Islam, Once a Hopeless Frontier, Now?

Part II: Living like Jesus, a Torah-Observant Jew: Delighting in God's Law for Incarnational Witness to Muslims

by Joshua Massey

What follows is the continuation of a paper published in IJFM 21:1, which introduced the need for a radical reexamination of the Mosaic Law when ministering to Muslim peoples since they, like Jesus, his apostles, and early Jewish Christians, share a deep appreciation for its divine origin and practice. Part one surveyed the work of several Messianic Jewish theologians to help correct our view of the Law in the New Covenant, enabling us to preach a gospel with Law, which truly is 'Good News' to Muslims. Part one therefore laid the essential theological foundation for what follows: Gentile freedom to delight in God's Law for incarnational witness to Muslims.

Contextual and Incarnational Living

Contextualization has become highly popularized in missions today. However, its wide variety of meaning and application has led to confusion among missionaries to Muslims who attempt to apply contextual principles on a vast spectrum of options. Some understand it as the promotion of biblically permissible Islamic worship forms and architecture for Muslim background believers. Others wear local dress and keep a beard. Still others abstain from pork, serve only *halal* meats, and adopt Muslim prayer postures as they labor to promote indigenous movements of C5 Muslim believers.[1]

These are all valid applications of biblical principles in contextualization. However, contextualization by its nature often fixes our attention on *contexts* which vary from place to place, potentially ignoring the inner issues of heartfelt realities and worldview. When the affective inner world of the witness is ignored, the application of contextualization can become trapped in appearances without permeating his heart and soul. In other words, do "contextualized" missionaries adopt these forms (e.g., the beard, diet, prayer postures) only because of their *context*, but look forward to enjoying a pork chop or shaving their beard when back in their home country? Do they only prostrate in prayer when visiting Muslim homes or mosques, or do they daily prostrate in worship when no one is watching—even when visiting their homeland? If these forms are truly dependent on one's context (i.e., if they are *contextual*), they will likely function more like a façade or a cultural concession, without an inner appreciation of their sacred significance before God. If, on the other hand, they are practiced with deep reverence because they are rooted in divine initiative, they become profoundly *personal*.

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Being *contextual* is often accepted under the rubric of "biculturalism", and some missionaries have become extremely adept at such cultural gymnastics. But after time, even contextual chameleons can suffer from nagging questions that pester the conscience: "If my Muslim friends saw me now, might they feel I misled them to think I live differently than I actually do?" The more *contextualized* we live among Muslims (i.e., the more Muslim-friendly *changes* we incorporate into our daily living to minimize barriers of prejudice for the gospel and promote true indigeneity among new believers), the more incongruity we will likely see between our behavior among Muslims and Christians. What can begin as an exciting 'contextual' experiment in cultural adaptation may, years later, seem more like a masquerade before Muslims who have now become near and dear friends. Once the discomfort of this incongruity sinks in, questioning our own consistency, and perhaps even our authenticity, is not far behind.[2]

If these inner issues are not dealt with properly, our life may be strangely inconsistent with our stand on contextualization. For example, we may be pro-C4 or pro-C5 in philosophy of ministry,[3] but live and practice our faith like typical Western Christians. Not only can this hinder our personal witness to Muslims, but it can also create a confusing dilemma for Muslim believers we mentor. Verbally, they hear our constant encouragement to remain culturally Muslim. But as any parent knows, children learn more from our example than from what we verbally say. If we encourage Muslims to retain many of their Islamic forms, but live before them as liturgyless Christians, we may well end up hindering the very indigeneity we long to promote by contributing to their "Christianization" and "de-Muslimization." As Jesus said, *"A disciple... when he is fully taught will be like his teacher"* (Lu 6:40 RSV).[4] By contrast, if one practices these forms with an inner appreciation of their sacred significance before God—if they have become deeply *personal*—then there can be no charge of masquerade, façade, or incongruity within or without. Their practice is genuine, as is their witness: true to others, and true to self.

Contextual living then, as described above, is actually an unavoidable first step toward *incarnational* living. The latter is, I propose, a healthier way for field workers to conceptualize how we should live out our faith as servants set apart to disciple Muslim nations.

Among many competing christologies articulated by theologians today,[5] it is generally acknowledged that the term *incarnation* refers to the self-revelation of God in Christ: *"the Word became flesh"*

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so that *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself"* (Joh 1:14; 2 Cor 5:19 NASB). Although no one has ever seen God, Jesus *revealed* the Father to us. Full of the Spirit and one with the Father, Jesus could boldly proclaim, *"He who has seen me has seen the Father"* (Joh 14:9). As John A. T. Robinson put it so well, Jesus is "the human face of God" (1973). The apostle John puts it similarly in his prologue, *"No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known*" (Joh 1:18).

Because Jesus' humanity is often eclipsed by our focus on his divine glory, we often miss the profound implication of his prayer in John 17, where he appears to expect the self-revelation of God to similarly occur in us, even as it did in him—because we are *in him* and he is *in us. "Even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me"* (17:21). Jesus proceeds to explain how this mind-boggling translation can possibly occur, *"The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me..."* (17: 22–23). Space does not permit us to exegete all that Jesus may have implied by *the glory* which he received from the Father and now gives to his disciples, even to those who believe through their testimony (17:20). Nonetheless, we cannot help but hearken back to John's usage of the term in his prologue, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father"* (1:14). The Greek here for *"dwelt"* is connected with the word *"tabernacle"*, so that early Jewish readers of John would almost certainly be reminded of the Tent of Meeting, which was filled with God's *glory* (Ex 40:34–35).

Speaking of the Temple as the "central 'incarnational' symbol of Judaism", N. T. Wright reminds us,

> It was standard Jewish belief, rooted in Scripture and celebrated in regular festivals and liturgy, that the Temple was the place where heaven and earth actually interlocked, where the living God had promised to be present with his people. [Nonetheless] the Temple, for all its huge importance and centrality within Judaism, was after all a signpost to the reality, and the reality was the resurrected son of David, who was the son of God. God, in other words, is not ultimately to dwell in a human-built Temple, a timber-and-stone house. God will indeed dwell with his people, allowing his glory and mystery to "tabernacle" in their midst, but the most appropriate way for him to do this will not be through a building but through a human being. And the human being in question will be the Messiah, marked out by resurrection. This, I submit, is more or less how the early Christians reasoned. Jesus–and then, very quickly, Jesus' people–were now the true Temple.... (1999:110)

Paul asks, *"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"* (1 Cor 3:16). And again, *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?"* (1 Cor 6:19).

God wants to reveal himself to the nations by tabernacling in those whose hearts are fully his. Clearly then, one does not need to be pre-existent to be *indwelt* by God, or for his word and wisdom to *become flesh*. Equally clear,

however, is the certainty that unlike Jesus, we will often fall far short of manifesting God's indwelling Spirit. Nonetheless, this does not excuse us from incarnational ministry, nor did it discourage Jesus' prayer for us in this regard (Joh 17:20–23). Therefore, the questions an incarnational witness must constantly and prayerfully ask in pioneer Muslim contexts are: If the word of God became flesh today not as a Hebrew– and Aramaic–speaking Jew of Palestine, but as a _____–speaking _____ of _____ (fill in the blanks for your context), what would he say to Muslims? How would he live? How would he dress? How would he teach? What words would he use to describe Kingdom realities?[6]

Contextualization is concerned with appropriate forms for a context. Incarnation is concerned with the self-revelation of God from the depths of one's personhood—*emptying one's self to be like his master, who was made like his brethren in every respect* (Phil 2:5, 7; Mt 10:25; Heb 2:17). With contextualization, practitioners adjust as their context demands to remove communicative stumbling blocks that can hinder the message. With incarnation, *you* are adjusted, to the inner core of your being; you are part and parcel of the message, inseparably and organically related to the message, as God's Spirit tabernacles in you, his Temple. Incarnation is not contextual; it is personal. As you walk *in the Spirit,* in a very real sense, the word becomes flesh *in you.*

Because the incarnational witness prayerfully attempts to imitate Jesus' example of becoming *like his brethren in every respect,* especially with regard to Torah-observant forms ordained by God and practiced by Jesus and his apostles, he soon begins to appreciate God's purpose for these forms and delight in their practice. Incarnational witnesses therefore need not worry if Muslim friends drop in unexpectedly at any place, in any country. The practice of faith and devotion remains the same, regardless of context. While contextual and incarnational witness share much in common, the contrast is one of consistency and personal depth. And when your personhood is permeated by your calling irrespective of context, greater consistency is likely to result, thereby protecting one from external and internal questions of authenticity and even integrity.

Let us now proceed to put all of the above threads together (including part one of this paper) to explore how a proper use of the Law can guide us in incarnational witness to Muslims. To the weekend evangelist or occasional witness to Muslims, what follows may seem unnecessarily excessive. Though all of the Law is good and therefore beneficial for all who want to delight in it, the suggestions below are primarily directed at those whom God has set apart to devote their lives to discipling Muslim nations. Those who have not been set apart as such will also do well to understand these issues in order to appreciate the transformation required in incarnational witnesses. Otherwise, it will be extremely easy to misunderstand them, as Judaizing Christians misunderstood Paul and thereby missed out on a most amazing era in redemptive history as God's Kingdom broke forth among Gentiles.

Observing Kosher

Although Jesus opposed various parts of the Oral and halakhic law when they missed the point of Biblical Law, he obeyed both the spirit and letter of the Mosaic Law at every point so that he was *without sin* (Heb 4:15). This included observance of *kashrut* (kosher), abstaining from various foods like pork as prohibited in Leviticus 11.[7] Jesus' Jewish followers did the same. Well after Jesus' ascension, after his disciples were *"fully trained",* Peter made it clear his lips had *never* touched *trief* (impure) foods (Ac 10:14). Similarly, Acts 21:20 reveals that many thousands of Jewish Christians were *zealous for the Law*—which certainly included keeping kosher—well after Jesus "declared all foods clean" (Mk 7:19), and after the voice from heaven told Peter to *"kill and eat. ... What God has made clean, you must not call profane"* (Ac 10:13, 15 NRSV). These verses in Mark 7 and Acts 10 have led many Gentile Christians to conclude that Jews no longer need to keep dietary laws which have since been abrogated by the New Covenant. But does Scripture give any indication that first-century Jewish followers of Jesus came to similar conclusions?

Messianic Jewish theologians are quick to point out that the context of Mark 7 is not about *kashrut* but about ritual washings before meals *(n'tilat-yadayim),* as is clear from vv. 2–5. Therefore, according to David Stern, when Jesus "declared all foods clean," he was not declaring *treif* foods kosher, but saying rather that kosher food is not rendered unclear when touched by hands not ritually washed (1991:160). The ritual washing of hands before meals, as clearly explained in the parenthetical statement of vv. 3–4, was not Biblical Law at all, but Oral Law, a "tradition of the elders". As we shall see in Acts 10, this tradition of ceremonial cleanliness not only missed God's intention in the Law, but eventually led to the erection of barriers between Jews and Gentiles that hindered the fulfillment of the very task for which God used the Law to set Israel apart as a holy nation, i.e., to be a royal priesthood to the nations (Ex 19:6).

However we interpret Mark 7, the message of Acts 10:13–15 seems patently clear to non-Jews: God asked Peter to eat non-kosher, thereby nullifying dietary law. However, Gentile Christian scholars often overlook the fact that Peter's understanding of this vision was not clear[8]—though it occurred three times—until the following day, when he explained inside a Gentile home,

> You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean (Ac 10:28).

Peter is not referring to Biblical Law prohibiting Jews from entering Gentile homes, but Oral Law, i.e., another tradition of the elders.

The mistake was easy enough to make. If certain foods are "unclean", then Gentiles who eat such foods are also unclean, right? Wrong. "Ritually impure" is probably a better translation of the Hebrew טמא *(tamé),* often rendered "unclean," but really has no English equivalent. A woman does not become intrinsically polluted by going through her monthly cycle which God designed, but this does render her *ceremonially* or *ritually impure* for various places and functions that require

ritual purity, as with men after seminal emissions. Similarly, certain foods were also prohibited as "ritually impure" for Israelites, not because they were intrinsically dirty or unfit for human consumption, but because God also included diet as yet another way to set apart his covenant people as a royal priesthood to the nations. Various foods were, therefore, "ceremonially impure" *to them.* Each and every time Mosaic Law describes various creatures as טמא *(impure)* for eating, they are always followed by an extremely important qualifier: *to you* (Lev 11: 4–8, 26–29, 31, 35, 38; Dt 14:7–8, 10, 19). In other words, God did not ask all nations to abstain from these foods, just his firstborn among the nations. Everything God made is good! Peter's vision therefore did not nullify Biblical Law but Oral Law: Jews do not become ritually defiled by entering a Gentile's home because Gentiles do not become impure by eating 'clean' foods prohibited to Israelites.

Several oral laws regarding ritual purity, though developed as a "hedge of protection" around Biblical Law, actually served to set aside the commands of God. As Jesus said,

> You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. ... You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! (Mk 7:8—9).

The command of God set aside in this case was the mandate to bless all nations. How could God's firstborn among the nations serve her intended purpose as a kingdom of priests if she developed laws to ban Jewish entry into Gentile homes? Jews not only *can* enter Gentile homes without being defiled, they *should* enter Gentile homes to fulfill their role as priests to the nations.

Even though Cornelius was a God-fearer and respected by many Jews (Ac 10:22), Oral Law still prohibited Jewish entry into his home. Because Peter was not only completely Torah-observant but also lived in accordance with Jewish customs, he was not likely to violate this Oral Law without divine intervention. How is it that after spending several years with Jesus, Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, still adhered strictly to so much of the Oral Law? Clearly, Peter's rabbi was fully Torah-observant, and so were his fellow apostles. The fact that Peter continued to observe kosher long after Jesus' teaching in Mark 7 (Ac 10:14), and the fact that thousands of Jewish Christians remained zealous for the Law well after Peter's vision (Ac 21:20) is consistent with Jesus' teaching that no portion of the Law will pass away until heaven and earth disappear (Mt 5:18), including dietary laws mentioned in Leviticus 11 for the Jewish people.

Food has no power in itself to defile any man, not even a Jew, since food merely goes into *"his stomach and passes on"* (Mk 7:19). Rather, it is disobedience to God's commands that defiles a man, for such is licentiousness, springing from a rebellious heart (Mk 7:22–23). And if God has commanded his firstborn among the nations to abstain from various foods, their consumption does not depend on whether they are intrinsically 'clean' or profane. It depends on God's word. If God sets his firstborn apart with a priestly diet by forbidding various foods, they are forbidden. Nonetheless, they need not fear being ritually defiled by Gentiles who eat such foods (or, more accurately, who have chosen to treat some forbidden creatures *as food*), for both the creatures and the Gentiles are 'clean' (Mk 7:19, Ac 10:28).

The incarnational witness to Muslims is therefore free to obey these dietary laws as well, knowing that the Law is good and holy (Rom 7:12; 1 Tim 1:8); and if these laws were suitable for a kingdom of priests set apart to bless all nations, they are equally suitable for Gentiles set apart to bless Muslim nations who esteem and obey the same divine Law.

Keeping a Beard

Among ancient Hebrews, the beard was considered a sign of manhood, was carefully tended, trimmed, and (in later times) even anointed (Ps 133:2). Its removal was considered a horrific disgrace (2 Sam 10:5), unless done for mourning or purification rites (Job 1:20, Lev 14:9). Orthodox Jews today continue to keep beards as a sign of their faith and obedience to Torah, *"You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard"* (Lev 19:27). Rabbis interpreted this as a prohibition against shaving and forbade the removal of sideburns and hair on certain places of the cheek and chin (Werblowsky 1997:105). Some Jewish groups even ascribed mystical importance to beards. The Hebrew for *elder* (זקן, *zaqen)* literally means "one who wears a beard (זקן, *zaqan)*," likely because the office of elder in Israel, as in other ancient Near Eastern societies, was based on the authority of age and the wisdom that presumably accompanied it.

Though the New Testament makes no explicit mention of beards, there is no evidence that Jewish attitudes toward beards changed during the first century, even under Greco-Roman influence. After a brief period when Alexander set the fashion for shaving, beards were ubiquitous among Greeks. In fact, when Emperor Hadrian later broke with Roman tradition to sport a full, well-tended beard (c. 128 CE), historians speculate he may have been trying to "look Greek" (Birley 1997:61). Though shaving had been the norm in Roman society for several centuries before Hadrian, it is highly unlikely that Palestinian Jews adopted this practice during their early occupation, especially given the fact that non-Jewish literature during the Roman period frequently describes beards as typical of Jewish men.

Apparently, early Jewish Christians also took a very dim view of shaving. According to the *Apostolic Constitutions,*

> Nor may men destroy the hair of their beards, and unnaturally change the form of a man. For the law says: "Ye shall not mar your beards." For God the Creator has made this decent for women, but has determined that it is unsuitable for men. But if thou do these things to please men, in contradiction to the law, thou wilt be abominable with God, who created thee after his own image. If, therefore, thou wilt be acceptable to God, abstain from all those things which he hates, and do none of those things that are unpleasing to him. (1:3)

Somewhat surprising for many Christians today is the fact that this same attitude toward beards, and its biblical justification in Leviticus, seems to have prevailed in the late second century among early Gentile church fathers, who taught that shaving was effeminate and against God's order of creation. Consider the teaching of Clement of Alexandria (c. 182–202 CE), an early Greek theologian and head of the catechetical school in Alexandria. In his treatise on how to live as a good disciple of Christ, he writes,

> But for a man ... to shave himself with a razor, for the sake of fine effect, ... to shave his cheeks ... and smooth them, how womanly! .... For God wished women to be smooth, and rejoiced in their locks alone growing spontaneously, as a horse in his mane; but has adorned man, like the lions, with a beard, and endowed him, as an attribute of manhood, with shaggy breasts–a sign of strength and rule. This, then, the mark of the man, the beard, by which he is seen to be a man, is older than Eve, and is the token of the superior nature. In this God deemed it right that he should excel, and dispersed hair over man's whole body. ... For it is not lawful to pluck out the beard, man's natural and noble ornament. (*Paedagogus* 3:3)

With such attitudes towards beards among both Jews and Greeks, it is rather difficult to imagine a clean-shaven rabbi entering a first-century synagogue on the Sabbath to read from the scroll of Isaiah (Lu 4:17). Likely for these reasons, in spite of the total absence of any physical description of Jesus in canonical Scripture, both apocryphal writings and later artists depict Jesus with a thick and flowing beard.[9]

As beards have been common among all religious Jews and remain so today among the orthodox, so too have they signified pietistic faith for Muslims following Muhammad's example and counsel, "Keep a beard and trim the moustache short" (Bukhari 7:780). Though a large number of God-fearing Muslims today opt not to keep a beard, some even joking that those who do are on their way toward fanaticism, most continue to see beards as signifying a man's desire to be devout.

A Muslim friend of mine (who has not met many Christians) once commented, "Isn't it amazing how devout men of every faith all keep beards?"

"Oh?" I replied.

"Oh yes!" he continued. "Devout Jewish, Christian and Muslim priests all keep beards, as do Hindu sadhus, Sikhs, and Buddhist priests, that is, at least those who are genetically able."

"Now that you mention it, this is rather remarkable," I replied. "However, while some orthodox Christian priests do indeed keep beards, devout Christians don't necessarily need to keep a beard to symbolize their faith."

Unquestionably, Gentiles were expected to keep some of the Law, but not all of it.

"They don't?" he asked somewhat perplexed. "But *you* keep a beard."

Clearly, my beard was to him an indication of my faith, consistent not only with his worldview of righteous living, but also with the Torah as practiced by Jews for centuries, and most probably by Jesus and his early Jewish followers. Interestingly, this friend does not keep a beard himself, yet he rises before dawn every day to pray, diligently keeps the fast every Ramadan, gives generously to the poor, and is by all counts what most Christians would consider a *devout* Muslim. Nonetheless, he does not include himself in his own categorization of 'devout men', all of whom are marked out, according to him, by 'beards'.

Of course, not all Muslims are born with genes to grow a beard,[10] and most would surely have greater respect for a clean-shaven righteous man who loves his neighbor than a bearded wicked man who pursues only selfish ambition. Nonetheless, when accompanied by righteous living, beards remain a telltale sign to onlooking Muslims confirming a man is devout, more concerned about pleasing God than conforming to present-day trends. Clement of Alexandria would surely concur. So if God has set you apart to reach Muslims *and* blessed you with genes to grow a beard, you might prayerfully consider letting it grow as a sign of your faith and Torah-observance. And if your wife protests, you can gently tell her, "Honey, it's the Law."

Circumcision

Four thousand years ago, God made a covenant with Abraham which not only involved the multiplication of physical descendants and acquisition of land, but also the blessing of all peoples on earth (Gen 12: 1–3). It wasn't until about twenty-four years later, when Abraham was ninety-nine, that God gave him the sign of this amazing covenant. The Lord said to Abraham,

> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring.... So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. (Gen 17:10—13)

Why, it is fair to ask, did God choose circumcision, the cutting away of a man's foreskin, as a sign of his covenant with Abraham? It is clear throughout Scripture that what God desires most is circumcision of the heart, an even more mysterious metaphor to symbolize a right relationship with God (Dt 10:16, 30:6; Jer 4:4).

Rabbis speak of a hardened outer layer of skin around a man's heart which must be removed before he can be convicted of sin and sensitized toward God. It is this outer layer of skin that, if not removed, can harden a heart, making it oblivious to sin and hesitant to trust in or obey God *whole-heart-*

edly. Although this rabbinic symbolism in consistent with Scripture, it is surely impossible to circumcise the heart of an eight-day-old baby. Instead, he must come of age and decide for himself whether or not he will allow God to remove that outer layer of skin from his heart which prevents him from sensing God's presence and submitting to his reign. In the church today, circumcision of the heart is often symbolized by adult baptism. But how are we to understand a covenant of God cut into the flesh of a baby only eight days old?

Because God's covenant involved a line of descendants, it was important for those descendants to know they belonged to God. After all, their mere existence is the direct result of God miraculously opening Sarah's womb at age ninety. And so, according to some rabbis, circumcision on the eighth day can be seen as an arranged marriage ceremony. Vows are made and the agreement is sealed in the flesh of the one betrothed to the groom. Of course, there will be times when the boy does not feel so connected with God, and times when God is not so enamored with him. Yet, the sign of their vows remain, cut in the flesh, a lifelong visible reminder that he belongs to God forever. And if he ever strays from the One to whom he belongs, he need not look far to see that he has been pledged to another, set apart at birth. He was born into this world by God's miraculous design, to bless all nations.

Circumcision became an extremely controversial topic during the first century when some Jewish followers of Jesus insisted Gentile believers be circumcised *to be saved* (Ac 15:1). Paul condemned such demands in no unclear terms, citing the fact that Abraham's faith was reckoned righteousness *before* he was circumcised (Ro 4:9–10). So it is with all people, Jewish and Gentile. Salvation comes by grace through faith, not by circumcision. Neither Jews nor Gentiles need circumcision to be 'saved'. Nonetheless, circumcision for the Jew remains a matter of obedience to God's command and everlasting covenant. While God has commanded some Gentiles to be circumcised (i.e., if they desired to keep the Passover while sojourning with the Israelites, Ex 12:48), we certainly have no biblical evidence to suggest God wants all nations circumcised. Nonetheless, Gentiles are clearly free to express their love for God and celebrate his glorious covenant with Abraham by circumcision—not because it is necessary for salvation or even profitable for righteousness, but because by faith they want to honor God with the same sign he chose to commemorate his redemptive work through Abraham's seed.

Two millennia after God established this covenant with Abraham, Paul revealed its marvelous fulfillment among Gentiles:

> So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:7, 29)

Because all who belong to Christ, even Gentiles, are also Abraham's offspring by faith, then by faith Gentiles are surely free to obey the same command to Abraham's offspring. Again I say, Gentiles are free to do this not because of any legal obligation, but because they are thrilled about what it symbolizes: the covenant which ultimately resulted in the coming of Jesus, the Lion of Judah and offspring of David (Rev 5:5, 22:16), and our very redemption in Christ. Though fulfilled in great measure by Christ himself, this covenant is by no means terminated but continues to be fulfilled as his ambassadors bless the nations with good news of God's kingdom.

Of all the signs God could have chosen to symbolize his everlasting covenant to Abraham, he chose circumcision. All nations are therefore free to have a *brit milah* (covenant of circumcision) ceremony for eight-day-old sons to sanctify, set apart, and dedicate their sons to God. Obviously, circumcision is not the only way to do this, but it surely remains one excellent way as modeled by Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and all his apostles in obedience to God's divine initiative. And if circumcision was appropriate for our Lord Jesus himself, it certainly remains appropriate for Gentiles who want to celebrate all that God has done and will continue to do through this amazing covenant. To insist otherwise is ultimately to condemn a vast number of Christians in North America who circumcised their sons at birth, albeit for hygienic reasons. If Gentile Christians are free to circumcise for hygienic reasons, how can we oppose those who want to circumcise for covenant reasons?

After presenting this material to several church planting teams in Asia, one Western missionary approached me privately and confided that he was not circumcised as a child but felt God prompting him to do so as an adult. Before doing so, adults must carefully consider Paul's teaching,

> Was any one at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. (1 Cor 7:18—20)

In earliest Christianity, decades before any portion of the New Testament was written, most Christians were Jewish. As Gentiles began to put their faith in Jesus, Jewish Christians were then the 'senior' Christians, the 'most experienced' Christians, and the 'best' Christians with the greatest knowledge of Scripture—which many studied from childhood in its original Hebrew form.[11] In such an environment, it should come as no surprise that many Gentile believers, desperately anxious to do the right thing, were quite willing to be circumcised in order to achieve full status as 'God's people.' Proselyte circumcision was seen as an essential rite for any full-convert to Judaism.[12] Therefore, to admonish the *uncircumcised not to seek circumcision* was to admonish Gentiles not to convert to Judaism. This appears consistent with Paul's teaching elsewhere, for as Andrew Walls says,

> Paul knew that the path of the proselyte [*ger tsedeq*] was a blind alley for Gentile disciples of Jesus. They had to bring Christ to bear on areas of life of which people who had been observant Jews all their life knew nothing; and if they became proselytes, became in effect imitations of Jewish Christians, they would be disabled from bringing Christ to bear on those areas. (1996:52)

But was Paul actually *forbidding* Gentiles from circumcision in 1 Cor 7: 18, or just *discouraging* it? David Stern has noted that rabbis of Second Temple Judaism were required by *hallakhic* law to initially "discourage potential Gentile converts in order to winnow out those who are insincere" (1991:177). Stern is therefore convinced that 1 Cor 7: 18–20 is simply an example of this standard rabbinic discouragement and that the New Testament does not forbid Gentile Christians from conversion to Judaism *if* they want to identify fully with the Jewish people (:178; cf. Fischer 2001:141–149; Wolf 2001:133–139). This conclusion is further supported by the context of 1 Cor 7 where Paul apparently allows for exceptions to all of his admonishments. Paul admonishes singles to *remain as they are* (i.e., unmarried, vv. 8, 27); but if they cannot control their passions and choose to marry, *they have not sinned* (vv. 9, 28). Similarly, Paul admonishes slaves to *remain as they are,* for even freedmen are slaves of Christ; but if they can obtain their freedom that too is acceptable (vv. 21–24, cf. NRSV, Lamsa). And so, most Gentile believers should also *remain as they are* and not convert to Judaism to follow Jesus; however, if they insist and persist after repeated discouragement from Jewish church leaders, and if they really want to fully identify with the Jewish people even in circumcision, then *they have not sinned*.[13]

For our purposes, however, no one is advocating that incarnational witnesses to Muslims convert to Judaism! Instead, any man who feels led to get circumcised either to celebrate God's covenant to Abraham, or even *to win the more for the sake of the Gospel*,[14] needs to ask himself whether or not Paul was prohibiting this in 1 Cor 7:18. I, and it seems David Stern, do not believe Paul was. Rather, 1 Cor 7 suggests that Paul does not forbid marriage to the unmarried, freedom to the slave, nor circumcision to the uncircumcised—though all are admonished to contentedly remain in the state they were in when called. When circumcision is sought in order to become Jewish, Paul discourages it; he does not forbid it. However, it is an entirely different matter to seek circumcision in order to advance the cause of the gospel among the

I expect Paul would have applauded any missionary willing to get circumcised in order to advance the cause of the gospel among Muslims.

circumcised. Actually, I expect Paul would have applauded any missionary willing to get circumcised in order to advance the cause of the gospel among Muslims. In fact, Paul expected nothing less from Timothy.

> Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. (Ac 16:3)

Timothy was yet another early Christian who took the Law *very* seriously. Timothy's father was Gentile, but his mother Eunice was Jewish. And because Jewishness travels through the mother's line, not the father's, Timothy was *halakhicly* (legally) Jewish. Nonetheless, Timothy's Gentile father evidently opted not to circumcise him on the eighth day. He may have reasoned with Eunice, "What if our boy wants to compete in the Greek games or conduct business with Gentile clients? Hellenistic Jews are paying a great deal of money nowadays to remove the marks of their circumcision[15] so they won't be excluded from such activities." What is known with certainty is that Timothy made it to adulthood without being circumcised, that is, until Rabbi Paul arrived! Remember that Paul was a Pharisee, and Scripture testifies that he continued to identify himself as a Pharisee when proclaiming the gospel (Ac 23:6). He therefore may also have continued wearing the uniform of a Pharisee throughout his ministry (Friedman 2001:48). Imagine the scene when Rabbi Paul broached the subject to Timothy: "Shalom! My son Timothy, I'd really love for you to come along and join our team, but there's a delicate matter we must first discuss. Please, have a seat. I'm referring, of course, to the fact that I'll need to circumcise you first."

Timothy may have gulped, *"Really?* With all due respect Rabbi Paul, are you *sure* this is absolutely necessary?"

"Yes of course!" Paul may have replied. "Would I even mention it if it wasn't? I wouldn't joke about a thing like this. We're talking about your *brit milah* (covenant of circumcision). You may have missed out after completing your first week of life, but it's never too late! I'd be happy to perform the procedure myself if you like. Who would you like to be your *sandek* (the Jewish male who holds down one's legs during the procedure)? Actually, you'd better choose two."

And so Paul circumcised Timothy—*an adult!* Bear in mind this is the same Paul who told Galatian Gentiles, *"Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you"* (Gal 5:2). Why circumcise Timothy in Lystra then discourage Gentiles from circumcision in Galatia? While we can safely assume Timothy's Jewish mother was a significant factor in his circumcision, Scripture does not cite this as Paul's rationale. Instead, according to Acts 16:3, Paul circumcised Timothy *"because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek"*. While Galatian believers had been *"bewitched"* by Judaizers to believe circumcision was necessary for salvation (Gal 3:1, 5: 4), Timothy was circumcised for the right reasons: to remove any stumbling block that might hinder their witness among the circumcised. Though all Gentiles are free to get circumcised for the right reasons, Galatian believers had clearly been seduced by a perversion of the Law. Furthermore, as evidenced by the large number of Gentile God-fearers (half-converts to Judaism) in comparison to the relatively small number of full-proselytes, Paul surely knew that a campaign of circumcision was not likely to promote a viable and indigenous church planting movement within Greco-Roman society, where circumcision was seen as both vulgar and shameful.[16] Non-Jews simply do not need to be circumcised to be an heir of the covenant symbolized by circumcision. Nonetheless, if a believer freely chooses to obey the Law of circumcision for the right reasons, as Timothy did, then I believe Paul

would not hesitate to circumcise him, as Timothy experienced firsthand.

Tracing their ancestry to Abraham through Ishmael, Muslims also regard circumcision with great importance. Stuart Caldwell, a church planting missionary in Asia, recounts,

> After entering a village mosque at the invitation of a Muslim friend, there was great anxiety about my presence as a foreigner. I soon learned that they were not worried about my faith, but about whether or not I was circumcised. If not, their mosque would be desecrated and their prayers nullified. They were much relieved to hear I too bore the sign of God's covenant with Abraham, and I was much relieved they did not demand proof! (2000:26)

Although many North American Christians have been circumcised in hospitals at birth for hygienic reasons, it's difficult for us to understand how such a commotion could break out at a mosque over this issue. Nonetheless, according to Islamic tradition, the importance of circumcision to Muslims is rooted in its practice by Abraham and all subsequent biblical prophets (Bukhari 8:312; Muwatta 49:4). Regarding salvation, circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing. But regarding the covenant to Abraham, circumcision remains the sign chosen by God and practiced by Jewish followers of Jesus from the inauguration of Christ's reign till today. Our very calling to bless Muslim nations is ultimately rooted in the covenant symbolized by circumcision. Circumcision, therefore, is not a meaningless ritual invented by Abraham, but the sign God chose to commemorate his glorious covenant to bless all nations. Let us treat it as such as we seek to disciple Muslim nations who also welcome this same divine sign.

Liturgical Prayer Toward Jerusalem

Set Times of Prayer

The institution of three daily prayer services is legendarily ascribed by Jewish sages to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and clearly practiced in the time of David and Daniel at evening, morning and noon (Ps 55:17, Dan 6:10).[17] Scripture suggests these prayer times were also observed by Jesus and his apostles, as would be common for all pious Jews (Mk 1:35; Ac 3:1, 10:9). Furthermore, as we shall see below, the apostles apparently taught new Gentile believers—unfamiliar with praying at set times—to also pray three times daily (Didache 8:3).

The Direction of Prayer

Solomon set the direction of prayer toward the Temple in Jerusalem when its construction was complete.

> May your eyes be open day and night toward this house, the place where you promised to set your name, and may you heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. And hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; may you hear from heaven your dwelling place; hear and forgive. (2 Chr 6:20-21 NRSV)

The apostles apparently taught new Gentile believers—unfamiliar with praying at set times—to also pray three times a day

That this direction of prayer became customary is seen in Daniel's example, with *"windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God..."(*Dan 6:10). Even today, when Jews pray, and especially when reciting the Amidah (prayer liturgy), they turn in the direction of Jerusalem and the Temple mount. Similarly today, Messianic Jewish congregations also pray toward Jerusalem, even as we look forward to the new Jerusalem, which will come down out of heaven from God, with no need for the sun or moon to shine on it, "*for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp*" (Rev 21:2,23).

However, after Emperor Hadrian outlawed the practice of Judaism in 135 CE, Gentile Christians found it rather dangerous to continue praying toward Jerusalem three times daily. Unlike Daniel, they chose to differentiate themselves from Jewish custom by praying toward the east seven times daily, citing Psalm 119:164 and other verses as their rationale (Woodberry 1996: 175). Before Jesus' birth, Zechariah prophesied that Jesus would be the "rising sun" (Lu 1:78), which, of course, always appears in the east (cf. Rev 22:16). This new eastern direction of prayer for Gentile believers was further bolstered by the fact that the entrance to the Temple faced toward Eden in the east. It is striking to consider how 'contextual' praying toward the rising sun in the east would have been alongside pagans who also prayed toward the east to worship 'Eostre' ('Ostara'), the Teutonic goddess of the rising sun.

Freedom in Liturgical Worship

We previously noted Gentile freedom to innovate in liturgical practice, both for reasons of indigeneity and surely for survival amidst an increasingly anti-Jewish Roman empire. However, it is noteworthy that both Jewish and Gentile believers prayed at set prayer times and in a set direction, even after Jesus' teaching in Samaria that

> the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ... when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. (Joh 4:21, 23)

Evidently, this teaching did not deter early believers from liturgical observance of prayer at set times and in a sacred direction.

In spite of popular modern attitudes toward liturgy as vain, meaningless and mechanical ritual, many branches of the church have retained some form of liturgical prayer. On the one hand, liturgy can tutor the soul with words we long to say to God but need help articulating. As Phillip Yancey wrote:

> The Psalms supply me with the words I need and sometimes want to say to my God. Words that celebrate his reality: "The heavens declare the glory of God." Words that confess his action in my life: "You have turned my mourning into dancing." Words that express my utter dependence: "In my mother's womb, you formed me." Words that convey my hoped-for intimacy: "This one thing I desire, that I might dwell in the house of the Lord

> forever." The Psalms tutor my soul in my love for God. (Yancey 1999:124)

On the other hand, liturgy can become rote and void of the intimacy it attempts foster. In spite of the tendency for liturgy to degenerate among the masses, rabbinic leaders constantly called people to worship God with all their heart. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*,

> Even after the introduction of fixed liturgical prayers, rabbis emphasized the need to retain an element of spontaneity. One should pray only in a devout and reverential frame of mind (Mishna Berakhot 5:1), and "he who makes his prayer a fixed, routine exercise, does not make his prayer a supplication" (Berakhot 4:4). The Mishna condemns prayer undertaken as a burden to be discharged or prayer that contains no original thought (Berakhot 29b). In rabbinic tradition, prayer was primarily the fulfillment of a commandment, that is, part of the wider discipline of serving God: God wants the person praying to bring personal fears and wishes to him, as a child would to his or her father. (Werblowsky 1997:541)

Ismar Elbogen's classic book *Jewish Liturgy* illuminates the scene further. In Second Temple Judaism,

> The liturgy became common property; every individual Jew knew it and repeated it daily. Not only was the synagogue visited at times of prayer, but artisans and laborers would interrupt their work at times of prayer (Mishna Berakhot 2:4); people prayed while walking on the road; and some liked to stand at a street corner or in a lane and pray in public (Mt 6:5). (1993:196)

Liturgical Prayer as Worship

Whether or not the incarnational witness comes from a Christian tradition that values liturgy, we must be aware that Muslims do—as did Jesus and his Jewish followers. However, many missionaries arrive on the field with only one category of prayer in mind: the spontaneous prayer that comes from the heart as the Spirit leads on any given occasion. Although both Judaism and Islam practice their own varieties of spontaneous petitions and praises, they don't generally major in this branch of prayer. Instead, they see liturgical prayer as a true act of worship. According to Jacob Neusner, the distinguished scholar of Judaism,

> In Judaism and Islam, prayer is liturgy in the classic sense of the word, that is, labor: it is work to be done for God. People recite prayers because they are commanded to do so, out of religious duty, in Judaism. And to that conception, the notion that one prays when the spirit moves the person, or one fabricates a prayer for the occasion, is alien. True, the Judaic and Islamic liturgies make provision for informal and idiosyncratic prayer, even for individual prayer, outside the framework of the quorum representing the holy community of the faithful. But both Islam and Judaism concur that fixed obligations govern the recitation of prayer, and much law encases the performance of those obligations in set rules and definitions. Prayer conforms to a fixed text. It is carefully choreographed, body movements being specified. It takes place at set times, not merely whenever and wherever the faithful are moved, or indeed, whether they are moved at all. It is an obligation that God has set, because God wants the prayers of humanity. And while Protestant spirituality judges that the letter convicts but the spirit revives, Muslim and Judaic faithful attest to the contrary: the requirement of regular, obligatory prayer provokes piety despite the recalcitrant heart. (2000:1)

Does God really want us to pray liturgically at set times, in addition to varied and spontaneous prayers? Rabbis found the theological essence of prayer expressed in the biblical phrase "serving God with the heart."

> And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Dt 10:12)

Therefore, in a very real sense, obedience to the greatest commandment of the Law includes prayer. To bow down and adore God is quite literally to worship him. In fact, the primary Hebrew word for worship שחה (*shachah*) is translated as *worship* ninety-nine times in the Old Testament. However, sixty-three times this same term is also translated as *bow*, *bow down*, *fall down, obeisance,* or *crouch*. In other words, the Hebraic understanding of "worship" is virtually synonymous with reverential postures of homage. It's no wonder then that God's anger and jealousy in Scripture is often directed at those who *bow down* to idols, "*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God"* (Dt 5:9). Could it be that God's jealousy here is partially related to the fact that he actually wants his people to *bow down* to him? It appears God may have answered this question long ago through the prophet Isaiah,

> Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow....' (Isa 45:22—23)

The Psalmist also calls us to bow in humble adoration of our Maker,

> O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." (Ps 95:6—7)

Unlike previously discussed matters of incarnational witness above, liturgical prayer at set times is not, in the strictest sense, an obligatory matter of explicit Biblical Law. It was, on the other hand, a rabbinic application of what Jesus called the greatest commandment, *"to love the Lord with all of your heart"* (Mt 22:37). Surely, it is good and right that we should regularly bow down in true worship and kneel before the Lord our Maker, for he is our God.

Our Text for Liturgical Prayer

If incarnational witnesses to Muslims decide to introduce liturgical prayer into their devotional life at set times daily, what should be the text of our prayer? If we were to sit down with Jesus and ask him to teach us to pray, what might he say? Fortunately, his disciples asked this very question, and Jesus responded, *"When you pray, say..."* (Lu 11:2). *Say?* Does this sound like Jesus is introducing a four point model after which we should pattern an endless variety of prayers? Or might he be introducing an specific prayer he wants his disciples to pray? Remember, Jesus is speaking to Jews for whom prayer *is* liturgy. It's therefore no accident that the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray, the

so-called "Lord's prayer," has been well known and well prayed, word for word, by countless Christians for nearly two thousand years. As N. T. Wright has said, when you take these words on your lips, you stand on hallowed ground (1996:4).

If Jesus' disciples did understand him to introduce a new liturgical prayer in Luke 11:2-4, we might expect to find some historical evidence of early Christians praying it as their "liturgical text" at three set times each day—consistent with the Judaic tradition of praying in the evening, morning and noon. Interestingly, this evidence is found in the *Didache,* also known as *The Teachings of the Apostles,* which most scholars agree dates back to the late first century (Draper 1985:269). The Didache is an orientation manual for new converts, portions of which appear to be adapted from Jewish documents used to initiate proselytes into the synagogue. It consists of instructions derived directly from the teachings of Jesus. Early teaching on prayer preserved in the Didache reads,

> ... pray as follows as the Lord bid us in his gospel:
>
> *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name;*
>
> *your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven;*
>
> *give us today our bread for the morrow;*
>
> *and forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors.*
>
> *And do not lead us into temptation, but save us from the evil one,*
>
> *for yours is the power and the glory forever.*
>
> You should pray in this way three times a day. (8:2–3, Ehrman 1998:315)

Didache 15:4 adds, "Say your prayers, ... and do everything just as you find it in the gospel of our Lord" (Ehrman 1998: 317). The Didache affirms not only that the Lord's Prayer was in common liturgical use in the first century, but that early Christians also taught it should be prayed three times daily.

Unfortunately, anti-Semitic church history has not always enabled us to see the deep richness of this prayer in its Jewish context. Those who would use the Lord's Prayer for their daily liturgy will therefore greatly benefit from studying *The Lord and His Prayer* by N. T. Wright (1996) and *The Jewish Background to the Lord's Prayer* by Brad Young (1984), both of which do a masterful job of unpacking its historic and Judaic treasures.

Postures of Prayer

As to how early Jewish Christians might have choreographed this prayer, we have already seen how worship and bowing down were virtually synonymous in Hebraic thought. However, a description from a sixth century monk-traveler John Moschos may also be helpful. In 587 CE (twenty-three years before the birth of Islam), Moschos left home to tour the entire Byzantine world, staying in caves, monasteries, and remote hermitages along the way. He wrote up the details of his journey in a book called *The Spiritual Meadow,* which William Dalrymple used in the 1990's to retrace his steps. Dalrymple describes the prayer service he witnessed at the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Mar Gabriel in southern Turkey,

> The entire congregation began a long series of prostrations: from their standing position, worshippers fell to their knees, and lowered their heads to the ground so that all that could be seen from the rear of the church was a row of upturned bottoms. All that distinguished the worship from that which might have taken place in a mosque was that the worshippers crossed and recrossed themselves as they performed their prostrations. This was the way the early Christians prayed, and is exactly the form of worship described by Moschos in *The Spiritual Meadow.* In the seventh century, Muslims appear to have derived their techniques of worship from existing Christian practice. Islam and Eastern Christians have retained the original early Christian convention; it is the Western Christians who have broken with sacred tradition. (Dalrymple 1998:105)

Islam not only derived its *salat* prayer liturgy from Christian forms of worship, but also from Jewish forms, as Woodberry has shown (1996: 176–177). The *salat* standing posture (*qiyam*) is seen in both Old and New Testaments (1 Kgs 8:14,22; Neh 9: 2; Mk 11:25). The bowing posture (*ruku*) is equivalent to the Jewish *keri'a* and communicates a sense of humble servitude. Islamic prostration in prayer (*sujud*) is also seen in both Old and New Testaments (Gen 22:5; Num 16:22; 1 Sam 24:9; Neh 8:6; Mt 26:39) and is equivalent to the Jewish *hishtahawaya,* similarly practiced by Eastern Christians.

Though these prayer postures are rich in meaning and still used by many Jews and Christians today (as Dalrymple reminded us above), they are not often part of the liturgical tradition of most evangelical missionaries to Muslims. However, if we return to a liturgical use of the Lord's Prayer—as Jesus may well have intended and the apostles apparently taught (Didache 8:2–3)—then we can naturally return to the use of biblical postures of prayer to choreograph it for liturgical worship. The biblical postures mentioned above are therefore a rich source from which we can draw. Doing so will not only effectively equip us for incarnational ministry to Muslims, but it can also serve to deepen our own intimacy with God as we begin to recover the pietistic disciplines of the prophets and earliest Christianity.

Ablutions

Before I describe a specific way to choreograph the Lord's Prayer with biblical worship postures, let us also consider the matter of preparation for such prayer. God gave very specific guidelines about how priests were to prepare before entering his presence in the tabernacle:

> Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die. They shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die: it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his descendants throughout their generations. (Ex 30:19—21)

As strange as such ritual washings may seem to Western Christians today, they were in fact commanded by God in the Scriptures. The penalty for disobedience was also rather severe. Furthermore, it was not only priests

who consecrated themselves with ablutions before entering God's presence. After Samuel arrived in Bethlehem, he said to Jesse and his sons, *"I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice"* (1 Sam 16:5). To "consecrate oneself", commentators acknowledge, involved preparing oneself spiritually as well as making oneself ceremonially clean by washing and putting on clean clothes (Ex 19:10,14; Lev 15; Nu 19:11-22).

In spite of modern Christian freedom to attend church services in extremely casual or vogue attire, many Christians firmly believe that entering God's sanctuary with offerings of praise and worship is a most sacred act. When done properly, ablutions serve to consecrate ourselves with water to symbolize the washing away of impurities that can hinder our fellowship with God. In this way, God asked all Israelites to consecrate themselves with ritual washing before he would descend on Mount Sinai to meet them,

> And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, and be ready by the third day; for on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people'" (Ex 19:10—11).

The Jewish order of ablutions began by washing the face, then the hands, then the feet—the same sequence practiced in Islam (Woodberry 1996:175; Sura 5:7). Naturally, washing our feet requires we remove our shoes, as God commanded Moses when entering his presence on Sinai (Ex 3:5).

If incarnational witnesses freely choose to prepare for liturgical prayer by following God's commands above, they need not do so in a rote way but can meaningfully prepare their hearts for true worship. For example, when washing our face, we can silently pray that God will clear away the things that cloud our vision, giving us eyes to see. As we wash our ears, we can pray that God will give us ears to hear his voice clearly, despite all the noise of this world crying out for our attention. As we rinse our mouth, we can reflect on words spoken throughout the day, dedicating our tongue along with its every utterance to God's glory and the edification of others. While washing our hands and forearms, we can reflect on how we have used them throughout the day, dedicating them for God's holy use alone. While washing our feet, we can reflect on where we have recently been or expect to soon go, dedicating them to take us only where God leads.

The Lord's Prayer as Incarnational Liturgy

Now let us bring all these threads together to see a specific way we can choreograph the Lord's Prayer with biblical postures. Please remember, however, that 'incarnational' does not mean 'contextual'. This is not suggested as something done only in Muslim lands or when with Muslim friends. That might be contextual, but not incarnational. Rather, the incarnational witness is the same, no matter where he or she is. This liturgy is therefore suggested as a format for genuine and deeply intimate worship which can help keep us centered on seeking God's kingdom first when daily circumstances tempt us to live according to the flesh.

To better comprehend the richness of this prayer in its Judaic context and thereby enhance our experience of worship by recovering the fullness of meaning implied by Jesus, I again recommend the invaluable works of Young (1984) and Wright (1996).

We are obviously free to choreograph the Lord's Prayer however the Spirit may lead. The following page shows one example of how some incarnational witnesses have been led to pray, in the direction of Jerusalem, three times daily, after ablutions.

By no means does this suggest we discontinue spontaneous prayers of petition and praise that uniquely reflect the work of God's Spirit in each believer's life (Eph 6:18). Keep giving thanks at meals for this is how our food becomes kosher or *halal* (1 Tim 4:4–5). Keep laying hands on Muslim friends to pray for healing and blessing. Non-liturgical prayers need not cease in any way. However, if God has set you apart to disciple Muslim nations and you have not already adopted some form of daily liturgical worship *(shachah)*, bowing down and kneeling before your Maker, you might prayerfully consider doing so as he leads.

After such prayer becomes a genuine part of a kingdom worker's life, no matter how discreet he or she intends to be, Muslim friends will notice. They know the tell-tale signs: a wet sink; excusing yourself a bit longer than usual; a folded prayer carpet neatly set in some inconspicuous place. In fact, as long as one does not pray liturgically *to be seen* by others, there's nothing wrong with *being seen* in prayer. Surely, Jesus' disciples saw him praying on many occasions.

One devout Muslim friend, who has lived in my home and I in his, has often commented with appreciation how much he respects my example of seeking after God. On one occasion, he declared that he knows the Bible I read must be "the true book" (i.e., uncorrupted) because of the Torah-observant way I live: "You pray regularly, eat no unclean foods, have no images of Jesus or Mary in your home, and your wife always wears long sleeves." Righteous living, according to Muslim categories of righteousness, communicates an apologetic far more powerful than words. Disappointed that his eleven-year-old son was not praying regularly, he also requested I speak to him about prayer. Of course, I was glad to oblige.

Religious Identity and Forms

Torah-observant incarnational living also helps solve the puzzling issue of religious identity facing most pro-C4 and pro-C5 missionaries. Given the irreparable damage done to the term 'Christian' in most Muslim lands, many young missionaries experiment with numerous creative alternatives to describe their religious identity, some even going so far as to call themselves some kind of Jesus-following 'Muslim'. The problem, of course, is that most Muslims do not have so many categories for religious identity. People are either Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Buddhist. If one waffles on such basic questions, suspicions tend to rise. When Christians dabble with calling themselves 'Muslim', but speak and live more like Gentile Christians, things do not add up for Muslim

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,

Stand with hands cupped around ears, signifying desire to hear God's voice.

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done,

On Earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

Palms up and cupped, as in dua *prayers, signifying expectation to receive blessings of sustenance from above.*

And lead us not into tempation, But deliver us from evil , for

Thine is the Kingdom,

Point right index finger up at "Thine."

And forgive us our debts, As we have also forgiven our debtors;

forever and ever,

Amen.

and the power, and the glory

All photos courtesy of M. Brandon

onlookers. At best, they may conclude the missionary is a recent Christian convert to Islam; at worst, a spy or member of some radical Muslim cult whom police should quickly deport.

However, if we delight in God's Law to guide our incarnational witness to Muslims, there is no need to call ourselves anything other than 'Christian.'[18] Who else would pray the Lord's Prayer three times daily? Nonetheless, Muslim acquaintances will quickly see that we do not fit into their stereotypes of unclean, pork-eating, clean-shaven, non-praying, scantily-clad, immoral 'Christians'. Torah-observant incarnational living is completely biblical and Muslim-friendly, without having to be 'Muslim.' Although this practice of our faith may seem unusual when compared to Gentile Christianity at large today, it is in fact quite similar to earliest Christianity before the acute Hellenization of the church occurred among non-Jewish believers. Our practice is therefore easily explained by the Bible, encoded in Biblical Law, and modeled by Jesus and his apostles. Such a patent contrast to typical Gentile Christianity will surely not escape Muslim notice.

Nonetheless, merely practicing the externals of Torah-observance will not necessarily endear Muslims to the gospel. Rather, the second greatest commandment of the Torah must also be observed from the heart, for the royal law is the law of love: *"If you really fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'"* (Jas 2:8). The law of love (Lev 19:18) is called 'royal' because it is the source of all other laws governing human relationships, and their summation (Mt 22:36–40; Ro 13:8-10).

Rabbi Isidore Epstein, an orthodox Jewish scholar, puts this royal law into perspective as he discusses the essential meaning of the Torah in three steps: Justice, Righteousness, and Love (1968). Quoting Hillel, Epstein simply defines justice as "not doing unto others what is hateful to ourselves" (:7). Justice is merely the avoidance of doing wrong, obedience to the basic laws of the land. Nobody gets rewarded for stopping at red lights or paying a proper wage to employees. To be just is to do the minimum required by the law. While justice demands we not do what is *bad* unto others, righteousness teaches we must do *good* unto others. Contrary to common Christian understanding, righteousness in Jewish thought is not an illusory state of sinless perfection, but rather it is humble service and charity rendered to the needy in obedience to God (Mt 25:37,46). Justice requires we *not* do to others what is hateful to us, while righteousness requires we *"Do to others as you would have them do to you"* (Lu 6:31). Righteousness therefore demands intentionality, initiative, and deliberateness, often going out of our way to do good. But it is not enough to practice justice and righteousness alone; we must practice both with love. What does it profit a man who callously dispenses food to the hungry or aid to the poor but despises them in his heart and speech (cf. Mt 5: 44–46; Lu 6:32–33)? Epstein observes,

> Love is the height of goodness. It cannot be reached unless we have learnt thoroughly and well the lessons of Justice and Righteousness. Where there is no Justice and Righteousness, there can be no Love. But at the same time, Love is greater than Justice and Righteousness put together. This becomes clear when we compare the meaning of Love with that of Righteousness and Justice.
>
> Justice demands that we do not harm others.
>
> Righteousness commands that we do good to others.
>
> Love makes us *want* to do good to others.
>
> Love has only one motto, from which all the rest follows. This motto has been proclaimed by our Torah in its command: "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev 19:18). (1968:47)

Torah-observance then, as I have used the term, is not merely limited to external forms. I agree wholeheartedly with Bradford Greer, author of "Free to Live Under the Law: A Model for Islamic Witness" (2002), who wrote,

> The adoption of 'forms' by a follower of Jesus will not ultimately compel Muslims to consider the claims of Christ. However, forms remain very significant. When a worker is sensitive to 'forms', this helps remove barriers created by stereotypes because by their use common negative stereotypes are contradicted. When confronted with this contradiction the observer is challenged to think beyond the stereotypes. Charles Kraft speaks about the importance of not confirming stereotypes when he talks about factors that facilitate diffusion and social change [1991:49]. Contradicting such stereotypes is essential in communication that is going to effect change.[19]

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Law is good when used properly. God's good and holy Law should not be confused with its perversion by legalists. The Law is no burden, but rather it can be our delight. And, as previously stated, I believe the Law is crying out to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path for incarnational witness to Muslims. Like the Jewish authors of Scripture who penned countless praises of the Law, Muslims also appreciate God's Law more than most of us can imagine. Proclaiming "freedom from the Law", therefore, does not necessarily sound like Good News to God-fearing Muslims. More often it sounds like antinomianism, a lawless, chaotic existence that demands unbridled freedoms and eventually results in what we see today in the 'Christian' West: the virtual rebirth of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Young missionaries to Muslims often naively assume that once a Muslim learns how few restrictions will be upon them if they become Christian, naturally they will convert. However, just the *thought* of eating pork, for example, is enough to nauseate many Muslims. A dear Muslim friend wanted to welcome our relatives visiting Asia. She was wondering what kind of meal to prepare for them, then asked, "Do they eat..., you know?" I knew what she meant but tried to divert her inquiry and avoid a direct response. Nonetheless, she persisted, "Do they eat..., you know?"

'You know' was her way of not defiling her tongue by saying the name of the animal which God explicitly forbid his people to eat in the Torah (Lev 11:7)—the same animals into which Jesus sent

a legion of demons then watched them drown after rushing down a steep bank into the sea (Mk 5:13). Unfortunately, I knew these relatives *did* eat it, and, well, frankly, there was just no easy way to say it. So I quietly replied, "Well..., I think they might... occasionally." The look of absolute horror and shivering disgust that came over her face surely illustrates a reality that seems inconceivable to many Gentile Christians: most Muslims simply do not *care* about such dietary freedoms!

Elsewhere in Asia, C5 Muslims were translating Mark's Gospel into their vernacular. They were perplexed at how to handle the parenthetical statement in Mark 7:19, *"Thus he declared all foods clean."* No one showed them, as we saw earlier, that the context of hand washings indicates Jesus was not declaring *treif* foods kosher but rather that kosher foods are not defiled when touched by ritually unclean hands. Nonetheless, they found another way to deal with this verse. They first wondered if it was a later insertion by Gentile scribes which should be omitted—what some scholars call "orthodox corruptions of Scripture"(Ehrman 1993). Could Jesus really have abrogated the Law? They could find no biblical evidence that any of Jesus' Jewish disciples began eating non-kosher foods after this teaching. The most difficult thing for them to imagine, however, was: How could Jesus have declared *pork* clean? This, to them, was unthinkable. After prayerful consideration, they decided not to omit the phrase but translate it directly. When the foreign translation consultant (committed to an insider model of having them determine the direction of translation) asked how they arrived at this conclusion, they said, "It was simple. Pork is not 'food' for us. Do you eat fried scorpions, beetles, and locusts when you visit Bangkok? No, because that is not food for you, just as pork is not food for us." Does God's declaration that reptiles are clean in Acts 10 mean we should all eat snakes and lizards to demonstrate our freedom in Christ?

We started with the premise that a better understanding and appreciation of the Law is critically important for four salient reasons:

1) Knowing the difference between legalism and being free to obey the Law will help prevent the inconsistencies of "contextual chameleons," whose behavior oscillates according to the people they are with at any given moment (e.g., Muslims or Christians), often resulting in a nagging incongruity that can pester missionaries about their own authenticity, i.e., "if my Muslim friends saw me now, might they feel I misled them to think I live differently than I actually do?"

Does God's declaration that reptiles are clean in Acts 10 mean we should all eat snakes and lizards to demonstrate our freedom in Christ?

2) Rooting incarnational witness in the Law frees a missionary from the occasional discomfort of wondering whether or not it is healthy to adopt Islamic forms if they are ultimately rooted in flawed theology. When Torah-observance guides our personal liturgical practice and diet (among other things), it becomes clear that we are actually living more like our Lord and his Jewish apostles, who are surely good examples to emulate.
3) Similarly, Torah provides a much firmer foundation to explain our lifestyle adjustments to accusing Christians who think we have abandoned the faith or succumbed to syncretism.
4) Fourthly, understanding the Law as interpreted by the world's preeminent rabbinic theologian (i.e., Jesus Christ our Lord) will not only help us live incarnationally among Muslims, but it will help us preach a Gospel *with* Law that truly is good news to Muslims.

We also mentioned a fifth reason for the Law to guide our incarnational living among Muslims, especially for pro-C4 and pro-C5 workers who want to promote truly indigenous church planting movements. Living like a non-Torah-observant Christian can actually hinder the very indigeneity we long to promote as we mentor Muslim believers. Though they hear our constant encouragement to remain culturally Muslim, students are more likely to follow the example we live out before them. Living as liturgyless Gentile Christians, therefore, may well end up contributing to their "Christianization" and "de-Muslimization" which we strive to avoid. As Jesus said, *"A student... who is fully trained will be like his teacher"* (Lu 6:40).

All of the Law is good if used properly, including dietary laws, the law of keeping a beard, the law of circumcision, and even liturgical developments surrounding observance of the law to serve God with all our heart. So while Gentile Christians are surely free to let the Gospel permeate their own society according to the categories of thought dominant in their worldview, incarnational witnesses to Muslims are similarly free to delight in the Law like the Psalmists, not pervert it into burdensome legalism like Judaizers. The comparative analysis of Judaism and Islam by Jacob Neusner underscores why such a choice may be wisdom for incarnational witnesses to Muslims.

> When we examine how Judaism and Islam portray the critical relationships that people maintain–between themselves and God, among themselves in the community of the faithful, and between that community and the outsider–we find a striking fact. It is that Judaism and Islam concur on a great many practical matters, using different language with the same result time and again. (Neusner 2000:vii)

Neusner elsewhere concludes,

> Judaism and Islam concur that culture and society cohere with religion, so there is no distinction between secularity and religiosity, state and church such as Christianity from Constantine's time forward contemplated. Both are religions of law... both place heavy stress upon

> the formation of a society that conforms to God's will, expressed in verbal revelation having to do with social norms, and both set forth through jurisprudence an elaborate and articulated message . ... Judaism and Islam in one important way [actually] stand closer together than either does to Christianity. That way is their conviction that law embodying public policy as much as theology sets forth religious truth. (1999:3, 5)

When the Gospel permeated the Western world, Gentile Christians began to ignore a great deal of Mosaic Law which they called *ceremonial*. This may have been appropriate for Gentiles who clearly did not want to live within its guiding light, but it is unnecessary for those who claim Abraham as their father through Ishmael and delight in many of the same divine Laws given to Israel. Because most of us have been reared on sermons which tend to belittle the Law or confuse it with legalism, we clearly have much to learn about Torah-observance within the New Covenant from our Messianic Jewish brethren.

The issues presented above are only a brief sampling which require significant development. How might incarnational witnesses to Muslims apply the Law of wearing phylacteries of Scripture as memorials of God's commands (De 6:8, 11:18)? What about laws regarding hospitality to strangers (Lev 19:34; Heb 13:2), respect for the elderly (Lev 19:32; 1 Tim 5:1), caring for the poor and needy (De 15: 7–11; Lev 19:9–10; Gal 2:10; 1 Jo 3: 17; Jas 1:27, 2:15–16), justice for the oppressed and downtrodden (De 24: 17,19; Mal 3:5; Mt 23:23; Ac 24:25), conservative dress (De 22:5; 1 Tim 2:9), sacred handling of the Biblical text (Ex 25:16; Lu 4:20), and fasting (Lev 23:27; Is 58; Zec 8:19; Mt 6:16–18)[20]? Surely, Jesus and the apostles had a great deal to say about many of these issues. However, reading these New Testament teachings with greater appreciation of their Judaic religio-legal context may better illuminate principles for application as we strive to disciple Muslim nations. Are these teachings optional 'good things' to do, or legal 'commandments' of the New Covenant contract, part and parcel of what it means to follow Jesus as *Lord* (Hettinga 1996)? Although Jesus often used the language of Law when calling disciples to himself—*"If you love me, you will keep my* commandments" (Joh 14:15; cf. Lu 6:46)—we do not always hear legal tones in his Great Commission, *"teaching them to observe all that I have* commanded *you"* (Mt 28:20).

Some may argue that many Islamic similarities to Judaism are in fact similarities to legalistic Jewish perversions of the Law, not to biblically proper delight in the Law. In some cases, this may well be. But now that David Stern has helped us see what Paul likely meant by being "under the Law"—i.e., to be "in subjection to the system that results from perverting Torah into legalism" (1991:129)—we are in a better position to read the classic passage which has inspired so many contextualizers. As rendered in Stern's *Jewish New Testament* (1989), Paul writes,

> With Jews, what I did was put myself in the position of a Jew, in order to win Jews. With people in subjection to a legalistic perversion of the Torah, I put myself in the position of someone under such legalism, in order to win those under this legalism, even though I myself am not in subjection to a legalistic perversion of the Torah. ... Don't you know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one wins the prize? So then, run to win! Now every athlete in training submits himself to strict discipline, and he does it just to win a laurel wreath that will soon wither away. But we do it to win a crown that will last forever. (1 Cor 9:20,24–25)

Paul, we see, did not just observe Torah according to its proper usage, but at times he even subjected himself to a *legalistic perversion* of Torah when ministering to Jews who lived under such legalism.

Perhaps the time has come for missionaries to Muslims to become zealous for the Law, similar to early Christians of Jerusalem (Ac 21:20). As Paul said, this will require strict training. As a Pharisee, Paul could handle it. Can we? Should we? I believe many of us should, as many as can learn to delight in God's Law as he intended for his firstborn among the nations. Muslim nations need to know that Jesus is much more than a prophet. He is the promised king, whose rule and reign will never end, the only mediator between God and man, the Lamb. I do not want to meet Paul in glory only to hear him say,

> It's really a shame more Muslims aren't here. Why didn't more missionaries to Muslims just obey the Torah? I did! That would have made sense to Muslims. It was right in front of you all along. Wasn't its observance by all the prophets and the Messiah enough for you? Our Lord himself never ate pork. How could so many Christians let mere food and ritual purity hinder their witness in reaching Muslim peoples? Regarding circumcision, our Lord himself also received this sign of God's covenant, the same covenant that resulted in your missionary calling in the first place. And why did so many among later Gentile Christians frown upon regularly washing up and bowing down before God in sacred worship? Why didn't more Christians just live according to the Torah?

Why not indeed. **IJFM**

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Endnotes

[1] "C5" refers to Christ-centered communities of Muslims who follow Jesus as Lord (cf. Massey 2000; Travis 2000) and retain their Muslim identity, in contrast to "C4" Muslim *background* believers who no longer identify themselves as Muslim.

[2] "Bicultural" missionaries who never question themselves accordingly might truly be living 'consistently' among both Muslim and Christian communities (both abroad and in their sending countries), perhaps because the Muslim and Christian communities in which they mix are more similar than in other parts of the world, or possibly because they have not actually adopted many significant Muslim-friendly *changes* into their lifestyle. Certainly, the contrast would be minimal if one's Muslim friends are mostly Westernized, "liberal", "progressive", or not actually practicing Islam. The test, of course, would be to let one's Muslim friends fully observe the missionary in his *other* context.

[3] "Pro-C4" and "pro-C5" refers to missionaries who favor the use of biblically permissible Islamic forms by "C4" Muslim background believers and "C5" Muslim followers of Jesus (cf. Massey 2000; Travis 2000).

[4] All biblical citations are from the RSV, unless otherwise noted.

[5] Workers among Muslims will appreciate the profoundly relevant christological work of Colin Brown, "Trinity and Incarnation: In Search of Contemporary Orthodoxy" (1991); James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (2003); and John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (1973) and *The Priority of John* (1987).

[6] The words God might want to use today among Muslims may *not* necessarily be the same words selected by Bible translators in existing translations of Scripture. In other words, archaic or non-Muslim-friendly Bible translations can be a poor source for learning how to describe biblical truth in a given Muslim vernacular.

[7] In Jewish understanding, *kashrut* also involves observance of many dietary oral laws. See Friedman (2001:21–27) for a fuller discussion on Jesus' dietary practice as recorded in Scripture.

[8] See Ac 10:17, 19.

[9] See Acts of John 88-9, 93, and one of the earliest pictorial renderings of Jesus on a fourth-century sarcophagus found in Rome (Witherington 1997:59).

[10] Given that all men do not have genes to grow beards, God's Law regarding beards (Lev 19:27) is perhaps one of the clearest attestations that God never expected all

nations to obey the entire Mosaic Law (cf. Massey 2004:17; Stern 1991:156), but rather it was given primarily to God's firstborn among the nations whose genetic composition made this commandment relevant.

[11] The Bible Jesus read was eventually referred to by Gentile Christians as the "Old Testament" perhaps as early as the late second century.

[12] See *The Clash of Jewish Missiologies* in part one of this paper for additional rites and privileges associated with full-converts to Judaism during the Second Temple period (Massey 2004:16).

[13] For a fuller discussion on the context of 1 Cor 7:18–20 and its application to C5, see Massey (forthcoming).

[14] 1 Cor 9:19,23.

[15] A delicate surgical procedure known as *epispasmos* was performed on some Hellenized Jews to "remove the marks of circumcision" beginning around 133 BCE and persisting throughout much of the Greco-Roman period. Hellenistic and Roman societies widely practiced public nakedness in Greek gymnasiums and Roman baths, where politics were discussed and business negotiations completed. However, both Greeks and Romans also considered that baring the tip of one's penis (i.e., the glans) was both vulgar and shameful. Such attitudes effectively barred Jews from these social arenas, thereby excluding them from significant business with Gentile clientele. Participation in athletic contests and exhibitions, also performed in the nude, was often required for social advancement. Here again, circumcised Jews dare not participate only to become amusement for Gentile spectators. *Epispasmos* reached its peak of popularity in the first century CE, in spite of strong Jewish opposition. The apostle Paul was among these Jewish opponents, and discouraged Jewish Christians from undergoing such a procedure (1 Cor 7:18). See also *http://ww.cirp.org/library/restoration/hall1.html*

[16] See previous note for more on Greco-Roman attitudes toward circumcision.

[17] As in Islam, the Jewish 'day' begins with evening (Gen 1:5).

[18] The 'Christian' self-identity of foreign workers is, of course, an entirely separate matter from the 'non-Christian' self-identity of C4 Muslim background believers or the 'Muslim' identity of C5 believers, both of whom are far more adept at genuinely maintaining a 'non-Christian' identity since they have never lived or spoken otherwise (cf. Dutch 2000).

[19] Personal email correspondence, January 7, 2004.

[20] Cf. "Fasting" by Werblowsky (1997: 251) and Jewishencyclopedia.com.