

THE CRESCENT AND THE CROSS

ISLAM AND THE GOSPEL

*“I am the way, the truth, and the life:
no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*

JOHN 14:6

ISLAM AND THE GOSPEL

A History, an Examination, and a Call to Christ

Compiled by the Webmaster
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INTRODUCTION

Islam claims more than a fifth of the human race, and its shadow falls across whole nations where the name of Christ was once preached freely and is now spoken only in secret. This book is written out of love for the Muslim people and out of grief for the many places where the Gospel has been shut out by the sword, the school, and the state. It is not written to mock a people, but to examine a system — and to set that system, honestly and without evasion, beside the Word of God.

Two errors are equally easy to fall into, and both are common. The first is to treat Islam as though it were simply another sincere path to the same God, differing from the Christian faith only in custom and language. Scripture will not allow this; a faith that denies the Cross, denies the Sonship of Christ, and denies the Trinity cannot be a variant form of the true religion, however devout its adherents. The second error is to reach for whatever polemic sounds most damaging, true or not, and repeat it because it is convenient. This book refuses that path as well. Where a popular argument against Islam does not hold up under honest scrutiny — however widely it has been repeated in Christian circles — it will not be used here. The case that needs to be made can be made from sound history and from Islam's own earliest and most trusted sources, and it needs no help from arguments that will not stand.

That is the method of this book. Rather than relying on secondhand claims about Islam's origins, the chapters that follow draw first on the Quran's own text, on the earliest Islamic biographies of Muhammad such as Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat*, on Ibn al-Kalbi's *Book of Idols*, and on the collected sayings preserved in *Sahih al-Bukhari*. These are not hostile Western sources; they are the record Islam itself has kept and transmitted for over a thousand years. When that record is read plainly, it tells us a great deal about the religious world of pre-Islamic Arabia, about the shrine at Mecca before Muhammad ever preached there, and about which of those older practices survived into the faith he founded. A Muslim reader cannot wave away his own canon, and an honest inquirer needs nothing more.

Alongside those primary sources, this book draws on the work of serious historians of early Islam — men such as Robert Hoyland and Patricia Crone, and earlier scholars such as C. Snouck Hurgronje — rather than on popular but poorly sourced theories that have circulated in some Christian literature for decades. The reader deserves an argument that can survive scrutiny, not one that collapses under it.

The purpose of all this, however, is not merely historical. It is to bring the reader — Muslim or Christian, doubting or convinced — face to face with the claims of Jesus Christ. Scripture gives plain tests for a true prophet and plain warnings about a false one:

*“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” —
Galatians 1:8*

This book will set the claims of Muhammad, and the faith built upon them, against that standard and others like it, without flinching and without unfairness. It will ask honestly whether Muhammad is foretold anywhere in the Scriptures, as some claim. It will look at the documents sometimes offered as an Islamic “gospel” and trace where they actually came from. And it will not turn away from the present suffering of Christians and Jews living under Islamic rule today, because a religion must be measured by its fruit as well as its origin.

Christ Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). That claim is either true or it is not; it allows no rival and no addition. This book is written in the conviction that it is true — and in the hope that some who read it, of whatever background, will come to know Him.

What follows, then, is a history of Arabia before Muhammad, an honest look at the shrine he inherited and reshaped, an account of the man and the movement he founded, and a doctrinal comparison of what Muslims and Christians actually believe — all leading, at the last, to the Gospel itself.

CHAPTER TWO

ARABIA BEFORE MUHAMMAD

Muhammad was not born into a spiritual vacuum, and Islam did not arise on a blank page. The Arabia of his birth, around 570 A.D., was a crowded and restless religious world — tribal, oral, bound together by trade and blood rather than by any central government, and thick with gods. To understand the faith Muhammad founded, it is necessary first to understand the world he inherited.

The peninsula was home to two very different ways of life. Most Arabs were Bedouin nomads, moving their herds across the desert under the authority of tribe and clan rather than king or state. But scattered among them were settled trading towns — Mecca, Yathrib (later Medina), Ta'if — that grew wealthy from the caravan routes carrying incense, spices, and goods between Yemen in the south and Syria in the north. Mecca's position on that route, and the shrine at its center, made it one of the most important of these towns long before Muhammad ever preached there.

A Crowded Heaven

Pre-Islamic Arabia was not irreligious; if anything, it suffered from the opposite problem. Hisham ibn al-Kalbi's Book of Idols, our fullest early Islamic catalogue of Arabian paganism, records dozens of tribal gods and shrines scattered across the peninsula, each tribe typically keeping its own idol and its own sacred stone.

Strikingly, the Quran itself concedes that the pagan Arabs already used the name “Allah” and already regarded Him as the Creator — Surah 29:61-63 and 39:3 both describe the idolaters acknowledging that Allah made the heavens and the earth, while still turning to lesser gods as intercessors between themselves and Him. The problem Muhammad set out to correct, in other words, was not that Arabia had no concept of a supreme God; it was that this supreme God had been crowded out by a great many rivals for the Arabs' worship.

Chief among those rivals were three goddesses named together in Surah 53:19-20 as “the daughters of Allah”: al-Lat, worshipped chiefly at Ta'if; al-'Uzza, whose shrine stood near Mecca; and Manat, venerated near Qudayd on the road to Medina. Unlike much of what later tradition added to the picture of pre-Islamic religion, these three names are not merely a matter of Islamic memory — they are independently attested in pre-Islamic inscriptions, which is more than can be said for many of the other deities

later writers catalogued. At the Kaaba in Mecca itself stood Hubal, described in Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat* as the chief idol of the sanctuary, a statue of red carnelian used by the Quraysh for divination by arrows.

One detail deserves particular notice. Surah 71:23 names five gods belonging to the generation of Noah who refused his preaching: Wadd, Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq, and Nasr. Islamic tradition itself — recorded by Ibn al-Kalbi and traced by Ibn 'Abbas back through al-Bukhari — identifies these as the very gods still being worshipped by named Arabian tribes on the eve of Islam: Wadd by the Banu Kalb at Dumat al-Jandal, Suwa' by Hudhayl, Yaghuth by tribes of Madhhij, Ya'uq by Hamdan, and Nasr by Himyar. Whether one takes the traditional explanation — that these names survived from before the Flood — or the more sober historical reading, that the Quran is simply naming the tribal gods of Muhammad's own contemporaries and projecting them back onto Noah's story, either way the passage shows how thoroughly local Arabian idolatry had worked its way into the Quran's account of the distant past.

Neighbors of Another Faith

Arabia's paganism did not exist in isolation from the biblical faiths. To the north, the Ghassanid Arabs were Christian allies of the Byzantine Empire. To the south, in Najran, a substantial Christian community had taken root long before Muhammad, and had suffered greatly for its faith — in 523 A.D. the Jewish Himyarite king Dhu Nuwas is recorded to have massacred the Christians of Najran rather than let them abandon their confession. Jewish communities, meanwhile, were firmly established at Yathrib, where the tribes of Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayza lived alongside the Arab clans who would later host Muhammad, and at the oasis of Khaybar to the north. For a time an entire Jewish kingdom had ruled in Yemen under Dhu Nuwas himself. Farther east, Persian Zoroastrianism had its own foothold, after the Sassanid Empire drove out an Ethiopian occupation of Yemen in the 570s and installed its own governor there.

Arabia also knew a smaller company who fit neither the pagan nor the settled Jewish or Christian mold — the hanifs, native Arabian monotheists who had rejected the idols of their tribes without formally converting to Judaism or Christianity. Islamic tradition names Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a cousin of Muhammad's wife Khadijah remembered as a Christian scholar, among those consulted in the earliest days of Muhammad's revelations, along with the hanif Zayd ibn 'Amr. Their presence shows that biblical monotheism was not a foreign curiosity to the Arabs of Muhammad's generation; it was a known and living option, encountered at the market and within the extended family, well before any Quran existed to proclaim it.

The Year of the Elephant

One event from this period found its way into the Quran itself. Around the year of Muhammad's birth, Abraha, the Christian Aksumite viceroy governing Yemen, marched north against Mecca with an army that reportedly included war elephants, intending — by most traditional accounts — to destroy the Kaaba and redirect Arabia's pilgrimage traffic toward his own church at Sana'a. The campaign collapsed before it reached the city; Surah 105, "Al-Fil" ("The Elephant"), credits the army's destruction to flocks of birds pelting the soldiers with stones, an event some historians have connected to a sudden outbreak of disease. Whatever the precise cause, the failure of Abraha's campaign left Mecca's shrine standing and its prestige, in Arab eyes, considerably enhanced — just as the boy who would one day preach against its idols entered the world.

This, then, was pre-Islamic Arabia: not a people ignorant of the one true God, but a people who already knew His name and had buried it under the weight of many others; not strangers to the biblical faith, but neighbors to Christians and Jews who had lived among them for generations. It is against this crowded and syncretistic backdrop — not a religious blank slate — that the rest of this book's account of Muhammad, the Kaaba, and the faith he built upon it must be read.

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." — Acts 17:26-27

CHAPTER THREE

THE KAABA: A PAGAN SHRINE

Whatever else may be said of the Kaaba, one fact is not seriously disputed by historians of any background: for centuries before Muhammad was born, it stood at the center of a thriving pagan sanctuary. This chapter sets aside, for now, the question of who first built it — that question belongs to a later chapter — and asks a narrower one: what was the Kaaba actually being used for on the eve of Islam?

Witnessed by Outsiders

The shrine's fame reached beyond Arabia long before Muhammad. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, writing in the first century B.C., described a sanctuary along the Arabian coast that he called “very holy and exceedingly revered by all Arabians” — a description many historians of the region connect to the sanctuary at Mecca, though the identification cannot be proven beyond doubt. Two centuries later, the geographer Claudius Ptolemy listed a settlement in roughly the same area under the name “Macoraba,” which a number of scholars have likewise associated with Mecca. Neither writer was interested in Arabia's Ishmaelite genealogies or its coming prophet; they simply recorded, as outside observers, that a major shrine already existed there and was already drawing worshippers from across the peninsula.

Under New Management: Kusayy and the Quraysh

Islamic tradition itself supplies the clearest picture of how the Kaaba came to be run the way it was in Muhammad's day. Sometime in the fifth century, Qusayy ibn Kilab — Muhammad's own ancestor, five generations back — wrested custodianship of the shrine away from the Khuza'ah tribe, who had held it before him. Later biographers record that Qusayy's predecessor as guardian, Abu Ghabshan, was persuaded to hand over the keys in exchange for a skin of wine. Qusayy then rebuilt the Kaaba, organized the surrounding houses of Mecca around it, and established his own clan, the Quraysh, as its hereditary keepers — the same clan, and very nearly the same family, into which Muhammad himself would be born roughly a century later. The shrine Muhammad grew up beside, in other words, was not an ancient relic quietly awaiting rediscovery; it was an actively managed pagan sanctuary, organized as such by his own great-great-great-grandfather.

A House Full of Gods

By the time Muhammad returned to Mecca in triumph in 630 A.D., Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat* records that the Kaaba and its precincts held some 360 idols, which Muhammad then had removed and destroyed. Chief among them was Hubal, described by Ibn Ishaq and by the early historian al-Azraqi as a statue of red carnelian, shaped like a man, its broken right hand replaced with one of gold. Hubal stood over a well inside the Kaaba itself, where offerings were brought to him — tradition records a gift of a hundred camels on one occasion — and where seven arrows were kept for a hereditary custodian to cast in divination over questions of parentage, marriage, and other matters put to him by worshippers.

Hubal was not unusual in receiving blood offerings at his shrine; this was the normal pattern of Arabian paganism generally. Sacred stones across the peninsula regularly doubled as altars, with the blood of sacrificed camels, sheep, and goats poured or smeared directly over them — Ibn Ishaq records, for instance, that the idol Sa'd, worshipped by the Banu Kinanah, stood permanently stained by the animal offerings brought to it. There is no reason to think the Kaaba's own idols were kept any cleaner.

The Black Stone Before Islam

The Black Stone set into the Kaaba's corner was already an object of pilgrimage veneration — kissed, touched, and circumambulated by pagan Arabs — long before Muhammad incorporated the same gestures into Islamic ritual. That continuity was evidently felt within the early Muslim community itself, not just alleged by outsiders. *Sahih al-Bukhari* records that the second caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, once came to the Stone during his own pilgrimage, kissed it, and then addressed it directly: he knew, he said, that it was only a stone, powerless to help or to harm anyone, and that he kissed it only because he had once watched Muhammad do the same. A caliph does not need to reassure himself, and his audience, of the harmlessness of a stone unless the older instinct to venerate it as more than a stone was still very much alive around him.

This, then, was the Kaaba on the eve of Islam: a sanctuary of ancient and widely acknowledged fame, rebuilt and administered for generations by Muhammad's own ancestors, housing hundreds of idols that received real sacrifices, and centered on a stone already kissed by pilgrims long before any verse of the Quran was revealed. The question of whether this same shrine can also be traced back to Abraham — as the Quran claims — is taken up next.

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.” — Acts 17:29

CHAPTER FOUR

MUHAMMAD AND THE RISE OF ISLAM

Having looked at the world Muhammad was born into and the shrine he grew up beside, this chapter turns to the man himself — his early life, his call to prophethood, and the twenty-two years in which a single preacher in a minor caravan town became the ruler of most of Arabia.

An Orphaned Beginning

Muhammad was born at Mecca around 570 A.D., in the same year tradition remembers for Abraha's failed campaign against the Kaaba. His father, Abdullah, died before he was born; his mother, Amina, died when he was about six. He was raised first by his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, and after the old man's death by his uncle, Abu Talib. As a young man he worked in the caravan trade and earned, even among his critics, a reputation for honesty — he was known, tradition says, as al-Amin, “the trustworthy.”

Khadijah and the Cave of Hira

Around 595 A.D. Muhammad married Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, a wealthy widow considerably older than himself, whose caravan business he had managed. For fifteen years afterward he had the habit of withdrawing periodically to a cave on Mount Hira, outside Mecca, for solitary reflection. It was there, according to the account preserved in Sahih al-Bukhari, that at around the age of forty he experienced his first encounter with the being later identified as the angel Gabriel — seized and pressed so forcefully, in Muhammad's own recollection, that he felt he could not bear it, and commanded three times to “Read,” though he protested that he could not. He returned home shaking and asked to be covered. Khadijah reassured him, and together they went to her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, an elderly Christian long resident in Mecca who, tradition records, likened what had happened to Muhammad to the calling of Moses and told him his revelation was genuine.

It is worth pausing on this moment, because it returns us to a figure already met in an earlier chapter. Waraqah was no stranger encountered by chance; he was Khadijah's own cousin and a member of Muhammad's extended family, and his recognition of the experience depended entirely on categories — prophet, revelation, the God of Moses — that were already native to the biblical faith he had practiced for years among the Quraysh. Islam's first outside confirmation, by its own account, came from a Christian relative applying a biblical framework.

A Contested Memory

One episode from these early Meccan years deserves an honest mention, precisely because it is disputed rather than settled. Early historians such as al-Tabari and Ibn Sa'd record a tradition — commonly called the story of the “Satanic Verses” — in which Muhammad is said to have once recited words permitting intercession through al-Lat, al-'Uzza, and Manat, the three goddesses discussed in the previous chapter, before retracting them as an insertion from Satan rather than a genuine revelation. Many later Muslim scholars reject the story outright as unreliable; some Western historians, on the other hand, have argued that a story this embarrassing to Muhammad's claim to prophethood is unlikely to have been invented by his own followers. This book takes no firm position on which side is right — the tradition's authenticity is genuinely contested, and it is used here only to note that even within Islamic memory, the line between worshipping Allah alone and accommodating the old Meccan goddesses was, for at least one moment, remembered as dangerously thin.

Persecution and the Hijra

Muhammad's preaching against the idols of Mecca — idols tended, as the previous chapter showed, by his own kinsmen — met fierce resistance from a Quraysh leadership whose wealth depended substantially on Mecca's status as a pilgrimage center. Boycott, harassment, and outright persecution followed for over a decade. In 622 A.D. Muhammad and his followers migrated to Yathrib, henceforth known as Medina; this migration, the Hijra, became the starting point of the Islamic calendar. At Medina, Muhammad drew up an agreement, often called the Constitution of Medina, binding together his own followers, the pagan Arab clans of the city, and its three resident Jewish tribes — the Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayza, already introduced in Chapter Two — under his own arbitration.

The Ummah at War

That arbitration did not hold for long. In 624 a small Muslim force won a decisive and unexpected victory over a much larger Meccan army at Badr; in its aftermath, the Banu Qaynuqa were besieged and expelled from Medina. A year later at Uhud the Meccans returned and inflicted a serious reverse on the Muslims, Muhammad himself being wounded; the Banu Nadir were expelled soon after, accused of conspiring with the enemy. In 627, a large Meccan-led coalition besieged Medina itself in what is remembered as the Battle of the Trench, a siege the city withstood behind fortifications Muhammad had ordered dug.

What followed the siege is recorded plainly in Islam's own earliest biography. Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat* states that the Banu Qurayza, the one Jewish tribe still remaining in Medina, were besieged in turn on suspicion of having intended to aid the besiegers, and surrendered on the understanding that their fate would be decided by Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, a wounded Muslim commander from a clan previously allied to them. Sa'd ruled that the men should be killed, the property divided among the Muslims, and the women and children taken as slaves. Ibn Ishaq records that Muhammad approved the ruling as being in accordance with God's own judgment. The men of the tribe — Islamic sources themselves give figures ranging from roughly six hundred to nine hundred — were beheaded in trenches dug in the market of Medina. This is not a charge invented by later critics of Islam; it stands in the tradition's own earliest and most trusted account of Muhammad's life, alongside the victories at Badr and the endurance at the Trench, as part of the same continuous narrative.

Return to Mecca and Death

A truce with the Meccans at Hudaibiyyah in 628 gave way, two years later, to Muhammad's largely bloodless conquest of Mecca itself, at which point — as the previous chapter recounted — the idols of the Kaaba were destroyed and the shrine rededicated to the worship of Allah alone. By the time of his Farewell Pilgrimage in 632, most of Arabia had submitted to Muhammad's authority, whether by conversion, treaty, or conquest. He died at Medina on June 8, 632, leaving behind not merely a new religion but a functioning state, an army, and a peninsula more unified than it had been in living memory — and, as the next chapter will show, an unfinished argument within his own revelation over whether that unity was to be kept by persuasion or by the sword.

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.” — Matthew 7:15-16

CHAPTER FIVE

JIHAD AND THE “RELIGION OF PEACE” QUESTION

Six days after the September 11, 2001 attacks, President George W. Bush stood in the Islamic Center of Washington and told the nation, “Islam is peace.” He was making an urgent and, in one sense, a true point: the overwhelming majority of the world's Muslims had nothing to do with those attacks and were as horrified by them as anyone else. But as a claim about the religion's own founding texts and founding history, the sentence is harder to sustain than the moment allowed for. The previous chapter left Muhammad's movement at the height of its unity in 632 A.D. This chapter asks what kind of unity it was, and what became of it.

Two Kinds of Verses

The Quran itself contains both halves of the disagreement. From the Meccan period come verses of real tolerance: Surah 2:256 states there is to be “no compulsion in religion,” and Surah 25:63 and following describe mercy toward those who repent and do good. But from the Medinan period, after Muhammad held military and political power, come verses of a very different character: Surah 8:12 and Surah 47:3-4 command striking at the necks of unbelievers in battle; Surah 4:34 permits a husband to strike a wife who persists in defiance; Surah 4:74 and 4:95 promise a greater reward to those who fight for Allah than to those who stay behind; and Surah 5:51 warns believers against taking Jews and Christians as *awliya* — a word closer to “allies” or “protectors” than to “friends” in the ordinary sense, though translators render it both ways.

Simply noting that both kinds of verses exist proves less than it might seem, since every scripture contains texts written for different circumstances. The harder question is which set of verses Islam's own scholars have understood to govern when the two collide — and Islamic jurisprudence has a specific doctrine for exactly that question.

Which Verse Wins? The Doctrine of Abrogation

Classical Islamic scholarship developed the doctrine of *naskh*, or abrogation: where two revelations genuinely conflict, the later one cancels the ruling of the earlier one, even though both remain physically present in the Quran. Surah 9:5, known traditionally as “the Verse of the Sword,” commands fighting the polytheists once a grace period has passed, sparing only those who repent, pray, and give alms. The early exegete al-Tabari read this verse as nullifying the earlier calls to forbearance, including 2:256 and the similar

109:6 (“to you be your religion, and to me mine”). Ibn Kathir's tafsir records the view that 2:256 was abrogated by the Sword Verse, and al-Suyuti's al-Itqan lists it among the verses various scholars considered abrogated.

This was never a unanimous reading. The Hanafi jurist Abu Bakr al-Jassas argued that the tolerance of 2:256 remained in force for non-Arab peoples generally, and was narrowed only with respect to the Arab polytheists Muhammad was then fighting; other classical scholars rejected any abrogation of it at all. The scope of naskh itself became a subject of real dispute — one early scholar counted roughly 138 abrogated verses, a later one as many as 238, and a good many of those were credited to the Sword Verse alone. The honest conclusion is not that Islamic scholarship unanimously erased its own peace verses; it is that a major and long-standing current within Islam's own classical jurisprudence has read the later, martial verses as the ones left standing when the two collide — which makes “Islam is a religion of peace” a claim that a significant part of Islam's own tradition would not straightforwardly recognize as settled.

Jihad in Muhammad's Own Community

It is often said, correctly as far as it goes, that jihad literally means “struggle” and can refer to an inward striving against one's own sin — what later tradition calls the greater jihad. But this cannot be the whole answer to what the word meant to the earliest generation of Muslims. Sahih al-Bukhari devotes an entire book, Kitab al-Jihad wa's-Siyar (“Jihad and Expeditions”), to the subject, and its contents are overwhelmingly concerned with armed campaigns, the division of spoils, and the conduct of war — not with private spiritual struggle. Whatever jihad may mean in a devotional sermon today, in the hadith collection Muslims regard as second only to the Quran itself, the word is put to work describing exactly what its English rendering as “holy war” has long suggested.

A Thousand Years on the Offensive

Whatever one makes of the texts, the subsequent history is a matter of settled record. Within a generation of Muhammad's death, Arab Muslim armies had destroyed the Persian Empire outright, ending well over a thousand years of Zoroastrian rule in Iran, and had stripped the Christian Byzantine Empire of roughly half its territory. By 732 a Muslim army out of North Africa had reached Tours, deep in France, before being turned back. By 750 the Umayyad Caliphate stretched from the Iberian Peninsula to the Indus valley in modern Pakistan — one continuous political and military expansion across little more than a century. Muslim armies would remain substantially on the offensive for most of the following thousand years, with

only two major exceptions in the historical record: the centuries-long Reconquista by which Christian kingdoms slowly retook Iberia, and the Crusades, themselves a reaction to earlier Islamic conquest of historically Christian lands in the Near East rather than an unprovoked assault upon Islam.

None of this history licenses hatred toward the many ordinary Muslims for whom, in practice, the faith really is lived as a religion of peace — President Bush's underlying instinct to protect Muslim Americans from a wave of suspicion and reprisal after September 11 was a right one, and Scripture itself commands love even for one's enemies. But love for people is not well served by a false account of their history, and honesty about that history requires saying plainly that “Islam is peace” was never a claim the religion's own founding texts, founding jurisprudence, or founding centuries could bear on their own terms.

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds).” — 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

CHAPTER SIX

DID ABRAHAM BUILD THE KAABA?

Chapter Three left one question standing: the Kaaba that Muhammad grew up beside was, by any outside or Islamic account, a functioning pagan shrine — but the Quran claims it was originally built, or rebuilt, by Abraham himself. If that claim is true, it changes everything about how the shrine's later paganism should be read. If it is not true, it is worth asking why the claim was made at all.

The Quran's Claim

The claim itself is stated plainly and more than once. Surah 2:127 describes Abraham and Ishmael together raising the foundations of “the House.” Surah 3:96 declares that the first house appointed for mankind's worship was the one at Bakkah, universally read by Muslims as Mecca. Surah 22:26 adds that Allah showed Abraham the site of the House and commanded him to keep it pure for those who would circle around it. Traditional Islamic exegesis fills in the rest of the story: Hagar and the infant Ishmael are said to have been brought to the Meccan valley, the well of Zamzam sprang up to save them, and years later father and son together built or rebuilt the sanctuary.

The Silence of Genesis

Scripture's own account of Abraham's life is not vague or fragmentary; it is one of the most carefully documented biographies in the ancient world, tracing his journey from Ur to Haran, from Haran into Canaan, down into Egypt, through Gerar, to Beersheba, and to Mount Moriah, ending with his burial in the cave of Machpelah near Hebron (Genesis 25:9-10). Ishmael's own story is told with comparable care: when Hagar and Ishmael were sent away, Genesis 21:14 places them in the wilderness of Beersheba, and the years that followed in the wilderness of Paran (Genesis 21:21) — both well within the southern edge of Canaan, hundreds of miles short of the Hijaz. Nowhere does Genesis so much as hint that Abraham ever traveled the length of the Arabian Peninsula to build a house of worship, and nowhere does it mention Ishmael doing so either. A record this detailed about a man's travels does not casually omit a journey of a thousand miles undertaken to found a permanent sanctuary. Its silence here is not an accident of a thin record; it is the silence of a record that had no such journey to report.

Taha Hussein's Verdict

It is not only outside readers of the Quran who have doubted the Abraham-at-Mecca story. In 1926 the Egyptian scholar Taha Hussein — blind from

childhood, educated at Cairo and later at the Sorbonne, and eventually Egypt's own Minister of Education — published *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jahili* (“On Pre-Islamic Poetry”), applying modern literary-critical method to the poetry and traditions of pre-Islamic Arabia. Among his conclusions, Hussein argued that the story of Abraham and Ishmael building the Kaaba together looked less like preserved history than like a story shaped to serve the interests of the Quraysh — Muhammad's own tribe — by grafting their central shrine onto the prestige of Abraham's name. The reaction was fierce: religious authorities accused him of blasphemy, the book was withdrawn from circulation, and Hussein was tried for apostasy and lost his position at Cairo University in 1931, though no criminal conviction followed. He republished a year later under a different title with the offending chapter removed. Whatever one makes of the rest of his literary theories, the fact that Islam's own most eminent modern literary scholar reached this conclusion, using the ordinary tools of historical criticism, is difficult to dismiss as Western prejudice.

What the External Evidence Shows

The previous chapters' findings only deepen the problem. Diodorus Siculus and Ptolemy both attest to the shrine's fame centuries before Muhammad, and neither breathes a word of any connection to Abraham — an odd omission if the shrine's own founding legend was already current. Muhammad's ancestor Qusayy reorganized the sanctuary as a functioning pagan center in the fifth century, and by the time of the conquest of Mecca in 630 it held some 360 idols, tended for generations by hereditary custodians who show no trace, in any source, of guarding a memory of Abrahamic monotheism. If the Kaaba really had been consecrated by Abraham to the worship of the one true God, its centuries-long career as one of Arabia's busiest pagan shrines — unremarked upon, unresisted, and apparently unremembered by anyone until the seventh century — is left unexplained.

There is also a plainer theological problem the claim runs into. Scripture is explicit that the covenant promise to Abraham runs through Isaac, not Ishmael: “In Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Genesis 21:12), even while Ishmael himself is genuinely blessed in his own right (Genesis 17:20; 21:13). A tradition that relocates Abraham's own sanctuary-building to Ishmael's side of the family, in Ishmael's own territory, does more than add a legend to history — it quietly reassigns the line of promise. Genesis will not permit that reassignment, however old or sincerely held the tradition built upon it may be.

“And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.” — Genesis 17:19

CHAPTER SEVEN

PAGAN RITES RETAINED IN ISLAM

A new faith rarely erases the old world all at once. More often it inherits the old world's habits and gives them new names and new reasons. Scripture itself records Israel doing exactly this with the high places and local shrines of Canaan, worshipping the true God at sites and in forms borrowed from the very Baals He had commanded them to forsake (Judges 2:11-13). Islam's own earliest sources show a comparable pattern at work in the rites of the Hajj — not rites invented from nothing at Muhammad's word, but older Arabian customs retained, and in at least two cases retained over the visible discomfort of the first generation of Muslims themselves.

The Black Stone, Kissed Again

Chapter Three already showed that the Black Stone was kissed and venerated by pagan pilgrims long before Muhammad, and that Umar's own hadith preserves an anxious need to explain that the stone itself has no power. What matters here is simpler: the physical gesture was not abolished. Muslims today still kiss or touch the same stone, in the same corner of the same building, as part of the same circumambulation the pagan Quraysh performed — the object of the reverence was reinterpreted, but the reverence itself, and its outward form, passed straight through the founding of Islam unbroken.

Running Between Two Idols

A stronger case still is preserved in the Quran's own text. The ritual jog between the hills of Safa and Marwah, called the sa'y, is required of every pilgrim performing Hajj or 'Umrah today. But classical Islamic commentary is candid about where the difficulty lay: an idol named Isaf stood at Safa and another named Na'ilah stood at Marwah, and the pagan Quraysh venerated them as they passed between the two hills. Ibn Kathir's tafsir on Surah 2:158 preserves the reports explaining what happened next — once Muhammad's followers destroyed the idols, they became reluctant to run between the two hills at all, precisely because the rite still felt like pagan worship in everything but name. Surah 2:158 was revealed to resolve their unease directly: "Verily, Safa and Marwah are among the symbols of Allah; it is therefore no sin... to go around them." This is not a critic's argument read into the text. It is the Quran's own verse, on the Quran's own subject, answering a discomfort the first Muslims are recorded as having felt about continuing an old idol's rite. The practice stayed; only its meaning was declared safe.

Undressing for the Gods

A third case corrects, rather than continues, a specific pagan practice — but in doing so confirms how deeply that practice was embedded. Ibn Kathir records, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas, that pre-Islamic pilgrims performed the tawaf around the Kaaba naked, men by day and women by night, considering the clothes they had sinned in unfit to wear before the sanctuary. Surah 7:31 addresses this directly: “O Children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid,” a verse the earliest commentators explicitly connect to ending the practice of naked circumambulation. That the Quran needed to legislate against pilgrims disrobing at Islam's own central shrine is a measure of how thoroughly the old Arabian rites still shaped the ritual space Muhammad inherited, even where his revelation moved to correct them.

The Stoning at Mina

One further rite deserves a more cautious mention. The stoning of the pillars at Mina, part of the Hajj today, is explained in Islamic tradition as a reenactment of Abraham driving away Satan's temptations. Some historians of religion have suggested this rite, too, has roots in older Arabian practices of throwing stones at particular sites to ward off evil spirits, though the connection is argued from comparative practice rather than from a text as explicit as the Quran's own verses on Safa and Marwah. It is included here only as a plausible parallel, not as settled fact in the way the two preceding cases are.

None of this is offered to mock the sincerity of the pilgrims who perform these rites today, most of whom have never heard of Isaf, Na'ilah, or naked tawaf, and mean by their devotion only to honor Allah. But sincerity is not the question the previous chapters have been asking. The question is whether the religion's own earliest and most trusted sources describe a faith built from nothing, or a faith that walked the pagan pilgrim's same path around the same stone, between the same two hills, and simply asked its followers to mean something different by it.

“And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.” — 1 Kings 18:21

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHAT MUSLIMS BELIEVE: A DOCTRINAL COMPARISON

The preceding chapters have dealt mostly with history — where the Kaaba came from, who Muhammad was, what became of his movement. This chapter turns to doctrine itself: what Islam actually teaches about God, about Christ, and about how a person is saved, set plainly beside what the Bible teaches on the same three questions.

One God, Truly One

Islam's confession of faith, the shahada, states that there is no god but Allah, and this insistence on God's absolute oneness — tawhid — is the single most emphasized doctrine in the Quran. On this point Christians and Muslims are not as far apart as popular imagination sometimes suggests: Scripture is no less insistent that the LORD alone is God (Deuteronomy 6:4), and no orthodox Christian confession has ever taught otherwise. Where the faiths divide is not over whether God is one, but over what kind of oneness His Word actually reveals Him to have.

The Trinity Misunderstood: Allah, Isa, and Maryam

The Quran's clearest statements against the Trinity are not really arguments against the Trinity as any Christian creed has ever defined it. Surah 5:73 condemns those who say “Allah is the third of three,” and Surah 5:116 pictures Allah asking Jesus directly whether he told men to worship “me and my mother” as two gods besides Allah — to which Jesus answers that he said no such thing and that Allah alone knows the hidden things. Read plainly, the Quran is rejecting the idea of three separate gods — Allah, Jesus, and Mary — which is tritheism, not Trinitarianism. No church council, East or West, Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, has ever counted Mary as a member of the Godhead; the historic doctrine of the Trinity has always confessed one God in three Persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — never four, and never Mary.

The confusion likely has a real historical source rather than being invented from nothing. The fourth-century bishop Epiphanius of Salamis documented a fringe Marian sect he called the Collyridians, who offered Mary a form of worship bordering on the divine. Muhammad's own exposure to Christianity came largely through such heterodox and popular devotional currents in Arabia rather than through orthodox creedal instruction, which makes it entirely plausible that the Quran is answering a real but marginal distortion of Christian devotion — and mistaking it for the settled doctrine of the

church. Either way, the biblical answer to both the strawman and the real doctrine is the same: God is one.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." — Deuteronomy 6:4

Scripture's own account of that oneness does not collapse into tritheism, and it does not include Mary. The prophet Isaiah records the LORD Himself declaring that no god was formed before Him and none will come after, and that there is no savior besides Him (Isaiah 43:10-11), while Paul can in the same breath call the Father the one God and the Son the one Lord — not two gods, but one God known in the relation of Father and Son, with the Spirit besides (1 Corinthians 8:5-6; Ephesians 4:4-6). Whatever mistake gave rise to Surah 5:116, it was never a mistake orthodox Christianity had actually made.

Isa, the Quran's Jesus

The Quran honors Jesus — Isa — more than it honors almost any other figure besides Muhammad. It affirms his virgin birth in some detail (Surah 19:19-22), calls him the Messiah and a Word from Allah (Surah 3:45), and credits him with real miracles. But at the two points that matter most to the Gospel, it reverses the New Testament's own testimony. Surah 5:116, already discussed above, has Jesus himself deny ever claiming divinity. And Surah 4:157 goes further, denying the event at the center of the Christian faith altogether: "they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but so it was made to appear to them."

This is not a minor disagreement about the details of an ancient execution. The crucifixion of Jesus under Pontius Pilate is attested not only by all four Gospels but by the Roman historian Tacitus and by the Jewish historian Josephus, and it was never disputed by any of Christianity's ancient enemies, who found it far more useful to mock the claim of resurrection than to deny that a crucifixion had taken place at all. Paul could hand on the report that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day as the very substance of the gospel he had received (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) precisely because the death itself was never in question among either friends or enemies of the earliest church. The Quran, arriving six centuries later, denies not a peripheral detail but the one event the entire New Testament treats as settled history and saving fact.

Deeds on a Scale: Salvation Without a Savior

It follows naturally from denying the cross that Islam has no doctrine of atonement to put in its place. Surah 101:6-9 pictures the final judgment as a literal scale: those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds find

happiness, and those whose deeds are light in the balance find ruin. Salvation, on this picture, is a matter of a life's accounts settling in one's favor, subject finally to Allah's mercy but never secured by any substitute bearing the penalty due. Scripture describes the same problem — that all have sinned and fall short (Romans 3:23) — but answers it not with a heavier scale but with a substitute: God presenting Christ as a propitiation, to be received by faith, so that a right standing with God is a gift and not a wage (Romans 3:24-25; Ephesians 2:8-9). Where Islam offers a scale a sinner must hope tips in his favor, the Gospel offers a Savior who has already borne the weight the scale was never going to hold.

At a Glance

Topic	Islam Teaches	The Bible Teaches
God	One God (tawhid); the Trinity is rejected as tritheism	One God in three Persons — Father, Son, Holy Spirit (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19)
Jesus (Isa)	Virgin-born prophet and Messiah; not divine; not crucified (Surah 4:157; 5:116)	Virgin-born, divine Son; crucified, buried, and raised the third day (1 Cor. 15:3-4)
Sin	No inherited sin nature; each soul answers for its own deeds	All have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23; 5:12)
Salvation	Good deeds must outweigh bad on the scale; Allah's mercy decides the rest (Surah 101:6-9)	A gift received by grace through faith, not of works (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:24-25)
Scripture	The Quran as final, uncorrupted revelation; earlier scriptures held to be corrupted	The Scriptures as given are able to make one wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15-16)

These are not small differences dressed up as large ones. They are the two faiths' own answers to the three questions that matter most — who God is, who Jesus is, and how a sinner is saved — and on all three, Islam and the Bible give answers that cannot both be true at once.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” — Ephesians 2:8-9

CHAPTER NINE

CREATION, MAN, AND THE RESURRECTION

The pattern traced through the rites of the Hajj in Chapter Seven — an older tradition retained, renamed, and pressed into new service — shows up again in the Quran's account of the created world and of man himself. This chapter looks at three verses from Surah Nuh and Surah Maryam that touch on the heavens, the sun and moon, and man's origin and end, and asks what they share with Genesis, and what they leave out.

Seven Heavens, Borrowed Whole

Surah 71:15 asks, “See ye not how Allah has created seven heavens in perfect harmony?” It is worth knowing that this picture of a seven-layered heaven did not originate with the Quran. Centuries before Muhammad, rabbinic Judaism had already developed a detailed doctrine of seven heavens — the Talmud, in tractate Hagigah 12b, names them one by one: Vilon, Raqia, Shehaqim, Zevul, Ma’on, Makon, and Araboth. That framework itself grew out of still earlier Second Temple-era Jewish apocalyptic writing. None of this makes the number meaningless, but it does mean that Surah 71:15 is not introducing a new revelation about the structure of heaven so much as adopting a cosmology already well established among the Jewish communities Muhammad's Arabia had long lived alongside — the same communities introduced back in Chapter Two.

Two Lamps in the Sky

The same verse goes on to describe Allah placing the moon as “a light” and making the sun “a lamp.” This is poetic, everyday language rather than a technical claim, and it should be read that way — Genesis itself speaks of the sun and moon simply as “two great lights” (Genesis 1:16) without any interest in describing their physical nature. Neither text is offering an astronomy lesson, and there is little to be gained by treating either one as if it were.

Grown From the Earth, Returned to the Earth

More interesting is Surah 71:17-18, which says Allah “caused you to grow out of the earth as a good growth,” and will “cause you to return thereto, and... bring you forth a new bringing forth.” This tracks Genesis with real precision: man formed from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7), under sentence to return to that same dust (Genesis 3:19), with Scripture's own resurrection hope set against exactly that sentence. This is not a coincidence worth mocking — it is a real point of contact, and it deserves to be named as one.

Islam did not invent this picture from nothing; it inherited it, at least in outline, from the same Genesis-shaped tradition that produced it.

A Borrowed Pattern Without Its Reason

But this is exactly where the inheritance breaks down. Genesis does not merely report that man returns to dust; it explains why: death entered as the sentence for sin, spoken directly to Adam after the Fall (Genesis 3:17-19). The Quran affirms the pattern — formed, returned, raised again — without ever accounting for why death was there to begin with. There is no doctrine of a Fall in Islam, no inherited sin nature, and consequently no explanation for the very mortality Surah 71 takes as a plain fact of human life. Scripture supplies both the diagnosis and the remedy in the same breath: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). The Quran has kept the second half of that sentence — a promise of being raised again — while discarding the first half that alone makes sense of why raising is needed at all.

Man Forgets He Was Nothing

Surah 19:67 asks, in the same rhetorical spirit, “Does not man remember that We created him before, when he was naught?” Taken on its own, this is a fair and even a healthy rebuke — Scripture asks much the same question of human pride: “He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14), and Job asks God directly to recall that he was fashioned like clay (Job 10:9). But the pattern holds here too. The Quran borrows the biblical instinct to humble man before his Maker without borrowing the biblical doctrine of sin and grace that gives that humility its point. Knowing that one was made from nothing is the beginning of humility, not the whole of the gospel; Scripture never lets the one stand in for the other.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” — 1 Corinthians 15:22

CHAPTER TEN

IS MUHAMMAD FORETOLD IN THE BIBLE?

Muslim apologists commonly point to four biblical texts as advance predictions of Muhammad: the promised prophet of Deuteronomy 18, the Comforter of John's Gospel, a single Hebrew word in the Song of Solomon, and the Servant of Isaiah 42. Each deserves to be read in its own context rather than mined for a single resemblant sound or phrase.

A Prophet Like Moses

Deuteronomy 18:15-18 promises that the LORD will raise up a prophet like Moses. The text itself specifies where that prophet will come from: “from the midst of thee, of thy brethren” (18:15, 18) — that is, from among the Israelites themselves, the very people Moses was addressing. Muhammad was an Arab of the line of Ishmael, not an Israelite of the brethren in view, which makes him a poor fit for the verse's own stated qualification before any other argument is even considered. The New Testament, for its part, does not leave the identification open: Peter applies this exact prophecy to the risen Christ before the Jerusalem crowd (Acts 3:22-23), and Stephen repeats the same application before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:37). This was not a later Christian theory read back into the text; it was the earliest apostolic preaching's own use of Deuteronomy 18, delivered to the very audience most equipped to challenge a mistaken reading of their own Scripture.

The Comforter

Jesus promises a Comforter in John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7 — in Greek, *ho parakletos*. Some Muslim writers, beginning with Sale and Keldani, have argued that the original word was *periklytos*, “the praised one,” roughly corresponding to “Ahmad” in Arabic, and that *parakletos* crept in as a scribal corruption. The claim runs directly into the manuscript evidence: of the many thousands of Greek New Testament manuscripts now catalogued, including copies that predate Muhammad by centuries — Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, the Bodmer Papyrus fragment of John from around 200 A.D. — not one reads *periklytos*. The word appears nowhere in the Greek New Testament in any manuscript tradition. This is not a disputed reading with evidence on both sides; it is a conjecture with no manuscript support at all.

The immediate context settles the question even without the manuscript evidence. John 14:26 identifies the Comforter by name: “the Holy Ghost.” John 14:17 says this Comforter “dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” — the language of an indwelling presence given to the disciples themselves,

not a traveling prophet to be born some five and a half centuries later in a country most of them would never see. And John 16:7 places the Comforter's coming immediately after Jesus's own departure, which the Book of Acts records as fulfilled at Pentecost, weeks rather than centuries later.

The Beloved of the Song

Song of Solomon 5:16 describes the Shulamite woman's beloved as "altogether lovely" — in Hebrew, mahmadim, from the same root, ḥ-m-d, that gives Arabic the name Muhammad. Some popular apologetic literature has pointed to this phonetic kinship as evidence the name itself appears in Scripture. But mahmadim is an ordinary common noun, not a proper name; it means simply "desirable things" or "delights," and the same root appears elsewhere in the Old Testament in entirely unremarkable settings — Lamentations 1:10-11, for instance, uses the singular form for the "pleasant things" looted from the Jerusalem Temple. A shared three-letter Semitic root proves only that Hebrew and Arabic are related languages, which was never in question; it does not turn a lover's compliment in an ancient wedding poem into the naming of a prophet who would not be born for well over a thousand years. The Song's own setting — a bride describing her husband's beauty to her friends — carries no marker of prophecy at all, and reading a proper name into a common adjective is the method, not the meaning, doing the work.

The Servant of Isaiah

Isaiah 42 describes a Servant chosen and upheld by God, given His Spirit, bringing forth justice to the nations — and some apologetic writers have pointed to the mention of Kedar, a northern Arabian tribe descended from Ishmael, in verse 11, as evidence the chapter concerns Arabia and its coming prophet. But Kedar appears here only as one incidental place-name among several in a poem addressed to "the isles" and "the ends of the earth" (42:10, 12); it identifies no one, and Mecca, in any case, is not Kedar. The New Testament settles the identity of this Servant directly rather than by geography: Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 at length and states plainly that it was fulfilled in Jesus, in His quiet, non-confrontational healing ministry (Matthew 12:15-21). The portrait itself confirms the fit: a Servant who "shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street," who will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax (Isaiah 42:2-3), describes a figure of deliberate gentleness and restraint. Chapters Four and Five of this book have already traced Muhammad's own career in some detail — a preacher who became a military commander, fought pitched battles, and approved the execution of hundreds of captives. Whatever else may be said

of that record, it is not the record of a Servant who does not cry aloud or break a bruised reed.

None of these four texts, examined on its own terms — its grammar, its immediate context, and the way it was actually understood and applied by the community that received it — yields the reading apologists have built upon it. A resemblance of sound across two unrelated languages, or a single word lifted from its setting, is not the same thing as a fulfilled prophecy.

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” — 2 Peter 1:20-21

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE MANUFACTURED GOSPELS

The previous chapter examined verses lifted out of context and pressed into service as predictions of Muhammad. This chapter examines something more ambitious: entire documents produced, centuries apart, to give Islam something the four canonical Gospels never gave it — a first-person Christian text that denies the crucifixion, denies Christ's divinity, and names Muhammad as the one truly foretold. Two such documents deserve attention, because they show the same need being met twice, by two very different methods.

The Gospel of Barnabas

The best known of these is the so-called Gospel of Barnabas, which survives in two manuscripts: an Italian text probably copied at the end of the sixteenth century and now held in Vienna, and a partial Spanish manuscript rediscovered in Sydney in the twentieth century. The work presents itself as an eyewitness account by the apostle Barnabas, and its content is tailored precisely to Islamic doctrine: Jesus repeatedly denies his own divinity, foretells Muhammad by name, and — in a detail found nowhere in the Quran itself — is spared the cross when Judas Iscariot is miraculously transformed to resemble him and crucified in his place.

The manuscripts betray their own age unmistakably. Jesus is made to speak of a jubilee year that comes “every hundred years” — a schedule that did not exist until Pope Boniface VIII decreed it in the year 1300, thirteen centuries after the events the text claims to narrate. The same work borrows recognizable turns of phrase from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, describes a European vassal owing his lord a share of his crop, and pictures wine stored in wooden casks rather than in the skins actually used in first-century Palestine. Its base text, moreover, tracks the fourth-century Latin Vulgate rather than any Greek original an actual companion of the apostles would have used. Taken together, this evidence has persuaded even sympathetic modern researchers that the text cannot be earlier than the fourteenth century and is most likely a product of the sixteenth — almost certainly written by a former Christian, quite possibly a Morisco convert to Islam in Spain or Italy, working many centuries after both Jesus and Muhammad were dead. Tellingly, a good number of Muslim scholars have themselves declined to treat the work as authoritative, not least because its central plot device — Judas crucified in Jesus's place — is a specific substitution theory that the Quran's own brief and ambiguous wording in Surah 4:157 never actually states.

The Gospel According to Islam

A second example is far more recent, and far more openly what it is. In 1979 the writer Ahmad Shafaat published a book titled *The Gospel According to Islam*, and said so directly in his own introduction: the work was “a new Gospel, a Muslim equivalent of, and alternative to, the existing Gospels,” assembled mostly from the New Testament's own material but “transformed according to the Qur’anic revelation” where the two disagreed. Shafaat made no claim to have discovered an ancient manuscript; he was frank that he was composing a harmony of his own, filtered through Islamic doctrine, in the twentieth century. His retelling of the crucifixion, for instance, has Pilate order the release of a prisoner named Jesus Barabbas, only for confused officers to release the wrong man and crucify Jesus of Nazareth's double by administrative mistake — a substitution story built from whole cloth, paralleling Barnabas's centuries-older device without any claim to its antiquity.

What matters is less the difference in honesty between these two works — one written to deceive, the other written in the open — than what both of them, six centuries apart, testify to by their very existence. If a first-century document already supported Islam's claims about Jesus, no one would have needed to forge one in the sixteenth century, or to compose a new one from scratch in the twentieth. The oldest and best-attested account of Jesus's death remains the one this book has already cited: Paul handing on, within a generation of the event, the report that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) — a report that needed no manufacturing because it was written down while the men who could have contradicted it were still alive to try.

“For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.”
— 2 Corinthians 11:4

CHAPTER TWELVE

TESTING THE PROPHET: WHAT SCRIPTURE REQUIRES

Every chapter to this point has gathered evidence — historical, textual, and doctrinal. This chapter steps back and applies to that evidence the tests Scripture itself gives for weighing anyone who claims to speak for God, rather than a test invented for this book alone.

The Deuteronomy Test

Moses gives two connected tests. The first concerns a prophet's claim to speak in God's name presumptuously, or in the name of another god (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) — measured, in context, against whether his word comes to pass. The second is stronger still, because it removes the easiest escape hatch: even a prophet who gives a sign or a wonder that actually happens is not to be followed if his message is to go after gods Israel has not known (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). A true sign never validates a false message. This matters directly here, because whatever else may be said about Muhammad's career — its rapid success, the Quran's own literary power, the empire that followed — none of it, on Scripture's own terms, would settle the question even if freely granted. Success and eloquence are not the test Moses gives; conformity to what God has already revealed is.

The Galatians Test

This book's introduction already cited Paul's flat warning: “though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). The force of that test is that it does not depend on the messenger's identity or apparent power — an angel is explicitly included, not excluded. Muhammad's own tradition holds that his message came through a being later identified as the angel Gabriel. Paul's test does not ask whether the messenger was angelic; it asks only whether the message matches the gospel already delivered. Chapter Eight has already shown that it does not: a denial of Christ's divinity, a denial of the cross, and a system of salvation by a scale of deeds rather than by grace through faith are not variations on the apostolic gospel. By Paul's own stated standard, the source of the message changes nothing about the verdict on the message itself.

The Fruit Test

Chapter Four closed with Christ's own warning to judge a prophet “by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-16), and the chapters since have supplied a good deal of fruit to weigh. There is the execution of the Banu Qurayza men after the

Trench, on Muhammad's own approval, recorded in Islam's earliest and most trusted biography (Chapter Four). There is a doctrine of abrogation within Islam's own classical jurisprudence that a significant tradition reads as leaving the war verses, not the peace verses, standing (Chapter Five). There is a Hajj whose own central rites required the Quran to talk first-generation Muslims out of their discomfort at continuing what still looked like idol-worship (Chapter Seven). And there is a six-century pattern of manufacturing entirely new documents because no genuine first-century one would say what was needed (Chapter Eleven). None of this is drawn from hostile outside polemic; every item in this list comes from Islam's own Quran, Islam's own hadith, or Islam's own classical scholarship.

The Prophet's Own First Doubt

One further detail belongs here, not because it is comfortable, but because it too comes from Islam's own most trusted source. Sahih al-Bukhari records that Muhammad's first reaction to his experience on Mount Hira was not confident recognition but fear — he told Khadijah plainly that he feared something had happened to him, using language his own culture associated with possession by a jinn. Ibn Ishaq's Sirat adds that during the later pause in revelation, grief and uncertainty pressed him repeatedly toward the edge of a cliff, until, by his own account, a voice identifying itself as Gabriel called out and turned him back each time. Whatever one makes of that account, it is Islam's own earliest and most reliable source, not a later critic's invention, and it records a man whose own first instinct was to suspect deception rather than to recognize God. Scripture commands exactly this kind of caution as the ordinary posture toward any spiritual experience, however overwhelming it feels from the inside: “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). Muhammad's own earliest fear, on this point, was closer to the biblical instinct than the confidence that followed it.

None of the tests this chapter has applied were written with Islam in view; all of them are older than Islam by many centuries, given first to Israel and then to the church for the ordinary purpose of telling a true word from a false one. Applied plainly, without exception made for Muhammad's sincerity or the size of the movement that followed him, they do not return a mixed verdict.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” — 1 John 4:1

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SUFFERING CHURCH UNDER ISLAM TODAY

Chapters Four and Five traced the treatment of the Banu Qurayza and the doctrine of jihad back to their earliest sources. This chapter asks a harder question of the present rather than the past: what has actually become, in living memory, of Christians who live under Islamic rule or alongside Islamist movements today? The purpose is not to indict a billion and a half ordinary believers for the actions of governments and militants, but to see clearly what this book's earlier chapters would lead a reader to expect — and to remember, by name where possible, the people paying the price for it.

The World Watch List

Open Doors, a research and advocacy organization that has tracked Christian persecution for decades, released its 2026 World Watch List reporting that 388 million Christians now live under high, very high, or extreme levels of persecution — a record figure, up more than eight million from the year before. North Korea again ranked first, and Eritrea fifth, neither case rooted in Islam; but of the rest of the top ten, most are Islamic by government, by insurgency, or by both: Somalia at second, Yemen third, Sudan fourth, Syria sixth, Nigeria seventh, Pakistan eighth, Libya ninth, and Iran tenth. Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia follow close behind in the rankings. This is not a list compiled by a Christian ministry with an axe to grind against Islam specifically — the very top of the list is an atheist-Marxist dictatorship — but the concentration of Islamic-majority states through the rest of the top ten is not incidental either.

Nigeria: Ground Zero

The starkest single figure in the 2026 report concerns Nigeria. Of 4,849 Christians killed worldwide for their faith in the report's twelve-month research period, 3,490 — nearly three in four — were Nigerian, killed chiefly by Boko Haram, its offshoot ISWAP, and armed Fulani militants operating across the country's Middle Belt. This is not sectarian violence in some vague, mutual sense; it is the systematic targeting of Christian villages, church buildings, and clergy by groups that state their Islamist aims openly. Nigeria alone now accounts for the great majority of all Christians killed for their faith on earth in a given year.

Blasphemy and Apostasy Law

Beyond outright violence, the machinery of law itself enforces conformity in much of the Islamic world. The Pew Research Center has documented that

blasphemy — which in practice very often means criticizing Muhammad or Islam — carries a possible death sentence in Afghanistan, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, among others. Apostasy laws go further still: as of 2026, thirteen countries prescribe death specifically for a Muslim who leaves Islam, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Mauritania, Qatar, and Pakistan. Every single country in the world with a law criminalizing apostasy is a Muslim-majority nation; the pattern is not scattered across religious traditions but concentrated entirely within one. The Iranian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, sentenced to death in 2010 simply for having left Islam for Christ, survived only because international pressure secured his release in 2012 — a rare case with a happy ending, and a reminder of how many others never make world headlines at all.

None of this is disconnected from the earlier chapters of this book. Classical Islamic law has never treated the position of Christians and Jews under Muslim rule as a matter of neutral citizenship; the traditional dhimma system offered legal protection in exchange for a special tax, subordinate legal standing, and often real restriction on building or repairing churches. Modern blasphemy and apostasy statutes are not a rupture with that legal tradition so much as its continuation by other means. The severity documented by Open Doors and Pew today is the visible edge of a legal inheritance traceable, in outline, all the way back to the jurisprudence discussed in Chapter Five.

None of this should be read as license to view ordinary Muslim neighbors with suspicion or contempt; the same reports that document this persecution also record Muslims themselves — converts to Christianity chief among them — paying the heaviest personal price of all for following Christ. The believers behind these numbers are not statistics to be cited and set aside; they are brothers and sisters whom Scripture commands the rest of the church to remember.

“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.” — Hebrews 13:3

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE GOSPEL CALL

This book has covered a great deal of ground: the crowded paganism of Arabia before Muhammad, the Kaaba's own documented history, Muhammad's rise and the wars that followed, the doctrines of Islam set beside the doctrines of Scripture, the texts pressed into service as proofs of Muhammad's coming, the documents manufactured when no genuine one would do, the tests Scripture itself gives for weighing a prophet, and the real cost still being paid today by believers living under Islamic rule. None of it was gathered to win an argument for its own sake. It was gathered because the identity of Jesus Christ is not a matter religions may simply agree to disagree about, and because what a person believes about Him determines everything else that matters.

One Way, Not Many

Jesus did not present Himself as one prophet among a series culminating in someone else. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Peter told the rulers of Israel the same truth in blunter terms still: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And Paul, writing to Timothy, could say there is "one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5) — not one mediator among several acceptable options, but one. Every chapter of this book has, in its own way, tested a rival claim against that exclusive claim, and none of the rivals has displaced it.

The Gospel Itself

The good news this book has defended is simple enough to state plainly, whatever else has needed many pages to untangle. All have sinned, and none can reach the glory of God by his own effort (Romans 3:23). The wages sin earns is death, but God offers, as a gift rather than a wage, eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23). God did not wait for anyone to become worthy of rescue: "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). That death was not the tragic end of a prophet's career but a Savior's chosen substitution, and it did not stay a death — He was buried, and He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), leaving an empty tomb that neither Rome nor the religious authorities of Jerusalem, who had every motive to produce His body, were ever able to explain away. And the promise standing at the end of that history is open to anyone: "For

whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13) — by grace, through faith, not of works, so that no one has grounds to boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

To the Muslim Reader

If you have read this far, you have given more patient attention to a hard argument than most people ever give. This book has disagreed with you plainly, and it will not soften that disagreement now. But disagreement is not contempt, and the purpose of everything written above was never to make you feel foolish for having believed what you were taught — it was to ask you to look, as honestly as you are able, at the evidence for who Jesus actually is and what actually happened to Him. You have been taught that He did not die on the cross. The earliest and best evidence, including from sources hostile to Christianity, says otherwise. You have been taught that calling Him the Son of God makes Him a rival to the one God rather than the way the one God has revealed and given Himself. Scripture invites you to test that claim rather than simply refuse it. Read the Gospel of John for yourself, from beginning to end, and ask honestly who this account says Jesus is, and what He claims to offer. If what this book has argued is true, the cross was not Christianity's embarrassment to be explained away — it was God's own answer to the very problem your own faith rightly says exists: that no one's good deeds will be enough to outweigh the bad on any scale. You do not need a heavier scale. You need a Savior who has already stepped onto it in your place, and He is not far from you now.

To the Christian Reader

If you have read this far as a believer, take the arguments of this book as tools for clarity and conviction, never as weapons for contempt. Chapter Thirteen's numbers are not abstractions; they are your own brothers and sisters, and Scripture commands you to remember them as such, in prayer and in whatever practical help lies within your reach. And the Muslim neighbor, coworker, or friend in your own life is not a doctrinal position to be defeated in an argument but a soul for whom Christ died just as surely as He died for you — Peter's charge to give an answer for the hope within you comes bound to a companion charge to do it “with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Know what you believe and why plainly enough to say it clearly when the moment comes; say it as one beggar quietly telling another beggar where to find bread, not as a victor announcing a conquest.

The case laid out in these pages was written in the same spirit as Paul's own words about the countrymen whose zeal he never doubted and whose

salvation he never stopped seeking, even while refusing to soften what he knew to be true about their need for Christ.

“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” — Romans 10:1-2

That is this book's own desire and prayer for every reader who has followed it this far, of whatever background: not that an argument would be won, but that Christ would be known.