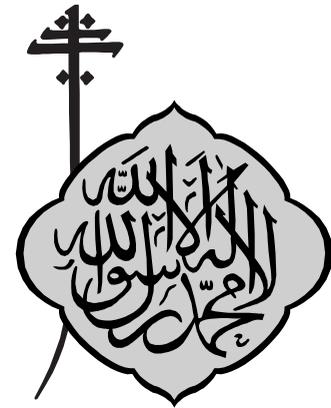


Are God and Allah the Same?

David L. Johnston



Contrary to what others may teach and preach, I remain unconvinced that the God of the Qur'an is any different from the God of the Old Testament. If we say Jews worship the same God as we do, then we must logically grant Muslims the same "privilege." After all, they recognize Jesus as the Christ (though their definition is vague and comes nowhere near satisfying us), pointing to His virgin birth, spotless life and miracles – going a lot further in our direction than do Jews!

I am not saying the Qur'an is Scripture like the Old Testament. There is certainly that sense in which Christians share a deep affinity with Jews because they share part of the same Scripture. I am not talking about the text, however, but about the theology behind it. I am simply arguing that since Muhammad started at the same point as the Bible with regard to creation (the one God who created all there is), we are talking about three faiths (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) that have this doctrine in common. As one reads the Qur'an (much of it reads like the Psalms or other parts of Scripture), one discovers the all-powerful God, the originator of all that is, the sustainer and the provider of all good things that humans (and other creatures) need. He is also the God of Adam and Eve (though she is not mentioned by name in the Qur'an), of Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, and Jacob. Is there another God like that? Granted, the element of fatherhood is missing, and love is not emphasized (though mercy and forgiveness are often mentioned)

But surely, if Paul could look at an Athenian statue and proclaim to his pagan audience that this is the "God" who raised Jesus from the dead, we certainly can proclaim to our Muslim friends that the Creator God they worship is the one who sent Jesus to redeem us from our sins! When

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it comes to the doctrine of creation we stand on common ground, and this in turn empowers us in the necessary task of breaking down the centuries-old enmity between Christians and Muslims.

To summarize, I see five positive reasons why I believe Muslims, like the other monotheists (Christians and Jews), are speaking of the same God. The reasons are philological, cultural/linguistic, theological, practical, and missiological.

1. Philological: The word "Allah" is a Semitic word parallel to the Hebrew "El," referring to the highest god, creator of all that is. You can read the "Allah" and "ilah" (the generic word for a "god" in Arabic) articles on this in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Scholars of all stripes agree on this. Hebrew and Arabic are cognate languages (same Semitic origin, with Aramaic between Hebrew and Arabic), with many words in common, not to mention the wide cultural overlapping as well.

2. Cultural/Linguistic: Arab Christians used the word "Allah" for "God" before Islam came along, and continue to do so today. It is the only Arabic word for God – which our Arabic Christian brothers and sisters were using even before Islam. We are talking about 15 million Christians in the Middle East whose Bible translations have always used "Allah" for God, and whose liturgy and prayers are all directed to Allah as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

3. Theological: Allah was considered the highest god at the pre-Islamic shrine at Mecca. The Qur'an in many passages gives witness to the Supreme God, creator of the heavens and the earth, the God of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and other biblical figures as well. It also mentions Arabian monotheists by the name of *haneef*, and Muhammad claims them as precursors of Islam. What is more, when Muhammad finally marched triumphantly into Mecca (630, only two years before his death), after eight years of self-imposed exile, he cleansed the pagan shrine of all other deities and proclaimed that it would now be dedicated solely to the One True God, Allah. This is an interesting act of contextualization, actually one example among many intentionally carried out by

Muhammad. Finally, right from the start it is clear he believed and taught that he was a prophet preaching the same faith as the Jews and Christians.

Though he deviated much more from Christianity in the end, he never contradicted the basic biblical story line from Genesis to the prophets. (In the details, however, he follows much more the oral traditions passed down by the Arabian Jews than the Scriptures—of which he probably never had a copy for himself anyway.)

4. Practical: Often the opposing argument goes, “They say they are worshipping the same God but in fact, because their faith is borne out of Satan’s deceit, they are really worshipping the devil.” First of all, I don’t believe anyone worships the devil while they are consciously worshipping God. He is the only one who can judge the human heart and discern its true intentions. But then secondly, as John says, “We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the power and control of the evil one” (I John 5:19). I would not want to be naive: any system that sets itself up against the gospel of our Lord Jesus falls into John’s category of “the world.” That is certainly John’s intention in linking “the Jews” (Jesus’ overt enemies in his gospel) to “the world.”

On the other hand, wouldn’t we want to say that a person groping for God in their prayers (from whatever background) is at least a potential recipient of God’s mercy in Christ? Only Jesus can judge the deepest intentions of the heart. The New Testament teaches us that through his Holy Spirit the “Son of Man who came to seek and to save the lost” is wanting to draw this precious seeker to himself. Thus when someone says, “I love God and want to draw nearer to him,” I take that at face value and try to lead him or her on from there.

5. Missiological: Without common ground we cannot even begin a conversation with a Muslim friend. If my opening statement is, “You and I believe in a different God,” we have already lost a precious bridge to his or her heart. If in fact we can agree on a common Creator God who created humans as His deputies on earth, holding them accountable through the words of His prophets, and warning them of the judgment to come, then yes, we can start in a familiar place and build from there. This has certainly been our experience in years of ministry in the Middle East. 🌐

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A rose by any other name is still a rose, but what about the Deity?

Elliot Paulson

On the levels of the *Famous* and *Familiar* names for the biblical God and the Muslim Allah, God and Allah are the same. But on the level of the *Family* name, the biblical God and the Muslim Allah *are not the same*, for without the biblical *Family* name of Father, the Muslim rosary of the ninety-nine names of Allah is one bead too short.

A Muslim who believes in the Allah of the ninety-nine most beautiful names, believes in the Merciful Master of the *Famous* and *Familiar* names who calls him his servant. But he *cannot* believe in the loving Father of the *Family* name, who calls him his child.

A Christian who believes in the biblical revelation of God also believes in the Merciful Master of the *Famous* and *Familiar* names who calls her his servant. But she also has the privilege to pray to the loving Father of the *Family* name, who calls her his child.

My prayer for both Muslims and Christians is paraphrased from Ephesians 1:16-19: I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious *Father*, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, *so that you may know him better*. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which the *Father* has called you, the riches of the *Father's* glorious inheritance in the saints, and the *Father's* incomparably great power for us who believe. 🌐

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