

MUHAMMAD LEARNED MONOTHEISM FROM CHRISTIANS

Muslims today believe the myth that Muhammad introduced monotheism to the area around Mecca and Arabia in general. The truth is that Muhammad got tired of the Christians constantly preaching monotheism to his fellow Arabs, knowing in his heart, that they were correct in their criticism of Arab paganism. There can be little doubt that Christians, in their evangelism of the area around Mecca, charged the Arabs with paganism and polytheism. Christians criticized those worshipping 260 pagan gods at the Kabah and offered Christianity as a far superior monotheistic religion. In his heart, Muhammad knew the Christians were right and had a better religion of monotheism. But some Muslims today, are totally ignorant of the fact that monotheism was widely preached before, during and after the rise of Muhammad, by the Christians. It was a well-known theology and the Arabs were familiar with it. Amazingly, today Muslims criticize as polytheists, the very one's who taught Muhammad about monotheism! By the time Muhammad came along, the pagan Arabs were ripe for conversion to Monotheism because of the preaching of Christians.

"The religious situation of Arabia, and particularly of Mecca, as it was at the end of the sixth century, there must have been many serious-minded men who were aware of a vacuum and eager to find something to satisfy their deepest needs." ([Muhammad at Mecca](#), W. Montgomery Watt, 1953, p 23-29)

Meanwhile the seed of monotheism had been sown all along the Arabian Peninsula. ... The time was ripe for a religious revival. ([Islam and the Arabs](#), Rom Landau, 1958 p 11-21)

In brief, in the sixth century after Christ, the majority of the people of Arabia were still pagans, but monotheism was spreading steadily. The time was ripe for the Arabs to abandon their superstitions in favour of a more spiritual and monotheistic conception of God. ([The Life and Times of Muhammad](#), John Bagot Glubb, 1970)

Muhammad was only one of several preachers of monotheism in the Arabia of his day. ([Islam: Muhammad and His Religion](#), Arthur Jeffery, 1958, p 85)

The Meccans had numerous contacts with Christians. ([Muhammad's Mecca](#), W. Montgomery Watt, Chapter 3: Religion In Pre-Islamic Arabia, p26-45)

By the Prophet's time, Christian influences were making themselves felt. ([Islam in the World](#), Malise Ruthven, 1984, p 28-48)

"The influences of foreign religions such as Christianity which had won many followers in Arabia" ([Studies on Islam](#), edited by Merlin L. Swartz, Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion, by Joseph Henninger, 1981, p 3-22)

The milieu of the prophet was not one, however, of polytheistic paganism untouched by any other influences. As in South Arabia, so too in North the monotheistic faiths of Judaism and Christianity had long since become known. ([The Archeology Of World Religions](#), Jack Finegan, 1952, p482-485, 492)

It seems equally certain that Allah was not merely a god in Mecca but was widely regarded as the "high god," the chief and head of the Meccan pantheon, perhaps the result, as has been argued, of a natural progression toward henotheism or of the growing influence of Jews and Christians in the peninsula." ([The Hajj](#), F. E. Peters, p 3-41, 1994)

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The old Arabian paganism was at that time in a process of disintegration, but Judaism and Christianity were widely represented in the peninsula, and to a lesser extent Zoroastrianism and certain Gnostic sects. Several preachers of monotheism had arisen, and each had gained a following, but it was Muhammad who succeeded in syncretizing certain basic elements of Judeo-Christian faith and practice with native Arabian beliefs and, by his own burning faith in his mission and indomitable courage in carrying out that mission, initiated what has become one of the world religions of our day. ([Islam: Muhammad and His Religion](#), Arthur Jeffery, 1958, p xi-xiv)

The old Arabian paganism both in North and in South Arabia was polytheistic, but under the influence of the surrounding culture a strong movement toward monotheism had developed. The legends about the Hanifs are one evidence of this. Muhammad was only one of several preachers of monotheism in the Arabia of his day. ([Islam: Muhammad and His Religion](#), Arthur Jeffery, 1958, p 85)

The question has been asked: How could a religion such as the ancient Arabian, which was otherwise so inadequate and under-developed, attain to so lofty a conception of God as is expressed in the belief in Allah? ... It is perhaps more probable that the pagan Arabs were influenced by ... the monotheistic belief of the neighbouring Christian peoples. ([Mohammed: The man and his faith](#), Tor Andrae, 1936, Translated by Theophil Menzel, 1960, p13-30)

Although idolatry was the prevailing religion in early Arabia, the idea of One Supreme God was not unknown to the Arabs. Jews and Christians, of course, professed monotheism and the Sabeans recognized One God, but they associated many lesser deities with Him. The Magians believed in a good god, Ormuzd, and an evil god, Ahriman. Each of these two gods was continually fighting for the possession of the world. All the Magian had to do to reconcile himself to monotheism was to believe that Ahriman was the creature of Ormuzd in revolt against Him. Certainly an easier transition than that which had to be made by the idol-worshipping Greeks and Romans in accepting Christianity. ([Islam and the Arabs](#), Rom Landau, 1958 p 11-21)

Meanwhile, the seed of monotheism had been sown all along the Arabian Peninsula. Judaism had made converts in the north and south, and Byzantine influence was felt from Yemen to Syria. Christian and Jewish traders exchanged religious ideas with pagan Arabs along the caravan routes. Mecca enjoyed a rising prestige among the Arab cities, and Allah, lord of the Kaaba, was rising with it. The time was ripe for a religious revival. ([Islam and the Arabs](#), Rom Landau, 1958 p 11-21)

Bedouins of the Hijaz on their caravan journeys to Syria and other Christian centers undoubtedly carried back with them a superficial knowledge of Christian beliefs and customs. Dissident Christian sects, mostly of the Monophysite confession, and numerous monks turned ascetics had their retreats in the steppes of north Arabia along caravan routes. As a caravan leader, Muhammad is supposed to have befriended a Christian monk, Babira; it is said that he even wore tunics which were the gifts of other Christian monks. Two Christianized Arab tribes, Judham and `Udhra, roamed the Hijaz. According to local tradition, there were even Christian religious artifacts in the Ka`bah at Mecca. It is not unlikely that Muhammad may have exchanged religious views with monks, even with Christians who possessed some formal knowledge of Christian theology. Jacobites and Nestorians. are known to have conducted active missionary activities among the pagan tribes of Arabia; indeed, priests and deacons were assigned to each tribe, and in Najran the Monophysites had established churches which, when persecuted by dhu-Nuwas, invited Abyssinian intervention. Monasteries astride caravan routes were open day and night to traveling caravans and roaming Bedouins. Here, besides receiving food and shelter, they undoubtedly had occasion to 'observe such practices as praying, fasting, and alms giving three of the five basic injunctions of Islam. The Nestorians had established schools and some churches in

many of the towns frequented by Arab tribesmen of the Hijaz. ([Islam](#), Beliefs And Observances, Caesar E. Farah, p2-7, 26-35)

When Muhammad began his summons to Islam, Christians were involved in deep theological disputes, not the least of which was over the use of icons, a dispute which culminated in the celebrated iconoclastic controversy in Christianity. Some Christians in South Arabia were accused in the Qur'an of having departed from the basic tenets of their faith. Such dissensions, coupled with the fact that the Bedouin Arabian, even in the judgment of the Qur'an, was notoriously inclined to irreligion, could not have disturbed materially the few religious convictions of the Arabs before the preaching of Muhammad.

Evidence of Transformation: Be that as it may, socioeconomic trends long current in Arabian society appeared to converge in the Hijaz, and specifically at Mecca, when Muhammad emerged on the scene. The mustering of economic power through control of transit trade and the housing of pagan deities in the Ka`bah under their supervision, gave the Quraysh an enviable position of influence and contributed to their rising status. Mecca had become the center of pilgrimage and the hub of economic life in West Arabia. ([Islam](#), Beliefs And Observances, Caesar E. Farah, p2-7, 26-35)

The probability would seem to be that Muhammad talked about Biblical matters with people who knew more than the average inhabitant of Mecca, but what he received from them must have been limited in scope in view of the paucity of his knowledge of Judaism and Christianity. ([Muhammad's Mecca](#), W. Montgomery Watt, Chapter 3: Religion In Pre-Islamic Arabia, p26-45)

The references in the Qur'an to the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs are cast in a form which suggests that at least some of the hearers already had an idea of the outline of the stories, and that what the Qur'an was doing was to point out the lessons to be learnt from these stories; for example, they show how God defends his prophets from their opponents. ([Muhammad's Mecca](#), W. Montgomery Watt, Chapter 3: Religion In Pre-Islamic Arabia, p26-45)

For the study of the life of Muhammad it is hardly necessary to decide the relative importance of Jewish and Christian influences, especially since many details are disputed. The main necessity is to realize that such things were 'in the air' before the Qur'an came to Muhammad and were part of the preparation of himself and of his environment for his mission. ([Muhammad at Mecca](#), W. Montgomery Watt, 1953, p 23-29)

The Meccans had numerous contacts with Christians. Their trading caravans took them to the Christian cities of Damascus and Gaza in the Byzantine empire, as well as to Christian Abyssinia and the partly-Christian Yemen. A few Christians also resided in Mecca itself, at least temporarily. There were hardly any Jews in Mecca, but the Jews were numerous in Medina, where Meccan caravans to the north some-times made a stop. Such contacts could, of course, lead to no more than an external knowledge of these religions, and it is probable that few Meccans engaged in religious discussions. ([Muhammad's Mecca](#), W. Montgomery Watt, Chapter 3: Religion In Pre-Islamic Arabia, p26-45)

The Arabic word for 'God', Allah, is a contraction of *al-ilah*, which like the Greek *ho theos* simply means 'the god,' but was commonly understood as 'the supreme god' or 'God'. It is possible that before the time of Muhammad the Meccan pagans used to indicate the principal deity of the Ka'bah, in the same way in which the deity worshipped at at-Ta'if was known simply as al-Lat, the goddess. If the word Allah was also used for God as acknowledged by Jews and Christians, the opportunities for confusion would be great. The probability therefore is that while some Meccans acknowledged God, they did not see that their old polytheistic beliefs were incompatible with belief in God and reject them. These premonitions of monotheism among the Arabs must have been due mainly to Christian and Jewish influences. The Arabs had many opportunities of contact with Christians and Jews. The Byzantine empire, whose power and higher civilization they greatly

admired, was Christian, and so was Abyssinia. Even in the Persian empire Christianity was strong, and al-Hirah, the Persian vassal-state with which the Arabs were much in contact, was an outpost of the East Syrian or Nestorian Church. This combination of monotheism with military and political strength and a higher level of material civilization must have impressed the Arabs greatly. ([Muhammad at Mecca](#), W. Montgomery Watt, 1953, p 23-29)

The nomadic tribes and settled communities in closest contact with these states were indeed being gradually Christianized; and even some of the Meccan merchants were not uninfluenced by what they saw when they traveled to the border market-towns on business. There were also Christians in Mecca ... The opportunities for contact with Jews were not so extensive as those with Christians ... There were apparently practically no Jews in Mecca. ... The possibility of influence from monotheistic groups other than Jews and Christians cannot be entirely excluded, but at most it must have been slight. ([Muhammad at Mecca](#), W. Montgomery Watt, 1953, p 23-29)

Though the religion of South Arabia was polytheistic, the monotheistic communities of Jews and Christians in the Hejaz gained in influence. ([Britannica](#), Arabian Religions, p1057, 1979)

Pre-Islamic deities. Pre-Islamic Arabian religion is commonly understood to be polytheistic. ([Britannica](#), Arabian Religions, p1057, 1979)

The hanif. It may well have been the presence of Christians and Jews that set the stage in the Hejaz for the so-called hanifs, men who found the old cult of the gods inadequate to their level of spirituality and monotheistic ideals, and who repudiated what they could not associate with Ilah. ([Britannica](#), Arabian Religions, p1059, 1979)

Pre-Islamic Arabian monotheism. Yet on one topic, namely monotheism, the views of many scholars show a marked interest in developmental change. This topic arises in two contexts: the possibility of an original monotheism anterior to Arabian polytheism, and the possibility of a monotheism as a late development out of Arabian polytheism. Arguments for an original monotheism are based largely on the ubiquity of the word *il, ilah*, for "god" in Semitic languages. Each tribe started with its own single god, it has been argued, and a polytheistic pantheon was derived from a situation where tribes, failing to identify others' deities with their own, expanded the list. Whatever the speculative possibilities of such a theory, the Arabian situation was polytheistic at the time of the first surviving records of it. More fascinating and more tangible are the indications that in the last few pre-Islamic centuries an Arabian monotheism developed. There were, of course, monotheistic influences from outside Arabia. Christian missionaries... ([Britannica](#), Arabian Religions, p1059, 1979)

The influence of Christianity was brought to bear upon Arabia both from Syria in the northwest and from Mesopotamia in the northeast. In the sixth century A.D. the Arabic kingdoms of the Ghassanids in Syria and the Lakhmids in Mesopotamia were allied respectively with the Byzantine and the Persian empires and were strong centers respectively of Monophysite and of Nestorian Christianity. From these regions and in this time if not also earlier, Christian ideas spread on into the farther reaches of Arabia. A careful study of the relevant data particularly in the Qur'an shows that Muhammad had a very considerable store of knowledge of Judaism and Christianity, and that it was of the sort which he would have been most likely to obtain through oral channels and personal observation over a long period of time. He was specially impressed, it seems, with the fact that both the Jews and the Christians were PEOPLE OF A BOOK, and it was his desire likewise to provide his own people with a Book which would be to them what the Torah was to the Jews, and the Bible to the Christians. ([The Archeology Of World Religions](#), Jack Finegan, 1952, p482-485, 492)

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<http://www.bible.ca/islam/islam-myths-learned-monotheism-from-christians.htm>