ishmael – Elohim will hear! It is very interesting to me that so many of Ishmael's children today also have visions of the Lord Jesus and He speaks to them. Perhaps the majority of believers from a Muslim background in the Arab World have had a similar experience to that of Hagar.

The fulfilment of the promise that Ishmael's seed would greatly multiply has clearly been fulfilled. Arabia, whose population consists mainly of Ishmaelites, is and has been a living fountain of men and women. Arabs have migrated to many parts of Asia (Malabar in India, Aceh in Indonesia), across North Africa, down the east coast of Africa and in the 20th century almost everywhere. Where there has been such a clear fulfilment of the promise of natural increase are there not grounds to believe that God will hear and pour out great spiritual blessing?

Thirteen years after the first promise to Ishmael, we hear the promise renewed just after the instruction of circumcision – the sign of the Covenant of Faith:

Genesis 17:18: ***"Abraham said to God, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before You!' But God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you ….' "***

What is the significance of Abraham's prayer for Ishmael? Is it probable that he merely asks for temporal prosperity and length of life? This doesn't explain why the prayer asks that Ishmael may live **before** God. Abraham's prayer arose out of his anxiety that Ishmael should not be excluded from the blessings of the Covenant that God had made with Abraham – an everlasting Covenant (Gen. 17:13). God's answer contains no denial of the prayer of Abraham. This is in favour of such an interpretation. In his prayer Abraham was expressing the possibility of an indefinite – perhaps even infinite – neglect of Ishmael by God and that was very painful to his parent heart. Abraham asks for life for Ishmael in its highest sense – life in the presence of God (i.e. before God). God gave Abraham the assurance that what he had asked would be granted. This is the meaning of the circumcision of Ishmael (Gen. 17:23). It is a rite that ratifies the Covenant of God with Abraham and to his seed including Ishmael and his descendants. They would also be in the sphere of the blessings of God. However much the Arabs may have departed from the faith of Abraham over all these millennia, they have remained faithful to the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant by the rite of circumcision.

The Repentance of Ishmael – Genesis 21:8-21

For the third time we read of a special revelation (a theophany) to prove God's love for Ishmael. In the pathetic story of Hagar's expulsion, Ishmael is the central figure. His mocking of Isaac was its cause. He was probably 13 or 14 years old. Sarah said to Abraham, ***"Cast out this slave woman, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac."*** Abraham gave Hagar bread and water and sent her away. She went down into the Negev. When the water in the bottle was gone Hagar separated herself about 200 metres from Ishmael for she said, ***"Let me not look on the death of the child."*** And as both of them got ready for death – Hagar quietly crying – the Angel of the Lord called to Hagar:

Gen. 21:17-20: ***" 'What troubles you Hagar? Fear not, for <u>God has heard the voice of the boy</u> where he is. Arise, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.' Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water ... and God was with the boy."***

This story shows Ishmael's repentance. **God heard his voice**. God forgave his sinful mocking. God saved his life. God was with the lad! When Abraham died, ***"In good old age and full of years … his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah … with Sarah his wife."*** (Gen. 25:8-10)

No mention is made here of the sons of Keturah at Abraham's death except Isaac and Ishmael. Clearly there was a reconciliation. In Gen 25:12-16 the names of the sons of Ishmael are given. The names of the sons of Ishmael and Isaac are given again in the Covenant genealogies of I Chronicles 1:28-34. They are recorded in full in order to bind together the prophecies of Genesis with the Messianic promises for the seed of Isaac.

The Twelve Princes

The twelve 'princes'– sons of Ishmael whose names are given in Gen. 25:12-16 – were undoubtedly the patriarchs of many Arab tribes. In Biblical times they mostly lived in north west Arabia. Some of the names can be distinctly traced through history and are easily identified with modern tribes in Arabia. The fourth son, Mibsam, corresponds to the Nejd tribe of Bessam. The fifth son, Mishma, is most likely the tribe called the Beni Misma. Before looking at the descendants of Nebaioth and Kedar, here is a brief mention of Biblical references to some of the lesser sons and their descendants.

6th son – Dumah: the descendants of Dumah gave their name to Dumah – capital of a district known as the Jawf (al Jawf) in northern Saudi Arabia. Today the ruins are called Dumat el Jendal. It was a town well-known to both the Assyrian and Babylonian empires in the 6th and 7th centuries BC.

7th son – Massa: his descendants also settled in Northern Arabia. A Greek historian wrote that they lived North East of Dumah. Some Bible translators think that Mesheck should be translated as Massa. There is a possibility that in the introduction to both Proverbs 30 and 31 the Hebrew word 'hammassa' (usually translated 'oracle') should be read as a place name. So both Agur and Lemuel are descendants of Massa. King Lemuel must have had a spiritually discerning mother to have written Proverbs 31!

8th son – Hadad (or Hadar in the KJV/AV)

9th son – Tema: this also became the name of the district the tribe settled in. It is mentioned together with Dedan and Buz (Jer. 25:24) as the place where the people, ***"Cut the corners of their hair"*** ! These places were famous for the caravan trade on the incense route from south Arabia to Syria and the Mediterranean. It is about 250 km north-west of Medina on the edge of the Nafud.

10th son – Jatur/Iturea (Y^{e}tûa in Hebrew): This tribe is mentioned in 1 Chron. 5:19 as a tribe with Israel who lived east of the River Jordan. In 105-104 BC the Jews fought against them and captured some of their land. In New Testament times they were usually called 'Syrians' and sometimes 'Arabians' by Josephus, Pliny and others.

11th son – Nephish: the location of this tribe has not been determined, but they are mentioned in 1 Chron. 5:19 as an inter-tribe consortium – called the Hagarites – made up of the descendants of Jetur, Nephish and Nobad – a tribe of which nothing else is known. The consortium was conquered by the combined Jewish tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh with a great loss of livestock!

12th son – Kedemah: this may be the tribe called elsewhere in the Bible 'Kadmonites' – i.e. 'easterners' (beni qedem). Job was called the greatest of all ***'the people of the east'***. (Job 1:3). So possibly Job was an Ishmaelite. The 'East' in the Bible is often the Trans-Jordan area from the east of the Gulf of Aqaba up to the area of the Hauran south of Damascus.

Aside from these Biblical references, the first two sons of Hagar stand out clearly in history – **Nebaioth** and **Kedar**. As long ago as Pliny in the second century, they are mentioned together in his **Natural History** as 'Nabatoi et Cedrei'. It is these two names – whose identity no-one questions – that are at the centre of glorious promises. Isaiah 60 is well known as one of the greatest Old Testament passages containing special promises. Many don't realise that much of it contains special promises for Arabia.

Firstly some historical data and then the promises:

Nebaioth: the Nabateans are considered to be the descendants of Nebaioth. The Nabateans are mentioned in Assyrian history (650 B.C.). But they grew to prominence at the end of the Persian Empire and the beginnings of the Greek Empire. A historian writing in 50 B.C. describes them as a

nomadic desert tribe who straddled the 'frankincense route' from Basra across northern Arabia and from Yemen in the south. Their capital was Petra about 50 miles S.S.E. of the Dead Sea. The Greek king after Alexander had two military expeditions to Petra in order to gain control of the trade (312 B.C.**).** Petra was a 'stronghold'. Nabatean engineers constructed a well-developed system of water conservation and water distribution that enabled a large town to grow up and more importantly enabled cultivated land. Many of their dams and reservoirs are still usable today. Petra is surrounded by huge cliffs pierced by narrow ravines – an almost impregnable defence.

The Nabateans grew richer and richer. They built other towns including Medain Saleh in Saudi Arabia near the village of Al Ula on the old Turkish railroad.

In the third century A.D. the rise of the city of Palmyra diverted some trade from the Gulf and the Silk Road that formerly went to Petra. Slowly Petra began to decline as a trading centre. Interestingly an article/booklet has been written by Jeremy Smyth called The Mecca Question. It is part of a larger book by Dan Gibson entitled Qur'anic Geography (ISBN 978-0-9867144-4-3) – see www.indipress.ca

This article gives detailed evidence to show that Petra, not Mecca, was the birthplace of Islam! The Kaaba was not located in Mecca and early Islamic writings all point to Petra and not Mecca as the "Holy City". Apparently Mecca didn't exist much before A.D. 900 – i.e. about 250 years after the death of Muhammad. The change took place in a war in A.D. 683 between the Umayyads in Damascus and Abdullah Ibn al-Zabayr who declared himself Caliph of the "Holy City". Ibn al-Zabayr lost the war, demolished the "Holy City" and dug out many of its support structures as well as the "Black Stone" which he removed to Mecca and built the present Kaaba. The Umayyad army set out to destroy Petra (AH 73-74).

(AH is after the Hegira – the flight from Mecca to Medina ~ Sept. AD 672. This year became AH 1. However the Muslim year is not a solar year but a lunar year of 12 'new moons' and so is shorter.)

The current ruins of Petra were caused by a huge earthquake in A.D. 713. In about AH 82 mosque buildings began to change their Qibla (the direction of prayer) from Petra (not Jerusalem but Petra) to Mecca. So Petra as a trading centre died after the birth of Islam largely due to a number of earthquakes. Dan Gibson's book, Qur'anic Geography is well worth reading.

The Biblical promises relating to Kedar and Nebaioth

Kedar: Isaiah 42:10-13, 16

10. ***"Sing to the Lord a new song,***
His praise from the ends of the earth.
You who go down to the sea and all that fills it,
And coastlands and their inhabitants.

11. ***Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice***
The villages that Kedar inhabits.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy.
Let them shout from the top of the mountains.

12. ***Let them give glory to the Lord and declare His praise in the coastlands.***

13. ***The Lord goes out like a mighty man;***
Like a man of war He stirs up His zeal.
He cries out; He shouts aloud,
He shows Himself mighty against His foes.

16. ***And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know,***
in paths that they have not known I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I do and I do not forsake them."

This is a summons to the whole world to sing and to sing a new song in response to a new realisation of the goodness and faithfulness of God. Kedar represents the Bedouin of Arabia in a generic sense. So here in a generic way these verses speak of the Bedouin of the desert, the Arab fishermen of the Red Sea reefs and the pearl divers and fishermen of the Gulf.

When will these prophecies be fulfilled? It describes the present and future state of the peoples of Arabia! Kedar have forsaken their nomadic tents and have been urbanised. Riyadh in the Nejd currently has a population of nearly 5 million people. New cities are being created in Arabia – on the coastlands, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE and Oman are all increasingly urbanised. The only proper name in this passage as a geographic centre of the entire chapter is Kedar. In two other prophecies (Is. 21:13-17 and Jer. 49:28-33) that have no Messianic character, Kedar is referred to as synonymous with the Bedouin.

The whole passage is in the context of an immense spiritual battle. The mighty warrior is the Mighty God! Clearly a time is coming when the Bedouin increasingly forsake their tents for cities. God has been silent for nearly 1500 years in Arabia during which time Muhammad apparently said Arabia should only be inhabited by Muslims – a period of divine restraint (v. 14). The Mighty Warrior (the Lord Jesus) also became a Rescuer – leading the blind (the work of a slave!). Also He will overcome ignorance – ("a way they have not known") and He will remove barriers so there is no hindrance ("turn darkness into light") and no one will stumble ("the rough places smooth"). There is a revelation of divine determination! In Is. 42:17 there is a description of how this great Warrior God comes face-to-face with His Satanic enemy and how Satan falls before him – "Utterly put to shame and his followers are doomed".

These verses in conjunction with all the other more general promises, leave no room for doubt that these sons of Ishmael have a great place in the coming glory of the Lord and the brightness of His rising. This has only been delayed by our neglect in evangelising the Arab peoples of the Peninsula.

Nebaioth: the firstborn son of Ishmael

Isaiah 60:1-7: The context of this passage is the coming of the Anointed Conqueror (59:14-63:6). It speaks of the Lord's city and the consummation of all the promises of Abrahamic blessings. It is the consummation of the worldwide purposes of God!

1. ***"Arise, shine, for your light has come,***
   and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

2. ***For behold, darkness shall cover the earth***
   and thick darkness the peoples.
   (This is true of all Muslim peoples!)
   <u>But</u> the Lord will arise upon you,
   and His glory will be seen upon you.

3. ***And nations shall come to your light,***
   and kings to the brightness of your rising.

4. ***Lift up your eyes all around and see;***
   they all gather together they come to you,
   your sons from afar and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.

5. ***Then you shall see and be radiant,***
   your heart shall thrill and exalt …
   And the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

6. ***A multitude of camels will cover you, young camels of Midian and Ephah;***
   all those from Sheba (Yemen) will come, they will bring gold and frankincense,
   and will bear "good news" of the praises of the Lord.

7. ***All the flocks of Kedar will be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth will minister to you.***
   They will go up with acceptance on My altar and I shall beautify My glorious house."

Isaiah is the only Old Testament prophet who uses the metaphor of "light" to a notable extent. The people who come to the light are not just bathed in light; they are irradiated – inwardly charged with new outshining life! Why? ***"For your light has come."*** This is aimed at a world in need. The Lord's glory – the Lord in all the glory of His person and majesty – has appeared. The **dawn** of His brightness was over 2000 years ago and a worldwide re-gathering is happening – the winning of the nations by the Gospel being preached. And as they gather, they come telling the "good news" of the Lord's praises. And the Lord fully accepts their offerings and gifts.

So this is the list of Arab peoples:

Midian – Abraham's son by the concubine Keturah (they lived on the East Bank of Jordan among the Moabites and in Gideon's day had perfected highly mobile warfare using camels. So the dreaded spoilers of Gideon's day now become the welcome worshippers.)

Ephah is east of the Gulf.

Sheba (Yemen) is in the deep south.

Nebaioth is the west side of the Arabian Peninsula.

Kedar is in the centre of Arabia.

So these Arabian peoples are converted, but more, they are seen as "evangelists" – bringers of the "Good News"!

Their flocks are accepted, not to provide animals for the altar but as partaking of the benefits of the altar (the Cross). The rest of the poem is a wonderful description of the nations serving in the New Jerusalem and being transformed by the Lord and the Lord being the light of the new city (Revelation 21:22-27).

Sheba and Seba

Another group of special promises for Arabia cluster round the names **Sheba** and **Seba**.

Sheba is the land in south west Arabia – modern Yemen – whose Queen visited Solomon. Seba (both the people and the land) were closely related to Sheba.

Psalm 72:10: ***" … may kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before Him, all nations serve Him."***

Psalm 72:15: ***" ... long may He live, may gold of Sheba be given to Him …!"***

This is clearly a Messianic Psalm.

Isaiah 60:6: ***"All those from Sheba will come; they will bring gold and frankincense and will bear "good news" of the praises of the Lord."***

Before the rise of Islam there was quite a large number of Christians in Yemen.

The people of Sheba for much of the 1st millennium BC were heavily engaged in commerce. Gold, frankincense, spices and jewels were transported from Aden up to the Mediterranean ports by camels. Joel 3:8 mentions that they were also engaged in the slave trade.

The successive capitals were Seba, Sana Zaphar and now Sana'a. Seba, the oldest capital, is identified with the present Marib. In the past, the land of Yemen was a land of gold and incense and of great opulence and glory – especially at the height of the Himyarite Kingdom of Yemen. The Romans called Yemen "Arabia Felix" (happy Arabia).

The Beginning of the fulfilment of all these promises

Acts 2:11 - On the day of Pentecost it mentions that ***"Arabians"*** heard the Gospel as the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke in Arabic about the mighty works of God.

The growth of the church in Arabia is told in a paper **Christianity in pre-Islamic Arabia**. It is a story of great encouragement but also with a sad end.

Conclusion

Although Arabia has this tremendous wealth of promises, it is not an area to exercise feeble faith. Yet **because of these promises** we can learn to look at this spiritually barren land with the same reckless, calculating, defiant confidence in which Abraham, ***"Without being weakened in faith, faced the fact that his body was as good as dead … but did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but grew strong through faith giving glory to God."*** (Rom. 4:19-20)

The promises are great because the obstacles are great so that the glory of the plan, as well as the glory of the work, may be to God alone.

The peoples of Arabia need men and women who will believe 'as seeing One who is invisible' – the All-victorious Lord Jesus. The spirit of Islam has possessed the peoples of Arabia for over 1400 years! In Mk. 9:14-29 we read the account of a dumb boy being brought to the disciples by his father. But they couldn't cast out the evil spirit that was the cause of the dumbness. The Lord Jesus came and said to the father, ***"All things are possible for one who believes"***! The disciples asked Him afterwards why they couldn't cast him out. He said, ***"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer"***!

Everlasting life for the peoples of Arabia must come from the Life Giver. We often declare, **"I believe in the Holy Spirit"**. So the abundant harvest will come to Arabia and this will demonstrate that all the promises of God have proved, in every particular and to their fullest extent, to be completely true.

So Abraham's prayer, ***"O that Ishmael might live … As for Ishmael I have heard"*** will be fulfilled completely.

2. Three Burning Questions

Introduction

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us!
No people has risen above its religion and no religion has been greater than its idea of God.

The most important question is what, in the depths of our hearts, do we conceive God to be like – for we tend to be controlled by our mental image of God. The most revealing thing about us is what we say about God – or leave unsaid! We can never escape the self-disclosure that comes when we talk about God.

It is absolutely crucial that our idea of God corresponds to the actual true and living God. Creedal statements are irrelevant if our ideas are buried under the rubbish of conventional religious ideas.

We need a painful self-probing – not systematic theology – for the Bible reveals that man's greatest problem is idolatry – an idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He really is! Idolatry is substituting a self-created god for the True God.

Ps. 50:21: ***"You thought that I was one like yourself."***

So the essence of idolatry is thinking thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.

Rom. 1:21: ***"For even though they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks ...."***

Idolatry begins in the mind. We imagine things about God and then act as if they were true. But both we and our Muslim friends have **the same problem**. In order to worship God and God alone, we must know Him as He really is.

In sharing the Gospel we need to start with what we have **in common** – a desire to worship God.

Are we worshipping the same God? Some factors to consider:

- **Trying to think Biblically about Muslims**

"Sarah saw *(Ishmael)* ***mocking."*** Gen. 21:9

"God heard the boy *(Ishmael)* ***crying."*** Gen. 21:17

The one (Sarah) saw Ishmael as a rival, a competitor and an enemy. The other (God) saw a boy in need, crying for water, alone and dying in the desert. Sadly, we are more like Sarah as we look at the sons of Ishmael – the Arabs – and, by extension, all spiritual followers of Arabia's most famous son – Muhammad.

Muslims are not slow to sense how we regard them. Today there is as wide a communication gap between Muslims and Christians as there has ever been. Our human tendency is to blame Muslims for this wall of misunderstanding and dismiss them all as ignorant and fanatical.

So we need to ask the question, **"Why are Muslims so resistant to the Gospel?"** Often we assume all Muslims have seen such a wonderful display of God's grace and love in the Christians they have met – if not in person then in films, satellite TV and the media – that the blame for their failure to come to faith in the Lord Jesus falls on them.

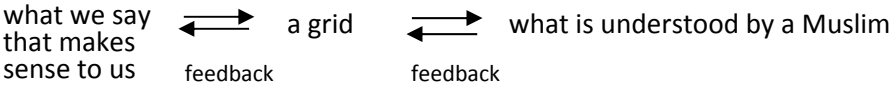
Is this a true or logical assumption? Are we being fair to Muslims? I have not found Muslims particularly resistant to talking about eternal, spiritual things – about God, how to worship Him aright, how to live a pure life, how to help children grow up morally pure etc. In fact most Muslims are friendly especially when they recognise you as a "godly" person. In many ways evangelism among Muslims is easier than evangelism among post-modern secular humanists who want God to die.

- **Three Basic Convictions**

1. We must try to **think Biblically** about Muslims.
2. We need to understand the mind of Muslims – what does it mean to a Muslim to be a Muslim? My generalisations won't be accurate for all Muslims. Islamists are trying to get all Muslims to

conform to the Shariah that details how the prophet Muhammad lived in 7th century bedouin culture. In many countries throughout the Muslim World there is strong Arabisation to "bedouin culture". The Shi'a' and other Islamic groups strongly resist this.

3. We need to reflect on the process of communication



- **The grid**: language difficulties
  non-verbal behaviour
  cultural and worldview framework

  The result: false attributions – usually all negative
  miscommunication
  stereotypes
  an increase of ethno-centrism

So the potential for miscommunication is huge. How can we reduce this? We must make every attempt to do this at least from our side.

➢ **Some historical problems underlying Muslim/Christian difficulties**

- **Muhammad and Christians in Arabia**

  Muhammad met many Christians during his life both up in Syria when he was a trader and in Mecca. Sadly most of these 'Christians' were heretical. Three religious powers sought to control Arabia at the time of Muhammad – the Greek Orthodox Byzantine Empire, the Monophysites from Axum in Ethiopia who were very anti-Greek Orthodox and the Sassanid Empire that used priests from the Nestorian Church of the East to exert their influence. So the 'Christianity' Muhammad met was politically charged and very diverse theologically. The Scriptures were not translated into Arabic until the 8th century. So Muhammad came across distorted and often corrupt forms of Christianity. Almost certainly he was never "presented with the Gospel".

- **The Crusades**

  To Arab minds these confirmed that 'Christians' have their minds set only on political and economic power. Some Crusaders were extremely brutal. They slaughtered large numbers of Christians, Jews and Muslims indiscriminately. They destroyed and robbed wherever they went. (Remember the 4th Crusade where they attacked the Greek Orthodox in Constantinople – raped Christian women and plundered the place severely weakening the Byzantine Empire.) The Crusades brought shame on the name of Christianity and after 900 years that is still present.

- **The Colonial Period**

  The British, Dutch, French, Spanish and Portuguese conquered large parts of the Muslim World. In about 1900, 90% of all Muslims lived under 'Christian' colonial rule. Some of this rule was beneficial – the Muslim 'elite' were exposed to science, western industrialisation and good administration. But this period brought very great shame on Muslims. Often 1900 is considered the nadir (lowest point) of Muslim culture and sense of honour. Muslims have power in the world today, but the perception is that the 'Christian' west is increasingly trying to restrict and impede the growth of Muslim self-respect and honour.

- **Polemic attacks on the Qur'an, Muhammad and the Hadith**

  These polemic attacks are not new, but they have increased since 9/11. There has been some useful research on early manuscripts of the Qur'an – variant texts etc. and on the historicity of some of the events in Muhammad's life. There has also been research on the validity of the

Hadith, but mainly by western scholars. This research rarely gets into the general media, which is often ill-informed and wants to reduce very complex issues to simplistic slogans.

All this has accelerated since 9/11, the Iraq war and the situation in Afghanistan. Again, these attacks, particularly on Muhammad (e.g. the Danish cartoons), inflame Muslims worldwide and increase what is often called "Muhammad veneration".

In terms of polemics (aggressively attacking your opponents), it was said of polemic attacks by Christians on rationalists, agnostics and atheists in the 19th and early 20th centuries that:

"Proofs of the existence of God have made many sceptics.
The declaration of the love of God has made many saints."

Polemic arguments rarely make friends, let alone introduce people to the Lord Jesus. Polemics assumes that the war is in the realm of ideas and those who hold them. See Eph. 6:12,

"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Polemic attitudes have largely influenced European Christianity probably since 325 AD when the official religion of the Roman Empire was declared to be Christianity.

- **Degraded western culture – low in moral principles, filled with immorality and greed**

  For most Muslims western culture is synonymous with Christianity. With the advent of satellite TV and oil wealth (so tourism to the west is possible), Muslims around the world are increasingly shocked and repelled by 'Christian culture' – its immorality, its violence and greed. Little wonder many see Islamic banking as more moral than western capitalist banking. Satellite TV is often filled with pornographic images. When you talk to Muslims about the Lord Jesus it seems to them that you are 'selling western culture'. They will be very cautious and hesitate to listen.

- **Christian Zionism**

  All Muslims – especially Arabs – are upset that 'Christian' countries indiscriminately support the 'Zionist State' of Israel. So when Israel violates International Law, 'Christian' nations do nothing and don't even try to justify the Israeli actions. This goes back to the Balfour Declaration of 1917. This is a complex issue for us, but to Muslims – especially Arabs – it is very simple: 'Christians hate Muslims and have no sense of justice and they are using the Jews (mainly of European extraction) to be a 'thorn in the side' of the Muslim World and deprive Muslims of access to their third holiest city – Jerusalem (after Mecca and Medina).'

- **The spiritual and physical neglect of Muslim countries**

  Around 1900 AD about 1% of the world's missionaries worked among Muslim peoples. Samuel Zwemer produced a devastating report about the neglect of the Muslim World in 1910 for a conference in Cairo. By the early 1960s – i.e. 50 years later – this number had increased to about 2%. Data is much harder to get now for agencies are reluctant to release numbers and locations, but it is estimated that the current number is around 10%. This is encouraging. The extra numbers are really making a difference!

  Still about 24% of the world's population are Muslims. Most unreached people groups are Muslim peoples. There are still many Muslim unreached people groups where there is no one from anywhere seeking to share the Gospel with them.

  The second false perception is that all Muslims are in oil-rich states. The reality is that millions of Muslims are among the poorest people in the world. They not only need the Gospel. They also need great material help in terms of development and wealth creation.

- **Extracting believers from a Muslim background out of their own culture**

  Over the last two hundred years mission work has tended to follow a common pattern:

- ✓ A person becomes a seeker and then a believer. His/her friendship with the expatriate is kept secret from his/her family. This is because the family would almost certainly remove him from the 'foreign' influence.
- ✓ The person is secretly baptised and then extracted out of his/her family and culture and given new name and a Christian background identity. Usually he/she gets employment far away in a Christian institution to prevent him/her being killed.

The consequences of this over the years have been extremely negative. The Muslim family viewed conversion as apostasy. Under Muslim Law it was punishable by death. When expatriates extracted family members it was tantamount to kidnapping them. Christian workers were looked on with deep suspicion, but were usually protected by the colonial powers from direct retaliation.

The family were very resistant to the Gospel. This means that we did not see 'family' conversion. Remember:

- ✦ Noah was saved **and his family**
- ✦ Rahab was saved **and her family**
- ✦ Cornelius was saved **and his family**
- ✦ Lydia and the Roman jailor were both saved **and their respective families**

Extracting BMBs (believers from a Muslim background) has slowed down the journey of their families to faith and in many cases has made such a journey impossible.

- **Rationalising our failure**

I think we have succumbed to rationalising our failure by making the assumption that Muslims are harder to reach with the Gospel than anyone else. The reason given is that more than any other group of people on earth they are in a satanic grip. Biblically they are no more in Satan's grip than anyone else – Hindus, atheists or animists!

➢ **Dealing with our prejudices**

- **Psalm 106:6:** ***"We have sinned with our fathers"***

There is so much Islamophobia in the western church. We need to speak with a spirit of humility, for we have done much wrong – the historical problems over the last 1400 years. Huge walls of mistrust and misunderstanding have been built and many of these walls have been built by us.

- **Mt. 5:43-47:** ***"You have heard that it is said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun to rise on the just and unjust. For if you love those who love you what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"***

We must avoid any 'them' and 'us' distinction. Both they and we are seeking to worship God correctly in a way that will please Him. Assume that your Muslim friends are God-fearing. We both know idolatry is very wrong and we **must** worship God in the way **God** desires and not as we please.

- **Gen. 20:1-18:** This is the story of Abraham's visit to King Abimelech. Abraham was afraid the king would kill him and take Sarah as his wife. So he persuaded Sarah to say she was his sister. (Sarah was about 80 years old and apparently still looking stunning! Did God restore her youthfulness?) In v. 11 Abraham explains why he lied. He says, ***"I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God in this place and they will kill me because of my wife.' "***

Abraham sinned because he was afraid. God is speaking to Muslims in dreams – as He did to

Abimelech – and through His Word. It is safe to assume that God is, in some way, preparing your friend to listen to you. Don't be afraid like Abraham and 'lie' in some way.

- Note the Biblical progression of the story of the conversion of the Samaritans:
  - **Luke 10:25-37**: The story of the Good Samaritan is very shocking/insulting to the Jewish listeners! The person you least expect to show kindness does so. There are parallel attitudes/phobias between Jews/Samaritans and Christians/Muslims. I wonder if the Samaritans heard this story Jesus told? They would have been amazed that a Jewish rabbi thought well of a Samaritan!
  - **John 4:9-42**: The woman at the well – clearly Jesus loved Samaritans. He broke cultural taboos to show them who He was. He started by putting Himself in a position of need.
  - **Acts 1:8**: Remember the Samaritans! The Lord Jesus commissions His Jewish disciples not to forget the Samaritans.
  - **Acts 8: 14-17**: Samaritans were baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit.

  The disciples began by thinking the Samaritans were unredeemable – outside any covenant promise. Gradually they began to realise that their resistance to loving these people was the main obstacle. It took Philip – not one of the original disciples – to bring the breakthrough. Philip was a Hellenised Jew with less cultural baggage. Our prejudices hinder us. We must allow the Holy Spirit to take them away.

- **Acts 9:10-19:** Here is another source of prejudice. Was Saul really converted or was it a trick? This is the attitude of the persecuted church made up of Christian background believers in Muslim countries. Ananias had his doubts. Note v. 26: ***"He*** (Saul) ***was trying to associate with the disciples and they were afraid of him, not believing he was a disciple."***

  It is true that sometimes (rarely in fact) we are tricked and then betrayed. As a foreigner this leads to arrest and deportation. But fear of this improbability is so great that we fear **all** seekers after faith in the Lord Jesus.

- **Acts 10:28, 34:** Peter said, ***"God has shown me…."*.** Peter needed a profound spiritual experience – three times repeated – to shake him out of his prejudices! Like Peter, we all tend to be racist and ethnocentric. Ask God to reveal to you your prejudices and then help you to get rid of them.

➢ **Exploring Biblical models to understand Muhammad**

- **Matt. 24:11:** ***"And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray."***

  This is the Lord Jesus speaking about the close of the age. So was Muhammad a false prophet? If so, was it altogether Muhammad's fault?

- **1 Jn. 2:18-23; 4:1-3:** ***"Beloved don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist who you heard was coming and now is in the world already."***

  These two passages are equivocal in terms of Muhammad. No Muslim denies that Sayyid Isa al-Masih comes from God and that He is the Messiah. In Latin 'anti' has the sense of 'against', but in Greek it has the sense of **'a substitute'**.

  Certainly as Islam has developed Muhammad is seen as a substitute for the Lord Jesus. In the 20th century there has been an elevation of the position of Muhammad. Technically the Lord Jesus is the Word of God – which the Qur'an affirms. But in reality, Muslims take the Qur'an as God's final word. So in both senses the Lord Jesus has been substituted.

- **Judges 6-8:** The story of Gideon. There are similarities between Gideon and Muhammad:
  - Both led a campaign against idolatry.
  - Both rallied the tribes against their enemies and led their armies into battle.
  - In later life both deteriorated morally.

  So Muhammad was 'chronologically' AD (~ 630) but 'informationally' he was (about 1200 BC!).

➢ **Learning to Pray for Muslims**

- **Gen. 16:1-15:** The angel of the Lord (a theophany) appeared to Hagar as she was running away from Sarah towards her homeland – Egypt. The Angel of the Lord told her to return to her mistress and submit to her. She was given a promise that her offspring would greatly multiply, ***"So they cannot be numbered"***. Then the Angel of the Lord gave her a promise and a prophecy. ***"You shall call his name Ishmael*** (God will hear)**"**.

  In Hagar there was clearly a genuine inward participation in the faith of Abraham. Ishmael is the 'father' of the Arab peoples of north and central Arabia. Muhammad claimed to be a descendant of Ishmael. Whatever happened to the Arab peoples subsequently, enshrined in their progenitor's name is the fact that God hears our prayers for these people.

- **Gen. 17:** God gives Abraham the covenant of circumcision. In v. 23 we read, ***"Then Abraham took Ishmael his son … and he circumcised the flesh … that very day."***

  In verses 15-17 God promised another son to Abraham. There was unbelief in Abraham's heart and he prayed, "***O that Ishmael might live before you."*** It was a prayer that Ishmael too would be under God's covenant blessing.

  God's answers Abraham that he will have a son called Isaac and that God will establish an everlasting covenant with Isaac's offspring. Then in v. 20 God says, ***"As for Ishmael, I have heard you."*** Many believe that in some sense they too are part of the covenant blessing of God. Certainly all Muslims are faithful to the covenant sign.

- **1 Tim. 2:1-5:** Paul gives instruction on how we are to pray for 'all people' (v. 1). The context is praying for those in authority – the rulers of the nations. We are to pray for, ***"All people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men – the man Christ Jesus".***

  It is clearly God's desire to save Muslims! We need to pray that, ***"We*** (the workers) ***may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."*** It is in this environment that our Muslim friends will be most open to the Gospel.

- **Acts 4:29-30:** The context is one of responding to threats. The Temple authorities had threatened Peter and John: ***"When they were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them."*** Then they prayed.

  Prayer is the most appropriate response to threats. It is interesting to note what they **didn't pray for**. They didn't pray for protection, but they did pray for boldness. "***Enable your servants to speak Your Word with boldness and confidence …. While You stretch out Your hands to heal and signs and wonders are performed through Your name…."***

  God will do His part – authenticating the truth of our words – if we will speak His Word with boldness. In Eph. 6:19 Paul asks the Ephesian believers to pray for him, "***That words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel."***

These should be models of prayers we should pray for ourselves as we go to speak to Muslims:

- ✓ A prayer for effective communication – building bridges not walls
- ✓ A prayer for confidence and boldness
- ✓ A prayer that God will authenticate His message through us with signs and wonders

The Three Burning Questions

1. Is the God of Islam the same as the God of the Bible?

- This is a burning question! It is also a trick question like the question, 'Have you stopped beating your wife?' You are in trouble whether you say, 'Yes' or 'No'!
- An illustration: A coin is at the bottom of a glass of water. Looking down, do you see the coin? Yes. Do you see where it is? No. Refraction is taking place. There is its 'real depth' and its 'apparent depth'.
- In the experience of believers from a Muslim background (BMBs) the answer is equivocal. It is both 'yes' and 'no'!

So what are the similarities? What are the differences? Is there enough in common so we can use the same word?

➢ The Qur'an affirms the God of the Bible

Sura 29:45-46: *"Dispute not with the People of the Book* (Christians) *except with what is better, unless it be those of them that have done wrong; … and say, 'We believe in what has been sent down to us and what has been sent down to you; our God and your God are one and we are those who surrender."*

Again in sura 22:40: *"Our Lord is Allah, for had it not been for Allah's repelling some men by means of others, cloisters and churches and oratories and mosques wherein the name of Allah is oft mentioned would assuredly have been pulled down."*

The implication from these Qur'anic passages is that the same true God is worshipped in both mosque and church. So Muslims say we worship the same God! It is probably best not to deny this the first time you meet!

➢ The source and meaning of the word Allah

- The Arabic word for 'a god' (ilah) is derived from a Semitic root and is similar to the Biblical Hebrew words el, eloha and elohim. In Aramaic the equivalent word is 'alaha'. The Arabic term for God is derived from Al (the definite article – 'the') and ilah (god). Al+ilah (the God) is contracted to Allah.
- In the pantheistic cultures of ~2000 BC in the Fertile Crescent 'El' was considered the **'Supreme God'**. The writers of the Bible, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were willing to use the word pagans used for the 'Supreme God'. But they **redefined** it to mean **the one and only true and living God**. For example:

  Ex. 6:3: El-Shaddai – God Almighty

  Gen. 14:18-24: El-Elyon – God Most High

  Beth-el – the House of God in Hebrew

  Gen. 20:1-7: Abraham and King Abimelech used the same name of God.

- Arab Christians used 'Allah' as the name of God **before** the birth of Muhammad. The first use of 'Allah' in 'Christian' Arabic is in a tri-lingual Greek/Syriac/Arabic inscription in Zabad (near Aleppo in Syria) dated 512 AD.
- In pre-Islamic Arabia 'Al-ilah' was used for the creator high god who stood above a multitude of lesser Gods worshipped by various Arab tribes. In Mecca he was not represented by an idol. The pagan Arabs focussed their devotion on these lesser deities that served as intermediaries between humans and the High God.
- So Muhammad used the same word as the monotheists (Jews and Christians) for the one and only true God.

- In the Ka'aba in Mecca in Muhammad's time a whole pantheon of images of these lesser gods were kept and stored – about 360 of them. They were regularly brought out, paraded and worshipped. The Ka'aba is now empty and has been since 630 AD when Muhammad captured the city and destroyed the idols.

  (Three of the most popular of these idols were the 'daughters of Allah'. It may be because of this that Muslims so strongly object to the term 'Son of God'. It reminds them of their idolatrous past.)

- Muhammad used the only possible word in Arabic in the context of a polytheistic culture. So Muslims say we worship the same God – the God of Abraham.

➢ What do we say as Biblically-oriented Christians?

Some say a qualified. 'Yes'! Others say, 'No'! The reason for the qualifications is that **the Qur'an is referring to the God of the Bible, yet it does not affirm everything in the Bible about God**. It even denies things clearly taught in the Bible. Christians believe the fullest extent of God's revelation is in Jesus Christ. We believe the fullest, most complete expression of the love of God is in Jesus and in His self-giving love as He gave Himself on the Cross. Muslims deny this!

The whole concept of the incarnation – that God was in Christ – is definitely rejected by Muslims. Many believe the Qur'an rejects the death of Jesus (although this isn't a necessary conclusion).

So God as **subject** – Yes! We worship the same God. But God as **object** – what He is like and what He does – No!

➢ Our Major Concern about God : Areas of Common Ground

In the Old Testament – at least until the Exile – the man concern about God was His **uniqueness** in the midst of a polytheistic culture. We are both monotheists. This is a major emphasis of Islam:

Muslims: *"There is no God but God."*

The Bible (Deut. 6:4): ***"The Lord our God is one Lord."***

This is the major message of the Meccan suras in the Qur'an. There is only one God – idol worship is wrong and will bring God's condemnation.

- **The Attributes of God**
  Most of the attributes of God are the same in Christianity and in Islam. The 99 names of God refer to God's attributes. The major difference between our Muslim friends and us is that Biblical revelation adds another name to the list – Father!

  This is denied in the Qur'an. God does not beget – i.e. He does not have children. Sura 5:116 says, *"God shall say, 'O Jesus, Son of Mary, have you said to mankind, 'Take me and my Mother as two Gods beside God?' He* (Jesus) *shall say, 'It is not for me to say that which I know is not true.'"*

  There are other passages stating that God has no son. For an orthodox Muslim 'Father' is much too human a word for God. God is "wholly other". It is unthinkable that He would so pollute Himself as to become human. God is too great a being to incarnate Himself. It is almost blasphemy to call God "Father". It is extreme presumption for a mere human being to assume a relationship with this exalted, eternal 'being'.

  Both the Bible and the Qur'an speak of God as a Covenant God – God makes an agreement or a contract with His people in which the people make a commitment to obey and follow. But in the Qur'an this concept of covenant is marginal. See sura 7:172-173.

  In the Bible this concept of covenant is absolutely central. This is an aspect of Biblical revelation that we must teach to our friends – especially to believers from a Muslim background. They need to understand this. We should start in Genesis with the covenant with Noah and then build on this with Abraham.

In many of the other attributes of God **the words used are the same but the content of the word and the emphasis of its meaning are different. Here are some examples:**

- **The Sovereignty of God**: We both believe in this, but in Islam it is emphasised so strongly that everything else about God is controlled by it. Look at the **means of salvation**. The Qur'an says God forgives whom He wills and does not forgive whom He wills. God is sovereign and nothing can limit the freedom of His actions. Our goodness or badness cannot limit God's choice. So the **assurance of salvation** is impossible for any human being because this would limit the sovereign will of God. So any **means of salvation** – such as atonement – is unnecessary because God is always free to save whomever He likes.

  The Christian perspective is very different. (Rom. 3:21-26) God wants to display His righteousness (moral purity and justice). So when a sin has been committed it must be punished by death. But God is love and He loves us. So God punished Himself in the person of His Son. Christ took upon Himself my sins. So God remains **just** – in that sin has been punished – but He is loving in that He, Himself, bore that punishment in our place. The whole concept of the atonement is central in the Bible and completely absent from the Qur'an. In the Bible God's sovereignty is balanced by His love and His righteousness.

- **The Love of God:** I have often heard it said that the God of Islam is not a God of love. Our friends are upset by this since it is not true! One of the 99 names is '**wudud'** (The Loving One). However, the meaning and the content of the word is different. In Islam the major emphasis is on **reciprocal love** – sura 3:31 "*Say: If you love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. Allah is forgiving, merciful … But if they turn away, Allah does not love disbelievers."*

  God loves those who do good, but hates those who do evil. **It is a reciprocal love – a conditional love.**

  [Aside: I am sometimes asked how can Muslim fundamentalists in Afghanistan, Sudan, Algeria etc. be so murderous. How can they slaughter innocent people in the name of God? The answer is that in Islam you do not have to love the unworthy. God hates sinners and so should we!]

  In contrast, the God of the Bible **is Love** (1 Jn. 4:8) and this love is **unconditional.**

  Rom. 5:8: ***"God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***

Here is love reaching the unlovely. 1 Jn. 4:10: ***"In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins."*** Because we believe in a God of unconditional love, we Christians must always demonstrate unconditional love!

There are always a few exceptions:

a) **Mu'tazilites** (dissenters – separatists) an early sect in Islam – strong in Egypt but long since died out. They strongly emphasized the love of God and man's freewill.

b) **Sufi literature** – there are many beautiful poems about the unconditional love of God.

Finally, in comparing Islam with Christianity it is vital to **visualise** the various terms and attributes that refer to God. Don't think conceptually! **Visualise!**

The Qur'an describes God as **King** – as a **Lawgiver**. It also describes Him as a **trader** and a **businessman**. A PhD thesis by a German scholar (Jeffrey) is entitled: **The Commercial-Theological terms in the Qur'an**. It demonstrates that many concepts of God used in the Qur'an originated from Muhammad's experience as a caravan trader:

- ✧ You can make a deal with God
- ✧ The idea of balances
- ✧ Exchange and barter terms

In the Bible God is **King** and **Lawgiver**, but He is also **Father**. This great attribute qualifies everything. In the Qur'an God is merciful, but it is the mercy of a remote and exalted king. In the Bible God is merciful but it is the mercy of a kind and loving Father.

This wholly different emphasis in the nature and character of God is reflected in:

a) the decisions of the major 'spokesmen' – Muhammad and Jesus

b) prayer – compare Al-Fatiha with the Lord's Prayer

[Aside: When looking up a verse in the Qur'an, you may not find what you are looking for – i.e. 29:45 is 29:46 in some Qur'ans. The versifications are additional and different ones are used in different parts of the Muslim World. I have used Arberry's translation – based on Flugal's edition of the Qur'an that is normally used by western translators. If you can't find a verse try looking + or – five verses!

Arberry is the best English translation of the Qur'an. Don't use Yusuf Ali!! The Qur'an is written in poetic prose with a strong rhythm. This is usually lost in translations. Arberry has tried to recapture the poetry by writing in blank verse. It is also accurate. The problem is that Arberry only marks every 5th verse and so it is difficult to look up anything!]

✓ **Liturgy**

The phrase beginning *"Bismullah……" "In the name of God the beneficent and merciful"* is widely used on many occasions – as a grace – on top of exam papers etc.

The phrase has been found in many pre-Islamic inscriptions in Yemen and so was 'borrowed' into Islam – see Ex. 34:6 "***The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious."*** Also Middle East Orthodox Christians use, "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" in the same way – i.e. as a talisman to ward off evil.

✓ **Practice and Attitudes**

- **Submission to the will of God**

  Our friends: sura 3:18 *"I have submitted myself to God."*

  Us: James 4:7 ***"Submit yourselves to God."***

  The words 'Islam' and 'Muslim' are derived from the root word **'to submit'**. We too, submit ourselves to God!

  Sura 3:18 says, *"Verily, the religion of God is Islam and if unbelievers dispute with you say 'I have submitted myself to God' "* – i.e. 'I am a Muslim'.

- **In-shallah – 'If God wills'**

  Our friends: Sura 18:23

  Us: James 4:15

This phrase is used in many contexts. It may mean 'yes' or' no'!

'Yes I expect so, but everything is in God's hands' or 'No, I am not going to do it, but let us blame someone else rather than myself!'

James – a Semitic person – wrote to Jewish people from a Semitic background – all following the law. Arabs – also Semitic peoples – understand James very easily. Luther found it hard to understand and rather dismissed it.

➢ Our Major Concern about God : Areas of Difference

These arise out of our common concern to worship God aright.

✓ **The problem of 'shirk' and the Trinity**

This is probably the greatest problem our friends have with the Christian faith. If we are to worship God aright we need to understand God as He really is. This leads our Muslim friends to **reject** the Trinity and their **motives** for doing so are right! The Muslim position is as follows:

- Worshipping anyone but God is sin. It is the greatest sin – idolatry!

- Adding anything to God is just as bad – this is the sin of **'shirk'**. To make an ordinary man a god is the height of folly and blasphemy.

Christians are rebuked in the Qur'an for their belief in the Trinity:

Sura 4:169: *"O you People of the Book, overstep not the bounds of your religion …. The Messiah, Jesus, Son of Mary is only an apostle of God and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary and a Spirit proceeding from Himself. Believe therefore in God and his apostles and* ***say not three****…. God is only one God. Far be it from His glory that he should have a son."*

Sura 5:77 *"They are surely infidels who say God is the third of 3, for there is no God but one God!"*

To understand our friends' rejection of the Trinity you need to understand the background.

a) **Polytheism**: There was a highly idolatrous situation in Mecca at the time of Mohammad. Some of the more popular lesser deities were the 'daughters of Allah'. These were worshipped in Mecca and in the whole of Arabia. Muhammad quite rightly rejected these false deities. God is not immoral. He has no biological daughters and no biological sons either!

b) **As Christians we need to repent and confess it is our fault Muslims misunderstand the Trinity**.

Most misunderstandings arose because of heretical Christians living in Arabia at the time of Muhammad. They lived outside the Byzantine Empire to avoid persecution.

- ✧ Sura 5:116 clearly indicates that Muhammad thought the Trinity was Allah, Jesus and Mary.
- ✧ There was a Christian sect called the Kalaridians in Arabia (reported by St. Epiphanius (a Greek Orthodox scholar of the 6th century). They believed Mary to be God and worshipped her and offered sacrifices to her. They actually said that the Trinity was 3 separate gods.
- ✧ There was excessive veneration of Mary in the Middle East church **then** and there is the same practice today. Coptic and Orthodox Christianity tends to reinforce this myth. Look at the works of art – icons etc. There is often a bigger halo around Mary than around Jesus!

So what the Qur'an rejects is tri-theism – i.e. sura 4:171: *"Believe … in God and say not three."*

Implication: If we understood what Muslims understand by the Trinity, we would reject it as well! We are not polytheists!

How to Share about the Trinity

We must be very careful not to add anything or person to God (shirk), but we must also be very careful not to subtract anything from God – this is equally bad.

- ⅄ We dare not mutilate God by separating Him from His Word and His Spirit.
- ⅄ God has revealed to some extent what He is like – **not** so that we might understand Him, but so we will worship Him aright.
- ⅄ Don't make the Trinity a major point of witness. We are to praise and worship the Triune God.
- ⅄ God has revealed Himself in human form so we can better understand Him. We are persons and ultimately we can only understand personality.
- ⅄ Christians have never raised a man, Jesus, to the position of the Godhead. No! The Bible teaches that God was incarnated in the person of Jesus.
- ⅄ Sadly, some Christians have so elevated Mary that it appears to our Muslim friends that we think we have the power to make Mary a goddess! This is not Biblical and we should say so.

A Christmas Story

An unbelieving farmer stays at home on Christmas Eve. His wife and family go to church. It is very cold. It is snowing and there is a blizzard. The farmer, sitting by the fire, hears a bird tapping with its beak on the window. The farmer goes outside and tries to get the bird to fly into the barn. He opens the

doors. It is warm in the barn but the bird doesn't understand. It panics and keeps trying to get through the window. The farmer is very frustrated and the bird is near exhaustion. The church bells ring. The farmer falls to his knees in tears. All of a sudden he realizes this is what God had to face! How could He let us know He loved us and wanted to save us? The farmer thought, 'O to be a bird to be able to tell that bird it was warm and safe in the barn!' So, he understood the incarnation – God in Christ is the guarantee we will understand God aright so we can worship Him aright – Jn. 14:9: ***"Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father".*** Jesus made God known.

The Holy Spirit (Jn. 15:13), who is the Spirit of Truth, has been sent to us to lead us into all truth (including the truth about God). The Spirit of Truth is the One who reveals and interprets God truly and exactly to us so that we can worship Him aright.

Both our Muslim friends and ourselves want to worship God aright, but we come to different conclusions. Our friends say that you can't add a man and a woman to God! We say God Incarnate and the Holy Spirit guarantee that our understanding of God is correct so we can worship Him.

How did the early disciples arrive at the truth of the nature of God?

- The early disciples weren't philosophers. They couldn't' have an erudite discussion on the transcendence vs. the immanence of God! They were simple Jewish villagers – mostly fishermen.
- As Jews they recited twice a day, ***'The Lord our God is One Lord'***. They believed this before they met Jesus, while they were with Jesus and they continued to believe it afterwards. All their lives they were monotheists.
- For three and a half years they lived with Jesus. They came to the observable conclusion that God was in Jesus. They didn't try and figure it out. They **experienced** it!
- They were cowardly – all forsook Jesus at His trial except John. (He didn't walk round with a sign, "I am a disciple. Kill me if you dare!") He kept a low profile.
- They **experienced** the resurrection. That was proof that Jesus was God. They **experienced** Pentecost! A power that was divine came to live in them! They changed from being cowards to being men who preached fearlessly about Jesus.
- They **experienced** God as a complexity. They worshipped Him as a complexity.
- The Trinity isn't a violation of God's unity. It is a way of understanding it. The Trinity isn't something to argue about or formulate. It is the way we are to experience God. We must introduce our Muslim friends to the faith by the same path as the early disciples – bring them into an experience of Jesus as Lord and Saviour before verbalizing our faith to them in creedal statements.

The complexity of God is not irrational or unbelievable

Beware of using the wrong models e.g. how can Jesus be fully God and fully man? If a glass is full of water, how can it be full of oil at the same time? Of course it cannot! But Jesus is not a glass!

An electron can be described as a particle (it has weight). It can also be described as a wave for it has some properties of waves. It can also be described as an area of negatively charged space. Clearly we cannot exactly describe an electron with words, so we must use approximations.

Electrons (and quarks) are primary matter and we can't adequately describe them. God is at the other end of the spectrum – infinite. It isn't irrational to suppose that we can't fully understand Him or describe Him adequately with words.

The higher the form of life – the greater is the complexity. Amoebas have a low form of unity and they are complex enough. Yet we as humans vastly more complex than amoebae are still one. Even so, we are much more similar to amoebas than to God! Unity is possible in diversity!

The complexity of God is to be expected – one, but diverse! By definition He is the highest form of life! In maths we need to introduce many dimensions (up to nine) to grapple with String Theory! God is more complex than we could ever hope to understand and describe. God can do all things, so if He reveals Himself as complex we can't argue with God and say we are baffled!

Scripture reveals that God is complex

We believe God is complex because Scripture says so! We don't believe it because we reasoned it out. There are Scriptures describing Him this way. He is described in a triune way in Mt. 28:19 and Jn. 14:16. Our Muslim friends have a similar problem about how to describe God. In the Qur'an there are many anthropomorphic terms. There are schools of law in Islam that argue and wrestle with these terms – 'the hand of God'; 'the foot of God' etc. They can't deny the Qur'an, so God has a hand because the Qur'an says so. Is the hand connected to an arm? No! So it's not like a human hand? No! What is it like? It is impossible to say! It is *"Without how"*.

A Warning

We need to stick very closely to the words of Scripture in our explanation of Scripture. Our orthodox formulations such as, *"Three persons in one substance"* can be misleading. Scripture never uses the word *'substance'* in connection with God. Even the word 'person' is a more individualistic concept today than it was in the 4th century world where they worked out Trinitarian formulae. The Greek word "personae" was used of an actor. One actor could put on three different masks during a play and be considered to be three different persons – one actor, three persons. So the theological terms in the creeds didn't have the same meaning then, when they were drawn up, as they do today.

So why do we believe in the triune nature of God? Because this is the way God has revealed Himself to be – '*without how'*. We can make four basic statements about the Trinity:

1. In the Bible there are three who are recognised as God.
2. The way they are described in Scripture compels us to think of them as distinct personalities.
3. The tri-personality of the Divine Nature is not merely economic – i.e. each having a different role or function. It is not just temporal, but eternal and imminent.
4. The tri-personality is not tri-theism since they have one essence and are equal.

So we, as Christians, understand and experience what **God does** and our relationship to Him. The Old Testament demonstrates that men who had faith in this Divine Unity (God) had a relationship with Him.

- ✧ Fellowship presupposes freewill.
- ✧ Freewill involves the possibility of evil.
- ✧ Experience shows that evil is a reality in separating us from fellowship with God.
- ✧ God's sovereignty requires this to be overcome – His love also demands it.
- ✧ God intervenes in history.
- ✧ God's love for man "begets" or "generates" the activity of redeeming love evident in the incarnate Jesus.
- ✧ The monotheists who lived with and experienced Jesus could only explain this redeeming experience by saying ***"God was in Christ"*** – God in self-revelation in Jesus.
- ✧ Evil is overcome.
- ✧ We can experience God's presence in a new way – joy, power and fellowship.

So the Biblical teaching about the Triune nature of God is always in the context of God's relationship with man. This relationship is the clue to His Nature.

Rough Parallels in Muslim Thought

- Our Friends have an objective, visible form of revelation – the Qur'an – believed to be eternal. We have an objective, visible form of the revelation of God – Jesus.
  "The Word was in the beginning with God. The Word was made flesh." (Jn. 1:1-14)
- Our friends sometimes experience inner revelations and have a subjective experience. This is especially true of Sufis who have many mystical experiences. We too, have an experience of God that is **subjective** – the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- Some people like to use illustrations such as: sun/heat/light or body/soul/spirit to show diversity. Like all models they have their limitations.

Another warning

In the Qur'an Jesus is given the titles: *"The Word of God"* and *"The Spirit of God"*. It is a mistake to put too strong a Biblical meaning into these terms! They can't be used as proof texts. There are two good books written by a Roman Catholic scholar called O'Shaunassy entitled: **The Word of God in the Qur'an** and **The Meaning of the Spirit in the Qur'an**. These books clearly demonstrate that Muhammad didn't have any idea of the Greek term 'logos'; neither had he heard of the Holy Spirit.

Islamic scholars maintain that the "spirit" occasionally refers to the Angel Gabriel, but more usually to an impersonal force. They also maintain that when the Qur'an says Jesus is the Word of God, it means that God said, "Be!" The creative word "Be" then passed into the womb of Mary and made her pregnant and Jesus was the result. The spirit from God – i.e. the impersonal force – was cast into the womb of Mary etc.

These are not the Biblical meanings of the words! It is possible to quote sura 94:10. This verse says, *"If you do not understand your revelation* (the Qur'an) *ask the people of the Book what it means."* On this basis it is possible for us to say that Islamic scholars are wrong and the real meaning is given in John chapters 1 and 13-16.

You don't need to be a clever theologian to explain the Trinity. We need spiritual men and women who have **experienced** the work of the Triune God in their lives in a non-intellectual, deeply pragmatic way. This experience leads them to demonstrate a life of **worship** and a life of **loving relationships**. This will communicate!

✓ Creation, Sin, the Fall and Man's Problem

The Creation

There are similarities and major differences between our friends and us. The Qur'an says that the creation took place in 6 days:

Sura 7:54: *"Your Lord is God, who in six days created the heavens and the earth and then mounted the throne"*.

Sura 76-1-3: *"Has there not been a period of time when man was nothing* – (not even) *mentioned? Truly we created man from a drop of sperm, mingled in order to try him; so we gave him the gifts of hearing and sight. We showed him the way; whether he be grateful or ungrateful* (rests with him)*."*

Sura 6:2: *"He it is who created you of clay – he decreed the term of your life."*

Our friends are fascinated with the early chapters of the book of Genesis – in fact with the whole book. This is the best place to start a study of the Bible with them. Man created in the image of God is absent from the Qur'an. At best man is a 'khalifa' – a representative of God. To our friends, the differences between God and man are so great that ***"created in the image of God"*** is hard to understand. Point out the following consequences:

There are two truths that emerge:

- All human beings are addressable **by** God.
- All human beings are accountable **to** God

Therefore there is a universal awareness of God. So evangelism is not primarily to Hindus, Muslims etc. All religious labels are secondary. Evangelism is directed towards people made in the image of God, to whom God can speak and who stand before God in His judgement and mercy. We **must** recognize the dignity and status of all human beings; otherwise our evangelism is so easily polluted by a superiority complex. This is easily recognized by our friends and is most definitely unwelcome!

The Fall in the Qur'an

The words for sin are much the same in all Middle Eastern early religions – i.e. the religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia. The worldview is that all of nature is ordered/controlled by God (or gods) – e.g. the flooding of the Nile – and that sin is an **aberration** – out of step, disharmonious. Islam has continued this view. The Biblical worldview is different!

Sura 20:14: *"And truly we made a covenant of old with Adam, but **he forgot** and we found no constancy in him."* **Note:** Adam does not really sin. **He forgot** and **did not intend** to do wrong.

Sura 4:33: *"For man was created a weakling."*

Sura 2:34-37: *"Then Satan caused them to slip …."*

Sura 12:53: *"…for the heart is prone to evil, save them on whom my Lord has mercy."*

This is a useful verse – also sura 19:33.

Sura 2:35-37 states that when Adam 'slipped', God quickly forgave him and he was re-instated.

Sura 7:10-26 is an account of Adam and Eve's expulsion out of Paradise to earth.

Sura 70:20: *"Surely man was created fretful when evil visits him, impatient when good visits Him … save those that pray."*

In summary, the Qur'an implies **no fall at all!**

- Man is basically alright. His problem is that he is **weak and ignorant**. An exception to this might be al-Baidawi's comment on sura 19:33 where he says: 'There is not a new born child but Satan touches it when it is born, except Mary and her son Jesus.'
- No means of salvation is necessary at all. To require one would limit the sovereignty of God who: *"forgives whom He wills and does not forgive whom He wills."*
- Sin is not very serious and man can quickly and easily be forgiven.

A Solution to the Problem of Sin

To our Muslim friends, what is needed is the revelation of God's will in a series of laws. For man is seen as able to do God's will if he understands it – i.e. he can keep the law. So for our friends the basic question is: "What is the will of God so that I may do it? What are the rules?"

If man does sin, these sins are forgiven on the basis of good works. In practice sin is failure to carry out ceremonial practices correctly. (Sura 3:190-194 – Here people ask for forgiveness and God answers that their good works will not be lost and that he will 'blot out their sins'.)

The Biblical Worldview (Gen. 3:2-6 and Rom. 7:21-25)

This is very different from that of our friends. Sin = disobedience. It is wilful rebellion against a Holy God. Our relationship with God is based on covenant. The character of the covenant is:

- **Personal**: so sin is not just breaking a rule – it is rebellion!
- **Rewarding**: faith always comes first and leads to works, ***"If you love me keep my commandments."***
- **Revealing**: sin is a refusal to believe.

According to the Bible, man's problem is man's nature. He is in a permanent state of rebellion. He is knowingly living in disobedience. Because of this he was/is banished from God's presence. According to Eph. 2:3 we are, ***"By nature children of wrath"*** *because* we have grievously dishonoured God. Man has a bias towards evil.

From Rom. 7:21-25 we can see that our problem is not lack of knowledge of God's will. Even though we know what we should or should not do, we cannot do it! The law has a function, but it doesn't save us because we can't obey it. Attempts to keep the law lead to pride and self-righteousness. The function of the law is to show us how desperately we need a Saviour and to lead us to Christ – Gal. 3:24. The law, spiritualised by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, reveals man's motives and reveals his sin. In the Bible sin is painted in very black colours – in the Qur'an it is only light grey! In the Bible sin has terrible consequences! Not so in the Qur'an.

How to convey a sense of sin to our friends?

How did Jesus convey it to a pious follower of the law? (See John 3) Note the parallels between Judaism and Islam:

- Very similar laws – both moral and ceremonial injunctions
- Very similar creedal affirmations
- Share most of the same prophets
- Both express a total way of life
- Both reject a suffering Messiah as incompatible with their expectations of God's sovereign rule
- Both (in the Judaism of Jesus' day) focussed on good works and outward conformity to the law to gain salvation
- Both have a similar view of Jesus – ***"Rabbi we know that you are a teacher come from God because no-one can do the signs that you do unless God is with him."***

The way Jesus talked to Nicodemus is the way He would have talked to a pious, God-fearing Muslim!

Fundamentally, Jesus said:

(a) **You need a Redeemer** – guilt must be paid for and observance of the law is not enough! Jn. 3:14-16

(b) **You need a new life – new power**. You can't enter the God's Kingdom unless you have a completely new nature. You need transformation. This is God's answer to man's weakness! See Jn. 3:3, 5 etc.

Also read Is. 6:1-6. To see God and to see His righteousness leads to an emotionally violent crisis in our consciousness of sin.

- **A Brief Comparison between Jesus and Muhammad** (Not technically legitimate)

  We believe Jesus to be God incarnate. Muslims believe that Muhammad was only a prophet. (They don't like to be called Mohammadans but rather Muslims – i.e. those who have submitted.)

  In practice they really are followers of Muhammad as we are of Jesus:

  - He is the source of their theology and law.
  - They follow the Qur'an and the Sunna (also the Hadith – practice/teachings of Muhammad).
  - Increasingly Muhammad's position is being raised to that of Jesus – e.g. books in the Muslim World have the 99 names of God inside the front cover and the 99 names of Muhammad are inside the back cover (many are identical).
  - The Qur'an tells us of Muhammad's sins – suras 40:55; 47:19; 48:1, 2 – but many Muslims maintain that he is sinless.
  - The elevation of the birthday of Muhammad

- The book by Peter Marshall, **Mr Jones meets the Master** can be compared with Faizel Ahmed's, **Meet the Master: A Life Sketch of Muhammad the Saviour.**

So Muhammad is increasingly being raised to a high place that is very similar to the place where Christians hold Christ.

The Message

There are some real differences but also similarities:

- The words of Jesus about His own death and resurrection are denied in the Qur'an.
- Both **began** to preach the message of **repentance**
  Jesus: ***"Repent the Kingdom of God is at hand"***
  Muhammad: *"Repent the judgement of God is coming"*
- Both experienced a similar reaction to their message – persecution
  Jesus was not received in his home town – Nazareth – Lk. 4:16-24
  Muhammad was not received in his home town – Mecca (This was probably because his teaching on idolatry undermined the commercial interests of the town – like Paul at Ephesus.)
- Neither Jesus nor Muhammad was from a prominent family.
- The poor heard Jesus gladly but the leaders of society did not. The poor also followed Muhammad – sura 80:1-10.

Their Reaction to Persecution

Muhammad chose to rule rather than suffer. Jesus chose to suffer rather than rule! People came to Muhammad from Medina and asked him to go there as a referee in deciding an issue relating to water rights. It is very hard to side against your relatives. An impartial judge is required who is not related to anyone involved. So he did not initially go to Medina as a prophet but as a referee! This gave him the opportunity to build the "Kingdom of God" on earth – an earthly kingdom with an earthly leader leading a fighting force – its laws applying to every area of life.

Muhammad chose to be a Messiah as the Jews expected their Messiah to be – a conquering earthly ruler. So Muhammad set himself up as the leader of a city-state – Medina. He issued laws applying to all areas of life. He led his armies in battle. He chose resistance – victory – rule.

Jesus chooses to suffer rather than rule

- The temptation in the wilderness:
  - ✧ He rejected success based on miracles - jumping from the pinnacle of the temple.
  - ✧ He rejected the concentration on man's physical need.
  - ✧ He rejected worldly power.
- After the feeding of the 5,000 they wanted to make Him an earthly ruler (the role Muhammad chose), but Jesus refused this role!
- When Jesus asked the disciples who He was, Peter used the word 'Messiah' (by which he meant the coming earthly ruler). Jesus says to him in effect, "Yes, Peter, you have the right title but the wrong job description". He goes on to explain why the Messiah had to suffer and die. Often it seems that Jesus, rather than avoiding trouble, seemed to stir it up! In the end He set His face towards Jerusalem knowing it meant His death.
- Jesus summarized His ministry in Mk. 10:45: ***"For even then Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many."***
- To Pilate Jesus said, ***"My kingdom is not of this world"***.

To Muhammad, the 'Kingdom of God' **was** 'of the world'. He set up this kingdom in Medina and it spread. Force and coercion were part of the kingdom life and historically this is how Islam spread.

To Jesus the Kingdom of God is **not** of this world. It is spiritual. It is eternal. Power is demonstrated, but it is the power of the Cross: "***The Cross, the power of God for salvation …"*** (Rom. 1:16). Christians must never use force to build the Kingdom.

The Essence of Kingdom Life

Muhammad laid down rules so every area of life was covered. The laws apply to social, religious, political and personal matters – down to the most private details. The law should control all society.

Jesus told disconcerting stories about the Pharisees. They too were strict followers of the Law with a mind-set similar to a strict Sunni Muslim. The essence of His stories was that they were self-righteous, but not righteous before God.

Jesus internalised the law:

- He removed the essence of law keeping from practice (outward observation) to motivation – e.g. it is not enough not to kill someone. You must not hate him.
- He talked about new birth – a radical transformation **inside** rather than controlling all things by the external force of law.

With Muhammad as both a political and a religious ruler, Muslims never separate religion and politics. Attempts to do so are wrong. It is practically subversive to preach the Gospel in an Islamic state. Jesus said, ***"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's"***. So we can assume it is not only possible to separate religion from politics, but it is also advisable.

The contemporary implications are enormous

When Christians choose to follow the way of Jesus (suffering), they are forced to rely on spiritual resources and power from God is released. When Christians choose to follow the way of Muhammad it is always disastrous – the Holy Roman Empire – the Crusades etc.

Pakistan was set up so Muslims might be politically ruled by Muslims. The British were going to leave India. The Hindus were happy, but the Muslims were worried. It is impossible for Muslims to be a suffering minority in a Hindu state. Muslims, in order to be Muslims, must have the laws of God controlling them. Consequently Pakistan was set up. 'Pak' means holy or pure. 'Stan' means the land – Pakistan = the holy land. It is interesting that the flag of Saudi Arabia is entirely green (green represents the family of Muhammad) while the Pakistan flag is predominantly green, but there is a white strip in it. This indicates that there is a place reserved in Pakistan for the non-Muslim, while no such place is reserved in Saudi Arabia!

The 1979 revolution in Iran was an attempt to reconstitute the Kingdom of God on earth. The sin of the Shah was that he removed the veto rights of the religious leaders. He made the wearing of the veil illegal. He broke down religious symbols and he even tried to change the calendar back to Cyrus – in effect saying that our history is greater than Islam. He tried to undermine the whole fabric of an Islamic society by changing the laws and separating religion and politics. The Shah sought to emphasize **nationalism** – saying it was more important than Islam. This created enormous outrage. What was the sin of the West? It gave the Shah the power to do what he wanted to do – secularize the state. The West provided the means – through music, economic development, education etc.

These tensions are deeply felt in all Muslim states. They are rooted back into the decision Muhammad made to 'build an earthly kingdom'. From a Christian perspective, if we are to build the Kingdom of God, let us make sure that our means are those of Jesus – not force, but a self-giving, sacrificial love.

➢ Jesus in the Qur'an

The Qur'an presents the person of the Lord Jesus in two different ways:

1. It speaks of Him with great respect. Several statements clearly suggest His holiness. In general our Muslim friends have a high veneration of Him.
2. In an apologetic contrast the Qur'an promotes Jesus as no more than an ordinary man.

- **Mary the mother of Jesus**

  Mary's father is Imran – who is also called the father of Moses and Aaron. Apparently Muhammad thought that Mary, the sister of Moses, was the mother of Jesus.

  Sura 3:31 *"When she* (Mary's mother) *brought forth her child she said, 'My Lord, verily, I have brought forth a girl…and I have called her Mary and I place her in your care and her offspring against the accursed devil."*

  In most respected collections of the Hadith (traditions), Satan touches all the children of men at their birth and because of the above prayer; **only** Mary and Jesus were preserved from this. (Bukhari - Book of the Prophets No. 44 and also in Muslim – The Book of Virtues)

  Since our Muslim friends don't know of a doctrine of original sin, it seems very strange to them! But they believe that both Jesus and Mary had an "immaculate" birth. The virgin birth of Jesus is taught in Sura 66:12 *"Mary the daughter of Imran … preserved her chastity."*

- **Qur'anic teaching that honours Jesus**

  - ✧ The Qur'an speaks of many prophets who ask God's forgiveness and are told by God their sins are forgiven. In the Qur'an Muhammad asked forgiveness of his sins three times. The Qur'an never mentions that Jesus sinned and so our friends believe that He is the only sinless prophet.
  - ✧ He was born without a human father.
  - ✧ Miracles – our friends are very interested in these. Some mentioned are that:
    - ✓ Jesus healed the sick
    - ✓ He brought the dead back to life
    - ✓ He spoke as a newborn baby
    - ✓ As a child He modelled a lump of clay, blew on it, gave it life and it flew away!

    (This is interesting. It clearly shows Jesus had the attributes of creator – an attribute only God has!)

    These last two miracles are not found in the canonical Gospels, but they are found in various apocryphal Gospels. Note: All the miracles that were done by Jesus were done by "God's permission".
  - ✧ Jesus escaped the Cross, was raised by God into heaven and from there He will return at the end of time. He will then complete His earthly life and die. This signals the end of time. Jesus is the only prophet in the Qur'an about whom so many miracles are mentioned. He is the only one who did not die and will return again.
  - ✧ Jesus received the Gospel and gathered His disciples. An occasion is recorded when He asked God to send down a table of food – sura 55 – perhaps an allusion to the feeding of the five thousand.
  - ✧ Jesus had authority to "change Scriptures" and abrogate some judicial prescriptions of the Torah. Sura 3:48: *"God will teach Him the Book and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel …. I* (Jesus) *raised the dead with the permission of God, verifying who was revealed before me in the Torah and allowing to you* (Christians) *part of what was forbidden* (in the Torah)*."*

- **Qur'anic teaching emphasizing that Jesus is not Divine**

  Sura 43:59: *"Jesus is nothing but a servant."* (Interesting in the light of Phil 2:5 ff!)

  Sura 3:73, 79: *"It is not right for a man to whom God gives the Book, the power* (rule) *and office*

of a prophet, that he should then say to the people: Be my servants instead of God's servants…. God would not tell you to take angels and prophets as servants."

(Also what is interesting is that in any Islamic bookstore you will see books like the one written by Mirza Ghalam Ahmed (a Pakistani) – **The Teaching of Islam – Our Lord and Master, the Prophet Muhammad**.)

The message of the Qur'an is primarily directed against pagan gods. It proclaims the absolute transcendence of God above all created beings. The fullest text against the divinity of Jesus is sura 4:169-171 – which includes *'Say not three'*. It speaks of Jesus as the Messiah, as the Word of God and as the "Spirit of God". As we have seen, these titles don't carry the same meaning as they do in the Bible. "Spirit" is conceived in the Qur'an as a great angel or being higher than the angels, but not as God! Some heterodox Christians also taught this about Jesus.

In Summary

Our friends believe that however great Jesus is:

- Religion is completely perfected in Islam and the Qur'an has everything necessary for salvation (sura 16:91).
- Jesus is only a creature (sura 43:59) and although a very great prophet, He is merely in a chain of prophets sent by God to restore to mankind the belief in One God.
- In the Qur'an salvation is directly from God. Each one is responsible for his/her own acts and no-one can help him on the Day of Judgement except Muhammad who has received from God the favour of interceding for others (i.e. Muslims). God doesn't need sacrifice or mediation in order to forgive.
- Jesus didn't die. There was no atoning death for our sins. There was no resurrection. Only the heterodox Ahmadiya believe that Jesus was crucified. But they believe that he wasn't dead when He was taken down from the Cross (the swoon theory). He regained consciousness, went to India and died at the age of 120 years. He is buried in Kashmir. They also reject His redemption.

Why Muslims have difficulty with the death of Jesus

- They assume Muhammad was the ideal prophet; so all prophets should follow his example.
- But Jesus chose to suffer. This leads to confusion in their thinking.
- God couldn't allow a prophet to suffer such a terrible death because it would appear to all that evil triumphed and God lost the contest!

The Substitute Theory

God thought so highly of Jesus that he took Him, without death, straight to heaven. The likeness of Jesus, God placed on someone else. It was that substitute who died on the Cross. Where did Muhammad get this idea? From heretical Christian sects! The Docetics taught that Jesus' suffering and death only seemed to be physical. Ignatius (an orthodox Christian) writing in Ephesus in AD 115 said that some people believed that Jesus "suffered semblance".

In the apocryphal Gospel of Peter (end of 2nd century) Jesus cried out on the Cross, "My power, my power why have you left me?" When He spoke He was taken up. So sadly, the whole idea of a substitute is not originally Islamic, but a Christian heresy!

Qur'anic Teaching about the Death of Jesus

In the Qur'an Jesus is the servant of God. Sura 19:31: *"I am the servant of God."* This is very helpful because you can introduce the clear job description in the great Servant Songs of the Lord found in Isaiah 41-53 –. These clearly point out two things:

- ✧ The Servant of the Lord was divine
- ✧ The Servant of the Lord had to die (Is. 53)

In sura 19:34 (a Meccan Sura) Jesus speaks of, "*The day of my death and the day of my being raised up alive."* This is an apparent contradiction of the Substitute Theory. The usual explanation of this passage in the Qur'an is that it is a future event.

Sura 4:156: *"Their saying* (i.e. the Jews) *'We slew the Messiah Jesus, the Son of Mary, Allah's Messenger'. They slew Him not, nor crucified him, but <u>it appeared so unto them</u>, and lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof…. They slew not for certain, but God took Him up unto Himself."*

This could be interpreted that the Jews **thought** they had the power of death over Jesus – as Pilate thought! – Jn. 19:11

Sura 3:48: *"God said, 'O Jesus I am going to bring thy term to an end and raise thee to myself.' "*

Surely what the Qur'an is confirming is that **only** God had the **control** in the crucifixion event. We agree! Again this is confirmed in sura 5:19, "*Who then will control God in the least, if He wishes to destroy the Messiah, the Son of Mary?"* See also sura 5:83 and sura 9:30.

The Major Point

The Bible says that He (Jesus) really did die – Mark 15. The whole of the Old Testament leads up to the "Servant of the Lord" making atonement for our sin by His death.

The idea of a substitute largely came from false Christian writers. For example: Basilides (a Gnostic writer of the 2nd century) taught: "The divine intelligence (nous) appeared in human form, but at the crucifixion Jesus changed forms with Simon of Cyrene who carried the Cross."

Another example: Mani (a Persian who died in 276 AD) claimed that it was the widow of Nain's son who died as a substitute for Christ. Manichean sources – who believed in a universal dualism – said it was the devil that died. Other suggestions by Muslim writers include Judas and Pilate.

The Problem with All Substitutes

It doesn't solve the problem! The problem is that God has to be seen to be victorious over: sin/wicked men/Satan. How is this accomplished in the Qur'anic version? – not at all! Also it creates a problem as it brings into question the **justice** of God – making someone suffer a terrible death as a consequence of the teachings of Jesus.

Solutions by various Muslim writers

- Jesus was raised in some unexplained way e.g. Kamal Hussein in **City of Wrong** (a Palestinian reviewing the history of Jerusalem) says that Jesus was led to be crucified – great darkness came – confusion reigned – when the darkness lifted Jesus was not there!
- Another solution of the Ahmadiya (a sect of Islam found mainly in Pakistan) is that Jesus was crucified but not killed (the swoon theory). He went to Kashmir and died at the age of 120! You can visit his grave in Kashmir today!
- Another solution Muslims propose is that Jesus died – but only His body. Like all true martyrs, He never really died. Sura 2:149: *"Say not of those who may be killed in the way of God 'dead'; no, they are alive only you are not aware."*

Implication: the Jews could not kill the soul of Jesus. Compare Mt. 10:28:

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell."

So What Do Muslims Deny? Not the intention to kill! Why did the Jews want to kill Jesus? According to John 19:7: ***"We have a law and according to that law, He*** (Jesus) ***must die, because He claimed to be the Son of God."***

But the Qur'an denies this claim! It is difficult to find a reason in the Qur'an why the Jews were so upset with Jesus that they wanted to kill Him. But in the Qur'anic account they really wanted to kill Him and they

thought they had. So the intention to kill Jesus is there. Also Christ's acceptance of death is there! Jesus chose to be the 'Suffering Servant' in the Qur'an as well as in the New Testament. Only the 'climax' is missing. It is that the Father took the 'cup' from Him at the last moment. So the Qur'anic account includes the sin of men and the self-offering of Christ.

From the Biblical Account: God could not and did not "rescue" Jesus from the Cross. Rom. 5:8: ***"God showed His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us"***. If God had "rescued" Christ from the Cross, we would still be guilty of all our sins and under the wrath of God. We would still be subject to Satan and the principalities and powers in the kingdom of darkness. We would still be under the law. We would be ***"without hope"*** and without the Holy Spirit to empower us etc.

The crown of thorns is a symbol of what happened. The little game (drama) that the soldiers had is a picture of the universal drama. The thorns are a symbol of the curse. Christ accepted them so we would not have to bear them, but could wear the Crown of Life.

According to the Qur'an, the Jews scheme against Jesus but God outwits them: sura 3:4: *"God is the best of all plotters."*

How does God get the better of evil?

In Islam: by rescuing Jesus from the Cross

In the Bible:

- ✧ By Christ bearing the sin of the world and making a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, ***"For without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin."*** Heb. 9:11-15
- ✧ By dying on the Cross Christ inaugurated a new "will" (covenant) Heb. 9:16-26. All the blessings of the new covenant have become ours because Christ died.
- ✧ Col. 2:15: Christ, by His death on the Cross, ***"Disarmed the powers and authorities …. triumphing over them by the Cross."***
- ✧ ***"By His death, He destroyed Satan who has the power of death and set free …. those held in slavery by their fear of death."*** Heb. 2:14-15
- ✧ By His death and identification with His death, we also, "died" to the flesh and the old life.

How do we communicate these things to Our Friends?

1. By taking up our Cross and following Him - by living "a crucified life" and by living in the power of the resurrection. At best, apologetics only removes walls of misunderstanding. At worst it may build those walls! The power of a holy life (the new life) lived in the power of the Holy Spirit is the key "demonstration" of the Cross - Eph. 1:19-20.

2. Our Friends say God's sovereignty doesn't require a means of salvation.

As in creation, God said. "Be" and it was. Sura 5:18: *"God forgives whom he wills."* One of the names of God is 'the Forgiver'. But there is no wrestling with Paul's question: "How can God be just and justify the sinner?" The Biblical answer is: only by the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Matt. 16:21-23 after Jesus had explained to the disciples, ***"That he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things … and that He must be killed and on the third day raised to life"***, Peter said, "Never Lord! This will never happen to you!" Peter said this because he had the Muslim/Jewish paradigm of God's power. Again, those who called out to Jesus, "***Come down from the Cross and we will believe"*** had the wrong paradigm of God's power. For the Jews (and Muslims) the Cross is a "stumbling block" and foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18-29), ***"But to us who are being saved it*** (the message of the Cross) ***is the power of God!"***

3. Re-walk the Emmaus Road with your Friends - Luke 24:13-35

The two disciples had a typically Muslim view of things, ***Jesus of Nazareth…. He was a prophet,***

powerful in word and deed before God and all the people." But it appeared to them that God lost!! Jesus had been crucified! They were very sad and very confused**.**

"Jesus said to them, 'How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself."

That is what we must do. Start with Genesis! The church has already faced the problem posed by Islam! So it isn't difficult to give a Biblical answer. In Mt. 16:16-21 Jesus made sure the disciples knew who He was. He then revealed what that identity involved because, like our Muslim friends, they could not accept a crucified Messiah. What changed their thinking? **The Resurrection**!! Eph. 4: 8: ***"He led captivity captive!"*** The disciples could only really understand in retrospect – looking back at the Cross and the Resurrection. This is the expression of God's power – not His "out plotting the plotters". This was the content of the apostolic preaching of the Gospel and it must be the content of our preaching as well! So our friends have the wrong event as the expression of God's power. It was not the 'assumption' but the resurrection!! Read Phil. 2:5-8.

What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God?

Our friends interpret this purely in physical terms (father, mother, son – in a way that resembles the immorality of the gods of Greek mythology) – i.e. biological terms.

In the Bible the term "Son of" expressed close relationship with persons or things. There is no necessary physical descent through the normal procreative channels.

Idiomatic Uses (some examples)

- **In the Old Testament**

  Judges 19:22: ***"Sons of Belial"*** is the Hebrew text. The NIV translates this idiom, ***"Some wicked men of the city"***.

  See Deut. 13:13; Judges 20:13; 1 Sam. 25:17 in KJV.

  1 Kings 20:35: ***"Sons of the prophets"*** is used meaning a group or company of prophets.

- **In the New Testament**

  Mt. 9:15: ***"The sons of the bridegroom"*** – i.e. his friends

  Jn. 17:12: ***"The son of destruction"*** – i.e. the one who is damned

  Gal. 3:7: ***"It is the men of faith who are Abraham's sons"***

Personal – yet non-biological - father-son relationships

	Father	**Son**
1 Sam. 3:6:	Eli	Samuel
" 24:17:	Saul	David
Mt. 9:2	Jesus	the paralytic
2 Kings 2:12:	Elijah	Elisha
1 Tim. 1:2:	Paul	Timothy
Titus 1:4	Paul	Titus
Philemon 10:	Paul	Philemon

These are just a few of the many personal 'father-son' relationships in the Bible that have nothing to do with biology.

Semitic languages are rich in these expressions

"Ibn-al-sabil" (a son of the road) = a traveller

"The son of Satan" = mischief-maker. Does Satan have a wife? No! (See Paul in Acts 13:10)

"The mothers of the Faithful" are the wives of the Prophet Muhammad.

Specific uses of "the sons of God"

Ex. 4:22: God's chosen people

Job 1:6: angelic beings

2 Sam. 7:14: kings and rulers

Mt. 5:9 pious godly people

The Use of the "Son of God"

The Annunciation: The angel told Mary her son would be called ***"Son of the Most High"***.

In Lk. 1:32, 35 it is: ***"Son of God"***

His Baptism: "***This is My Beloved Son"*** Mt. 3:17

The Transfiguration: ***"This is My Beloved Son"*** Mk. 9:7

The Crucifixion: ***"Surely He was the Son of God!"*** Mt. 27:54

The Resurrection: ***"Who through the Spirit of Holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead."*** Rom. 1:4

The Lord Jesus didn't deny His Sonship – Mt. 26:63 ff. and Jn. 3:6 - the "Son of God" is a unique expression for a unique relationship. It indicates:

Pre-existence with the Father - Jn. 17:15

Obedience to the Father - Jn. 8:37-47

It is an attempt to describe in words a spiritual truth for which there is no human language. It is used to describe one who has the same will and qualities/characteristics as another - i.e. the Father.

The polar extreme phrase is "son of Satan" – ***"You are of your father the devil and your will is to do your father's desires."*** Jn. 8:39-44.

In the Qur'an, "son of God" had the same sexual overtones as "daughters of God" – goddesses worshipped in Mecca. Muhammad - quite rightly – violently rejected any thought that the true and only God could get into immoral sexual relationships. So the term "son of God" was rejected because it conveyed something else. According to Phil. 2:10- 11 the Father is glorified when we bow in worship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

How to Interpret this to Our Friends?

- **Preliminary remarks**
  - The term is more appropriate in worship than in witness to our friends.
  - Jesus was hesitant to use the word "Messiah" of Himself because the term had come to mean something other than its Old Testament roots. The use of the term would have been confusing. He chose to describe Himself using another Messianic title – "Son of Man".
  - Get your friends to actually read the New Testament where they can see the context.
  - Note again that the Bible doesn't elevate a mere mortal man to the Godhead. The incarnation shows that God was in Jesus Christ.

Finding Channels of Communication with Your Friends

- **Abd Allah** – "the servant of God" – see sura 19:30

  A son's job is to serve his father. In Phil. 2 Jesus was obedient to death – even death on a cross. Then He was given a name that is above every name.

- **Rasul Allah** – "the apostle of God" – see sura 4:157

  Apostles are sent ones. In Heb. 3:1 Jesus is called an apostle – i.e. one uniquely sent by the Father. The modern equivalent of an apostle is an ambassador – one sent to represent the Head of State. You treat and honour the ambassador as you would the King or President. Yet Jesus was more than an apostle/ambassador! He is "Emmanuel" (God with us).

  There is a very helpful parable that tells of an absent landlord – Mt. 21:33-43. The landlord sent "apostles" and finally he sent his son, who was killed. Jesus was sent to reveal, to save and to destroy the works of the evil one.

- **Kalimatu Allah** – "the Word of God" see sura 4:171

  Our friends are in doubt as to what this means and there are a variety of interpretations. Use sura 10:94, which says, *"If you are in doubt about what we have sent to you, then ask those who have been reading the book previous to this* (i.e. the Bible)*."*

  To most of our friends the Scriptures are the Word of God – i.e. the primary and eternal source of revelation:

  - God's Word is an eternal Word – so too is God's revelation in the person of Jesus Christ.
  - Our friends believe the 'Word of God' (which is as eternal as God) can be available in a book.
  - We believe the "Word of God" is an eternal person – Jn. 1:14, 18 ***"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His Glory – the Glory as of the only Son of God."***

    Jn. 14:1, 9 ***"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father"***. He reveals the Father and how better to do this than in human form?
  - If we accept the Son of God into our lives as Saviour and Lord, we too can become **'sons of God'** by adoption!

2. Is there any genuine revelation in Islam? (briefly)

- **How does Islam compare with pre-Islamic paganism in Arabia?**
  - Very much better – e.g. female infanticide was outlawed
  - **But** it did incorporate a great deal of Arabian folk religion.
- **Was Muhammad a sincere seeker after God?**

  Almost certainly he was in the Meccan period when he faced persecution. Sadly the Christians he came into contact with were mostly heretical sects. He was unable to read any Arabic Scriptures of either the Old or New Testaments.

- **How are we to understand general revelation in the experience of Muhammad?**

  Only in the sense that there is no genuine new revelation. There is a great deal in the Qur'an that is borrowed from the Bible. This borrowed material is still true. So there is no special revelation in the teaching of the Qur'an.

- **What about the accusation often made by our Muslim friends that we have changed the Injil -** we have corrupted it? They say we have removed all references to Muhammad in the Injil. Basically our New Testament is not the original Injil and this is why God sent down the Qur'an – God's final revelation.

Is this accusation true? Is this in fact what the Qur'an says? Here are four Qur'anic verses that contradict what most Muslims have been told by their leaders:

- Sura 10:94: *"And if you* (Muhammad) *are in doubt concerning that which we reveal to you, then question those who read the Scripture* (that was) *before you. Verily the truth from the Lord has come to you. So be not of the waverers."*

  Point out that modern translations of the Old and New Testaments were translated from their original languages from the oldest manuscripts available, all of which pre-date Muhammad.

- Sura 4:136: *"Oh you who believe! Believe in Allah and his messenger and the Scripture that he revealed aforetime. Whosoever disbelieves in Allah and his angels and his scriptures and his messengers and the Last Day – verily he has wandered far astray."*

  Of course the Scriptures 'before' are the Old and New Testaments.

- Sura 5:65-66: *"If only the People of the Scriptures* (in context this refers to the Jews – see previous verse 64) *would believe and ward off evil, we would remit their sins from them and surely we would bring them into Gardens of Delight. If they had observed the Tawrat and the Injil and that which was rewarded unto them by their Lord, then they would have been nourished from above them and beneath their feet."*

  So, is the Bible corrupted and unreliable? 'No'(!) says the Qur'an.

- Sura 6:115-116: *"Those into whom we gave the Scriptures* (aforetime) *know that it is revealed from your Lord in truth. So be not* (O Muhammad) *of the waverers. Perfected is the Word of the Lord in truth and justice. There is nothing that can change His words. He is the Hearer, the Knower."*

  So tell your friend that when the Qur'an speaks about the *'before Scriptures'* the writer knew and was satisfied that they were uncorrupted in his day. Explain that the Bible we have today comes from manuscripts that existed long before Muhammad.

The Qur'an can be an effective bridge, but **move on**. Don't build a house on a bridge. Once you have crossed the bridge move on into the Scriptures.

3. Are there demonic forces in and behind Islam?

- Why single out Islam? There are demonic forces operating in all religions and in non-religious worldviews. Satan is the 'Prince of this World'!

- Does this mean every Muslim is demonised? Yes, in the sense that all of us are inherently sinners and born into the Kingdom of Darkness. Muslims are no more and no less demonised that any other people. Study Eph. 6:10-20 and Jn. 8:44.

God is working His purpose out

3. Building Bridges and Avoiding Barriers

Introduction

Cockroaches and Moths

In a dark room that has both cockroaches and moths, you can't tell the difference! Both fly and scuttle around. The easy way to distinguish the two species is to turn on the light. The cockroaches will run away and hide, but the moths will be drawn to the light.

How are we to find the people God is drawing to Himself by His Holy Spirit? Turn on the light of the Gospel. The 'moths' will be drawn to it. There are many more 'moths' out in the Muslim World than we may expect. It is estimated that since 9/11 over 6 million 'moths' have come to faith in the Lord Jesus **per year**!

Today we have an increasing number of friendly 'tools' – radio, satellite TV, DVDs and the Internet etc. to help us build bridges. The whole of the New Testament can be downloaded from the web in many languages used by 'moths'. Many are having dreams and visions of the Lord Jesus and there is an increasing number of demonstrations of God's power in healings and other signs and wonders. So expect to meet 'moths'.

➢ **The need for clarity in our aims in evangelism**

- To introduce my Muslim friend to the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, so he/she can become a friend and disciple of the Lord Jesus and join a local group of others of His disciples in a Kingdom Community.
- Three contributory aims:
  - √ To get my friend to read the Bible for him/herself
  - √ To pray with and for him/her In his/her presence
  - √ To study and discuss with him/her the Bible and its message for us today
- From time to time you will meet Muslims who have in some way been prepared by the Holy Spirit to be your friend. These days the most common preparation is via Christian satellite television.

➢ **Most Muslims come from honour-shame conscience cultures**

Cultural anthropologists have identified most cultures as fitting into 3 categories of conscience:

- Guilt- truth cultures / innocence
- Shame-honour cultures
- Fear-power cultures

Fear-power cultures are largely animistic. Fear is generated because punishment by evil spirits is inevitable when breaking known or unknown taboos.

Guilt, shame and fear are all consequences of sin. Notice in Gen. 3:7, 8, 10 Adam and Eve experienced shame, ***"They sewed fig leaves together"***. They experienced guilt and as a result, ***"They hid themselves from the presence of the Lord"***. Adam said to the Lord God, ***"I was afraid"***.

Most Muslims grow up in an honour-shame culture. Some tend more to guilt (those that are westernised) and others tend more to fear (those involved more heavily in Folk Islam).

✦ **What is shame?**

Shame is where once we were secure in ourselves, but now have feelings of mounting anguish because of an event. To feel shame is to feel diminished in one's self-identity. The feeling of being exposed as you really are is an essential part of shame. You feel deficient and inadequate as a human being.

- There is **a healthy sense of shame**. Embarrassment often leads to blushing. We need the ability to blush! We need to know we have made a mistake. We need to keep a sense of proportion. If we have no sense of shame our conscience is seared.
- **Unhealthy shame** is a sense of one's world disintegrating. It is a loss of dignity and self-respect.

  We have three basic needs:

  √ Meaning and a sense of purpose ⟶ "I am significant."

  √ A sense of belonging ⟶ a personal sense of security

  √ A sense of my own value ⟶ self-worth

  If any of these needs are left unmet, the result is self-doubt, self-blame and **shame**.

✦ **Some effects of shame – how do we respond when we feel shame?**

Shame leads you to feel unfit for your family/community or worse; your family/community may leave you alone or exclude you. There are several forms of solution:

- Seek to control others who might be in a position to expose you
- Rage – leading to violence/revenge/vindictiveness – so-called 'honour killings' are an example of this
- Arrogance in public
- Being critical of others
- Judgmentalism/moralising
- Contempt of others shamed
- Being a 'people-pleaser'
- Envy

Attempts to avoid shame usually results in an effort to project yourself in public as **greater** than the **real** self – i.e. be 'superhuman' or in fact put others down and exalt self.

The Lord Jesus was tempted by shame! Because of the stories surrounding His birth, it was assumed He was illegitimate. As a baby He was responsible for an infanticide on a large-scale causing great grief to a whole town. He was a refugee. He was hung up to die naked, in public, in front of his own mother! At the Last Supper, the Lord Jesus, ***"Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand and that He had come from God and was going to God …."*** acted as a slave and washed the disciples' feet. He is unique in that He never experienced shame! He was completely assured in His identity! He was eternally secure!

➢ **Finding a way to start to share the Gospel**

✦ **Find out what sort of Muslim your friend is**

You will find a wide variety of opinions on faith and practice among the different people you meet. Some know little about their faith apart from basic doctrines and duties they learned in childhood and in school.

Some have lived in large cities and been influenced by satellite TV and technology with its heavy overlay of western thought. Some are highly educated and have an existential, philosophical approach to life. Some are very involved in nationalistic politics. So it is important to find out what sort of a Muslim your friend is.

Possibilities include:

- Sunni, Shi'a, Ibadi, Ahmedi, Folk Islam, Sufi (mystic)
- Conservative, orthodox, liberal, nominal, westernised – ask about his/her system of values, beliefs and practices – try and piece together their worldview
- Does he/she go to a person for protection from evil spirits?
- Has he/she ever put a curse on anyone or been cursed?
- What does he/she believe about life after death and what happens at death?
- According to his/her beliefs how does a person go to heaven?
- How are sins dealt with?
- What does he/she think about God?
- Ask him/her, "What sort of person makes a good Muslim?"

✦ **Review how your Christian sub-culture preaches the Gospel**

Mine: typical of western evangelicals – first law – then grace. Preach law and bring people to admit their guilt. Then show that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the Cross. Therefore you should accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

This doesn't work with Muslims! Theirs is an honour-shame culture. They don't feel guilty!

✦ **Go back to Scripture**

Look to see **how** Scripture teaches the basics of the Gospel. It was largely written by and for Semitic peoples. Find from Scripture ways to correct their misunderstandings. Find new ways of re-stating the Gospel. Note: Scripture starts at the beginning – Genesis. With Muslims you need to do this as well by chronological story telling.

In Scripture there is much about sharing the Gospel with shame-based cultures. Examples include:

- From being unclean to clean – stories like Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-19) – the concept of defilement makes sense in shame-based cultures. The issue is, 'How do I become pure and clean?' See Malachi 3:1-3 and Psalm 51:2, 7,10.
- From nakedness (very shameful) to clothed with beautiful clothes – See Mt. 22:2-14 – the Great Wedding Feast.
- From being excluded/expelled to being visited by God. The stories of Abraham's visit by God, the tabernacle/temple (2 Chron. 6:13-42; 7:1-3)
- From weakness to strength
- From sickness to health

➢ **Replying Biblically to our Muslim friends' objections to our faith**

Basically these are:

- The authenticity of the Scriptures
- The Trinity
- The historicity of the Crucifixion
- The deity of the Lord Jesus
- The necessity of the atonement

Each of these needs a thorough look at **what** the Bible teaches and – just as importantly – **how** the Bible teaches it to Semitic peoples.

The Lord Jesus seeks to love Muslims through His Spirit living in us. In Luke 10:27-28 we are commanded to love all people.

- **How did the Lord Jesus love people?**
  - **He visited them in their homes.**
    - Simon's house – Jesus healed his mother-in-law (Lk. 4:38-41)
    - A feast in Matthew's house with lots of other tax collectors present (Lk. 5:29-31)
    - A meal in Simon the Pharisee's house (Lk. 7:35-50)
    - Zacchaeus' house (Lk. 19:1-10)
    - A ruler of the Pharisees (Lk. 14:1-14)
  - **He helped individual people.**
    - Peter's mother-in-law
    - A paralysed man who was lowered through the roof (Lk. 5:17-26)
    - A man with a withered hand (Lk. 6:6-11)
    - He raised a widow's son to life again (Lk. 7:11-15)
    - He fed the five thousand (Lk. 9:12-17)
    - He cast out an evil spirit from a boy (Lk. 9:38-43)
  - **He ate with people.** (See Lk. 5:29-30; 7:36-37; 14:1; 15:2; 19:5-7)
  - **He told them stories** – note 7 parables in Mt. 13. Telling parables was a sifting tool to discern the 'moths'. (Mt. 13:3-17 and Mk. 4:10)
  - **He sowed the 'Word of God' on a wide scale.** (Mk. 6:34; Lk. 9: 1, 2, 6; Mt. 13:1-3)
  - **He identified with His focus group.** (Mt. 15:24; 10:5-6)

- **How are we to love Muslims?**
  - Do what Jesus did!
  - Better to go two-by-two
  - Seek to help them in practical ways – invite them for a cup of coffee – accept invitations from them – go for a walk in a park in the "cool of the day" – play football, sing some songs.

The advantage of this approach is that you don't need to know anything about Islam, Muslims and their culture to start with. You don't begin on religious grounds but as a person helping people.

There is no single strategy that seemsto work better than others. It seems that God has given us a number of keys – a bunch – to unlock the door to a Muslim's heart. Prayer and flexibility are crucial. Always be open to what is new – friendship evangelism – Scripture distribution – prayer walking – sports/arts ministry. Be very cynical of simplistic solutions. But at the heart of every strategy **there must be love**. Ask God to pour into your heart **His**
love for the individuals you meet. Make it your aim to make **friends**.

5. Re-walk the Emmaus Road with your friends

- **Getting started and the problem of fear**

  Fear is one of the greatest hindrances to sharing the Gospel with Muslims. We don't need to be put in prison to 'be imprisoned'! Fear imprisons us far more. Fear not only imprisons us, it tortures us as well. ***"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."*** (1 Jn. 4:18)

There are usually three causes of fear. I am afraid because:

- I am aware of an insufficiency in myself.
- My imagination is actively anticipating trouble.
- I do not trust the intentions of others.

God has a wonderful answer to fear:

- He is Emmanuel – God with us
- Read 1 Jn. 3:19-20
- God loves us and will care for us (1 Jn. 4:19; Rom. 8:2)

- **Reason, but don't ever argue**. Argument may win a point, but it may lose you a friend. Remember, it is an honour-shame society.
- **Respect their culture**. Try not to offend anyone. Don't appear too free with the opposite sex. Don't refuse hospitality. Don't make jokes about religious topics such as fasting, prayer or God.
- **Persevere.** Your Muslim friends have a lot of rethinking to do when they are confronted with the Gospel. The Holy Spirit will work to His own timetable! Don't get discouraged. God usually works quietly and unseen. Memorise Gal. 6:9.
- **Some Barriers to Friendship**
  - Remember we are in a spiritual battle. We have a dreadful tendency to use "carnal" weapons! Put on the whole armour of God – against all the "wiles of the devil".
  - Muslims are very proud of their religion and history. It is their way of life – their identity. The thought of 'apostasy' is unthinkable. Nationalism is very strong. Christians are regarded as immoral, pig-eating, wine-drinking, loose-dressing, polytheistic infidels! The family will very strongly resist any family member becoming a Christian!
  - There are massive cultural differences between western 'Christian' cultures and most Muslim cultures – especially in western immorality, western politics and western Christian worship. There is a long, bitter history of antagonism between the 'Christian' West and the Islamic nations.
  - Muslim cultures produce strong family solidarity with a group honour conscience. To become a believer is considered a terrible shame – the worst possible. This leads to being thrown out of the family as well as state and cultural/societal persecution.
  - There are major issues that need to be dealt with: the Son of God, the Trinity, the Bible has been changed, the Lord Jesus was not crucified etc. Muslims are often self-satisfied and self-righteous because they think they have the final truth, the final book and the final prophet. To them the Lord Jesus is only a prophet. Islam is a moral religion.
- **Christianity is very confusing to them**. Be patient and explain slowly.

  Be conscious of the following:
  - There are many denominations.
  - Sometimes western religious leaders make statements of denial – i.e. the miracles of Jesus that the Qur'an affirms.
  - Western Christians – i.e. most people – are extremely secular.
  - Western Christians are often racists and Muslims are especially vulnerable.
  - Muslim ethnic minorities are devalued and unwanted.
  - Going to church is often a nightmare – Christians don't remove their shoes in church – they sit down to pray – the music is similar to a disco etc.
  - The Gospel has no appearance of 'Good News' at all.

- **Some initial dos and don'ts**
  - Muslims like to talk about religious issues. They feel comfortable because they feel themselves to be on strong ground.
  - It takes time to make friends and build up trust.
  - Being polite is considered a much higher value than telling the literal truth. So when you are given a "relational yes" it may mean "no" but they are not deliberately lying.
  - They only express their true feelings with very close friends they trust or with close family.
  - Telling your personal testimony is more constructive than arguing about doctrinal issues.
  - Pray with them and for them before you leave. Stand up, shoes off, palms up and eyes open.
    - ✧ Solomon **stood** to pray when he dedicated the Temple. (1 Kings 8:22)
    - ✧ Abraham's servant bowed before the Lord. (Gen. 24:26)
    - ✧ The Psalmist calls us to kneel before the Lord as well as bow down. (Ps. 85:6)
    - ✧ Ezra fell on his knees and spread out his hands to the Lord (Ezra 9:5)
    - ✧ The Lord Jesus **knelt** to pray in the garden of Gethsemane (Lk. 22:41)

    Muslims will watch us carefully when we pray and we shouldn't put them off by casual attitudes and a perceived lack of reverence expressed through our bodily movements or lack of them.
  - Be very careful about the terms 'Son of God', 'Trinity' etc.
  - If they come to a church meeting, explain in detail what will happen. Often singing is a big surprise as well as men and women mixed, shoes on etc.
  - Hospitality is very important. Give it and receive it.
  - When you have made a good friend, give him/her a whole Bible as a gift.

- **Tell your story in no more than three minutes**
  - Your own personal story is one of your most useful tools in evangelism. If you believe you know God in a personal way, don't be afraid to say so! If you believe your sins have been forgiven, explain the basis of your confidence in God's forgiveness.
  - Spend one minute on your life before you met the Lord Jesus, one minute on how you met the Lord and one minute on how life has been since you met the Lord Jesus.
  - Try and eliminate all evangelical jargon words and all vocabulary that misleads. Practice your story many times. Write it out. Have others review your story critically and finally memorise it. Be content to explain one small aspect of the Gospel at a time. Don't feel you have failed if you have been unable to explain the whole Gospel at one time.

- **Learn all that is good in their culture and show your appreciation!**

  Enjoy their food and their warm family life with its huge number of close relatives. Laugh at their jokes. Get out of your ethnocentric shells. Learn and understand and appreciate some of the great accomplishments of their history and culture.

- **Use Bible stories** and say they are from the Bible. Focus on the essentials. Don't make it hard on those who are struggling to understand the truth in their own cultural framework and divorce it from all the trappings of 'Western Christianity'. Seek to understand why and how they act, speak and think - their cultural, spiritual and intellectual background. Some of this can be done by observation. Learn to 'scratch where they are itching'. The Gospel **must** come over to them as **Good News**.

- **Seek to re-state the Gospel in a way that a Muslim's felt-needs will be met**

  - How many Gospels are there? (See Gal. 1:7-9; 2:7 Mk. 1:1) What is the Gospel for the Muslims and how can I communicate it so it can be understood and received? How can I prepare my Muslim friends to receive the Gospel and pass it on to their friends?

    Clearly there was a difference between how Paul talked to the Jews and how he talked to the Gentiles (see Acts 13 and 17). Identify the differences. What was the difference in how Peter talked to Jews and Gentiles (see Acts 2 and Acts 10)?

  - Your goal is to introduce your friend to the Lord Jesus so he/she becomes a follower of the Lord Jesus. This is usually a long process because the cost is high.

  - **Some initial aims**:
    - Get your friend to watch the Jesus Film or Magdalena or "Visions".
    - Get him/her to read or listen to parts of the Bible – especially the Gospels.

      Acts 8:35 - Philip: ***"Beginning with this Scripture …."*** Start where they are, not where you are! Ask questions, but always remember 1 Cor. 13: ***"If I speak in the tongues of men and angels and have not love…."*** Remember Heb. 4:12-13 and 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

      So make it a priority to encourage your friend to read one of the Gospels (Matthew or Luke). If he/she says the Bible has been corrupted, say that you are willing to discuss the matter, but ask if he/she has ever read the Bible.

      [It is best to start with Luke. Matthew is good but some Muslims find it too 'Jewish'. Mark introduces a major stumbling block in the first sentence. John is helpful at a later stage.]

    - Help him/her to access a relevant website.
    - Pray with him/her. It is best to pray palms upwards, eyes open and to remove your shoes.
    - Give your friend a New Testament as a gift before you leave. Explain where he/she should read. If you give a whole Bible then suggest they start with Genesis and then go on to Matthew or Luke.

  - **Try and discover their felt needs**. Ask God to help you. A 'need' is something you feel anxiety about and that, to some extent, causes you to feel incapable of functioning in a full and healthy manner. These may include the need for:
    - ✧ Education
    - ✧ An intercessor between God and man
    - ✧ Freedom from shame
    - ✧ Protection from the evil eye and demonic spirits
    - ✧ Understanding how to reconcile modern science with religion
    - ✧ Individual freedom
    - ✧ A way to overcome the fear of death
    - ✧ A remedy for lack of spiritual vitality
    - ✧ Freedom from sickness
    - ✧ The ability to show hospitality
    - ✧ Honour in the community

    - Study Luke 20 and see how the Lord Jesus asked questions:

      v. 1-8 He answered a question with a question to reveal their contradictory double standards.

      v. 9-18 He told a parable about His role as Son and Heir. He proved His point by quoting Scripture.

v. 21-26 People are trying to trap the Lord Jesus into answering their questions. He asks a very obvious question then gives a cryptic answer to a different question. Often the Lord Jesus didn't answer their questions. Sometimes he asked a question to clarify the intent of the questioner. **He was never boxed in**! So if you don't like a question, ask another question instead!

v. 27-40 In response to a rather stupid question, the Lord Jesus exposed their unscriptural pre-suppositions and proved from the Book that they were following religious traditions and not the Word of God.

- Three questions you should **not** ask (at least at the beginning) are about:
  a. The existence of God
  b. The prophethood of Muhammad
  c. The authenticity of the Qur'an/Hadith
- Learn about your friend's family, occupation, present residency, where he/she originally came from, language etc.
- Be a good listener!
- Learn to answer questions with questions. Here is an example:

  Friend: Are you a Muslim?

  You: Are you asking about my father or me?

  Friend: Your father.

  You: My father was a Christian.

  Friend: How about you?

  You: Are you asking about my relationship to God or my relationship to Muhammad?

  Friend: Your relationship to God.

  You: I have surrendered my life totally to God.

  Friend: How about Muhammad?

  You: I give Muhammad the honour and respect he deserves and I give the Lord Jesus the honour and respect He deserves.

  Friend: What do you mean?

  Back to Luke 20:41-44. The Lord Jesus asks a question. He was clearly showing them that their view of the Messiah was incomplete/inadequate.
- Do all you can to keep your conversation from degenerating into a 'me' vs. 'you' debate.
- Be genuine and patient. We aren't trying to 'get converts'. We are trying to obey the Lord Jesus and go where He leads. He will build His Kingdom.
- Turn the conversation back to the Lord Jesus as often as you can.

➢ **Learn a few phrases in their language**

- Greetings: in Arabic **'as salaam alekum'** (peace be upon you).
  [The same greeting the Lord Jesus gave to His disciples on Resurrection evening.]
- Use titles of respect – 'The Lord Jesus'. Don't speak disrespectfully about Muhammad or about the Qur'an (Sharif – noble).
- Muslims call the Lord Jesus 'Sayyid Isa' (used about 25 times in the Qur'an) and 'al-Masih' (used 8 times in the Qur'an).
- Religious terminology: 'salat' and 'dua' – the first is formal ritual prayer and the other is supplication.

- **Ask about their customs and seek to understand them – Finding Common Ground**

  There isn't time to go through a typical worldview of a Muslim. Here are a few pointers:

  - They are much more family oriented than the average westerner who is much more individualistic.
  - They are an honour-shame society rather than a guilt-innocence society like most of the western world. A shame-based culture needs external sanctions from the surrounding society to secure social control. Whether you have a mainly shame or guilt-based culture depends on different patterns of child rearing. Small nuclear families tend to produce a guilt conscience, while large extended families living together produce a shame conscience.
  - Treat your Bible with great respect. Never put it on the floor or put things on top of it!
  - Asking questions is a great way to learn about culture. Look for areas of common ground.

- **Think in their way**

  A logical line-by-line presentation of the truth rarely works well. The Semitic culture of the Middle East hasn't changed much over the past 4,000 years. In the Bible truth is presented through stories, illustrations and proverbs.

  Here are some examples of how to use stories in the Bible:

  - **Sin:** tell the story about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk. 18:9-14) and the story about the Rich Fool (Lk. 12:16-21). In a shame culture 'sin' feels as if one has been defiled (it relates to 'haram') both real and ceremonial. See Mt. 15:1-20 for the teaching of the Lord Jesus on this.
  - **God's love:** use the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Amazing Father and his two Lost Sons. (Lk. 15:3-32).
  - **God's way for mankind's salvation:** use The Great Supper – the garment of righteousness (Mt. 22:1-14) and The Wicked Tenants (Lk. 20:9-18).
  - **God's judgement:** use the Wheat and the Tares (Mt. 13:24-30).

- **Remember evangelism is not a process but a lifestyle**

  - **Meeting people:** Build friendships where you are staying with shopkeepers. Introduce yourself. Find out and memorize their names.
  - **Pray regularly** for those you meet. God will help you to begin to focus on key individuals.
  - **Interact:** Look for ways to spend time with people within their comfort zone – a tea shop – watching TV – going for a walk.

  There are no blanket formulae in evangelism among Muslims. You are placing yourself in a vulnerable position. The Muslims you meet will probably know more about 'Christianity' than you do about Islam.
  But sadly, most will be totally ignorant of the Gospel. It is vital to:

  - **Be constantly in prayer.** It is the Holy Spirit who wins men and women to the Lord Jesus. Seek His guidance and power as you present your witness – story.
  - **Always use the Word of God.** Muslims respect holy books – the law of Nabi Moses – the Psalms of David – the writings of prophets (i.e. the Old Testament) and the Gospels (i.e. the New Testament). Let the Word of God speak for itself. The Gospels are the best portions to start with – particularly Matthew and Luke together with Genesis.
  - **Be a genuine friend.** Saying, "Hello" isn't enough. If you really care, share your time with them, eat with them and help them with their problems.

- **Ask thought-provoking questions:**

  "Do you expect to go to heaven?"

  "Do you have the assurance that God will accept you?"

  "What does the Qur'an teach about forgiveness of sins?"

  "May I show you what the Bible teaches?"

  Questions like these show that you have an interest in the important things of life. Ask questions humbly and sincerely.

- **Turn** conversations to the Lord Jesus.
  - Read through the Gospels to see how Jesus turned conversations around to focus on His identity and the reason He came.
  - He seemed to be able to take any conversation and turn it round to who He was. [See Luke 12:13-14; 19:38-40 (the Messiah is worthy of praise); 20:2-8; 18:18-19; 2:48-49]
- **Listen attentively**. When you ask a question, courtesy requires that you listen to the answer no matter how long it takes. You'll be surprised at how much you'll learn!
- **Present your beliefs openly**. State what you believe as clearly as possible and without apology showing the Scripture passages that support those teachings. In this way you place the responsibility for that teaching where it belongs, on the Word of God – God's revelation.
- **Serve people:** As you meet people, pray for them and interact with them, God will show you ways to serve them. Respond to their felt needs. Take the initiative.
- **Sharing:** God will give opportunities to share His reality in your life naturally in an unforced, non-artificial way.

- **Use other points of contact**
  - **Amulets and other evil spirit repellents** to protect from the Evil Eye, jinn and other things like curses that may harm them: Ask how the objects protect them and what is causing the fear. Explain how being "in Christ" protects you from these occult attacks.
  - **For women: How to answer the question as to why you don't wear a veil?** See Is. 61:10 and Rom. 13:4 and say something like, "I do, but it is invisible". Then talk about these two verses.
  - **If asked whether we have an equivalent to the Shehadeh** (There is no God but God and Muhammad is the prophet of God) use Jn. 17:3.
  - **In discussing prayer use the Lord's Prayer** (Lk. 11:24). Compare and contrast it with Sura 1 in the Qur'an.
  - **In a discussion about Ramadan and fasting** share about the fast that God requires of us – a fast from sin – Is. 58.
  - **Almsgiving**: see 2 Cor. 9:15 ….
  - **Pilgrimage**: see Jn. 14:1-6. It speaks about the pilgrim, the city and the way. Share about The Lord Jesus, the practice, the belief and the experience.

- **Avoid the snake pit of political debate!**

  Debating is a huge problem. We don't have to go looking for it. It will come looking for us. Many Muslims have a list they were taught at school, in the mosque and on TV of what is completely wrong about Christianity. This is always linked to current politics. It can start with a friendly discussion about Islam and Christianity. The more your friend defends Islam (he/she is bound to

do this for honour's sake) the more he/she identifies with the position he/she is defending. It becomes impossible to back down or admit we are right without incurring shame! Now we have lost a friend.

Sometimes a friend will raise an objection – take a pot shot at some aspect of Christianity – almost as a reflex action when it is really no obstacle to him/her. If we pull out the 'heavy guns' of our argument then a superficial objection becomes a really major barrier.

Apologetics is helpful to believers from a Muslim background after they have come to faith! So our confidence is that the Word of God – especially the part that focuses on the Lord Jesus – when used by the Holy Spirit, can bring Muslims to faith.

If your friend says, "I will read the Bible with you if you will study the Qur'an with me"; this is a good idea. It will enable you to move forward in your objective of presenting the Lord Jesus to him/her through the Scripture and touching both heart and mind. There you will discover the Redemption Analogies.

Our goal is to be advocates of the Lord Jesus, full of eagerness for our friends to meet Him and follow Him. A key part of our advocacy is that we live our lives in obedience to the Lord Jesus. So avoid anything that might close the door to the entry of the Word of God. Don't give lessons! Let the Bible speak for itself.

- **P R E Ping for ministry to Muslims**

There is always the challenge between "being" and "doing". We need to set aside extra time for **prayer, reflection, evaluation and planning** (**P R E P**).

P R E Ping will help you recognise the activity of the Holy Spirit so you can co-operate with Him and make adjustments to join Him in what He is doing. Don't be overwhelmed by the tyranny of the urgent! Write down the names of people you have met, follow up details, questions you were asked, the literature/media you gave to them and how you would like to follow up while there and when at home.

- **Prayer is your greatest priority**! Be constant in prayer. It is only God Himself who can defeat such a formidable foe as the devil. Pray that God will lead you, prepare the people you will meet, bring to your memory all the words you will need, keep you from doing or saying anything not in harmony with His will and draw your friend to Himself. Jesus said, ***"If I be lifted up I will draw all men to Myself."*** (Jn. 12:32)

  Paul said, ***"I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some"***.
  (1 Cor. 9:20-22)

  Pray for your friend.

  The Lord Jesus was speaking in an agricultural culture. He used lots of agricultural terms. Many Muslims are only a generation or two away from an agricultural culture.

  Here are some terms to consider:

  - Prepare your friend to accept the seed of the Gospel. Pray as you deal with the spiritual bondage and lack of repentance in their hearts. Clear out the boulders of confusion.
  - Fields need ploughing – i.e. your friend needs to be opened up to new ideas.
  - The seed needs to be sowed in your friend's life.
  - The field needs water and light. They lack a 'Jesus-like' model. They have no one but you! Water the seed in prayer.
  - You have an enemy who seeks to dig up the little plant. Fight the powers of darkness in prayer so your friend will not reject the Gospel.

Prayer and **continuing friendship** are the keys.

- **Jesus is the model for our methods**

  He identified totally with us, yet without compromising His integrity and separateness. How would Jesus set about winning Muslims? I think He would dress like them. He would eat with them. He would sit where they sit. Would He pray with them when they prayed? Would He be all things to all Muslims?

  Ask God to show you what you should do in various circumstances – i.e. should you remove your shoes when you pray? Moses did!

- **Jesus is the model for our message**

  We must teach what He taught (Mt. 28:19, 20). He is the Gospel! He appealed to people to accept Him, believe on Him, feed upon Him, drink from Him. Jesus is central to our message.

  Let us not make it difficult for Muslims who are turning to God – see Acts 15:19.