

Ali's Story

Every time I passed by the church, I would spit on the lawn right in front of the cross. It became almost a religious duty with me. Sometimes I looked around to make sure no one saw me, but most of the time I hoped they did.

“Didn’t people know that these things were blasphemous?” I thought to myself. “Weren’t they scared of going to hell?”

I was terrified of going to hell. My name is Ali. I was born in America, but spent a good deal of my childhood in Gaza. There I attended school and learned Arabic and more importantly, Islam. My Palestinian upbringing taught me to hate crosses. I would even avoid looking at telephone poles because they were in the shape of crosses.

Even though I hated things that represented Christianity, as I felt I should, I didn’t hate Jesus. As a Muslim I revered Him as the Prophet Isa mentioned in the Qur’an. He healed people and did wonders. The Qur’an says that He created a bird from clay and spoke as a baby in the manger, “Peace be upon me in the day I am born, the day I die, and the day I shall be raised up to life again” as told in Surah 19:33.

Although I loved Jesus, I was a Muslim and knew my primary allegiance was not to Jesus but to Mohammed. I believed Mohammed was the last messenger who was sent to restore the truth after evil men corrupted the holy books.

My father traveled from Gaza to South America where he met my mother. Then they moved to America where I was born. Even though she was Catholic, it was decided by them both that I would be raised as a Muslim. Although the only time I would go inside a church was for weddings, I always wanted to know more about Jesus. I had seen some movies with the terrifying scenes of crucifixion, but I also remembered the miracles, the love and forgiveness.

When I was seven years old, I constantly pestered my mother until she let me check out a Bible from the local library. I sat and read the entire Gospel of John in one sitting. I read about Jesus opening the eyes of the blind and raising the dead. But I couldn’t understand why the people yelled “Kill the King of the Jews!”

“Who was the King of the Jews? Who are the Jews?” I wondered.

Somehow I didn’t fully understand what I was reading. Who was this man that died? Was that Jesus? What I thought was that they put a dead man on top of a rock, and three days later this man came back to life. I drew a picture of Jesus on the cross and showed it to my mother. “Your father is not going to like that” she said, so I quickly hid it.

Before I could begin to understand these stories, my parents divorced. I went to live with my father back in his home country. The people there told me that Jesus was a great prophet, but that there was another who was much greater, Mohammed. All I knew was that I was a Muslim, not a Christian. In fact, I hated Christianity because I thought Islam was the only truth. In my spiritual hunger, I became very devout. In our madrassah or school, we would learn from the imams about heaven. It was a place where we could ask for grapes or any food you wanted and you would get it. We were too young to be told about the virgins.

My allegiance to Islam was strong. I drew pictures of AlBuraq, the horse that carried Mohammed to the Seventh Heaven from the mountain in Jerusalem. I wasn’t allowed to draw Mohammed though, so I would cover his face when I drew him. I read my own Qur’an as much as I could, but I had a hard time trying to understand it. I would often take the Qur’an, sit in my living room, open it and pray that Allah would do a miracle in my life. I asked him to give me a sign that he loved me, but I was always disappointed.

Later my father moved back to America and I enrolled in high school. I soon became friends with another student named Brad. He was a clean-cut friendly guy. One day in the library he kept talking to me about Jesus.

