



Bible & Life

BIBLE TEACHING NEWSLETTER

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE & NEW TESTAMENT ASSEMBLY LIFE

Vol. 15. No. 4

Sept. 1, 2008

The Untold Story: Muslims Converting Worldwide

by David Dunlap

The mainstream news media has missed what may be one of the more important news stories to come out of the Arab world. Firsthand reports are indicating that Muslims are converting to Christ in large numbers in Arab lands. The news media continues to report that Islam is the world's fastest growing religion. On one hand, this is undoubtedly true. For example, USA TODAY recently reported that Muslims, for the first time, outnumbered Roman Catholics 19.2% to 17.4% as a percentage of the world population. Muslims now number approximately 5 million in France and nearly 1.6 million in England. Muslim families in many countries, especially Western Europe, have a high birthrate, giving the appearance that Islam is growing. The truth is, however, that Islam as a religion, when measured by conversion increase, is not growing but rather decreasing. More and more Muslims than ever before are becoming disillusioned with Islam. An increasing number of Muslims are beginning to question the validity of the Qur'an and the extremist teaching of Islamic teachers. Many are finding that the mechanistic rituals of praying five times per day, reciting verses that they do not understand, and frequent fasting are not a means to becoming more spiritual, and are taking a serious look at Christianity.

Every day, thousands of Muslim intellectuals are leaving Islam. They find Islam inconsistent with science, logic, human rights, and ethics. However the exodus from Islam is not reserved to the intellectuals alone. Today many average Muslims are finding that Islam is not the way to God, but the way to ignorance, poverty, and war. Millions of Muslims living in the Middle East, Africa, and Western Europe already have left Islam. This may be just the beginning of a mass exodus from Islam. They are leaving Islam to embrace other religions, especially Christianity. How many Muslims are converting to Christianity? It is impossible to give exact figures. However, a few years ago, a leading Muslim cleric stated that the number of Muslims who have converted to Christianity in recent years might be measured in the millions.

The Number of Muslims Converting to Christianity

Muslims throughout the Arab world are coming to Christ in record numbers. Former Muslim Paul Ciniraj Mohammed of India reports that more than 10,000 Muslims accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior throughout India last year (2007) alone. The Bible Society of India is publishing thousands of New Testaments for Muslims in different Indian languages including Tazi, with their own terminology and vocabulary.

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Sheikh Ahmad al Qataani

Live interview on al Jazeera Network, “Islamic Law and Life” program, Dec. 2001

Islam Watch, the largest support organization of ex-Muslims, reports that in Iraq, more than 5,000 Muslim converts to Christianity have been identified since the end of major combat operations. Fourteen new churches have opened in Baghdad, along with dozens of new churches opening in Kurdistan, some of which have 500 to 800 members. Thousands of Muslims have turned to Christ and are worshipping the Lord Jesus in Morocco, Somalia, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Maldives. Moreover, nearly one million Egyptians have come to Christ during the past decade. Recently Ramez Atallah, the General Secretary of the Bible Society of Egypt, reported “Egyptians are increasingly hungry for God’s Word; the Egyptian Bible Society used to sell about 3,000 copies of the *Jesus* film a year in the early 1990s. As per the figures taken from the *Millennium* campaign in 2000, they sold 600,000 copies, plus 750,000 copies of the individual cassette tapes (in Arabic) and about a half million copies of the Arabic New Testament.”¹

In December 2001, the al Jazeera Network, the Arabic language satellite television network serving the Middle East broadcasted a live interview with a leading Saudi cleric Sheikh Ahmad al Qataani. Maher Abdallah, the host of the program “Islamic Law and Life” interviewed Sheikh al Qataani, president of *The Companions Lighthouse for the Science of Islamic Law* in Libya, on the subject of Muslims converting to Christianity in Africa. During the interview, al Qataani stated that alarming numbers of Muslims are turning to Christ. “...There are now in Africa 1.5 million churches whose congregations account for 46 million people. In every hour, 667 Muslims convert to Christianity. Everyday, 16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity. Every year, 6 million Muslims convert to Christianity.” Stunned, the interviewer Maher Abdallah interrupted the cleric. “Hold on! Let me clarify. Do we have six million converting from Islam to Christianity?” Al Qataani repeated his assertion. “Every year,” the cleric confirmed, adding, “a tragedy has happened.”² (Note: These numbers may be inflated to incite violence against Christians)

Joel C. Rosenberg & Conversions in the Arab World

Journalist and respected Middle East expert Joel C. Rosenberg knows the Middle East mindset and its culture as well as anyone. For over twenty years, he has lived and worked in the Middle East, first as a journalist and later as a communications strategist for former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. More recently he authored the New York Times best-selling book *Epicenter: Why Current Rumbblings in the Middle East Will Change Your Future*. His organization and internet blog “Joshua Fund” are devoted to providing up-to-date information on what God is doing in the Arab world. Recently, he has interviewed numerous Arab, Iranian, and evangelical leaders in the Middle East. Their testimonies describe a dramatic resurgence of Christianity in a region that is extremely hostile to it. Rosenberg writes, “More Muslims converted to faith in Jesus Christ over the past decade than at any other time in human history. A spiritual revolution is underway throughout North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. As a result, a record number of ex-Muslims are celebrating Christmas this year, despite intense persecution, assassinations, and widespread church bombings.”

“Last Christmas, I had the privilege of visiting the largest Christian

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—Joel Rosenberg

Former communications strategist for for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, author of New York Times best-seller “Epicenter”.

congregation in the Middle East, which meets in an enormous cave on the outskirts of Cairo. Some 10,000 believers worship there every weekend. (Note: The majority of these are not Muslims, persecution is still strong in Egypt.)

A prayer conference the church held in May 2005 drew some 20,000 believers." In other places in the Arab world, we find the same pattern of conversion. "There were only 17 Christians from Islam in Afghanistan in 2001. But there are more than 10,000 believers at present. Every week dozens of baptisms are being held there. In 1990, there were only three known Christians in Kazakhstan and no Christians in Uzbekistan, but now there are more than 15,000 in Kazakhstan and 30,000 in Uzbekistan. There were only 500 Christians in Iran in 1979, but more than one million Iranians believe in Jesus Christ today, most of whom meet in underground house churches."³ Many are wondering why Muslims are converting to Christ in such large numbers.

Why Are Muslims Coming to Salvation in Christ

Dr. J. Dudley Woodberry, professor of Islamic Studies at Fuller Seminary in California, has been studying missionary outreach into the Muslim world for thirty years. Dr. Woodberry, aware that throughout the world Muslims have been turning to Christ in large numbers, was curious about the reasons for these conversions, especially in countries where the cost of converting is so high. To find the answer, he created a detailed questionnaire. Over a 16-year period, some 750 Muslims from 30 countries responded and the results are surprising.

1. NUMBER ONE REASON - The number one reason Muslim converts listed for their decision to follow Christ was the lifestyle of the Christians living among them. As Professor Woodberry, Russell Shubin, and G. Marks write in *Christianity Today*, Muslim converts noted that "there was no gap between the moral profession and the practice of Christians" they knew. An Egyptian convert contrasted the love shown by Christians with "the unloving treatment of Muslim students and faculty he encountered at a university in Medina." Other converts were impressed that "Christians treat women as equals" and enjoy loving marriages. And poor Muslims observed that "the expatriate Christian workers they knew had adopted, contrary to their expectations, a simple lifestyle." They wore locally-made clothes and abstained from pork and alcohol, so as not to offend Muslim neighbors.

2. NUMBER TWO REASON - Muslim converts identified "the power of God in answered prayers and healing." For instance, in North Africa, a Muslim family asked Christian neighbors to pray for a sick daughter; and then the girl recovered. Some converts noted "deliverance from demonic power" as another reason they were attracted to Jesus. Dreams and visions were also reported by many Muslim converts. Converts also mentioned unhappiness with Islam itself, especially the Qur'an's emphasis on God's punishment and the uncertainty of salvation. By contrast, Woodberry notes, the biblical teaching that God loved us so much that "He sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" is deeply attractive to Muslims. Converts are also attracted to "the love expressed through the life and teachings of Christ." Ironically, Muslims initially heard about Christ through the reading of the Qur'an, but later turned to the Gospels to learn more about salvation in Christ.

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FL
34639

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September 2008

• INFORMATION •

Bible and Life is published periodically and sent out free of charge and is supported entirely by the free will offerings of the Lord's people. Checks should be made out to "Bible and Life Ministries, Inc."

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3. NUMBER THREE REASON - The final and most important point is this: "When Christ's love transforms committed Christians into a loving community, many Muslims (identified) a desire to join such a fellowship." Woodberry's research shows that when the church is being the church, testifying of the love of Christ and His transforming power, then Muslims are drawn to salvation in Christ.⁴

When is the last time you welcomed a Muslim family to the neighborhood, or invited a Muslim co-worker for a cup of coffee? Even though we are in the midst of a worldwide war against Islamic-based terrorism, we must never forget Christ's command to witness to our neighbors, especially our Muslim neighbors.

Conclusion

At the present time, God is moving in a remarkable way among Muslims throughout the world. Moreover, the opportunities to reach the four million Muslims in our own cities and neighborhoods has never been greater. The immigration of Muslims to the United States presents a unique opportunity to reach them for Christ. Southern Baptist Missions researcher Dr. Jim Murk (author of *Islam Rising—The Never-ending Jihad Against Christianity*) estimates that 20,000 Muslims come to Christ each year in America. May the Lord use our gospel efforts to reach Muslims for Christ here and throughout the world.

Endnotes

1. <http://www.islam-watch.org/leavingIslam/muslims2Christianity.htm>
2. Interview with Sheikh Ahmad al Qataani, on the al Jazeera Network, *Islamic Law and Life* program, Dec. 2001. (The English transcript of the entire interview is available from Bible & Life upon request.)
3. Joel C. Rosenberg, <http://joshuafund.blogspot.com/2008/03/big-untold-story-in-middle-east-2008.html>, March 23, 2008
4. J. Dudley Woodberry, Russell G. Shubin, and G. Marks, "Why Muslims Follow Jesus," *Christianity Today*, 24 October 2007, pp. 80-85

Suggested Reading

1. Joel C. Rosenberg, *Epicenter: Why Current Rumbblings in the Middle East Will Change Your Future*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006
2. Paul Bramsen, *One God One Message*, Orlando, FL: Xulon Press, 2007