

Undergirding the Effort with Prayer: Muslims Being Reached Foremostly Through Extraordinary Prayer

by J. Christy Wilson, Jr.

“**T**he opening of the Muslim world for the gospel,” writes Patrick Johnstone, “cannot be organized by human effort or stratagems but only by prayer. Our weapons are spiritual, not carnal. Pray for an army of intercessors to be raised up that a breakthrough as decisive and sudden as that in China and the former USSR may also occur in the Muslim world.”¹

Of the approximately 11,000 people groups in the world still to be evangelized, about 4,000 of them are Islamic. Our Lord has promised, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations (*ethne* or people groups), and then the end will come.”² In that same passage, Christ said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.”³ Thus world evangelization is absolutely certain. But how are the Muslim people groups going to be reached? The answer is: Foremostly through extraordinary prayer.

The First Level

Dr. J. Edwin Orr, in his books on the history of awakenings, has pointed out that there are four levels to every true revival.⁴ This is true in the book of Acts and on down through Church history. (1) The first stage is prayer and reconciliation among Christians. (2) The second is evangelism as the lost are won to the Lord. (3) The third is that of missions with participation in world evangelization and, (4) the fourth is our service for Christ in action as we love our neighbors as ourselves and supply their needs physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually.

Most of the revivals in the past have

been localized because of the difficulty of transportation and communication. I believe that we are now on the verge of an awakening of worldwide proportions. This will fulfill the prophecy of Joel,⁵ quoted by the apostle Peter:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy, I will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs in the earth below. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.⁶

This revival, I believe, will bring about the completion of Christ’s commission of world-wide evangelization and will be the heart of reaching unreached Muslim groups for Christ.

Revival Resulting in Missions to Muslims

We see this on a limited scale in the awakening of 1858 and following. It started with a convert of Charles Finney who was an urban missionary, by the name of Jeremiah Lanphier, who began the Fulton Street Wednesday noon prayer meeting in 1857 for workers and business people in New York City. Within six months, about ten thousand were gathering for prayer every noon. This revival resulted in over a million converts being added to the American churches in the next two years.

The most prominent leader of this awakening in the States, as well as in the British Isles, was D. L. Moody. One of his closest associates, Ruben A. Torrey, said that Moody was a far greater man of prayer than he was a preacher. Here again we see the abso-

lute necessity of intercession in great awakenings. Moody was not only involved in evangelism, as huge numbers came to Christ through his messages, but he also helped establish the Y.M.C.A. in North America, started schools for girls and boys, established the Moody Bible Institute and founded a Christian publishing house, now called Moody Press.

His involvement in missions, which is another stage of true revival, came through close friends like Arthur T. Pierson who popularized the phrase, “The evangelization of the world in this generation.” In reference to this, Moody said, “It can be done—it ought to be done—it must be done.”⁷ According to our Lord’s promise in Matt. 24:14, we can add “It will be done.” In the summer of 1886, Moody invited Pierson along with Adoniram Judson Gordon to speak to 251 student leaders who had been invited to his Mount Hermon School for Boys in Massachusetts. One of these was Robert Wilder who had just completed his senior year at Princeton.

Wilder was born in India where his parents had been missionaries. He and his sister, Grace, prayed faithfully that 100 of the students at the Mount Hermon Conference would give their lives for foreign missionary service. In answer to their intercession, exactly 100 signed the pledge, “God helping me, I purpose to be a foreign missionary,” and the Student Volunteer Movement was born.

The following academic year of 1886-87, Robert Wilder and John Foreman, a seminary student, spread the vision by visiting campuses across the United States and Canada. Over 2,000

more signed the pledge to become missionaries. One of them was Samuel Zwemer at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. He went on to become the greatest missionary to Muslim peoples in history.

Zwemer believed that God was calling him to the hardest mission field in the world, the Islamic peoples of Arabia. No mission board would send him. They said that he would be killed for sure and they did not want to be responsible for that. Therefore he and Dr. Cantine formed their own agency, the Arabia Mission. As Dr. Zwemer said, "If God calls you and the board won't send you, bore a hole through the board and go anyway." After exploring around the whole Arabian Peninsula, they established mission stations in Muscat, Kuwait, Bahrain and Busra.

After working in the Muslim world for 25 years, Zwemer was invited to speak at a Keswick Convention in England. He used as his text,

Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word, I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net broke. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.⁸

Zwemer went on to say that he and others had toiled in the Muslim world all night and had taken next to nothing. He could count the Muslim converts on his fingers. But he said we have the command of Christ to obey and that if we are faithful the time will come when so many Muslims will come to Christ, that like the problem with the overloaded boats, there will not be room in the churches to hold them. The people at the Keswick Convention were so touched that they asked Dr. Zwemer what they could do. His answer was, "Pray!" This was the beginning of the Fellowship of Prayer for Muslims which has conducted special times of inter-

cession ever since.⁹ For example, days of prayer for Muslims are now held several times a year in Philadelphia and in the Los Angeles area. They also produce and distribute literature which encourages prayer.

It was the Student Volunteer Movement that also influenced Dr. William Mc E. Miller (1892-1993) to give his life for missions. While he was studying in seminary, he put a map of the world on the wall of his dormitory room. He would then kneel by his bed in front of it and would pray, "Lord, I am willing to go anywhere in this world for You. Show me where." It was then that he heard Dr. Zwemer share the challenge of the Muslim world. God, through him, called Bill Miller to go to Mashad in Eastern Iran near the border of Afghanistan.

Bill Miller then started a daily prayer meeting in his room to ask God for missionaries in accord with Christ's command, "Pray the Lord of the harvest that He will thrust forth laborers into His harvest."¹⁰ Through prayer, he was able to get over a hundred to be willing to be missionaries. Among those were Dr. Philip Howard, the father of Elizabeth Elliot, whose husband Jim was killed by the Auca Indians, who also was the father of David Howard who has been a missionary in Colombia, Latin America, who has headed up two of the Urbana Student Missionary Conventions, was Director of the Lausanne Congress in Pattaya, Thailand, then was Executive Secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship and is now vice president of the David C. Cook foundation. Through Bill Miller's challenge, my parents also went as missionaries to Iran. Thus we see the results in the Muslim world that came through prayer following the great awakening of 1858.

Prayer for Muslims in Afghanistan

I was born in Iran where my parents were missionaries. As a little boy, I

heard them praying for a country to the east which had no Christians. It was Afghanistan. I do not remember this incident, but my mother told me that our Iranian Pastor, Stephen Khoobyar, once asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I said that I wanted to be a missionary to Afghanistan. He replied that missionaries were not allowed in that land. I said that was the reason I wanted to be a missionary there.

Not only did the missionaries and Christians in Iran pray for the closed nation of Afghanistan, but dedicated men and women of God on the borders of that country in India, later in Pakistan and in Russia also interceded. For example, Flora Davidson from Scotland lived in a two-story adobe house in the town of Kohat on the Northwest Frontier. In front of a window which looked out on the mountains of Afghanistan in the distance, she had a little bench. There she would spend hours on her knees praying that God would open that country to the gospel.

She also started a circle of prayer for Afghanistan. She would regularly distribute requests for intercession to believers who were concerned about reaching that nation for Christ. Later Margaret Haines, the sister-in-law of Dr. William Miller, worked with Flora Davidson in Kohat. She edited and published a quarterly prayer bulletin called "Missions on the Borders of Afghanistan." When she returned to the Philadelphia area because of poor health, she continued to encourage intercession for Afghanistan and for years put out monthly prayer letters for the work in that country.

After I finished my studies, Afghanistan was still closed to regular missionaries. Therefore, I signed a contract with the Ambassador at the Afghan Embassy in Washington, D.C. to teach English in that country. After arriving there in 1951, while reading my Bible, I saw that this was what the Apostle Paul did."¹¹ Following him, I became a self-supporting missionary.

When my wife, Betty, and I arrived in Kabul, our main ministry was prayer. We also met with other Christian teachers for intercession. This was the way a house church began in our home. I used to pray every day for my Afghan Muslim students in the government school where I taught. One of these for whom I interceded went abroad for further study. He belonged to the Royal Family of Afghanistan. Later on I received a letter from him telling how he had put his trust in Jesus Christ as his Savior. He also had joined an evangelical church and was teaching a young people's Sunday school class. He enclosed a check to help out with God's work in Afghanistan.

Not only is prayer for Muslims effective, but also prayer with them for their felt needs can be a sign and a wonder when they see the answer which then can lead them to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. On one occasion, an Afghan friend came to me with his uncle who needed a cataract operation. They had just been turned away from the government hospital where they were told that a bed for him to have the operation would not be available for three months.

My friend explained to me that this made it very difficult since his uncle came from the central highlands which was a journey of several days each way. It therefore would be difficult for him to make the trip and come back in three months. On the other hand it would be very hard for him to stay in Kabul, the capital, away from his family for three months. He asked me whether I knew the head of that government hospital. I said that I did. He then asked me kindly to write a note explaining the situation and asking whether it might not be possible to admit his uncle sooner. I replied that I did not have to write a note but would personally speak to the head of the hospital.

The friend then asked me what the name was of the one in charge of the hospital. I answered, "His name is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Head of every hospital." I then said, "Let us talk to Him now." Praying in their language, I explained the situation to the Lord and asked Him to help. I then told them to go back to the government hospital. But they were reluctant to return there since they had just been turned away. I

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said to them, "You asked me to intercede with the Head of the hospital and I did this. Now go back." Finally they agreed to try again.

Several hours later my friend returned to see me and he was all excited. He exclaimed, "You do know the Head of that hospital!" He went on to explain that as soon as they returned, a patient was just being discharged and they admitted his uncle immediately, putting him in the bed which had just been vacated. And they would perform the needed operation soon. This Muslim became a believer in Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior.¹²

A Muslim convert to Christ in Europe has found prayer to be an effective means of evangelism. He finds out what needs they have and then challenges them to pray to Jesus to help them with these needs. When the Lord answers, they see a sign and a wonder in response to their prayers. Many Muslims then also pray to Christ to forgive them their sins and receive Him as their Savior and Lord.

The Weapons of our Warfare

As the Apostle Paul reminds us, "The weapons of our warfare are not car-

nal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."¹³ He also brings this out when he writes,

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.¹⁴

Our real foe is Satan and all of his evil forces. In the same way, Jesus Christ has taught us to petition daily in the Lord's Prayer that we might be delivered from "the evil one" [*tou ponerou* in Greek].¹⁵

Notice that Paul says our struggle is not against flesh and blood or people. We need constantly to love our Muslim friends. Our Lord loves them infinitely and this is the reason He has not only died for them but has commanded us to take His good news of forgiveness and eternal life to them. We must see that we are really fighting against the spiritual powers behind Islam. For this reason the passage adds that along with being strong in the Lord and putting on the whole armor of God so that we can stand against the devil, we also need to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."¹⁶

What accounts for the origin of Islam? Muhammad claimed that an angel or messenger from God appeared to him and gave the revelation of the Qur'an. He states this in Surah 81:19-23, "This is in truth the word of an honored messenger, mighty, established in the presence of the Lord of the Throne, (One) to be obeyed and trustworthy; and your comrade is not mad. Surely he beheld him on the clear horizon."¹⁷ We might ask, was this revelation really from God?

It is interesting to see how certain cults also trace their origin to a vision of an angel or a special messenger who

they claim came from God. For example, Joseph Smith, Jr., the one Mormons follow as their prophet, claimed that the angel Moroni appeared to him and gave him his commission three times.¹⁸ Also Sun Myung Moon who started the Unification Church claims that Jesus Christ appeared to him in Korea on Easter Day in 1936 and called him to be a special messenger.¹⁹ The Apostle Paul warns us that at times “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”²⁰

The Apostle John tells us in the Bible that “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”²¹ He also tells us to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” He then reveals the test for determining the source. “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.”²² In other words, true divine revelation acknowledges the incarnation of Christ. The Qur’an throughout denies that Jesus is God or the Son of God. Furthermore, Islam also denies that Christ died on the cross for our sins.

It was through seeking the real forgiveness of his sins that Haji Sultan Muhammad received Jesus as his Savior. He writes his testimony in the booklet, *Why I Became A Christian*.²³ After being an Islamic leader, a scholar and one who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, he finally concluded that only in the death of Christ was there atonement for his sins.

Even though Muhammad was a preacher or forthteller, he was not a prophetic foreteller. There is no instance in the Qur’an where he prophesied a future event which then came true, such as the prophets of the Old and New Testament did. Moses stated,

You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true,

that is a message that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.²⁴

Muhammad had no authenticating miracles with his message such as Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Christ and Paul. Furthermore Christ said, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by Me”²⁵ Or as the Apostle Peter said, “There is no other name (apart from that of Christ) under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”²⁶ This is the reason we should be deeply concerned since some billion people of the world are trusting a false absolute for their eternal salvation.

George Otis, in his book *The Last of the Giants*, points out that just as Joshua and his armies had to fight warriors of great size before the Holy Land was occupied, so we today have awesome forces that hinder the evangelization of the world. He points out that the greatest of these giants is Islam.²⁷ John Wimber states that Jesus Christ has won the war for world evangelization, but we through His strength need to do the mopping up and win the battles. The way we are to do this is not through our own strength, but through prayer to the Commander of the Lord’s army, even as Joshua did.²⁸

A World-Wide Revival of Prayer

We should be greatly encouraged with the present revival of prayer around the world. The Concerts of Prayer Movement is gaining faithful groups of intercessors on every continent. Dr. C. Peter Wagner, who is Coordinator of the AD 2000 Prayer Track, writes, “It is becoming clear that the real battle for world evangelization is a spiritual battle.”²⁹ Campus Crusade’s Dr. Kim Joon-Gon of Korea writes, “The Lord Jesus has the keys to open what no one can shut. I believe in the next ten years, history’s greatest revival will take place.”³⁰

In 1993 and 1994, Youth With A

Mission encouraged Christians to fast and pray in a special way for Muslims during the Islamic lunar month of Ramadan. They plan to continue this practice on a yearly basis. Also October 1993 was set aside as a time for focused prayer for the 10/40 Window of 62 countries. Over two-thirds of these nations were Islamic.

Conclusion

God the Father gives the promise to God the Son, “Ask of Me and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession.”³¹ We too can claim this promise for Muslim peoples. As our Lord said, “Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy will be complete.”³² World-wide awakening will come through what Jonathan Edwards called “explicit agreement and visible union of God’s people in extraordinary prayer for the revival of religion and the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on earth.”³³ In this way, all unreached people groups, including the Muslim peoples, will be reached. Then, as the Bible has promised, “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”³⁴

End Notes

1. Johnstone, Patrick, *Operation World*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 5th edition, 1993, p. 72.
2. Matthew 24:14.
3. Matthew 24:35.
4. J. Edwin Orr, *The Eager Feet* Evangelical Awakenings 1792 and 1830, *The Fervent Prayer* Evangelical Awakenings 1858—, *The Flaming Tongue*, Evangelical Awakenings, 1900 —, Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975, 1974, 1973. The specific reference for this is in *The Fervent Prayer*, page 160.
5. Joel 2:28-32.
6. Acts 2:17, 18, 19, 21.

7. Bush, Luis, editor, *AD 2000 and Beyond Handbook*, Colorado Springs, CO: AD 2000 & Beyond Movement, 3rd edition, 1993, frontispiece.
8. Luke 5:5-7 (KJV).
9. The address of the Fellowship of Faith for North America is: P.O. Box 65214, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4K 3Z2. They put out a prayer bulletin every few months on needs in the Muslim world.
10. Matthew 9:38.
11. Acts 18:1-4.
12. For further similar accounts, see my chapter in the book edited by Dean J. Dudley Woodberry, *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989, pp. 323- 336.
13. II Corinthians 10:4.
14. Ephesians 6:10-12.
15. Matthew 6:13.
16. Ephesians 6:18.
17. *The Glorious Qur'an*, Text and Explanatory Translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Mecca, Saudi Arabia: The Muslim World League, 1977, pp. 689-690.
18. *The Pearl of Great Price, Writings of Joseph Smith*, Section 2, verses 29-54.
19. Yamamoto, J. Isamu, *The Puppet Master*, Dowers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977, p. 16.
20. II Corinthians 11:14.
21. I John 3:8b and 4:1-3.
22. I John 4:1-3.
23. Paul, Sultan Mohammed, *Why I Became A Christian*, Bombay, India: Gospel Book House, n.d.
24. Deuteronomy 18:21-22.
25. John 14:6.
26. Acts 4:12.
27. Otis, George, Jr., *The Last of the Giants*, Tarrytown, NY: Chosen Books, Fleming Revell, 1991.
28. Joshua 5:15-18.
29. Bush, Luis, editor, *AD 2000 and Beyond Handbook*, Colorado Springs, CO: Ad 2000 & Beyond Movement, 3rd edition, 1993.
30. Bush, Luis, editor, *AD 2000 and Beyond Handbook*, Colorado Springs, CO: Ad 2000 & Beyond Movement, 3rd edition, 1993.
31. Psalm 2:8.
32. John 16:24.
33. Edwards, Jonathan, *A Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth*, New York, NY: 1844.
34. Habakkuk 2:14.

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