

Desperate for God

After I decided to follow Jesus, I found what I was seeking so desperately—the true God.

Would you be surprised to learn there is a Holy Spirit in Islamic theology? And would you be surprised to know that Muslims go to extreme measures to try to experience him? I myself did so while practicing Islam devoutly for the first 34 years of my life as a professor and an imam.

One of the pillars of Islam is to fast between the first prayer of the day (3:30 a.m.) and the fourth prayer (around 6:30 p.m.) during the 30 days of Ramadan. To try to please Allah, I did this and more.

On day 20 of the fast I would go to my mosque with two or three blankets and some poles. I took my Quran and other books about Islam. In one of the corners of the mosque I set up a little room with the blankets for walls.

I sat on the floor in this corner for the next 10 days. I left this place only to go to the bathroom, to lead the people at the mosque in the five daily prayers and to deliver the Friday sermon.

What was I hoping to receive? A visitation from the Holy Spirit! But my picture of the Holy Spirit was so different from the Holy Spirit of the Bible.

According to Islamic theology, the Holy Spirit is the angel Gabriel. The Quran says that the Holy Spirit and the angel Gabriel are the same being (compare Surah 2:97-98, Surah 16:102 and Surah 26:193).

References such as those just cited refer to chapter and verse in the Quran. For understanding the meaning of the Quran, the most useful English version is the translation by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, often published as The Noble Quran.

The angel Gabriel's job is to deliver Allah's messages to the prophets of all time, from Adam to Jesus to Muhammad. Gabriel (or the Holy Spirit) does not visit ordinary men—except for one visitation some time during the last 10 days of Ramadan (see Surah 97).

During this event, called the Night of Decree, Gabriel and other angels would descend to Earth to visit one person for one night. The Quran promised this person would have "Peace ... until the appearance of dawn" (see Surah 97:5).

From age 17 to age 34, I went to the mosque every year. I built my room, and I waited for the 10 days. I never received anything, and I never heard from anybody that the angels appeared to them or gave them anything to make a difference in their lives. So, the Muslim does not have the Holy Spirit that is in the Bible.

What spirit, then, walks with the Muslim every day? Islamic theology says that two angels are assigned to each person. These two walk with each man or woman wherever they go—one on the right, one on the left.

The angel on the right writes down the good things the person does, and the angel on the left writes down the bad. When the person stands before Allah on judgment day, Allah lets the book speak for the man.

This picture is very threatening for a Muslim. He always worries about what these angels are writing. It's like walking everywhere with two policemen.

The Muslim lives with fear and dread. He does not have a Comforter (see John 14:16), a Guide (see John 16:13), peace (see Rom. 8:6), power to live for God (see Acts 1:8) and, most important, someone to convict him of sin (see John 16:8).

But what does the God of the Bible say we must do to experience the Holy Spirit?

Jesus said all we need to do is ask, and God will send the Holy Spirit to walk with us (see Luke 11:11-13). The Holy Spirit is a gift—God does not demand that we do something to deserve Him (see Acts 2:38). He will stay with us forever, not just for one night (see John 14:16).

After I decided to follow Jesus, I found what I was seeking so desperately in the mosque all those years—the true God, walking with me every day through His Holy Spirit, loving me, leading me and never leaving my side.

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