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**PALESTINIAN MUSLIMS CONVERTING
TO CHRISTIANITY:**

EFFECTIVE EVANGELISTIC METHODS IN THE WEST BANK

by

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Abstract

This thesis provides the findings of an explanatory case study that utilized elements of ethnographic research to discover effective evangelistic methods being practiced among Palestinian Muslims in the West Bank. With the assistance of gatekeepers, twenty-four former Muslims were asked to explain how they were evangelized, with a particular focus on evangelistic methodology, the barriers to faith the respondents encountered, solutions to those barriers, and motivations to consider conversion.

This qualitative study follows the research model of Thom Rainer (2001) by asking those who have actually converted to describe the things that were helpful in the process of their coming to faith. For a theoretical framework it utilizes a nuance of McKnight's (2002) theory of conversion with an emphasis on crisis providing an intersection of the natural and supernatural for the purpose of conversion.

This thesis investigates examples of effective evangelism within the context of the West Bank, giving thorough consideration to Palestinian Nationalism and Islam as overarching cultural influences. It considers fruitful practices being practiced globally among Muslims, comparing those with what was found being practiced in the West Bank. The advocates represented in this report were primarily Palestinians born and raised in the West Bank, with the exception of three messianic Jewish Israelis and an American missionary. Additionally, they were evangelicals who generally utilized a contextually sensitive, *traditional* mission approach rather than an *Insider* model.

The end result is a knowledge base that can be helpful for future evangelism of Muslims in the West Bank or other similar contexts.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis, submitted for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Science of Religion and Missiology to the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and contains proper citation of all other works consulted during its preparation. Further, I declare that none of this work has been submitted to any other educational institution for course credit or degree.

Signed:

Date: 04 JULY 2013

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my dad, Guy Rogan Dunning, who had big dreams for me. I wish that he could have seen this project completed and that I could hear him say once more, “Doctor Dunning. That has a nice ring to it!”

I trust that this work will be helpful in others coming to know the Savior with whom he now enjoys full fellowship.

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Jesus Christ: You are the reason I embarked on this journey. Thank you for providing strength and encouragement along the way. I long for the day your name is considered great among all peoples. May this work be helpful to that end.

Colleen, Grace and Zach: I love you more than you can know. I could not have finished this without your patience and longsuffering. Thank you. What shall we do with all the extra time we'll have now that this project is complete?

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Respondents: Your stories made this work possible. Thank you. As Jesus prayed for those who would believe because of his disciples' testimonies (Jn 17:20), I pray for those who will come to faith because of your testimonies.

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Key Terms

Belief/Believe

Contextualization

Conversion

Dreams

Evangelism

Insider Movement

Muslim Background Believer (MBB)

Palestinian/Palestine

Prayer

West Bank

Abbreviations

Bible Translations:

ESV – English Standard Version

KJV – King James Version

NASB – New American Standard Bible

NIV – New International Version

NKJV – New King James Version

NLT – New Living Translation

RSV – Revised Standard Version

Journals:

ASR – American Sociological Review

BibSac – Bibliotheca Sacra

CRJ – Christian Research Journal

EFH – Education for Health

EJ – Ethnojournal

EMQ – Evangelical Missions Quarterly

HSR – Health Services Review

IBMR – International Bulletin of Missionary Research

ICMR – Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations

IJFM – International Journal of Frontier Missions

IJPR – International Journal of Philosophy of Religion

IJQM – International Journal of Qualitative Methods

IJRF – International

JETS – Journal of Evangelical Theological Society

JICJ – Journal of International Criminal Justice

JP – Journal of Personality

JPS – Journal of Palestine Studies

JQ – Jerusalem Quarterly

MAIR – Missiology: An International Review

MEID – Middle East Intelligence Digest

MF – Mission Frontiers

MISS – Missiology

QR – Qualitative Research

RHD – Research of Human Development

SA – Sociological Analysis

SFM – Saint Francis Magazine

SJT – Southwestern Journal of Theology

TB – Tyndale Bulletin

TFJ – The Family Journal

Terms:

CBB – Christian Background Believer

ICC – International Criminal Court

IM – Insider Movement

IRB – Institutional Review Board

MBB – Muslim Background Believer

Oslo – The 1993 Oslo Peace Accords

PA – Palestinian National Authority

UID - The 1981 Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One introduces the thesis by providing a motivation for the evangelization of Muslim peoples. I explain the difficulty of doing research among those who convert away from Islam and provide the problem statement that is answered in the thesis: What are current effective methods of communicating Christ among Muslims in the West Bank since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PA) in 1994? I explain the use of two controversial terms: Palestine and Palestinian. This explanation is supplemented with working definitions of the following key terms: Palestinian/Palestine, conversion, and gospel. Chapter One concludes with an explanation of the limitations of this study.

Chapter Two frames the study in its historical, geographical, and cultural context. Here, I explain how culture influences communication before describing the local culture, which I suggest is strongly influenced by the Palestinian National Authority (PA). The time and geographical boundaries of the study are explained in connection to the establishment of the PA. Finally, I explain 1) how the PA creates a culture of fear, 2) how honor and shame represent the traditional worldview, and 3) how the Occupation and a shared national identity influences the West Bank culture.

Chapter Three locates this thesis within the broader body of conversion and evangelistic methodology literature.

First, I utilize McKnight's (McKnight 2002) theory of conversion to consider religious conversion from both sociological and theological perspectives. This discussion is followed by my theory of conversion, in which I argue for a natural-supernatural dichotomy in conversion. I support this argument with evidence of the intersection of the natural and the supernatural in the life and ministry of Jesus.

In the second portion of this chapter, I consider methodological literature. Absent a significant body of literature specific to the West Bank, I examine two

works related to the broader discussion of methodology. The first is Martin Accad's (Accad 2012) article, *Christian Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach*, which presents a five-stage spectrum of Christian-Muslim dialogue. His taxonomy includes two types of dialogue – Syncretistic and Existential – that are not considered evangelistic. The remaining three are considered evangelistic, though he is fairly negative about apologetic and polemical interactions and prefers his own approach, which he labels *The Kerygmatic Approach*. In this section, I analyze his assumptions by presenting observations and questions that represent the apologetic and polemical positions. I also discuss theology of religions as expressed by these various positions.

The second work I consider is *From Seed to Fruit* (Woodberry 2008a), which is the report of the largest to date research project similar to my own. The report includes the reflection of some 5,800 fieldworkers, providing a consensus of fruitful practices among Muslims around the globe. Here, I discuss the important issues of residency, contextualization, and long-term commitments.

Chapter Four is a very personal, inside look at how I chose my research methodology, including the instrument, contextual challenges, ethical concerns, demographic issues, as well as my own identity as a researcher.

Chapter Five provides analysis of the information gained from the respondents regarding their conversions. I explain a three step process of evangelism: 1) Contact: Reaching Out, 2) Bridging: Bringing Them In, and 3) Conversion.

Contact: Reaching Out includes findings regarding who made first contact and how that was done, the motivations for first contact, as well as the types of advocates involved.

Bridging: Bringing Them In discusses how the Islamic dominance in the West Bank negatively affects evangelism and how the advocates manage that influence. Here, I also discuss how religious and non-religious crises were

important elements of the conversion process. This includes consideration of how the Bible, supernatural confirmation, and prayer each were important elements in the respondents' conversion.

Conversion gives consideration to respondents' initial struggle against conversion, the ways they recognized their conversion, as well as the theological details that were mentioned in their testimonies.

In Chapter Six I present my conclusions. Rather than focus on techniques, I focus on principles of effective advocacy that I found in my analysis, which include spiritual, methodological, and theological considerations. These principles are followed by conclusions regarding conversion, which include consideration of good works and crises as catalysts that bring Muslims into contact with the gospel. I conclude this section describing how the process of conversion became a search for truth for my respondents.

I also discuss post-conversion consequences, giving consideration to Shari'a and persecution, the converts' affiliation with a local church, and how the advocates and respondents balance the gospel and issues of social justice within the scope of a post-conversion evangelical Palestinian self-identity.

Finally, I suggest further research that can broaden our understanding of Muslim to Christian conversions in the West Bank. Due to the limited nature of this specific research, namely a decidedly evangelical and traditional theology and methodology and a limited time span, suggests other perspectives would broaden our understanding of conversion in the West Bank. Other perspectives could include Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox efforts to evangelize Muslims in the West Bank and those who utilize the Insider methodology. It might be helpful to include studies of those who converted away from Islam only to return and to give consideration to the period of Jordanian Occupation or the period immediately prior to the establishment of the PA. All of these are welcome additions to the limited body of literature dedicated to the West Bank.

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Preface

I like stories. I like to hear them and I like to tell them. One of the things I enjoy most in meeting new people is hearing their stories. Where are they from? What was life like in their childhood? And, if they are Christians, I want to hear the story of how they came to faith in Jesus. I am always thankful to hear a testimony of God's saving grace, but I am a missionary/pastor, and that makes me also want to know *how* the good news of Jesus Christ was delivered. That is the focus of this project, finding out *how* people heard the Gospel. What were the challenges they faced in believing? What solved those challenges? What moved them from unbelief to belief?

I'm not interested for the sake of marketing another method. Honestly, I'm quite disheartened at the marketing madness of the Western church, which seems so hungry for the next fad in marketing the gospel. It is very discouraging for me to receive email advertisements of crafted sermon series that have been used in this or that church and "caused a 50% increase in attendance." This project is not about finding the next wave of methodology. I agree with Scott McKnight, who said, "Conversion can't be reduced to a formula anymore than love can be set out as an equation" (2002:77).

Certainly conversion involves methodological considerations, but this project is primarily about hearing individuals tell the story of how they actually heard the gospel and learning what we can from their experiences.

Because I like stories, and this report is actually the story of how the gospel is being effectively shared among Muslims in the West Bank, I have chosen a more personal, narrative format to report my findings.

Without shame I will use the personal pronoun "I" in telling the story of my research. The process of decision making will be detailed and personal, often elaborating on the various possible methodological choices, and how and why I made certain choices; why I did it this way and not that way, as well as stories of

things that were said or done that confirmed my decisions along the way. This story will include much about the personal aspects of how I went about my research, and, when necessary, in an appropriate way that protects my respondents, I will share portions of their stories.

The researcher and the nature of the project are appropriately represented in this narrative style of presentation, which is well supported in the literature (Weiss 1994:193-210; Newman 2006:498-500; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995:169-210). It also accurately reflects my research findings, which is the main thrust of the project.

Please join me as I tell the story of how the greatest story ever told is being told in the West Bank.

1 Introduction

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 NKJV)

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6 NKJV)

. . . You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation . . . (Revelation 5:9 NKJV)

Those who believe that Jesus is the only way of salvation and that He will ultimately have followers from every people group on earth face a very real challenge regarding the rapidly growing number of people who have not believed, or even heard the gospel. What is the best way of getting the saving message of Jesus Christ to a rapidly growing number of people who have not believed, particularly those in hard to reach contexts?

George Otis referred to the challenge of reaching Muslims with the gospel as the “greatest last giant” (Wilson 1996:132) because he saw them as among the most resistant of these rapidly growing people groups who have yet to believe the gospel. In 1979, *Time Magazine* described Islam as (quoted in Parshall 2003:17) “. . . the world's youngest universal faith, and second largest with 750 million adherents. . . .”

In 2010, a little more than thirty years later, the Pew Research Center estimated that the followers of Islam have more than doubled (primarily through high birth rates), numbering some 1.6 billion, which is about 23% of the world population (Lugo 2011). The numbers are staggering and reaching this population with the gospel appears overwhelming, if not impossible.

While some mission strategists may understandably be discouraged or alarmed by the exponential growth of Islam, others are suggesting that we have entered into a new era of missions among Muslims. “. . . it is clear that more Muslims have come to faith in Christ in the past two decades than at any other time in the history of the two great religions,” wrote David Garrison (2004:102).

"There are now more Muslims coming to Christ worldwide than ever before in the history of the church," suggests missionary Keith Small (2007). Joel Rosenberg (2009) echoed that hopeful thought:

. . . as the kings of this world try to find a political formula to make peace, the Prince of Peace is steadily building His kingdom on earth and drawing more Muslims to faith in Jesus Christ than at any other time in human history. More than 100,000 Muslims in Saudi Arabia alone have come to faith in Jesus Christ in recent years. More than 1 million Muslims in Iran have come to Christ, as well. There are now more than 2.5 million followers of Jesus in Pakistan.

Patrick Johnstone (2008:5) also made a similar claim regarding the conversion of Muslims to faith in Jesus Christ:

The further good news is that since the rise of Islamism and the 1978 revolution in Iran, more Muslims have turned to Christ than in any time since the advent of Islam.

Are these claims hyperbole? If not, then one must ask how and where is this happening?

1.1 The Research Challenge

Conditions in the Muslim world make it difficult, sometimes impossible, to answer these questions. In many cases, Muslim Background Believers in Jesus (MBBs)¹ are afraid to publicly identify as former Muslims because of fear of reprisal from former co-religionists. Out of concern for the safety of those who have left Islam for Jesus Christ, those who work in evangelism and research among Muslims are also very guarded in the information they release. While trying to network with other researchers regarding this project, it was difficult to get assistance from Western missiologists due to fear of exposing their contacts to reprisal by Muslims.

¹ While Muslim Background Believer (MBB) is perhaps the most common designation for those people who came to faith in Jesus Christ from a Muslim background, I realize that some take exception to its use. In this thesis I use it only for the sake of clarity and brevity.

Because of this fear, the general policy of how to publicly handle information regarding ministry among Muslims in the Muslim world is one of caution. The common practice in ministry and research reports is to identify Christian workers or converts with a pseudonym, a generic Muslim first name like Ahmed or Abdul, or simply to maintain anonymity by using the generic terms “man” or “woman.” Similarly, only vague geographic details are generally revealed. For example, Strong and Page (2007) list some of the contributors to their book as having “lived and worked extensively among Muslims in East and North Africa” or “worked with an unreached Muslim people group in Northwest China.”

The hostility of the Muslim world toward those who have left Islam justifies these types of security measures. However, such measures make it very difficult to gain enough information to adequately evaluate Christian ministry efforts among Muslims. Clearly, research in this field is challenging, but with an appropriate measure of patience, perseverance and contacts, it is possible.

1.2 Problem Statement

The question this thesis answers is: What are current effective methods of communicating Christ among Muslims in the West Bank since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PA) in 1994?

1.3 Palestine: A Clarification

“Where do you stand on the question of Palestine? . . . there is no neutrality, there can be no neutrality or objectivity about Palestine . . . so ideologically saturated is the question of Palestine, so manifestly present is it to most people who come to deal with it, that even a superficial or cursory apprehension of it involves a position taken, an interest defended, or a claim or right asserted. There is no indifference, no objectivity, no neutrality because there is simply no room for them in a space that is as crowded and over-determined as this one.”

(Edward Saïd 1986:29-30)

The word Palestine often provokes emotional responses both from those who recognize its legitimacy as a nation, or nation-to-be, and from those who reject the legitimacy of such a nation, either historically or presently.

These *non-indifferent*, *un-objective*, and *non-neutral* emotions, are produced by the various stories of suffering from one or both sides. The emotions of the Israeli side are provoked by the tragic story of the Israeli athletes who were murdered by members of the Palestinian Black September Organization at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany or a host of other similar stories. The Palestinians' emotions are provoked by the hardships of the multiplied thousands of resident Arabs who fled partitioned Palestine during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and have since then, mostly remained in various refugee camps throughout the West Bank, Gaza, and the neighboring Arab nations of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.

These stories and countless others typically cause individuals inside and outside the conflict to attempt to determine the legitimacy of one side or the other, or in the United Nations' nomenclature, to answer "The Question of Palestine" (Akasaka 2008).

For some, theological and religious considerations serve as the framework of their evaluations. Peters (1984), Oren (2007), Kimmerling and Migdal (2003), and Ellison (1991) attempt to approach the question of Palestine from historical considerations; either ancient or modern, or both. Justice theory (Saïd 1979; Ateek 1989), geo-political awareness (Pipes 2013), and personal relationships or experiences (Aburish 1993; Ashrāwī 1995; Boyle 2001; Sabbagh 2007) are among the various other matrixes employed by those who evaluate "The Question of Palestine."

That there is widespread, and sometimes hostile disagreement regarding the legitimacy of a Palestinian state cannot be denied. However, evaluating the legitimacy of the conclusions of either side is beyond the scope of this research project.

This project is focused solely on better understanding a specific phenomenon occurring within a people group that self-identifies as Palestinian within a specific geographic area commonly referred to as Palestine. Therefore, the use of the words Palestine or Palestinian should be understood as a means of clearly designating the specific research subjects and not an endorsement or rejection of any political position regarding the legitimacy or existence of a Palestinian state.

1.4 Definitions

1.4.1 Palestinian/Palestine

For the purpose of this research, the word Palestinian indicates any person who self-identifies as a Palestinian and claims some personal connection to the geographic area commonly referred to as Palestine.

Some use Palestine as a reference to all the land(s) between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, which are south of Lebanon and north of the Sinai Peninsula. I narrow my use of the word to indicate Gaza and the area of land commonly referenced as the West Bank or the Occupied Territories.

1.4.2 Conversion

For the purpose of this research, conversion is defined from two angles: “from above (theologically) and from below (sociologically)” (McKnight 2007:71). McKnight’s “from above” definition of conversion serves well for the theological angle: “Conversion is the work of God in a person both to reconcile that person to himself and to transform that person’s life completely” (71).

Additionally, it is important to recognize the sociological implications (i.e., pre-conversion influences and post-conversion outcomes) of theological conversion away from Islam while living in a Muslim majority social context. Therefore, due to this study’s sociological considerations, conversion also is used to indicate the change of a social identity as a result of changing one’s religious allegiance from Islam to an evangelical framework of Christianity.

1.4.3 The Gospel:

My advocates understood the gospel in its simplest form to be the message that Paul spoke in I Corinthians 15:3-4, “. . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

They taught the respondents that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will not only be saved (Acts 16:31, i.e., be delivered from the penalty of sin) and become new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), but also inherit the hope of resurrection from the dead (I Cor. 15:12-28).

1.5 Limitations

The Muslim World, which spreads from the Middle East to North Africa and Asia is not monolithic in its cultural experience. While there are some clear similarities between Muslims in various Middle Eastern countries and those in Malaysia, for example, the life experience and cultural assumptions of those Muslims are generally different.

This qualitative study was designed to be *descriptive* of effective evangelistic methodologies being used in the West Bank. Therefore, the findings presented in this report are not intended to suggest similarities necessarily exist in Muslim ministries in other areas, though there may be some. Furthermore, this report does not represent an exhaustive report of all the evangelistic methodologies that are being implemented in the West Bank. Rather, it should be understood as an accurate representation of evangelistic strategies that were discovered through interviewing twenty-four Muslim Background Believers in the West Bank about how and why they came to faith in Jesus.

1.6 Contribution of this Research

The main contribution of this work is that it begins to fill the gap in information regarding Muslim conversions to Christianity in the West Bank since the

establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. Limited research results were available; specifically, Dr. Greenham's (2004) thesis *Muslim conversions to Christ: An investigation of Palestinian converts living in the Holy Land*. While his thesis was similar to mine, a significant distinction is that he included Palestinians who lived outside the West Bank in Israel. My respondents were restricted to those living in the West Bank. This distinction reflects my theory that the Palestinian Authority influences evangelistic methodologies in the West Bank through government restrictions, the elevation of Islam as the official religion, and a culture of fear.

2 Arafat Arrives . . . Geographical and Cultural Considerations

In his book *The New Middle East* (Peres and Naor 1993), Shimon Peres, the most visible Israeli politician and diplomat at the forefront of the establishment of a Palestinian state, takes an interesting approach to the reality of a Palestinian National Identity. First, he provides a historical context for the genesis of the Palestinian consciousness, claiming, “Until the 1948 War of Independence² the Palestinian people did not exist as a separate entity, either in their own consciousness, or in the minds of other people, including the Arab nations” (vi).³ However, Peres goes on to explain that it matters not how the Palestinians came to their national consciousness because the reality is they have one: “The Palestinians became a people when they decided to do so and when they began to act as a national collective . . .” (165).

This pragmatic (some might say realistic) approach to the present realities serves well as a model for how this chapter will describe who the Palestinians are by explaining the social, religious and political environment of Palestine as they have come to be since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994.

The intention of this chapter is to focus on three important cultural elements that have direct and significant bearing on evangelistic methodology: a society of fear, the honor-shame worldview, and Palestinian nationalism.

Approaching the culture of the West Bank in this way, suggests that the West Bank is a traditional, Middle Eastern, Muslim majority culture. All of the cultural norms of such a culture are present here, some of which are: Arabic as the dominant language, traditional Arabic foods, an appreciation for Arab poets and

² The Arabs generally refer to the 1948 war as an-Nakba (النكبة), the Catastrophe. See 2.5.2.6.1 The 1948 and 1967 Wars for more detail.

³ Some historians would challenge Peres’ claims. See, for example, Kimmerling and Migdal (2003), *The Palestinian People: A history*.

writers, an elevation of the Bedouin life as the Arab ideal, a committed patriarchal society, complete surrender to Allah's will, and a family or clan orientation.

2.1 Culture: Its Role in Communication

According to Charles Kraft (1996:38) culture is “. . . the total life way of a people, the social legacy the individual acquires from his group.” Hesselgrave (1991:99) is more specific, suggesting culture “. . . is a very inclusive term that takes into account linguistic, political, economic, social, psychological, religious, national, and other differences.”

Each of these cultural elements that make up the *life way of people* influences communication in regard to both how a message is sent and how one is received. The focus of this research, stated in general terms, is, “How does effective communication take place between people of different religious affiliations?” More specifically, “How do *Christians* effectively communicate the gospel to *Muslims* in the West Bank?”

In this focus statement, we see four elements: a message, a sender, a receiver, and a context.⁴ Three of those elements are typically included in the definition of communication: “. . . the transmission of information from a ‘sender’ to a ‘receiver’” (Hiebert 1985:142). While that is a common and sufficient definition of communication, the absence of any reference to context may lead one to conclude that context has no bearing on communication. However, that is an erroneous conclusion because context shapes the meaning of the words or symbols that convey the message (Hesselgrave 1991:53; Hiebert 1985:141). Communication does not take place in a vacuum. Communication always takes place within a cultural context, which is the reason the focus statement of this thesis specifically designates the West Bank.

The cultural context not only shapes the meaning of our words or symbols, it may also influence the methods we use to communicate. For example, certain

⁴ Context and culture are used interchangeably throughout.

contexts lack modern communication systems (e.g. the Internet, satellite broadcasting, mobile phones, etc.), and therefore, limit the way messages can be transmitted.

In other cases, certain types of messages are legally or socially restricted in terms of how they can be disseminated. For example, several years ago, our church in Jerusalem wanted to use city-owned notice boards to publish our message (see Figure 1). Initially, we faced a legal obstacle when we were told by city officials that it was illegal



for us to rent public advertising boards because our message could potentially

*Figure 1 - Yeshua Poster Campaign
Photo: Courtesy of Craig Dunning.*

cause a public disturbance. Our message was not illegal *per se* because we were allowed to broadcast it in other ways (e.g. literature distribution, bumper stickers, and teaching and street preaching) and in other venues (e.g. open air festivals, at hotels and conference halls, and our own church building). City officials were simply concerned with the particular medium we wanted to use. Eventually, through legal advocacy, we were allowed to purchase advertising space, but were subsequently restricted through vandalism, which is a type of social restriction.

In more repressive societies, certain messages may be so legally or socially restricted that people are forced to speak secretly or in code, which obviously influences the sender's and receiver's participation in communication. This was true, in certain circumstances, in this research.

These communication issues are important in all interpersonal relationships regardless of the context. However, in terms of building gospel relationships

there is another issue that must be acknowledged. When communicating the gospel, it is important not to confuse the gospel with a culture. It is important to recognize that while the gospel is supra-cultural (i.e., sourced from outside culture) (Hesselgrave 1991:103) and trans-cultural (i.e., not restricted to a single culture), “. . . it must always be expressed in cultural forms” because humans can receive it only through “. . . languages, symbols, and rituals” (Hiebert 1985:54). Thus, it is necessary to discuss culture, in general, and to explain specific elements of Palestinian culture.

2.1.1 Overarching Cultures and Subsets

Culture is not static. It is constantly in flux, changing or evolving “. . . as a result of innovations, internal pressures, and cross-cultural borrowing” (Hesselgrave 1991:101). Neither is a local culture monolithic, which seems to contradict a common use of the word. For example, using the phrase *American culture* without appropriate consideration of the many cultural subsets or levels that exist below the headline, might wrongly imply that *all* Americans are culturally the same (Kraft 1996:40).

In the case of the West Bank, an over-arching culture might be identified as the Greater Arab People, which has certain shared values and commonalities among its members, including a common language - Arabic. In fact, Hasbani (2009:68) says that Arab “. . . is a cultural and linguistic term . . .” that “. . . refers to those who speak Arabic as their first language.”

A subset of the Greater Arab Culture might be labeled the Palestinian people. And, like its parent culture, the Palestinian subset has certain shared values and commonalities among its members regardless of their location (e.g. shared national consciousness, national aspirations, common foods, common ancestry, and perhaps Arabic as a spoken language).

The Palestinian subset can reasonably be divided into at least three additional subsets: West Bank residents, exiles, and Israeli Arabs. Clearly, each of these subsets shares commonalities with the others, but their lived

experiences are dramatically different and thus shape their culture in different ways. For example, many of the Palestinians living in exile have never been in the West Bank, and thus have not lived under the Occupation, therefore, their view of what it means to be Palestinian reflects their exile experience. In contrast, those Palestinians living in the West Bank, have an existential connection to the land that those in exile only dream of having, and their understanding of Palestinian identity necessarily reflects this experience. The *Arab Israelis* are those Palestinian Arabs who became Israeli citizens because they remained in the area that became known as Israel after the 1948 War. In the Arab world, they became known as *'48 Palestinians*, and often have had a negative reputation throughout the Arab world because they remained among *the enemy* and also because their standard of living was typically better than the exiled Palestinians (Rees 2004:138).

The West Bank Palestinian subset could be further subdivided into Muslims, Christians, Converts to Islam, and Converts from Islam, each of which have certain shared traits with the larger culture as well as their own specific shared values and experiences. An example flowchart of these cultural levels (subsets) is presented in Figure 2 below.

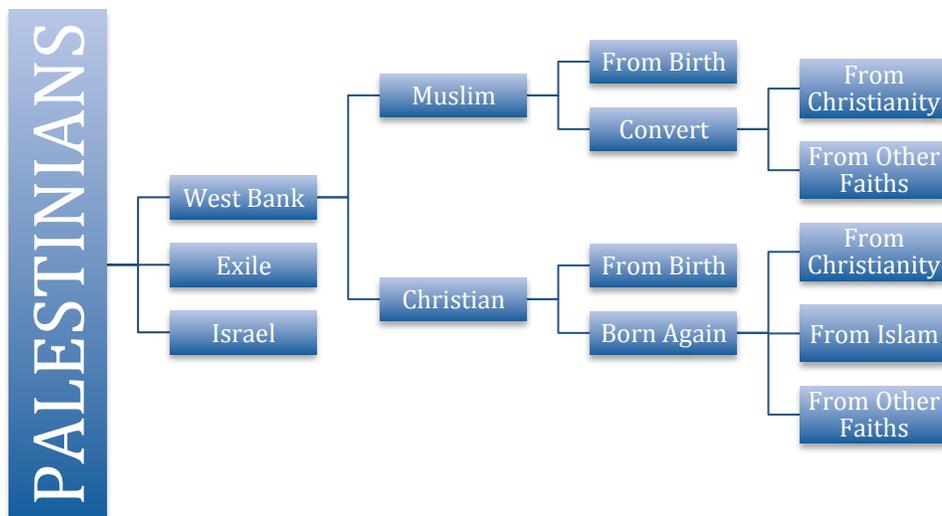


Figure 2 - Palestinian cultural subset flowchart emphasizing West Bank Palestinians

The balance of this chapter focuses on the cultural context of the West Bank Palestinian Muslim,⁵ giving attention to three specific phenomena that have particular influence on evangelistic methodology: A general fear resulting from the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority and the presence of Islam, the honor-shame worldview, and Palestinian nationalism.

2.2 The Establishment of the Palestinian National Authority

When Yasser Arafat, then chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, arrived in Jericho on July 1, 1994, the Middle East changed. Although his arrival in Jericho did not *finalize* the establishment of a national homeland for the Palestinian people, it suggested the Occupation was coming to an end and autonomy of the state of Palestine would follow.⁶

This moment in history was the culmination of many years of internal struggle as the Palestinians tried to define themselves socially and politically. It also seemed to be the positive result of an external struggle against those who resisted the Palestinian right of self-determination to identify not only as Palestinians, but also to establish their own nation in the areas that have come to be known as the West Bank and Gaza.^{7 8}

2.2.1 Palestine: A State or Independent Territory

The jubilation and exuberant celebration of Arafat's arrival in Jericho has for many Palestinians receded into frustration, disappointment and perhaps despair

⁵ See 4.7.5 Gaza Withdrawn for an explanation of why Gaza is not included in this study of Palestine.

⁶ State, country and nation are used interchangeably throughout.

⁷ Many of those who are opposed to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza are not opposed to its establishment in neighboring Jordan, which they claim was supposed to be Palestine originally. See, for example, Randall Price (2003), *Fast Facts on the Middle East Conflict*, 26.

⁸ Many Palestinians do not limit their geographic claims to the West Bank and Gaza, and, in fact, consider all the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River to be Palestine.

because Palestine is not yet *completely* free and independent. Khalidi (2006:182) represents this position well:

In spite of their vigorous sense of collective national identity, the Palestinians have never succeeded in creating an independent state of their own, and have no sure prospect in the future of ever having a truly sovereign state, or of possessing a contiguous, clearly demarcated territory on which to establish it.

Khalidi's and others' feelings of failure in this regard notwithstanding, the reality is that in some very important ways, Palestine already functions in ways that suggest a state or at least an independent territory. A certain level of autonomy is important in regard to the local culture because autonomy gives authority to a ruling body that may use that authority to control the actions or thoughts or beliefs of the people of that culture.

On January 21, 2009, the PA demonstrated *self-recognition* as a state by declaring in the voice of the "Government of Palestine" their recognition of ". . . the jurisdiction of the [International Criminal] Court (ICC) for the purpose of identifying, prosecuting and judging the authors and accomplices of crimes committed on the territory of Palestine since 1 July 2002" (Pellet 2010:982). In this declaration, the PA provided three important criteria to the ICC for consideration and recognition of their statehood: 1) Palestinian recognition of the ICC as a relevant governing body, 2) a functioning Palestinian government and 3) a specific Palestinian territory.

Scholars of international law continue to wrestle with the legal details of whether such recognition of the International Criminal Court is sufficient basis to deem Palestine a state. Worster (2012:6) identifies three key components, or qualifications, that can lead to the conclusion that Palestine is a state in *certain and specific situations*. First, he points out that "Palestine has been recognized by the UN as a 'nation,' . . ." ⁹ and thus has the right of self-determination. Second: The Oslo Accords, an agreement between the PLO and Israel, created

⁹ This refers specifically to the 29 NOV 1947 UN vote to partition the land into 2 states, 1 Arab and 1 Jewish.

the Palestinian Authority, who would have jurisdiction over the West Bank and Gaza for a transitional period after which there would be a permanent settlement.¹⁰ Furthermore, in agreeing to the establishment of the PA, Israel intentionally or unintentionally recognized the existence of a *Palestinian people*. Finally, Worster notes that the PLO “. . . administers the observer seat for ‘Palestine’ at the UN.” These three points indicate the existence of a *Palestinian* people and, in some specific ways, the existence of a Palestinian state.

In the case of Palestine, the difficulty of succeeding to gain recognition as a state via such a declaration of statehood is apparent. In spite of bi-lateral relations with a multitude of governments and international organizations like the United Nations, the prosecutor at the ICC rejected the Palestinian’s right to indicate statehood via unilateral recognition of the Court’s jurisdiction in Palestine.¹¹

The decision of the ICC notwithstanding, it should be noted that the West Bank and Gaza are generally referred to in the academic, international news, and sporting worlds¹² as Palestine, indicating wide recognition of Palestine as at least an independent territory. While there are many Palestinians, like Khalidi, who suggest that Palestinian statehood is a dream still unrealized, in many practical aspects, Palestine is now, according to Aburish (1993:191), a “*de facto*” independent nation.

For the purposes of this research it is not critical that Palestine be legally recognized as an independent nation. That may, in fact, be delayed or not happen at all based on political motivations or for other reasons. It is sufficient to

¹⁰ This agreement is officially known as the Israel-Palestinian Interim Agreement (1995).

¹¹ The prosecutor’s refusal was based on his understanding that “. . . Article 12 of the Rome Statue established that only a ‘state’ could confer jurisdiction on the court. . .” See “ICC prosecutor rejects Palestinian recognition,” 2012.

¹² The International Olympic Committee (IOC) makes a distinction between countries and independent territories, but allows either to compete in the quadrennial Olympic competitions. Since 1996, the IOC has allowed Palestine to compete as an independent territory. See “Olympic Profile.”

recognize the existence of a people group who bear common indicators of nationality, which bind them together and constitute the context of their lives. To that end, the Palestinians are a people who, among other things, 1) self-identify as Palestinian, 2) have a common language (Arabic), 3) have a national flag, 4) have a national charter or basic law (Abbas 2009), 5) have an internal police and security force, 6) have gained recognition as a nation by at least one hundred thirty two other nations,¹³ 7) have prior recognition by the League of Nations, 8) have made formal application for recognition by the United Nations,¹⁴ and 9) have, to some degree, a specified border.¹⁵

The Palestinian Authority, functioning in its governing role, has certain self-established obligations – such as protecting freedom of religion - that are frequently disregarded, and thus create an atmosphere of fear related to converting away from Islam.

2.2.2 The West Bank as a Cultural Subset

According to UNRWA's¹⁶ report *In Figures* (2012), there are more registered Palestinian refugees¹⁷ in exile (2,902,680) than in the West Bank and Gaza

¹³ As of 26 NOV 2012, “. . . 132 States Members of the United Nations have accorded recognition to the State of Palestine . . .” See United Nations General Assembly: Sixty-seventh session” (UN 2012) at <http://tinyurl.com/cq8qjld>. [Accessed 05 MAY 2013]

¹⁴ On 23 September 2011, Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority, formally requested full membership (as a recognized state) in the United Nations.

¹⁵ Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians regarding the demarcation of exact and final borders between the 2 countries are not complete. However, the general boundary framework of the West Bank and Gaza is in place (since Oslo). The PA territories are divided into 3 geographic districts (Areas A, B, and C) that indicate progressive levels of independence and sovereignty (i.e., self-rule) for the Palestinian Authority. For a more complete description and explanation of these areas, see 2.2.4 Areas A, B, and C Explained below.

¹⁶ UNRWA stands for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. See “UNWRA: About.” “UNRWA . . . provides assistance, protection and advocacy for some 5 million registered Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territory, pending a solution to their plight.”

¹⁷ See “UNRWA - Frequently asked questions: Who is a Palestine refugee?”

“The operational definition of a Palestine refugee is any person whose ‘normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.’

(727,471 and 1,167,572, respectively). Here, the distinction in geographic boundaries is important for the following reasons. First, it is used to clearly identify the geographic context of this research project. A major premise of this work is that because the Palestinian National Authority influences the cultural context it also influences evangelistic methods in the West Bank. Second, the distinction in geographic boundaries distinguishes this research from the fine work of Dr. Greenham (2004) who included *Israeli Arabs* in his Ph.D. thesis, *Muslim conversions to Christ: An investigation of Palestinian converts living in the Holy Land*. As previously explained, Arab Israelis are a different cultural subset than Palestinians living in the West Bank (see 2.1.1 Overarching Cultures and Subsets).

2.2.3 Oslo

The debate among academics and other interested parties regarding how long there has existed a Palestinian self-awareness is long-standing and has a certain value in regard to defining and understanding the cultural context of this project. However, it is likely nothing has more bearing on the *reality on the ground* in terms of cultural milieu than the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords (Oslo), which not only officially set in motion a working plan to establish a Palestinian state in the areas of the West Bank and Gaza, but created a governing authority (i.e., the Palestinian Authority) that directly or indirectly touches every aspect of Palestinian life.

2.2.4 Areas A, B, and C, Explained

One of the primary outcomes of Oslo was the determination of *where* the PA would operate (i.e., Areas A and B). Thus, through bilateral agreement, Oslo created the boundaries of the new entity called Palestine.¹⁸

Palestine refugees are persons who fulfil [sic] the above definition and descendants of fathers fulfilling the definition.”

¹⁸ The final boundaries are still pending the outcome of final status negotiations, and it is

According to the Interim Agreement, the West Bank and Gaza were both divided into three zones, identified as Areas A, B, and C.¹⁹ Beginning with Area A and moving toward Area C, these designations indicate progressively less Palestinian control and responsibility and increasing Israeli control and responsibility. (For a map of Areas A, B, and C as of 2000 see Figure 3.)

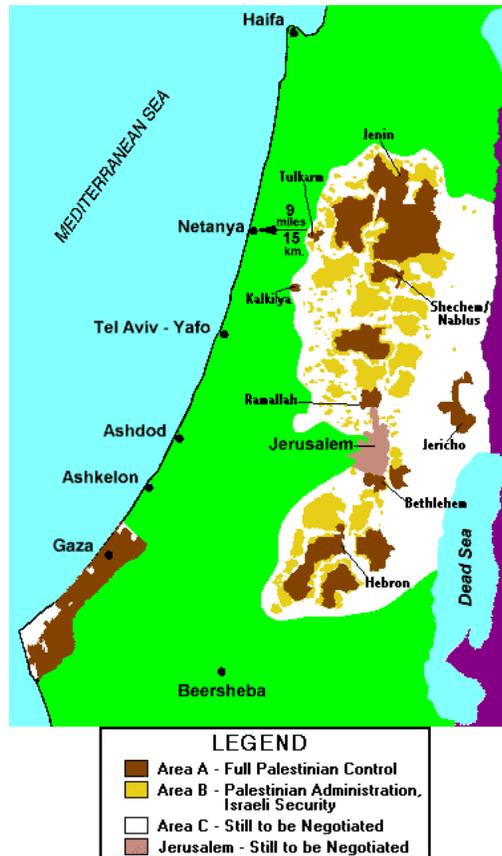


Figure 3 - Areas A, B, and C as of December 2000. Map courtesy of iris.org.il.

possible that at a future time the boundaries of Palestine will be increased. See Article XI, 3c of "The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip."

¹⁹ Since the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in August 2005, Gaza no longer has such designations.

Area A, initially accounting for about 2.7% of the West Bank (Shindler 2008:240), might be considered by some to be *truly* Palestine because 1) all civil²⁰ and internal security matters are the responsibility of the PA; 2) it was established around the seven major Palestinian urban population centers: Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Hebron; and 3) it is illegal for Israelis to enter area A (see Figure 4).²¹

Area B is the intermediate area of shared responsibility between Israel and the PA, leaving the civil services under the responsibility of the PA while security is shared between the PA and Israel. It is classified as more rural than Area A and initially included some four hundred fifty towns and villages that encompassed approximately 24% of the West Bank (Shindler 2008:240).

Together, Areas A and B “. . . contain 98 percent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza” (Weiner 2005:vi).



Figure 4 - Sign at the entrance to Palestinian Authority Area A
Photo courtesy of William J. Soper

²⁰ See Appendix 3 for a list of powers and responsibilities for civil affairs. The point of including this extensive list of civil responsibilities is to illustrate the comprehensive nature of the civil responsibilities and thus, the resulting sphere of influence and control of the Palestinian Authority.

²¹ In practice, the restriction only applies to Israeli Jews; Israeli Arabs are not only allowed, but also encouraged by the PA to enter Area A for social events and shopping. One exception to this restriction on Jewish entry to Area A is related to tourism. Israel and the PA have agreed to allow licensed Israeli tour guides to work in Area A and to allow licensed Palestinian Authority guides to work in Israel.

Area C includes those areas of the West Bank and Gaza over which Israel retains responsibility for all civil and security services. This means that all responsibility for providing utilities and supervising construction and development belong to the Israeli government, as do all internal and external security responsibilities. This area is characterized primarily as desert or agricultural lands with certain pockets of *settlements*, which are enclaves established and populated by Jewish-Israelis after the 1967 war.

2.2.5 The Type of Government

A second outcome of Oslo that continues to frame the Palestinian cultural milieu was the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority,²² which Mukhimer (2003:211) describes as “. . . a Palestinian bureaucratic system over the Palestinian territories.” The Palestinian government has three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial (Abbas 2009).

Perhaps the primary cultural influence of the PA is its determination of the type of government and system of jurisprudence that is used in the West Bank. The PA influences the culture by allowing certain behaviors and not allowing others. This latter point is specifically related to this research as an indicator of how tolerant the government is toward Muslims who convert away from Islam as well as how tolerant it is toward those who encourage Muslims to convert to other faith systems.

2.3 Fear: A West Bank Cultural Reality

A major premise of this dissertation is that fear has a major influence on the overall culture in the West Bank, and this fear results in specific challenges to Christian evangelism among Muslims. Below, I explain how the PA creates and maintains fear among its populace by declaring Shari'a as the foundation of the

²² Originally, the Interim Agreement was intended to be a five-year transition agreement that would facilitate the establishment of a permanent Palestinian government. In spite of that five-year period having expired in 1999, the Interim Agreement still serves as the general framework of the ongoing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority.

Palestinian legal system, its use of vigilante justice vis-à-vis honor killings and accusations of collaboration with Israel, and its failure to secure basic human rights that are typical of western nations.

2.3.1 The Palestinian National Authority's Basic Law

The most helpful source for understanding the framework of the PA government is the Basic Law (Abbas 2009) that was originally published 18 March 2003 and subsequently amended 13 August 2005.

The first part of the Basic Law's introduction is devoted to the Palestinian national identity and the Palestinian's historical connection to the land ". . . of their fathers and forefathers." It continues to build on the Palestinian connection to the land with a synopsis of the cost of statehood (Abbas 2009):

The birth of the Palestinian National Authority in the national homeland of Palestine, the land of their forefathers, comes within the context of continuous and vigorous struggle, during which the Palestinian people witnessed thousands of their precious children sacrificed as martyrs, injured persons and prisoners of war, all in order to achieve their people's clear national rights to establish an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as a capital, under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole, legitimate representative of the Arab Palestinian people wherever they exist.

After arguing for a legitimate connection to the land, the preamble establishes the interim nature of the Basic Law, stating that it ". . . constitutes a fundamental step towards the realization of the firm national and historical rights of the Arab Palestinian people." Article 115 recognizes the interim nature of the Basic Law and allows it to be ". . . extended until the entry into force of the new Constitution of the State of Palestine."

A line-by-line analysis of the Basic Law is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a number of its articles are relevant to my interests because they show a direct connection to the cultural context of Palestine in relation to Christians evangelizing Muslims and Muslims converting away from Islam.

Article 1 of the Basic Law establishes the overarching culture as the Greater Arab People: “Palestine is part of the larger Arab world, and the Palestinian people are part of the Arab nation. Arab unity is an objective that the Palestinian people shall work to achieve.” This article provides the larger cultural context of the West Bank and indicates the importance of an Arab identity for Palestinians, which should be considered when developing a contextualized evangelistic plan for that area. A relevant question in this regard would be: Is the Basic Law’s statement of Arab identity consistent with what is actually found among the people in Areas A and B of the West Bank?²³ The answer is an unqualified yes.

Further establishing the Arab identity, Article 4.3 of the Palestinian Basic Law states that “Arabic shall be the official language.” While a number of other languages are used by West Bank Palestinians (English, Hebrew, French, German, and Spanish, being the main ones), Article 4.3 legally establishes Arabic as the primary language of internal commerce and social interaction.

Although the twenty-four interviews for this project were conducted in different languages, Arabic (14), English (9) and Hebrew (2),²⁴ the overwhelming majority of respondents, twenty of twenty-four, were evangelized only in Arabic. In addition to Arabic, three respondents were also evangelized in Hebrew (Respondent Eighteen) or English (Respondents Five and Thirteen). Respondent One was unique in that he was evangelized only in Hebrew, though he did use an Arabic Bible during his personal Bible reading and study.

Based on these interviews, it is reasonable to conclude that Article 4.3 is more than a legal declaration; it also indicates the predominant language of the area and should be seriously considered when designing an evangelistic plan.

Article 5 establishes the governing system in Palestine as “. . . a democratic parliamentary system, based upon political and party pluralism.” This is good

²³ The question is crafted to exclude Jewish settlers who also live in the West Bank.

²⁴ The reason that I indicate twenty-five interviews here rather than the actual number of twenty-four is that one of the interviews was conducted in both English and Arabic.

news for minorities in that it *theoretically* gives them a voice regarding the direction of the country, and thus some influence on the culture.

2.3.2 Shari'a: The Rule of Law

Article 4 of the Basic Law frames a religious subset of the Arab identity and the principles established in Articles 4.1 and 4.2 have as much bearing on the cultural context of the West Bank as any other articles. Article 4.1 reads: "Islam is the official religion in Palestine. Respect for the sanctity of all other divine religions shall be maintained."

By framing Palestine as an Arab Muslim state, the Basic Law distinguishes its culture from various other Islamic states or territories like Pakistan, Indonesia, and Iran, which are all non-Arab Muslim states. In consideration of the cultural influence of Article 4.1 it is necessary to ask if the gospel contradicts Islam. And, if so, how? How should any potential contradiction influence an evangelistic method?

Apparently without undermining the first sentence in Article 4.1, the second sentence appears to suggest Palestine is somewhat open to other religious expressions. However, as will be demonstrated below, this openness is limited and Christians are allowed to live as Christians as long as they do not try to proselytize Muslims.

Fear of possible repercussions for being outside the official religion, especially as a convert away from Islam, is an important cultural factor that should be fully considered in an evangelistic plan because it results in a reluctance to listen to an evangelistic appeal.

Legal statements like Article 4.1 may, understandably, have a chilling effect on those who are interested in sharing their faith with Muslims. For a number of reasons it is important to know who will decide which religions are divine, particularly in a culture that supports vigilante justice (see 2.3.3 Vigilante Justice below). A legislator? A religious neighbor? And to what degree of fullness can

those divine religions be openly practiced? For example, Christianity is generally considered an exclusivist religion, which means that most Christians believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation (Lewis and Churchill 2009:2-3). That being the case, Christianity that is consistent is an evangelistic faith. So, the question is: If Christianity is one of the respected divine religions, does Article 4.1, allow Christians to evangelize Muslims? The answer is found implicitly stated in Article 4.2 since Shari'a²⁵ forbids conversion away from Islam: "The principles of Islamic Shari'a shall be a principal source of legislation." This article seems to follow the lead of the Egyptian National Assembly who in 1980 "... declared Islam 'as the religion of state,' and Shari'a as the principle [sic] source of legislation" (Marshall and Gilbert 1997:36). In fact, Lewis and Churchill (2009:36), suggested in 2009 that there is something of a trend in recent constitutions to include "... some vague references to Shari'a, ..." even though the constitution is "... more secular in tone." Al Awabdeh (2005:96) suggests this trend "... is motivated by a rising religious conscience in some countries that were once believed to be very modern and Westernized by Muslim standards."

Marshall and Gilbert (1997:36-37) concluded that in spite of Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's fairly secular and very strong-handed [now former] president, resisting "... the complete introduction of Shari'a, ..." it continued to increase in influence, resulting in increased persecution of Christians. In recent developments in Egypt, including the overthrow of Mubarak, there is a growing push for stricter enforcement of Shari'a. The implementation of Shari'a has huge cultural implications, particularly inducing fear of punishment for engaging in evangelism or for conversion away from Islam.

2.3.2.1 Shari'a: What is it?

The 1981 Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UID) defines Shari'a simply as "Islamic law," which is a mostly unhelpful definition. Farah

²⁵ In the literature Shari'a is spelled alternatively as Sharia, Shari', Shari'ah, Shariah, and occasionally without capitalization.

(2000:156) describes Shari'a as "Islam's constitution." Sarker (2004:200) quoting Breuilly et al. (1997), expands and clarifies the definition of Shari'a: "The shari'ah, literally 'the clear path,' is both a personal rule of life and a system of law that confirms the rights and duties given by God." Sarker continues, "This Islamic law, dating back to the seventh-century Arabian culture, includes rules about what Allah has commanded, recommended, deprecated, forbidden, and feels neutral about." Werden (1997:63-64) describes the pervasive nature of Shari'a: "In many respects, Islam and Shari'a affect virtually everything the Muslim does, from making pilgrimage to Mecca to praying five times each day to forming a rule of law to which the citizens must adhere, . . ."

2.3.2.2 Apostasy

Of particular interest to those who have converted away from Islam, or those who are considering doing so, is Shari'a's view of *apostates*: (Qur'an 3:85) "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost" (Ali 2002). While Muslims believe that ". . . Islam is the only universal religion" (Shahid 2002:62), they also believe it is more than a religion, it is an all-encompassing way of life (Lewis 1993:4). Its very name means submission, which is understood to mean submission toward the perfect will of Allah whose message has been mercifully delivered by Muhammad, the final prophet (Farah 2000:3). Based on that self-understanding, Islam takes a decidedly unhappy view toward those who turn away. In fact, apostasy is among the most serious sins possible to commit by a Muslim because it is a sin against Allah, and therefore carries a mandatory punishment (Al Awabdeh 2005:25; Accad 2012:30-31).

For Westerners, who are generally accustomed to a level of personal freedom unknown in the Middle East, it might seem quite strange that a person should or could be punished *by a human government* for a choice as personal as which religion to embrace. However, the collective identity is so strong in the Arab Muslim world, that there is really no concept of personal choice regarding

religion. Additionally, Islam is such an integral part of the collective identity that changing one's religious identity is considered abandoning the collective. Doing so can result in a variety of disciplinary or punitive measures such as, but not limited to, non-voluntary dissolution of a marriage (Welchman 2000:314-315; Forum-18 2001:80), termination of citizenship (Meral 2008:4) loss of employment, diagnosis of mental illness, or forfeiture of children "since a non-Muslim [male] may not raise Muslim children" (Schirmmacher 2010:32).

Far from a private matter in the Muslim world, apostasy is a serious community concern that Miller (2002:229) explains well:

The essence of the blasphemous act [of conversion to Christianity] is the rupture of the fabric of the sacred community that God has chosen and graced. So serious is the sin considered to be that traditional Islam has even pre-empted the eschatological judgment of God by turning it into a case for immediate communal action against the erring person, ranging from social ostracism to death.

Jay and Meridel Rawlings produced an on-camera interview with Ziad Abu Ziad, a Palestinian Legislative Council member. In this interview, Abu Ziad, *Legal Advisor* to PA Chairman Yasser Arafat, described the traditional process of dealing with apostates: "A Muslim who will convert his religion and publicizes that and he says that he has quit the Islamic religion, he will be treated according to the Islamic law. And the Islamic law is that he should be warned and asked to make up his mind and come back to Islam, but if he insists, then the rule for that is killing [i.e., execution]" (ICEJ 1998).

Not everyone, though, believes there is a systematic violation of religious freedom by the PA. The now defunct Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (LAW) published a study that concludes that no *systematic* Christian persecution by the Palestinian Authority exists. However, the report does include an official response regarding the PA's "position on the issue of Christian persecution in PA areas as it relates to apostasy," which states,

Palestinians are equal before the law, they have the same rights and obligations, and their liberty and freedom to worship and to practice their religious beliefs are protected. [. . .] The Palestinian people are also governed by Shari'a law as the Shari'a law is the law of Islam and is adhered to with regard to issues pertaining to religious matters. [. . .] *any Moslem who declares changing his religion or declares becoming an unbeliever is committing a major sin punishable by capital punishment.* (LAW 1998:9, emphasis added)

Clearly, as evidenced by the testimony of a PA Legislative Council member who was also the legal advisor to PA Chairman Arafat and for the PA's official responses, the PA views very seriously accusations of converting away from Islam.

Apparently recognizing the discrepancy between human rights advocacy and punishment for conversion, LAW tries to distinguish between *systematic persecution* or government hostility toward Christians and basic human rights violations (LAW 1998:10). LAW investigated five specific cases of converts who claimed to be persecuted by the PA because of conversion away from Islam. LAW concluded that the converts' claims were questionable due to “. . . the veracity of the testimonies given and, in some cases, the type of relationship [they had] with the Israeli authorities [or settlers]” (23). Interestingly, while conceding that all five were “. . . questioned about their faith,” LAW saw no connection between the converts' faith and their interrogations. The LAW report makes the distinction between religious persecution and human rights violations in this way (23-24):

This is not to say that there were not violations of human rights involved in the arrests and interrogations of the above. Salim was tortured and suffered from cigarette burns. Mohammed was tied and held in painful positions to extract a confession. Ala's jaw was broken during interrogation. But from their stories, and given their background, a credible case cannot be made that the various security services sought them out and persecuted them specifically for their faith.²⁶

²⁶ The names in this excerpt were changed in the original “. . . on request of the Moslem converts.” See LAW (1998), “The Myth of Christian Persecution by the Palestinian Authority,” 16.

Such a conclusion prompts the question why the topic of faith was raised during interrogation if there was *no* connection. LAW's conclusion notwithstanding, there is credible evidence that the PA has been involved in religious persecution against those who convert away from Islam, or they at least use the fear of being found out as an interrogation technique among their security services. Fear of government reprisal is a genuine concern among MBBs. Respondent Nine reported that her son, who had been a member of the Palestinian security apparatus, fled the country (to a non-Muslim country, outside Palestine and Israel) because other security personnel learned of his conversion to Christianity. Also, Respondent One claimed that he was arrested by the PA and tortured because he was evangelizing other Palestinians in Area A.

The wording of the LAW report suggests that the investigators think the men's abuse is understandable ". . . given their background," which is a reference to their alleged collaboration. This seems to reflect LAW's commitment to Palestinian nationalism, which is discussed below (see 2.5.3 Palestinian Nationalism).

In cases where the government's or a family's public image is at risk, there is another, *non-official*, means of dealing with apostates.

2.3.3 Vigilante Justice

The mandatory punishment, according to the prevailing interpretations of Shari'a, is death for the apostate *and* for anyone responsible for the apostate leaving Islam (Lewis and Churchill 2009:52). As for *literal* application of the death penalty for apostasy in some modern Muslim states, Lewis and Churchill (2009:53) say, it is ". . . no longer acceptable." However, they further clarify that the classical means of dealing with a conviction of apostasy (i.e., a trial, a sentence, and punishment administered by the authorities) ". . . has been replaced by incitement and murder." In other words, in an effort to find favor among Western nations, who consistently protest any type of punishment for

choosing a different religion,²⁷ rather than execute apostates by the hand of the government, some Muslim governments will allow (some say encourage) vigilantes to mete out the desired punishment (Meral 2008:4; Schirrmacher 2010:30).

An example of vigilante reprisal appears in the dedication of Weiner's *Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society* (2005:v):

This monograph is dedicated to the memory of a courageous man, Ahmad El-Achwal, a Palestinian convert to Christianity. El-Achwal was a married father of eight who lived in the Askar Refugee Camp. Despite repeated harsh treatment at the hands of the Palestinian Authority including imprisonment, severe beatings, arson, intimidation and torture, El-Achwal clung to his religious beliefs and even ran an informal church in his house. El-Achwal was murdered on January 21, 2004.

In fact, vigilante reprisals are not uncommon in the West Bank. In 2006, one of the more prominent examples of vigilante action was detailed by Klein (2006) who reported that Palestinian gunmen attacked and burned the YMCA in Qalqilya, located in the West Bank Area A. In spite of their protests to the contrary, the YMCA was accused of missionary activity and had received a series of warnings from the city's Muslim leaders that they must close down operations, otherwise the result would be ". . . acts that no one would like to see." According to a political source, the arson was a ". . . warning to YMCA's [sic] and Christian groups in the Palestinian areas that they are not safe." The same source also reportedly said, "The identity of the attackers is well known to Hamas. We don't expect the Hamas-controlled police, the Hamas city council or the Hamas Interior Ministry to do anything about this attack." Respondent Four described similar threats upon him and his family, which resulted in his home being severely damaged by a mob of Muslim teens and his family fleeing for safety.

²⁷ For contemporary examples of Western government protests, see Jay Carney (2011), "Statement by the Press Secretary on Conviction of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani," and William Hague (2011), "Foreign Secretary calls on Iran to overturn Iranian Church leader's death sentence."

2.3.3.1 Honor Killings

Honor killings are another example of vigilante justice. These types of murder are based on the importance of honor in traditional Arab societies, which is discussed below in sec. 2.4 Honor and Shame. Typically, honor killings target females who have or are thought to have harmed the honor of their families. Schirrmacher (2006) explains that they occur “. . . when it is believed that she has not exhibited the respectable conduct demanded of her in relationships between the sexes, has violated her sexual integrity, and, thus, has ruined the honor of the entire family.” Although Schirrmacher focuses on the connection between honor killings and sexual misconduct, and that is the most common reason for an honor killing, family honor is not limited to sexual misconduct.

The threat of honor killing was reported during my research interviews. When Respondent Two's husband suspected that she had converted to Christianity, or was at least considering doing so, he said that if he ever found out that she had, in fact, converted, he would send her back to her father. “And you know what he will do!” he warned. Similarly, when Respondent Twelve's father suspected she might be interested in Christianity, he and her brother beat her and locked her in a closet for sixteen days. This abuse resulted in hospitalization and a police investigation. However, fearing further reprisal, the respondent refused to cooperate with the police.

In Muslim majority countries, honor killings might best be considered state-sponsored vigilantism since most of those countries have reduced sentences for the perpetrators. For example, until 2001, Jordan's penal code (Article 340)²⁸ “allowed impunity for the honor murderer if he had caught his wife red-handed in the act of adultery” (Schirrmacher, 2006:33):

²⁸ According to Schirrmacher (2006), Article 340 “was through royal decree altered so that now a reduction in punishment is provided for in place of impunity for the honor murder of a woman caught in the act.” She added, however, that Article 340 was never ratified therefore, the status of this law is uncertain.

Article 340: (a) He who discovers his wife, or one of his maharim [female relatives of such a degree of consanguinity as precludes marriage], while committing adultery with another man and kills, wounds, or injures one or both of them, is exempt from any penalty; (b) He who discovers his wife, or one of his sisters or female relatives, with another in an illegitimate bed, and kills, wounds, or injures [one or both of them] benefits from a reduction of penalty. (Feldner 2000:44, bracket explanations in original)

Article 98 of Jordan's penal code "permits a reduction of sentence if the perpetrator commits a criminal offense out of justifiable anger at the false and compromising conduct of his victim" (Schirrmacher 2006:33-34):

Article 98: He who commits a crime due to extreme anger caused by an illegal, and to some extent dangerous act, committed by the victim benefits from reduced penalty. (Feldner 2000:44)

According to West Bank police, a 1960 statute from the period of Jordanian rule over the West Bank (1948-1967) that allows only six months imprisonment for honor killings, was still in effect in the West Bank when Aya Baradiya was murdered by her uncle in 2010 (Sherwood 2011).

After Aya's body was found abandoned in a well one year after she had gone missing, her uncle confessed to the murder, but claimed it was an honor killing. Demonstrating how entrenched honor killing is in this culture, Col. Ramadan Awad, director of the Hebron police (West Bank Area A), the officer in charge of the case, did not criticize honor killings. He only rejected the perpetrator's claim that it was an honor killing because, "It is known in honor killing cases that those who commit such an act, they confess to the murder. They immediately turn themselves in to the police. He did not do that and also brought complete strangers to help him" (Muthaffar and Morgan 2011). In spite of the general cultural acceptance of this practice, this particular case created so much outrage that it prompted President Abbas to terminate laws ". . . that guaranteed sentences of six months or less for such killings" (Laub and Shiyoukhi 2011), which might, in fact, signal a change is starting to take place in the West Bank culture.

It remains to be seen if this change reflects the common attitude toward women like Aya, or if that change will extend even to those who actually shame their families according to local customs.²⁹ Unfortunately, Chesler (2010) reports that the findings of a recent worldwide study of honor killings, “indicate that honor killings accelerated significantly in a 20-year period between 1989 and 2009,” although she is uncertain of the cause. It is possible that the spike reflects an actual increase in numbers of occurrences, or it may simply reflect better and more accurate reporting.

Without question, honor killings are a form of vigilante justice that is commonly overlooked, if not instigated by the PA government. In fact, that is the case throughout the Muslim world, which indicates that honor killings are, at this time, an *accepted* cultural phenomenon within the greater Muslim world, and as demonstrated by the select examples above, within the West Bank Muslim subculture. Perhaps a positive change is starting to take place, but certainly nothing sufficient enough to remove the fear of vigilante action, which is one of the purposes of honor killings. Whether through active incitement or passively allowing reprisals to occur, the PA appears to utilize vigilantism for their purposes.

2.3.3.2 Accusation of Collaboration³⁰

Another strategic tool used to create fear and thus cooperation, obedience, or submission is the accusation of collaboration with Israel. This tool is wielded with equal effect both by government officials and private citizens. Why collaboration? Because, similar to apostasy, collaboration also carries a death penalty, both legally and socially. For governmental purposes, changing a criminal charge from apostasy to collaboration relieves much external pressure from the West

²⁹ This distinction is very difficult, if at all possible, to make due to the perception of shame and what causes it. Feldner (2000:42) illustrates the difficulty well when he writes “a 15-year old Jordanian girl was stoned to death by her brother who spotted her ‘walking toward a house where young boys lived alone.’” She had not been seen inside, only apparently walking toward the house.

³⁰ Collaboration is the act of aiding Israel in any strategic way.

because prosecution for treason³¹ is less likely to be protested by Western governments, many of which have their own anti-treason laws.

Being identified as a collaborator is among the worst things that could happen to a person living in the West Bank or Gaza. In April 2012, after arresting ten “. . . veteran and experienced collaborators, . . .” the Hamas government in Gaza announced that it would begin publicly executing them (Abu Toameh 2012). Kelly (2008b:151) described *extra-judicial* (i.e., vigilante) executions in the

West Bank during the period of the Second Intifada, 2000-2005:

Throughout the second Palestinian Intifada armed groups have increasingly appeared to be taking the “law into their own hands,” seemingly challenging the Palestinian National Authority’s (PNA) monopoly in the provision of justice and the use of violence. As in the First Intifada of the late 1980’s and early 90’s, ‘umala (collaborators) with the Israeli occupation have been executed by the various armed groups associated with the Palestinian nationalist movement.

Whether the result of *legal* sanction or *vigilante* actions, one can easily see how powerful and dangerous the label of collaborator can be for someone in the West Bank or Gaza. Weiner (2005:19-20) illustrates how the cruel use of falsely identifying someone as a collaborator has effectively created an environment of fear among Christians, MBBs and potential converts in the West Bank:

In this environment, the threat of persecution is constantly hanging over the heads of Christians, since the PA police forces often target them as ‘traitors’ or “Israeli collaborators.” Many Christians have been thrown into prison without apparent reason or specific charges, only to be accused retroactively of ‘collaborating with Israel.’ (B’tselem 1994) For example, as two brothers revealed in a confidential interview, after having spent a substantial amount of time in prison, one of them was finally accused of being a Christian and of collaborating with Israel.

Muhammad Bak’r, a Muslim convert to Christianity jailed by the PA, described this torture in a PA prison. His hands were tied behind his back to a rope connected to the ceiling and he was left hanging there for

³¹ It should be noted, though, that in a Muslim context, apostasy is not considered religious treason only. Since there is no such thing as separation of religion and state in a Muslim context, apostasy carries the stigma of national treason, as well. See, Christine Schirrmacher (2010), “Defection from Islam in context: A disturbing human rights dilemma.”

several days. (Raab 2003) A friend who had visited Bak'r in prison confirms that he was tortured.

Although the PA accused Bak'r of selling land to Jews [i.e., collaboration], it is widely believed that he was being held because he distributed Bibles to Muslims. (Raab 2003) Bassem Eid insists that Bak'r's signed confession for the land change was elicited under torture.

Like honor killings, accusations of collaboration are a phenomena in the West Bank that create a culture of fear and intimidation. Most Westerners consider the use of these methods of control and intimidation, either by governments or extra-judiciously, to be an abuse of basic human rights.

2.3.4 Human Rights: International and Islamic

In the Western mind there appears to be a clear contradiction between traditional human rights based on Western values and those human rights guaranteed according to Islam. Furthermore, it often seems disingenuous when Islamic governments claim to protect human rights by subscribing to “. . . international declarations and covenants that protect human rights,” as Article 10:2 of the Palestinian Basic Law claims. In this same vein, Oslo's Article XIX commits the PA to give “. . . due regard to internationally-accepted norms and principles of human rights and the rule of law.” However, in spite of the fact that both the Basic Law and Oslo bind the PA to consider international declarations of human rights, neither specifies any *particular* international declaration. And the lack of specification leaves the citizen in the dark as to which declarations are intended, whether Western or Islamic.

The classic and most universally accepted declaration of human rights is the December 1948 United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UNDHR). Its preamble grounds this declaration in freedom, justice, and peace:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Article 2 is one of two key sections³² of this declaration in relation to this research:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

The UNDHR is based on the principle that human beings have intrinsic rights of equality simply because they are fellow members of the human race without regard to any other qualifications. However, as Merkley (2001:125) points out, in spite of their membership in the United Nations, “Muslim governments and Muslim theologians take the position that such declarations [of human rights] cannot bind their populations, since the only legal authority in this world is *shari’a*, God’s revealed law.”

The primary Islamic declarations - namely, the *Universal Islamic Declaration* (UIDHR 1981) and the 1990 *Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam* (OIC 1990, Cairo Declaration, hereafter) - are grounded in Shari’a (see Cairo Declaration Explanatory Notes [1b] and Articles 24 and 25, respectively) and afford equality only on the basis of rights specifically granted in Shari’a. For example, Article 9 of the *Cairo Declaration*, grants the right to seek knowledge and obligates the State to “. . . ensure the availability of ways and means to acquire education and shall guarantee its diversity in the interest of the society so as to enable man to be acquainted with the religion of Islam . . .” (emphasis added).

In this case, there is no right granted to acquire knowledge about other religions. Neither is there an obligation on the state to provide such, and Article 10 of the *Cairo Declaration* helps clarify why there is such a distinction in the particular rights granted: “Islam is the religion of true unspoiled nature.” And,

³² Article 18 is the other and is discussed below.

because Islam is the *true religion*, “It is prohibited to exercise any form of pressure on man or to exploit his poverty or ignorance in order to force him to change his religion *to another religion or to atheism*” (emphasis added). However, in contrast to protecting all Muslims from pressure or force to change their religion, the Preamble of the *Universal Islamic Declaration* was drafted by Muslims who believe “(e) in inviting all mankind to the message of Islam;” and “(f) that . . . [as Muslims] our *duties and obligations* have priority over our *rights*, and that each one of us is under a bounden duty to spread the teachings of Islam by word, deed, and indeed in all gentle ways . . .” (emphasis added).

The UNDHR clearly declares that all people are equal. In contrast, because of their grounding in Shari’a, the *Universal Islamic Declaration* and the *Cairo Declaration* do not declare all people equal. This is clearly discrimination based on religion. Merkle (2001:125), however, is not surprised because the UNDHR reflects “. . . Western values, not universal ones.” In a similar observation, commenting on Britain’s involvement in Egypt some fifty years prior to the UNDHR, Pryce-Jones (1991:151) writes, “Realization came late and reluctantly that the values implicit in European constitutionality might not be universal.”

In the Muslim mind it is not duplicitous to submit to Western declarations of human rights while knowing and intending that some elements will be ignored. They can do this because in their understanding Shari’a is the only legitimate foundation for legislation of rights and restrictions, and any time there is a conflict between Shari’a and other declarations of rights, Shari’a has priority: “It is the right and duty of every Muslim to refuse to obey any command which is contrary to the Law [i.e., Shari’a], no matter by whom it may be issued” (Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights, section IV.e). Therefore, we should not be surprised if there are some contradictions between the two sets of human rights declarations.

2.3.5 Human Rights: Palestinian

With this foundation, it is appropriate to narrow our focus to human rights under the Palestinian Authority. Article 9 of the Basic Law establishes equality before the law “without distinction based upon race, sex, color, religion, political views or disability.” If Islam is the official religion and Shari’a is a principle source of legislation, it is of interest to know if Christians have *full* equality before the law? Article 10 seems to answer yes: (10:1) “Basic human rights shall be protected and respected;” and (10:2) “The Palestinian National Authority shall work without delay to become a party to regional and international declarations and covenants that protect human rights.” However, since “. . . Shari’a deems them [i.e., Christians] unequal to their Muslim counterparts” a conflict is immediately apparent (Weiner 2005:5).

At first glance, Article 18 of the Palestinian Basic Law, which establishes that “Freedom of belief, worship and the performance of religious functions are guaranteed, *provided public order or public morals are not violated*” (emphasis added), appears to be compatible with Western notions of freedom, including the emphasized exception clause, which, in Western contexts would, for example, prevent someone from shouting “Fire!” in a crowded theater, unless there was actually a fire. However, as has been demonstrated above, the grounding of Basic Law Article 18 in Islamic Shari’a creates certain restrictions that are definitely not compatible with Western notions of freedom and human rights. And those restrictions have specific reference to religious freedom.

Recognizing one of the foundations of a democratic society, Article 18 of the UNDHR deals explicitly with religious freedom, including an important explanatory clause of what religious freedom includes or means:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right *includes freedom to change his religion or belief*, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, and worship and observance (emphasis added).

Clearly, the UN's declaration of freedom of religion is on a collision course with Islamic Shari'a and demonstrates the incongruity of Shari'a observant states, including the Palestinian Authority, making declarations that guarantee the freedom of religion. Without the freedom to change religion, there exists no freedom of religion. John Locke expressed well the UNDHR's idea of freedom of religion when he wrote, "The hope of salvation, as it was the only cause of his entrance into that communion, so it can be the only reason of his stay there" (Forum-18 2001:7). Locke appropriately highlights personal conviction or belief as the reason for embracing a religion as well as for remaining a member, which is in stark contrast to remaining due to fear of legal or social ramifications.

Under the framework of Shari'a, Article 19 of the Basic Law is no more realistic than Article 18: "Freedom of opinion may not be prejudiced. Every person shall have the right to express his opinion and to circulate it orally, in writing or in any form of expression or Art [sic], with due consideration to the provisions of the law."

Waleed Hasayin³³ (Al-Husseini 2010), a West Bank, Internet blogger learned a difficult lesson in how far one can go in expressing his opinion when he was arrested for writing blog posts explaining why he left Islam and proclaimed his atheism (Kershner 2010). He was accused of "mocking Islam, the Koran and the Prophet Muhammad" (Donnison 2010). According to human rights lawyer Naser al-Rais, "Insulting religion is a crime under Palestinian law, . . ." and Husayin ". . . could face a prison term of between three months and three years" (Donnison 2010). According to Miskin (2010), a PA officer told Agence France-Presse that, "Husseini is not in jail for his religious beliefs, but rather, for his own safety . . . It's impossible to release him because we are afraid he will be killed by his family." That he needed to be protected indicates the potential danger for those viewed as apostates in the West Bank, and this potential danger is an important consideration for this research.

³³ Walid al-Husseini and Walid Husayin are alternative spellings in the literature.

Tayseer Tamimi, the former chief Islamic judge in Qalqilya,³⁴ reportedly said, “Husayin is the first to be arrested in the West Bank for his religious views” (Hadid 2010). Much evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, taking this statement at face value might create the impression that legislation in the West Bank has not been strongly affected by Shari’a and thus does not strongly influence the culture. Schirrmacher (2011:62) speaks to this wrong conclusion, calling it a “grave error” because “. . . even where legislation has only partially been affected, the Sharia exerts a considerable influence as a norm for social behaviour and in its claim to be the genuine and valid law, as being of divine origin.”

In summary, we can see that the establishment of a Palestinian governing authority does not alleviate the problems of a Muslim culture in regard to those who might convert away from Islam. In fact, it appears that the PA actually helps facilitate those problems, as the problems are the result of sanctioned abuse of individual human rights, which Weiner suggests should cause the PA to be scrutinized rather than celebrated: “The principal *raison d’être* of government is to provide at least a minimum of protection for the basic rights of its residents. Failure in this area constitutes grounds for scrutiny by the international community in order to understand why these human rights abuses exist” (2005:17).

Seeking to understand *why* these abuses exist is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is important and pertinent to see *what* the abuses are and how they contribute to a culture of fear. Specifically, I have shown how the current environment is one of fear for those who would consider leaving the Islamic faith because Islam is the official religion and Shari’a – which does not allow conversion away from Islam - is the governing principle in Palestine. I have also shown that 1) even though apostates may not *actually* receive the death penalty, as may be the case in other Islamic states, the potential exists; 2) this potential

³⁴ Qalqilya and Kalkilya are alternative spellings in the literature.

creates a pervasive environment of fear; and 3) vigilante justice does occur and may, in fact, replace any type of official sanctions and exacerbate fear.

A climate of fear was verified in my research interviews: eleven of the twenty-four respondents specifically mentioned that prior to their conversions they were afraid of what might happen to them because they were reading the Bible or thinking about converting. Many of them remained in fear of retribution after they had converted. Perhaps the latter was best illustrated by Respondent Eight when he said this in response to a question about being baptized: “I want to, but I’m afraid because I would be killed if others find out.” I followed up by asking if he was aware of any converts who had been killed and he said, “maybe I’ve heard of some, but I’m not certain.” He had not been threatened personally. Neither was he certain that anyone else had been executed. Yet, he was terribly afraid of what he believed would happen if someone were to find out about his conversion away from Islam. In fact, the occasion of our interview, which occurred immediately after a congregational meeting about forty-five minutes from his residence, was the first time he had been outside his home in six months. At the time of our interview, he had been a believer for about eight years, and this self-imposed isolation had been his behavior pattern for the duration of that time.

Respondents Four, Five, Six, Nineteen and Twenty-One were relocated to a *safe house* after a neighbor overheard their family singing praise to Jesus inside their home and reported them to an extended family member. They continue to live under assumed identities in a different city.

Fear is a cultural reality in the West Bank for all the reasons outlined above – an Islamic government based on Shari’a, government restrictions, vigilante justice, etc. – and must be considered in any evangelistic plan, both in how it affects the potential hearers, and how it may shape the message and its delivery.

Another cultural reality in the West Bank is the honor-shame worldview.³⁵

³⁵ In the literature this worldview is sometimes labeled Honor/Shame, or Honor, or Shame.

2.4 Honor and Shame: Traditional Arab Muslim Worldview

In *Understanding Arabs: a guide for modern times*, Nydell (2006:15) includes honor in her list of Basic Arab Values. She describes its importance in this way: “A person’s dignity, honor, and reputation are of paramount importance, and no effort should be spared to protect them. Honor (or shame) is often viewed as collective, pertaining to the entire family or group.” While she is describing a value that is generally true among Arab Muslims across the Middle East, it is my sixteen-years observation that honor plays a major role in the West Bank Palestinian worldview, as well. (In fact, had I understood this earlier in my own sojourn in the land, I would have better understood many nuances of the culture sooner.)

It is not uncommon to see the words *culture* and *worldview* used interchangeably. The two are so closely related that, at times, there appears to be no distinction between them. Here I will distinguish between the two, using worldview as one of many components of a culture.

Worldview has been defined and used by Evangelical Christian scholars in a variety of ways. Müller (2010:102-107) suggests that in the literature, Evangelicals demonstrate the difficulty of succinctly defining worldview, as well as determining exactly which elements make up a worldview, because each emphasizes a certain element that best suits their own interests. For my purposes I will follow Hesselgrave (1991:197) who defines worldview as “. . . the way people see reality,” and Hoskins (2003:9) who expands on that definition: “A ‘WORLDVIEW’ IS THE WAY PEOPLE SEE and process their environment” [emphasis in the original].

While Hoskins (2003:9-10) suggests that “Three driving forces impact a Muslim’s worldview” (the Bedouin ideal, Honor, and Islamic traditions), he explains that “. . . honor is the ship that floats all of Muslim culture.” He also says that honor “. . . is more important than logic, truth, and even life itself. This may seem odd to us in the West, but *honor is an actual commodity to Muslims, which*

can be bought and sold, added to, and subtracted from" (emphasis in the original).

From among the elements that influence a worldview, all of which are important, I have chosen to focus primarily upon honor because it would be difficult to overstate its central role in the Palestinian West Bank worldview.

Moxnes (1996:20) defines honor as being ". . . the public recognition of one's social standing." Honor is gained or lost through a variety of things – family, vocation, wealth, education, compliments or insults, etc. – and is used to measure each person's standing or place in the community. The literature related to 19th and early 20th century Palestinian social and political developments, for example, is filled with references to two particular Arab families: the Husseinis and the Nashashibis³⁶ (e.g., Nashif 1977; Muslih 1987; Fleischmann 2000). To be born into one of these families was to be bestowed with honor or community standing automatically.

In contrast to Western individualism, the honor worldview, emphasizes community. Moxnes explains, "A person is never regarded as an isolated individual, but always as part of a group, responsible for the honor of the group and also protected by it. Because honor always derives from the group, an individual's conduct also reflects back on the group and its honor" (1996:28).

Honor is a positive measurement, typically of the patriarch (grandfather, father, husband, depending on the particular group), that each member of the unit (i.e., family, clan, or tribe) is expected to maintain, or increase when possible. Honor is contrasted by *shame*, which is to be avoided at all cost because shame reduces honor. Al-Krenawi and Graham (2005), researching marital therapy strategies among West Bank counselors and therapists, illustrated the Patriarchal nature of West Bank society and its emphasis on the *man's* honor when they described the lengths one of their subjects went to protect her husband's honor, even opening up herself for divorce. Since ". . . a

³⁶ al-Husayni and al-Nashashibi are alternative spellings.

man's sterility in Arab society is considered a shame," their client ". . . declared that she was sterile" (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2005:304). In a turn of irony, it was okay for the woman to be shamed in this way because she was protecting the man's honor.

Wikan (1984:636) describes a wide range of shameful actions: ". . . from trifling misdeeds or accidents, such as insulting a guest, gossiping, stealing and miserly behaviour, to acts judged horribly immoral, such as homosexuality, female adultery or loss of virginity before marriage." The latter offenses particularly related to unmarried females (Springer et al. 2009:232) were already highlighted above in regard to honor killings.

Müller (2000) explains that in shame-based cultures, there is no emphasis on right and wrong actions. Instead, shame and honor are the foci, or guiding principles. This is the reason that for most Westerners there is a complete disconnect regarding the topic of honor killings. In the West, we typically see actions in the world through the lenses of right and wrong, and killing is generally considered wrong. In the East and Middle East, in shame-based cultures, actions are viewed through honor and shame lenses. And in the case of honor killings, the victim is alleged to have done something dishonorable or shameful, and thus has harmed the group. Therefore, it is commonly understood that killing the offender will reverse the shame they caused. In fact, in these cultures, "one who refrains from 'washing shame with blood' is viewed as 'a coward who is not worthy of living'" (Feldner 2000:43).

Müller also describes how shame, or the avoidance of it, is used to maintain cohesion, or unity. Wikan (1984:636-637) validated this, explaining that in her research among children in Cairo, Egypt, shame (*'eb* - عيب) is ". . . one of the first words that people hear and, throughout their lives, it remains one of the most common." So common is the use of the word *shame* to correct a child's actions, ". . . there is not a toddler [among the poor children of Cairo] that does not understand what it means."

Although much of the literature focuses on how honor and shame are used to maintain group cohesion within the Islamic context – and usually in the context of female sexual behavior - shame is not limited to the behavior of those within the group (i.e., family, clan, or tribe). Shame can also result from the actions of those outside the group toward members of the group. This is discussed below in the context of Palestinian shame resulting from the birth of the Jewish state and how that relates to Palestinian nationalism.

Palestinian nationalism, which is thoroughly intertwined with honor and shame, is the third major cultural element to be considered.

2.5 Occupation and a Shared National Identity

Larsen et al (1995:165) are very helpful in explaining the importance of national identity: “The nation-state is not only a universal phenomenon, but nationalism remains the most fundamental source of identity and ideology in the world . . . national ideology responds to the universal human need to belong and to be secure.” The need to belong is a common theme among Palestinians, and the lack of belonging is a common source of frustration among them.

In this section I provide detail about the birth of the modern state of Israel and explain its central role in the development of Palestinian nationalism. This should not be understood to be an effort to minimize the universal need for identity. Instead, I am suggesting that the two, an innate human need for identity and the birth of Israel, work together (in addition to the influence of honor and shame) as the genesis of Palestinian nationalism.

2.5.1 Background: The Birth of Arab Nationalism

In a very real sense, the current Arab-Israeli conflict is the result of late 19th and early 20th century geo-political and social developments in areas of the Ottoman Empire. The overarching regional development was the birth of Arab nationalism, which was in stark contrast to longstanding submission to Ottoman rule.

Across what is identified as the Middle East, which was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire for approximately four hundred years prior to World War I, the Arabs shared a common identity based around a common language, and since the 7th century Muslim conquest, a mostly common religion (i.e., Islam). However, by the mid-19th century a number of issues started to undermine the long-term stability and unity the Empire had experienced. The natural challenge of ruling such a vast empire coupled with poor leadership led to an economic and moral decline of the Ottoman Empire (Zürcher 1998). This decline created an environment that was open to ethnic autonomy or nationalism, which was a new idea in this region.

The Western concept of nationalism gained interest among local Arabs in the Levant, not only because of economic and moral distress, but also due to local religious and secular developments. Both Protestant and French Catholic missionaries began arriving and opening schools for local Arab children in the mid-1800's, particularly in Beirut and Cairo, which were the cultural capitals of the Arab world at that time. The religious instruction the missionaries provided was accompanied by western political theory, including nationalism (Fisher 1959:350-351; Price 2003:24). In a secular context, the concept of nationalism also gained strength in the region as Arab students returned home with Western educations from universities in Europe.

Another important boost for regional Arab Nationalism came in January 1918 when US President Woodrow Wilson presented his *Fourteen Points* speech to the United States Congress. In this speech he offered non-Turkic nationalities governed by the Ottomans assurance of “. . . an undoubted security of life and an absolutely *unmolested opportunity of autonomous development*” (Wilson 1918, XII, emphasis added). Each of these influences coupled with an Allied victory in World War I³⁷ ultimately resulted in the October 1918 Armistice of Moudros,

³⁷ The Ottomans had “. . . joined Christian Europe's civil war in alliance with the central powers of Germany and Austro-Hungary against Britain, France and Russia.” See Peter Mansfield (1992), *A History of the Middle East*.

which marked the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of nation-state status in the Middle East.

The Ottoman surrender created a power vacuum that was filled by France and Britain. Under mandate authority finally assigned to them at the 1920 San Remo conference and later ratified by the League of Nations the two Western nations busied themselves dismantling the once great Ottoman empire in ways that “. . . disregarded all local interests . . .” and served their own national interests, often by *rewarding* Arab clan-leaders who had aided them in the war effort (Carmichael 1967:318-319). The end of Ottoman rule over the Arabic speaking world initially translated into the birth of seven independent nations: Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Trans-Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt. However, one region, known alternatively as *Southern Syria* or *Palestine* did not receive independence. Instead, that area remained under mandatory British rule.

So, while the Palestinians considered themselves among the Arab peoples and had similar interests in national autonomy that were coupled with an understanding that they would also receive autonomy they were excluded by the Western Powers from all the neighboring Arabs who did receive independent-nation status. This exclusion marks the beginning of the Palestinian perception of being treated both unfairly and differently than the surrounding Arab peoples. Such a perception emphasizes, in the minds of many Palestinians, the necessity of Palestinians to develop and promote a distinct Palestinian nationalism. This Palestinian nationalism is not only emphasized above and apart from an Arab nationalism, it is very much connected to two themes: the land and the Occupation.

2.5.2 The Birth of Zionism

Scholars from both sides recognize that Palestinian nationalism is directly related to Zionism. Palestinian scholar Edward Saïd (1979:144-145) suggests that the birth of Zionism, and by extension the modern state of Israel, was the

second critical regional development to engender a distinct Palestinian nationalism:

Palestinian nationalism grew out of two basic needs: (1) the need to identify their resistance with the post-Ottoman Arab struggle for political independence and statehood, and (2) the need to confront the demand for a specifically Jewish statehood, which seemed to – and later did – exclude them as a whole.

Israeli politician, historian, and former diplomat Shlomo Ben-Ami (2006:5) also suggests that Palestinian nationalism developed as a reaction to Zionism:

Just as Jewish modern nationalism was a response of the Jews to the threat posed by the Europeans to their distinct identity, so Palestinian nationalism can be largely seen as a collective reaction of the local Arabs to a Zionist enterprise that threatened their natural rights in Palestine.

2.5.2.1 Background: Jewish Assimilation and Anti-Semitism

Somewhat parallel in time to the emergence of Arab interest in independent nation-states, European Jews were starting to recognize a need for a Jewish homeland. By the last quarter of the 19th Century the Jews had passed the persecution of *Christian Europe* and finally achieved citizenship in the emerging European democracies. But this new acceptance led to their assimilation into the dominant European culture. This assimilation resulted in a more public presence of Jews in European society, which eventually created the *Jewish Question*. In other words, Europeans wanted to know what to do about the growing presence and apparently disproportionate influence of the Jews. This perception eventually led to open anti-Semitism.

In response to the *Dreyfus Affair*,³⁸ Theodore Herzl summed up the problem created by a European Jewish presence in his 1896 pamphlet, *Der Judenstaat*:

³⁸ Alfred Dreyfus was a Jewish officer in the French military falsely charged with and convicted of treason in 1894. Two years later, evidence that would exonerate Dreyfus and incriminate the real culprit was suppressed. As a result, the guilty soldier was acquitted while Dreyfus faced additional charges.

Herzl covered the trial for the French *Neue Freie Presse*, and “. . . was 1 of many who believed that Dreyfus had been framed and the trial rigged.” It was not until 1899 that this

The Jewish question still exists. It would be foolish to deny it. It is a misplaced piece of medievalism which civilized nations do not seem able to shake off, try as they will . . . The Jewish question persists wherever Jews live in appreciable numbers. Wherever it does not exist, it is brought in by Jewish immigrants . . . I consider the Jewish question neither a social nor a religious one, even though it sometimes takes these and other forms. It is a national question (quoted in Laqueur 1972:86).

In contrast to the Western European emancipation and assimilation that eventually led to anti-Semitism, the environment in Eastern Europe and Russia remained depressed and hostile toward Jews. In fact, Czarist Russia was forced to *tolerate* a significant number of Jews when the Russians annexed Poland, which had a significant Jewish population. Demonstrating the anti-Semitic atmosphere of that time, those newly *acquired* Jews were not allowed freedom of movement. Instead, “. . . roughly half of the Jews in the world . . .” were required to remain in prescribed areas known as the *Pale of Settlement*, which was “. . . a large swath of territory running roughly from the Baltic to the Black Sea” (La Guardia 2002:65). The Jews endured various types of persecution in Russia, including violent pogroms, isolation and segregation. Possibly the worst of the Russian persecution of the Jews was the conscription of ten-year-old boys to twenty-five-years military terms (Rydelnik 2004:63-64).

Out of these types of hardships grew two plans to facilitate the survival of the Jewish people. The first: a *modern-day* Exodus that resulted in over one million Jews fleeing to the United States between 1880 and 1900. That number increased to 2.6 million by 1914 (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:23). The second plan was to birth a Jewish nationalism that would be expressed through the establishment of a Jewish homeland, ideally in ancient Zion. Rydelnik (2004:64) sums up the genesis of Zionism this way:

. . . in the East, the harsh conditions were destroying the Jewish people themselves; in the West, freedom and emancipation were destroying Jewish identity and culture. It was in this context that the idea of a return to Zion was germinated.

injustice was confirmed when a French officer involved in the affair confessed. See Bickerton and Klausner (2002), *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*.

2.5.2.2 Theodor Herzl, the Father of Modern Zionism

With what appears to be prophetic insight, Hungarian born Theodor Herzl, recognizing “. . . the ambiguity of the position of the Jews in Europe and the anti-Semitism that was so dramatically illustrated by the notorious Dreyfus Affair,” organized the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland on 29 August 1897 (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:24-25). The purpose of this first congress was twofold (Herzl.org): First, to establish a plan of action for establishing a Jewish homeland, which was outlined as follows:

The programmatic encouragement of the settlement of Palestine with Jewish agricultural workers, laborers and artisans;

The unification and organization of all Jewry into local and general groups in accordance with the laws of their respective countries;

The strengthening of Jewish self-awareness and national consciousness;

and

The preparation of activity for the obtaining of the consent of the various governments, necessary for the fulfillment of the aim of Zionism.

The second purpose of the congress was to establish a democratically minded, international organization that would help facilitate the Zionist plan of action by raising funds, raising awareness and interest in a Jewish homeland, and influencing international decision makers at the highest levels in Europe, the United States and the Middle East. Ultimately, the plan of the first congress was successful, and it was there that Herzl demonstrated how prophetic his insight was when he wrote in his journal fifty years before a UN vote to establish Israel,

If I were to sum up the Congress in a word – which I shall take care not to publish – it would be this: At Basle I founded the Jewish State. If I said this aloud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive this. (La Guardia 2002:7; Rydelnik 2004:67)

The anti-Semitism noticed by Herzl and others continued to increase in Russia and Europe, ultimately reaching its climax under Hitler’s Third Reich. This

growing problem caused Herzl to initially consider two options for a homeland: Palestine, which he described as “. . . our ever-memorable historic home,” or Argentina, which he believed to be “. . . one of the most fertile countries in the world” (La Guardia 2002:6). Subsequently, Herzl and others considered alternative locations for a Jewish homeland. Places like Cyprus and the El-Arish area of the Sinai Peninsula (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:25). Ultimately though, in what was apparently a pragmatic decision, Herzl became favorable to the British proposal of a Jewish homeland in British East Africa called the *Uganda Plan*, which he presented at the sixth Zionist Congress on 26 August 1903. The proposal was very divisive. In fact, the Russian Zionist’s were altogether against this plan and walked out of the meeting. In the end, the highlight of the sixth congress was the decision to send a delegation for a site visit to evaluate the suitability of the proposed East African land. Herzl died the next year, and his proposal ultimately was rejected a year later at the 1905 seventh Zionist Congress.

One important result of the early Zionist congresses was an increase in Jewish immigration for the purpose of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The plan was to “. . . buy up the land from the Turks, cultivate it into productivity, [and] build a Jewish majority in the land” (Ellisen 1991:62). In those days, the land was rough and wild, but the early waves of pioneers, who had caught, in some sense – whether secular or religious – a messianic spirit, banded together to tame the land. Their immigration was assisted and distinguished from the local Palestinian Arab society by its organization “. . . of a bank and central fund and a world congress whose delegates met at regular intervals in parliamentary fashion.” These were clear evidence of the effectiveness of Herzl’s idea for the Zionist congresses. This centralized-governmental-type organization was in contrast to the Palestinian Arab society, which at that time was “. . . completely family-tribal in structure” (Pryce-Jones 1991:171), and gave the Jews a clear operational advantage over the resident Arabs. Carmichael described the contrast between these two peoples as follows (1967:322-323):

The Zionist Jews, mostly from Europe, brought with them an intensity of purpose inherent in the messianic drive of Zionism itself, together with the relatively advanced Western technology. They brought, in short, the manpower, capital, and determination to embark on large-scale enterprises that provided a striking contrast with the still traditional life of the Arabic speaking Palestinians, largely peasants and craftsmen, with a substantial Bedouin admixture and the small and, even for the Middle East remarkably backward class of lethargic, parasitic landowners.

Much of the success of land acquisition and settlement was due to the generosity of the French Jewish philanthropist Baron Edmond de Rothschild who purchased land from Arab landowners who were interested in avoiding exorbitant land taxes imposed by the Ottomans. Occasionally, it required bribes or overpaying for the land, but by 1903, de Rothschild's funds had acquired over 90,000 acres and subsidized over three hundred fifty families. By 1914, the land acquisition had grown to about 100,000 acres (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:26-27). It is important to keep in mind that whether the Arab landowners were selling to non-resident landowners or the Jews, the end result was that the sellers became peasant farmers indebted to those who would control what was once their land, and thus, would subsequently control their destiny (Pryce-Jones 1991:189).

This early period of Jewish land acquisition remains a point of contention and an example of victimization among Palestinians who may concede that the Jews, in fact, bought certain tracts of land, but continue to insist that it was done unjustly by utilizing Western colonial systems (i.e., organizational planning and the development of banks and land acquisition trusts, etc.) to take advantage of indigenous Palestinian farmers who were simple people of the land.

As land was acquired, communities were established to work the land, and this was the beginning of the *kibbutz* and *moshav* movements, which are collective farms and cooperative villages, respectively (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:26-27). These pioneer communities became the heart and soul of the Zionist movement because they were directly connected to the land. They were

evidence of “Practical Zionism” (Mansfield 1992:160) since the participants were no longer in exile dreaming of or theorizing about the restoration of Zion. They were actually seeing the land blossom as a result of their ingenuity, sacrifice, and commitment. These pioneers were also the ones who were risking their lives by living in the midst of an Arab population that was growing, sometimes violently, in their disapproval of the Jewish presence.

2.5.2.3 The Balfour Declaration

From the Zionist perspective, international recognition of their movement came in the form of the 2 November 1917 Balfour Declaration:

His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country. (Bickerton and Klausner 2002)

The Arabs saw the Balfour Declaration as evidence of Western duplicity and European powers “. . . meddling in Arab affairs” (Barakat 1993:6). In contrast, the Jews were encouraged. They understood this British statement as Gentile recognition of their right to a Jewish homeland.

Even though the Balfour Declaration appeared to contradict prior commitments to the Arabs, specifically the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, it was given permanent status by being included in the peace treaty between the Ottomans and the Allies, the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, and eventually in the July 1922 League of Nations’ *Palestine Mandate* (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:43).

2.5.2.4 The British Mandate

Among the most significant results of World War I were the French and British mandates to administer much of the Middle East, which were agreed upon at San Remo in 1920 and eventually ratified by the League of Nations in 1922. And from the Zionist point of view, the British mandate to administer Palestine, which

initially included the lands on both sides of the Jordan River (i.e., the modern Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and modern Israel/Palestine), appeared to be providential, considering that the British had already publicly supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine in the form of the Balfour Declaration.

One should note the nature of the mandates, which Bickerton and Klausner (2002:43-44) explain “. . . would be administered like trusts by the British and French, under supervision of the League [of Nations], until such time as the inhabitants were believed by League members to be ready for independence and self-government.” Interestingly, though this style of mandate could be understood to mean there is intention to establish a Palestinian state too, that Western powers would assume the authority to determine if or when *the locals* are ready to govern themselves, is viewed by Palestinians as evidence of colonialism and an affront to Arab honor.

One major event that affected both the Jews and the Arab Palestinians occurred between San Remo and the League of Nations' ratification of the mandates. In 1921, using the Jordan River as a boundary line, the British divided the Palestine Mandate territory - all of which, perhaps mistakenly, the Zionists understood would be theirs according to Balfour - into two sectors, one East of the river and one West of the river. As a reward for aid during World War I (Fisher 1959:444; Price 2003:26), Britain created a new entity called Transjordan in the eastern sector, which comprised approximately 77%, of the territory of the Palestine Mandate (Price, 32). Abdullah, the brother of Feisal, the new king appointed by the British to rule Iraq, was in turn appointed the leader of Transjordan. Both Abdullah and Feisal were the sons of Hussein ibn 'Ali who aided the British war effort by leading the Arab revolt against the Ottomans in 1916.

The period of the British Mandate, 1922-1948, grew increasingly tumultuous, as the Jews sought to use the Mandate as a foundation for statehood in the remaining 23% of Mandatory Palestine (i.e., the western sector). The Palestinian

Arabs rejected both the Mandate and the Balfour Declaration, understanding the latter to mean they would become immersed in a politically sovereign Zionist state. However, the Arabs' efforts to resist were often hampered by their lack of organization (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:47).

Neither side trusted the Mandatory government – the Jews because the British were continually reducing or outright blocking Jewish immigration and land purchases and the Arabs because of the duplicity of the British as demonstrated in the promises offered in the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, which the Arabs believed were undermined by the commitment to a Jewish homeland found in the Balfour Declaration. These tensions began to escalate in the mid-1930s as Jews sought refuge from the Nazis and more than doubled their numbers in Mandatory Palestine (Shindler 2008:34).

2.5.2.5 World War II and the UN Partition Plan

As World War II came to an end, the magnitude of the Holocaust became apparent and garnered sympathy – among Jews and non-Jews - for establishing a Jewish homeland, where Jews could live as Jews without fear of another holocaust. Much of the sympathy was guilt driven as Western nations realized their own failure in regard to the victim's of the Nazis, whether by refusing to follow up on reports of atrocities or by closing borders to Jews who were trying to escape.

During the war, the Jews living in Mandatory Palestine offered to create Jewish fighting units to fight alongside the British against the Germans in North Africa. According to Bickerton and Klausner (2002:73), this was “. . . part of the broader Zionist goal of circumventing the Malcolm MacDonald White Paper and securing ultimate Jewish statehood.” However, afraid to upset the Arabs, who they needed for their post-war efforts, the British rejected the offer. In a subsequent and similar effort, the Jewish Agency and the Jewish paramilitary fighters of the *Hagana*, eventually received British approval to create a Jewish unit that would fight in Europe alongside the British under a Zionist flag. There

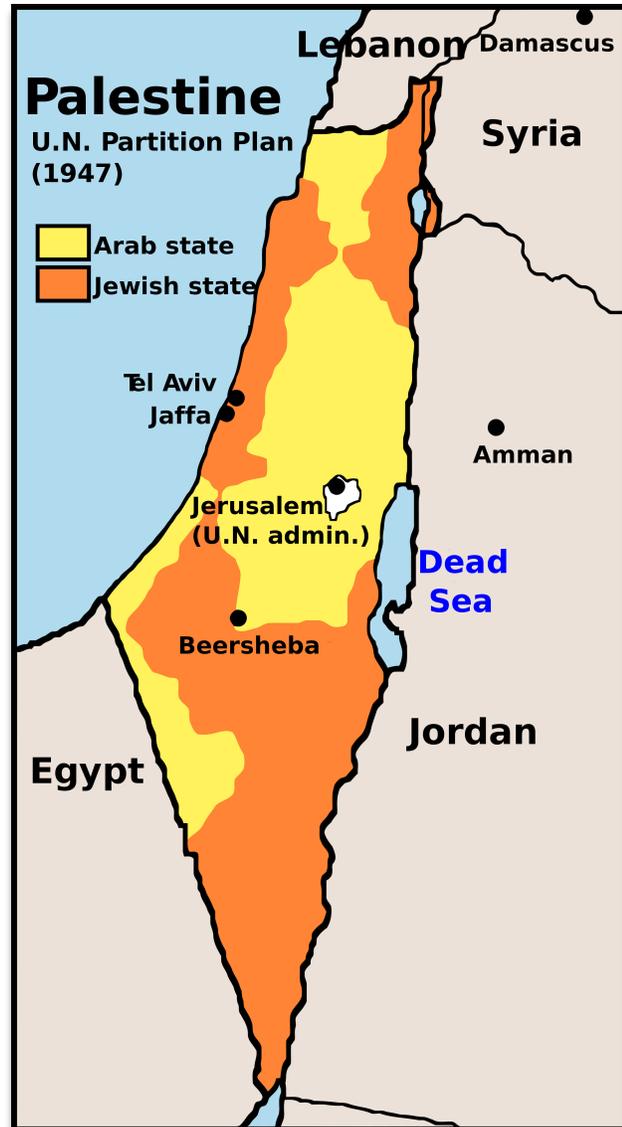
were a number of motivations for this offer: Obviously, the Jews had an interest in defeating the Nazis, but also they wanted to gain better “. . . military training, experience, and access to arms” (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:73). To some degree, this plan was successful in creating a stockpile of arms, which would be used over the course of the next couple years in their effort to establish a Jewish state.

Ultimately, by 1947 the British Mandatory Government grew weary of their responsibility over the mandate. The violence in Palestine had grown considerably with British personnel having been specifically targeted by both sides. Additionally, they were undergoing heavy international and domestic criticism due to their apparent failure in managing the escalating violence as well as their handling of Jewish refugees who were trying to escape the Holocaust. With mounting domestic and international troubles demanding their attention and an apparently hopeless situation in Palestine creating much of those troubles, the British sought an exit by asking the newly established United Nations for help in determining a solution to the Palestine Mandate (Sabbagh 2007:257).

In response, the United Nations set up a special committee, The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), to evaluate the situation, taking into consideration the current population groups in the land, as well as the Jews who had been displaced as a result of the Holocaust. UNSCOP spent five weeks in the Middle East gathering data from the Jews and the Arabs, including the Arabs in the newly formed Arab League.

Interestingly, in a change of course, the Jewish Agency met with the UN commission and consented to a partition of the Mandate land west of the Jordan River. This change of course contrasted with the Palestine Arab Higher Committee who took a defiant stand and refused to meet with UNSCOP. The Palestinian leadership felt the UNSCOP enquiry was unnecessary because the Arabs' rights were self-evident.

The conclusion of UNSCOP, presented on 31 August 1947, was that the Palestine Mandate should be terminated, the Mandate lands west of the Jordan River be divided into two nations, followed by a period of transition toward independence (see Figure 5). Their plan was for two nations, one Arab and one Jewish, to be established, more or less, along the lines of the 1936 Peel Commission Report, which “. . . proposed for the first time that the territory be partitioned into separate Jewish and Arab states,” (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:53), with a third portion, specifically Jerusalem, to be internationalized and neither Arab nor Jewish. (Jerusalem was later recommended to be Arab territory by Count Bernadotte, the UN mediator for Palestine.)



*Figure 5 – The 1947 UN Partition Plan.
Source: Public Domain Product of the United States Government.*

Though the partition plan was less than ideal, the Jews accepted it as a step toward a genuine homeland. As Ellison (1991:99) and others (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:85, for example) note, the plan offered two important things for the Jews that would create lasting tensions with the Palestinian Arabs: unlimited immigration and independence.

Requiring a two-thirds majority approval, the UNSCOP Partition Plan was presented to the UN General Assembly for approval. On 29 November 1947, fifty

years and three months after Herzl's first Zionist Congress opened, the Partition Plan was approved. The Zionists were delighted.

2.5.2.6 Israel: Born into War

In contrast to the Zionists' joy, the Arab nations were outraged at the UN's decision to partition Palestine into two states. Immediately, war erupted in Palestine. Arab fighters slipped across the borders to aid the Arab side. The Jewish side was aided by a cache of arms they had previously acquired, as well as an international network that was able to smuggle more weapons into the country. The fighting was so severe – nearly one hundred British soldiers were killed in the three months that followed the UN vote (Fisher 1959:584) - the United States proposed the five permanent members of the UN Security Council implement a temporary UN trusteeship. The Jews refused any outside interference because “. . . there could be no delay in the achievement of independence” (Fisher 1959:584).

Independence was achieved, but not without cost, both financial and in human lives. Seemingly every generation of Israelis has seen war: 1948, War of Independence; 1956, Suez Canal Crisis; 1967, Six Day War; 1973, Yom Kippur War; 1982, Lebanon War; 1982-2000, Lebanon Security Zone Conflict; 1987-93, First Intifada Arab Uprising; 1990, Gulf War I;³⁹ 2000-05, Second Intifada Arab Uprising; 2006, Lebanon II; 2008, Gaza War. All of these armed conflicts have influenced Palestinian culture in important ways. But, two of those conflicts are more significant in this respect than the others: The 1948 War of Independence and the 1967 Six Day War.

³⁹ The Iraq War is included in the list of Israel's wars because even though they did not officially participate, the nation was on high war alert for several months prior to being attacked by Iraq, who landed 39 Scud missiles in Israel.

2.5.2.6.1 The 1948 and 1967 Wars

In the intervening five months between the UN vote to partition Palestine into two states and Israel's declaration of statehood, the fighting between the Jews and the Arabs intensified, and finally, on 14 May 1948, David Ben Gurion announced in Hebrew, the founding of the Jewish state in Palestine, which would be called Israel. Some sixteen minutes later, US President Harry Truman announced US recognition of the new state of Israel. The next day, 15 May 1948, Israel's War of Independence began.

The Palestinian Arabs were joined by troops from Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Western, military trained Jews rushed to the country to aid in any way possible. This influx provided a tremendous military upgrade. Jewish financial support procured military supplies – from small arms to aircraft – from wherever possible, including Czechoslovakia, the United States, and even from departing British forces.

While the Jews were outnumbered and outflanked, their determination, organization, and supplies proved to be too much for the Arab armies, though La Guardia (2002:119) suggests that King Abdullah⁴⁰ of Jordan colluded with Israel to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.⁴¹

Egypt was the first to sign an armistice in February 1949, followed by Lebanon, Transjordan, and Syria. Although Iraq never signed an armistice with Israel, they had agreed to abide by any agreement Transjordan entered.

The original partition plan called for the Jewish state to receive approximately 5,500 square miles, while the Arab state was slated to receive approximately 4,500 square miles. However, once the dust of the 1948 War had settled, a

⁴⁰ Abdallah is an alternative spelling.

⁴¹ Many Palestinians believed they had been betrayed by Abdullah, which led to his assassination in 1951, 2 years after the armistice agreement. A Palestinian gunman shot Abdullah at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem allegedly to prevent a peace agreement with the Zionists. Clearly, certain Palestinians, perhaps most, viewed Abdullah's alleged cooperation with Israel as a betrayal of the highest order.

Jewish state existed in the Middle East for the first time in almost two millennia, and the land area of the new state was approximately 8,050 square miles, almost 47% larger than what had been designated by the UN Partition Plan (Ellisen 1991:107). In contrast, no Palestinian Arab state was established.

With the additional land, Israel had more area to settle Jewish displaced persons from the European theatre of war. About 100,000 Jews arrived by the end of 1948 (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:107).

Schanzer (2008:9) adequately captured the post-war feelings of shame, misfortune, and injustice among the Palestinians as he summarized the Partition Plan and aftermath of the 1948 War:

In 1947, the United Nations put forth a plan that afforded the Palestinian people half of what is today Israel, with significantly more land than what is now called the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. When the Palestinians rejected this plan, war erupted, leading to a free-for-all Arab land grab. The Egyptians usurped Gaza. The Jordanians occupied the West Bank. The Israelis took everything else in a victorious military campaign. The Palestinians were left with nothing.

For the next nineteen years the map would remain the same: Egypt in control of Gaza, Jordan in control of the West Bank, Israel controlling the rest. The Palestinians controlled nothing, which makes it clear why they call this event *an-Nakba* (النكبة), the Catastrophe.

2.5.2.6.2 June 1967: The Six Day War

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the June 1967 War for both sides of the conflict. The lightning victory for Israel strengthened the persona of the Israeli warrior, able to face any odds and come out victorious. This persona was much improved over that which resulted from the 1948 War. The earlier generation of soldiers was seen as a rag-tag bunch with great resolve and determination. This group of warriors was seen as a larger-than-life, modern, organized, and technically advanced military that should not be challenged, even by larger armies.

The Arabs, on the other hand, were once again humiliated in their defeat by the Zionists. But defeat was only part of their humiliation. It was as if humiliation was being served in stages. The first stage was defeat at the hands of the Zionists. The intermediate stage was the Israeli acquisition of more *Arab* lands: Syria lost control of the Golan Heights, Jordan lost control of the West Bank, and Egypt lost control of Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula. The final stage of humiliation was the reality of military occupation. The loss of Gaza and the West Bank to the control of the Zionists suggested the Palestinian Arabs' fears of the Balfour Declaration, five decades prior, were not misplaced. They had feared becoming immersed in a Zionist state. Not only did they not have their own nation, the Palestinians who did not flee found themselves trapped under the authority of the Zionists who now possessed three times more land than they had in 1949 (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:151).⁴² Humiliation was heaped upon humiliation.

In terms of imagery, the Six Day War did more than cast the Israeli army as strong warriors. It also created the platform to re-cast the biblical image of David and Goliath. The Israelis viewed themselves as the little David who, in their finest hour, stood up to and defeated the giant Goliath of neighboring Arab nations. And, considering Israel's rapid victory over an apparently much larger foe, much of the world recognized that image. However, in an ironic twist, Israel's victory gave the Palestinian Arabs the opportunity to adopt the same imagery, but with themselves cast as little David. With the acquisition of land, specifically the West Bank and Gaza, Israel also inherited 1.3 million Palestinian Arab residents who would unhappily come to live under military occupation. Suddenly the tables were turned; Israel had become the giant Goliath ruling over the smaller, weaker Palestinian Arabs. And, in the way that many saw Israel's Six Day War victory as a David and Goliath situation, many – journalists, academics, social analysts, and the Palestinians themselves – came to identify the Israeli military occupation as Goliath standing over the Palestinian David. This imagery

⁴² This estimate of increase includes the addition of the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. At the time of this writing, Israel has ceded the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, and the Gaza Strip and portions of the West Bank to the PA/Hamas.

was particularly useful in campaigning against the Occupation. During the two intifadas (Arab uprisings), photographs of young boys armed with only a slingshot or a handful of stones standing opposite an armed soldier or an Israeli tank became iconic images that are still used against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

If Herzl can be credited with founding the Jewish state, he can also be credited with unwittingly giving birth to Palestinian nationalism, which remained fairly subdued under *Arab occupation* between 1948 and 1967 (Bickerton and Klausner 2002:151). And, it is equally true that the 1967 War provided the platform for Palestinian nationalism to mature into an international movement. Ironically, while control of the West Bank and Gaza served as an illustration of Israeli resolve and power, it also created a new dynamic that would irrevocably alter the course of history in the region (Ashrāwī 1995:19). This new dynamic would come to be known as The Occupation, and would not only intractably intertwine the lives of Israelis and Palestinians, but also become the driving force of Palestinian nationalism.

La Guardia (2002:125) expresses the sentiments of many Israelis (e.g., Zertal and Eldar 2007; Grossman et al. 2003) when he described the “. . . conquest of territory . . .” as “. . . a poisoned chalice.” Ellison (1991:115) clearly explains that while controlling these territories was a symbol of superiority it also became the source of increased conflict:

. . . this acquisition represented a great triumph for the little nation, it later proved to be a millstone about her neck – and monstrous weight which her adversaries would use in an attempt to throw her into the sea. The occupied territories proved to be an ideal bone of contention for the Arabs, leading to further conflicts that would dwarf even the monumental battles of Israel's first twenty years of nationhood.

Plainly stated, The Occupation became the accelerant that fueled the growth of Palestinian nationalism.

2.5.3 Palestinian Nationalism

Palestinian nationalism is described by Schanzer (2008:7) as “. . . an ideology of the Palestinian people to create a state with permanent and recognized borders.” While this is an accurate description, it does not go far enough. When Palestinians speak of a state they have in mind a specific location, “historic Palestine” (Ashrāwī 1995:10), which at a minimum should be understood to be the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as marked according to the 1949 armistice agreements. However, many Palestinians - for example, Aburish (1993) and Saïd (1979) - think in terms of the West Bank, Gaza, *and* all of what is today Israel.

In either case, though, Palestinian nationalism is focused on eliminating the Occupation and establishing a modern nation-state, which as described above, has, to some degree, been accomplished. However, to most Palestinians, the existence of Area C (and in the mind of not a few Palestinians, Area B) and the lack of free movement across international borders to/from Gaza and the West Bank is evidence that the Occupation still exists and thus, remains a frustration and insult.

2.5.3.1 The Martyr

Nationalism is a powerful force that has affected Palestinians in surprising ways. One of those ways is of being a *shaheed* (شهيد),⁴³ a martyr. La Guardia (2002:145) helps our understanding by contrasting the Israeli warrior-hero with the Palestinian martyr hero:

For all the years of armed struggle, Palestinians have few, if any, military heroes in the usual sense of the word. Their history is not one of proud victories, but of heroic failures. There are no Dayans, Rabins, or Sharons for a movement that has not won a conventional battle or liberated any Palestinian territory by force of arms . . . there are no men of obvious military prowess among the Palestinian leadership. Palestinians see

⁴³ Shaheed is the English transliteration of the Arabic word commonly used to mean martyr. It is alternatively spelled shaheed and shahid in the literature.

themselves not, like the Israelis, as a nation of extraordinary fighters, but as a nation of martyrs.

The cultural and social value of the Palestinian martyr is evidenced by their mention in the introduction to the Palestinian Basic Law (Abbas 2009): “. . . the Palestinian people witnessed thousands of their precious children sacrificed as martyrs, . . . in order to achieve their people’s clear national rights to establish an independent Palestinian state . . .”

The self-sacrificing martyr has been the way the Palestinians have been able to strike back at their stronger enemy and earn honor in what is an otherwise shameful situation. The most common way to become a martyr is by dying while *resisting* the Israeli forces as many young boys and teenagers have done, even without any real hope of succeeding to defeat the Zionists. These young boys and teenagers usually only succeed in pestering the Israeli soldiers or embarrassing them by not backing down and causing the soldiers to lower their weapons so as not to shoot unarmed youth, particularly in front of international media. However, there are more than a few occasions when Palestinians succeeded at becoming a martyr by being killed, accidentally or intentionally, by Israeli forces.

2.5.3.2. The Suicide Bomber

Berko (2009) describes another form of martyrdom, the suicide bomber, in her book *Path to Paradise*. In her study she reveals two motivations for suicide bombers, both related to this study. The first is motivation to cleanse oneself or one’s family of shame. Many women volunteer or are pressured by family members (husbands or fathers, typically) in order to restore honor to their families; honor that has presumably been harmed by the woman. Many Palestinians, like Respondent Thirteen who volunteered to be a *shaheeda* (شهيدة)⁴⁴ but was subsequently dismissed from the program, view suicide bombing as a win/win scenario in that family honor can be restored and the

⁴⁴ Shaheeda is the feminine form of shaheed, the Arabic word meaning martyr.

Zionist enemy can be struck at the same time, which suggests a second motivation for suicide bombers: nationalist ideology. Bennet (2002) reports on the first successful Palestinian female suicide bomber, twenty-eight-year-old Wafa Idris, and after wondering about her motives, he eventually adds, “. . . interviews with those who knew her suggest that Ms. Idris was motivated more by nationalist fervor than by religion. She was a Muslim but not particularly religious, they said.”

2.5.3.3. Liberation Theology

An additional way that Palestinian Nationalism is expressed is through liberation theology, which focuses on the sameness and unity of Palestinian Muslims and Christians for the purpose of “. . . liberation from a particular situation of injustice,” namely Zionist oppression and injustice (Sabeel 2008). Weiner (2005:24) suggests that in some cases Palestinian Nationalism forces a type of cognitive dissonance when “. . . some members of the Christian clergy with Palestinian nationalist aspirations . . . deny the persecution of their community.” An example of this is Jerusalem Latin Patriarchate representative Father Labib Kobtl, who suggests that any claims that Christians are suffering under the Palestinian Authority are, “. . . mere propaganda against Islam.” In his report, *Human Rights of Christians in Palestinian Society*, Weiner provides several other examples of West Bank Christian leaders denying PA abuse of Christians. These denials can only be explained as the result of a commitment to Palestinian Nationalism, which has placed resistance to the Occupation above the rights or well being of Christians living under the PA.

Another example of one who places Palestinian unity above the Christian community is Dr. Atallah Hanna (1998), the Archimandrite of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, who discounts any suggestion that Christians suffer under the Palestinian Authority: “. . . we are a united people - having a shared culture and history. Arab Christians and Muslims are bound together by a common set of social behavioral and moral norms. . . . At this crucial time of nation-building:

laying the foundations and infrastructure of a healthy local economy, the need to defend the Palestinian Authority against this charge [of abuse against Christians] is clear.”

The motivations for Palestinian Nationalism, which have been outlined above - an innate desire for identity, the growth of Arab nationalism and the birth of Zionism - are understandable and should be considered in preparation of an evangelistic model for the West Bank.

Zionism is a sensitive subject and a source of anger throughout the Arab world. But because of the personal nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict for the West Bank Palestinians, Palestinian Nationalism reflects a sensitivity regarding Israel that is perhaps greater than what is evident in any of the other Arab nations. The most obvious way that Palestinian Nationalism affects evangelism in the West Bank is that it creates suspicion among Palestinians toward Western Christians who are assumed to be *Zionist Christians*, which of course, puts the Palestinian on the defensive at the outset. Recognizing this dynamic, Palestinian Evangelicals have recently engaged in a proactive effort to demonstrate Palestinian Nationalism without jettisoning their own evangelical commitments.

2.5.3.4 Christ at the Checkpoint

Christ at the Checkpoint is a biennial conference organized by Bethlehem Bible College that proclaims an evangelical Christian Palestinian nationalism. In other words, it is a Palestinian Evangelical response to the Occupation. While acknowledging that not all the speakers represent the exact thoughts of the evangelical community of the West Bank, my gatekeepers said the basic premise of the conference does accurately represent them.

The basic premise of the conference is found in the group’s manifesto (see *Christ at the Checkpoint Manifesto*). The conference organizers believe that the Church has the primary responsibility of being “. . . salt in the region, if there is to be hope in the midst of conflict,” and that “All forms of violence must be refuted unequivocally.” They recognize Israel’s right to exist, but also maintain claims to

their own state in the Palestinian Territories: “For Palestinian Christians, the occupation is the core issue of the conflict.” Frustrated with what they think has been overwhelming global evangelical disregard for their hardships, the organizers say that the “. . . real injustices taking place in the Palestinian territories and the suffering of the Palestinian people can no longer be ignored.” In contrast to other approaches to resisting the Occupation, and reflective of their evangelical faith, supporters of Christ at the Checkpoint require that, “Any challenge of the injustices taking place in the Holy Land must be done in Christian love.”

2.6 Summary of West Bank Culture

The existence and influence of the Palestinian Arab identity within the population of the West Bank must be recognized. This identity includes primary use of the Arabic language, a shared historical identity, as well as common values and traditions. The fear inducing influence of Islam is pervasive and permeates most aspects of life through its influence upon the governing bodies and social norms. This culture of fear is intertwined with the traditional Arab honor/shame worldview and has tremendous influence on life in the West Bank. Finally, Palestinian Nationalism is the other major influence on the culture. It is expressed through both violent and peaceful means with the intent of creating an internationally recognized Palestinian State.

3 Literature Review

The focus of this study requires a survey of conversion literature from three angles. First, consideration is given to the body of literature that attempts to understand conversion as a sociological phenomenon, which appears to have been weighted more by the social sciences than by the religious academies - at least since the early Twentieth Century.⁴⁵ The latter tends to emphasize conversion as a theological construct.

Second, the sociological literature review is followed by a presentation of my conversion theory.

Finally, evangelistic methodology literature, which has been, with certain exceptions, the primary focus of mission specialists will be surveyed. This methodological section will focus on literature that discusses evangelistic methodologies related to Muslim conversions to evangelical Christianity, a very small portion of which considers this conversion experience specifically in the West Bank. The limit of location-specific literature will necessitate a general approach to the methodological literature followed by possible direct applications appropriate to the context of this study.

3.1 Sociological Studies vs. Theological Studies

In the body of conversion literature, there has been historically a clear divide between evangelical theologians and social scientists (Pargament 1996:215), and even among social scientists themselves in terms of what is actually occurring when a person converts (Heirich 1977:653). McKnight (2007:71) frames this divide by suggesting that “conversion can be studied from above (theologically) and from below (sociologically).”

Evangelicals, typically studying *from above*, have focused their attention primarily on the theological framework of conversion based on two assumptions:

⁴⁵ McKnight (1998:24) suggests that this has changed in recent years, so much so that “integrating the two [social sciences and biblical studies] no longer needs serious defense.”

1) humans have a need for salvation that they can not meet themselves, and 2) God works supernaturally in the world to accomplish salvation. In this paradigm, because Evangelicals “see salvation as primarily the restoration of an individual’s relationship with God” (Parushev 2007:353), the focus is on man’s separation from God as a result of sin, man’s resultant need for salvation, and thus the need for evangelistic missions through which God works to bring people to faith. The Apostle Paul provides this emphasis in Romans 10:13-15 (NKJV):

For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?

In contrast, social scientists, characteristically studying conversion *from below*, are interested in understanding how and why people move from one social group to another and the resulting theories typically attempt to explain conversion - religious or otherwise - in natural terms, usually with little or no regard for either altruistic or supernatural considerations. Maruna, Wilson and Curran (2006) illustrate this commitment to natural explanations in their study of prison conversions in the United States and Britain. In spite of the fact that many of their respondents “attributed their conversion experience to deep, private reading of the Bible” (167), the authors concluded that conversion to Christianity “offered a clear and socially acceptable path out of this state of identity crisis” and “can be seen as an adaptive mechanism that helped to resolve psychological conflict” (174). In other words, conversion simply served as a pragmatic way for the inmates to cleanse themselves of the shame of their crimes, and any suggestion that conversion was related to a genuinely held belief was absent from the authors’ conclusion.

This reductionistic framing of religious conversion to “social forces or psychological urges” (McKnight 2002:49) fails to consider the genuine belief of the convert and is a demonstrably insufficient explanation when applied more broadly beyond prisoner conversion. For example, it is common for those who convert to what are considered deviant religions (e.g., Muslims converting to

Christianity) to actually forfeit an honorable reputation in exchange for one of shame as a result of their conversion. This reality - conversion creating shame rather than eliminating shame - is not only the opposite of the conclusion of Maruna, Wilson and Curran, but important to this specific study.

Another shortcoming of this particular theory is discovered when the authors suggest that the new “social identity of the born-again Christian also provides one with membership into a well-established community outside of the prison that welcomes the new convert into the larger fold” (175). This conclusion is based on the assumption that the convert has contact with a Christian community outside their immediate context of incarceration, which may or may not be the case for any specific prisoner. When this assumption is applied to a broader context (e.g., a Muslim cultural context), the convert from Islam to Christianity is likely to be isolated from well-established communities outside their context due to geographical or societal disconnect, or possibly through self-imposed isolation due to fear of their conversion to Christianity being discovered.

The above objections have been offered specifically toward Maruna, Wilson and Curran, but they are accurate to the broader body of social science conversion literature as well. These objections raise questions about the value of trying to understand religious conversion without consideration of the genuinely held beliefs of the convert.

The frustration that some evangelicals have with the various social science theories of conversion – e.g., thought reform or mind control (Schwartz and Kaslow 1979), social networks (Lofland and Stark 1965) narrative identity change (Maruna et al. 2006) or personal accomplishment (Straus 1979), etc. - centers on the realization that the standard naturalist presuppositions of social science result in a fundamental inability to understand evangelicals because it seems to reduce conversion to social determinism (McKnight 2002:48).

If the chasm between social science and theology is so wide, how can it be bridged? Though I am not convinced the gap between evangelical theologians

and social scientists has been narrowed as much as McKnight is, or that in consideration of the genuine foundational differences (Pargament 1996) the two can or should try to close the gap altogether, McKnight (1998:24) describes how the two sides have come closer and suggests the need for each side to allow the other to offer what they can toward a more complete understanding of the phenomenon of conversion:

At one time biblical scholars protested the presence of sociologists at dinner; we assigned them to a different house. Then we began to peer through their windows. Then we asked them to stand at our windows and listen in on our conversations. But today they frequently host our banquets. More important, theologians have long spoken of conversion with flash and spark but with little knowledge of what was inside the fireworks. At times, sociologists explain the chemical reaction; it is left to the biblical theologians to announce the spark and declare the boom. Today the discussion unites around a common table of interests.

Pargament (1996) suggests that psychologists “have much to gain by learning about, learning from, and working with the religious world in the effort to promote mental health” (215). Although he recognizes foundational differences between social science and religion, he does demonstrate an attempt to understand the other side: “From the religious perspective, the sacred is a goal in itself, one that cannot be reduced to other psychological or social ends” (232). Gooren (2007) recognizes “the typical social science bias of tending to reduce religion to social-economic or psychological factors” (348), and in developing his *Conversion Career* theory suggests that ignoring “what people believe in (i.e., beliefs and doctrine)” (348) undermines an accurate understanding of their conversion and how religious groups compete to recruit others.

Rainer’s (2001) decidedly evangelical sociological study of *recently unchurched* Americans sought to discover motivations and influences on the choice of church affiliation.⁴⁶ It revealed the value his respondents placed on

⁴⁶ Rainer’s study is not strictly about conversion according to an evangelical perspective of conversion, though new converts were among the respondents. It sought to understand what influenced and motivated people who did not attend church to begin attending church. Some of the respondents made the change via religious conversion, others via a change of mind about church attendance. It is included here to illustrate an evangelical study that incorporates some

belief as pertaining to both doctrinal content and personal certitude (125-137): “doctrine is the content of belief; certitude is the conviction of belief” (131). Rainer’s respondents placed a high value on *really* believing the doctrine of their particular church as a reason for choosing that church.

In spite of some important fundamental differences between social science and theology, it is important to recognize that religious “conversion does not occur in a social or psychological vacuum. Instead, conversion occurs in a complex, multifaceted environment that can be better understood only by taking into account the perspective of several disciplines” (Paloutzian et al. 1999:1071). Below, I present a blended theory of conversion that incorporates social science considerations without jettisoning my own theological underpinnings.

3.1.1 McKnight’s Blended Theory of Conversion

Belief in conversion unites all Christians; the experience of conversion, however, divides the same Christians into a myriad of groups.

Scot McKnight (2002:1)

McKnight is discouraged by what he believes is division in the church that has resulted from a lack of acceptance for the diversity of conversion experiences that have been reported as well as the different approaches to conversion that exist within “the major movements of the Christian faith” (2002:1). He suggests that this problem is the result of insisting on a *one-size-fits-all* approach to understanding the conversion experience, or trying to force all conversions to happen the same way, which is primarily a sociological frame, not a theological one.

In his proposed theory, which rests solidly on Rambo (1993), McKnight proposes a multi-angled view of conversion that he believes is sufficiently broad to envelop the various types of conversion stories.

sociological considerations in order to understand a religious phenomenon.

3.1.1.1 A Survey of McKnight's Conversion Theory

Like Rambo's, McKnight's proposal (2002) suggests three conversion orientations, or types: Socialization, Liturgical, and Personal Decision.

Within each of these orientations, McKnight recognizes six dimensions that are present in the conversion process: context, crisis, quest, encounter, commitment, and consequences. Here, McKnight makes an important distinction between Rambo's theory and his own: Whereas Rambo's process theory of conversion posits seven *stages* of conversion (context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences), McKnight's theory describes these stages as *dimensions*. McKnight's modification is based on a concern that using the word *stage* "leaves one with the feeling of a deterministic march from earth to heaven" (49), when in reality these dimensions, though present in the process of conversion, are not necessarily sequential (e.g., consequences may occur prior to conversion, particularly in an anti-Christian context). McKnight also deviates from Rambo in the specific collection of dimensions by combining *encounter* and *interaction*, thus reducing his count of dimensions to a total of six.

3.1.1.1.1 Conversion Orientation

Conversion orientation is the broad category or typology that McKnight uses to classify the variety of Christian conversion experiences. Each orientation has specific characteristics, which seem to make it a denominational prototype. In addition to their specific characteristics, each orientation also has "its own inherent potential problems" (12), as well as positive attributes, which are discussed below. However, before outlining the distinguishing characteristics of each orientation, I should note two important points of agreement shared among the three.

The first explains the extent of God's love toward people, even those outside the faith. McKnight (2002:12) notes that in spite of the clear differences between

the three orientations, “each of these views unambiguously affirms that God loves each person and that God meets each person wherever he or she is.”

The second point of agreement regards faith and conversion. Concerned that some mistakenly believe, according to his description of socialization and liturgical conversions, that faith can be (or altogether is) unnecessary for conversion, McKnight makes this clarification (2002:8):

I have chosen for both of these descriptions to minimize personal faith but not because it is absent. The third orientation to conversion [personal decision] . . . too often trumpets this accusation unfairly and inaccurately, so I need to make the presence of faith in these two orientations clear. There is no more reason to believe that “socialized converts” or “liturgical converts” have no faith than to believe that those who are raised with a focus on personal decision possess a genuine faith. Faith can’t be forced, guaranteed, or controlled - it comes in mysterious ways and through diverse channels. My experience shows that it is present in each of these orientations.

3.1.1.1.1 Socialization

The socialization orientation describes those who became Christians “by being nurtured under the sacred umbrella of a particular church” (McKnight 2002:5). These converts were raised in a church environment. The members of their family - immediate and often extended - were members of the church, perhaps for generations. Socialized converts typically have no memory of ever not being a part of the church. Often their experience includes being baptized into the church as infants, going through catechism and confirmation, followed by public participation in the Eucharist. These converts have attended church and been identified with that community – with varying degrees of regularity and intensity – all of their lives. McKnight describes these converts as those who “grow up in the faith and often do the same with their children” (5).

Growing up in an environment where one hears God’s word taught is a wonderful blessing, but where is the conversion? This question and similar others (e.g., “When did you become a Christian?” or “Are you born again?” or “When were you saved?”) frustrate McKnight because he believes such questions make

no sense to socialized converts (6). Furthermore, he suggests these types of questions reveal the enquirer's experiential preference and "apparent triumphalism and cocksure convictions," which is a turnoff to socialized converts (6). His frustration notwithstanding, McKnight offers this explanation (5):

This sacred umbrella was the primary force shaping the Christian conversion, and many have no comprehension of a time and date on which they became a Christian. The process of becoming a Christian for such persons is imperceptible yet palpable, like this soft-step dance of evening shadows . . . These conversions involve a series of gentle nods of the soul."

In other words, consistent exposure to their church's Christian culture, which includes the teaching, preaching, worship, and social identification of that church, brings the convert slowly and imperceptibly to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

The most positive attribute of the socialization orientation is the consistent exposure and identification with the faith from a young age, particularly in the context of a family unit:

Socialization integrates the child naturally into the faith of his or her parents while it also seems frequently to align that same child with a cultural expression of Christianity - and few can contest the impact a cultural expression of Christianity has. The emphasis in socialization conversion on family and community cannot be eliminated without doing damage to the corporate form of Christianity. (McKnight 2002:14)

In certain ways the socialization orientation represents the ideal: families growing in the faith together with children being instructed in the faith from an early age. This certainly seems to be the tenor of Scripture. In the Old Testament, just prior to the Jews crossing the Jordan into Canaan, parents were commanded to consistently and repeatedly instruct their children in the things of the Lord, to live in an environment of instruction in the words of the Lord:

Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your

children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth. (Deut 11:18-21 NKJV)

The wisdom literature similarly encourages parents to, “[t]rain up a child in the way he should go, . . . (Prov 22:6 NKJV). Joshua demonstrated the family unit of faith when he included his household in his declaration of fidelity to the Lord: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15 NKJV).

The New Testament places no less emphasis on passing along the faith by raising children in a godly, nurturing environment. While the following references are not necessarily suggestive of “church membership,” the principle is present and, in addition to the believing home, the church is a good place to get lifetime instruction in the faith. The Apostle Paul warned fathers about provoking their children to wrath and encouraged them instead to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4 NKJV). Paul recognized and commended the multi-generational faith exemplified in Timothy’s family and was stirred to pray for Timothy “when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Tim 1:5 NKJV). Two chapters later, Paul supported the idea that children can come to faith when exposed to the Holy Scriptures from childhood: “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:14-15 NKJV).

Even though the socialization orientation possibly represents an ideal environment to convert, there is an inherent danger. McKnight warns that socialized converts may lack sufficient personal integration of the faith. There is a risk that the socialized convert who “does not remember ever not being a Christian” may fail to exercise personal faith and instead depend on the vicarious faith of others or depend on church membership for salvation (12). Paul warned the members of the church of Corinth that all who identify as Christians need to “Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you

not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Cor 13:5 NKJV).

3.1.1.1.2 Liturgical

Similar to the socialization orientation but with definite differences, the liturgical orientation emphasizes “what the priest is authorized to accomplish for the benefit of the parishioner” (McKnight 2002:7). McKnight explains that the liturgical orientation places great value on the rites performed by the priest:

Thus, baptism assures a purification from original sin and entrance by proxy into the church; catechism is official enlightenment into the special teaching of the church; confirmation is an authorized and divinely anointed blessing from God securing that convert’s passage into God’s kingdom; the Eucharist profoundly enables the grace of God to be received with all its glories and blessings; and continued participation in the church secures, maintains, and promises eternal blessing (7).

According to McKnight, the positive attribute of the liturgical orientation is that it generates rituals and symbols or rites, “which are a part of the human need to express faith in physical form” (13).

The inherent danger in this type of conversion is the same as for the socialization orientation: Depending solely on the rights performed by the priest may result in a failure to exercise personal faith. Therefore, Paul’s warning to the members of the church at Corinth to examine their own conversion in 2 Corinthians 13:5 is equally appropriate for liturgical converts.

McKnight discusses the challenge of finding the liturgical orientation to conversion in the gospel record. While he suggests the liturgical orientation is evident in “John the Baptist calling people to baptism in the Jordan (Luke 3:1-22), [in] Jesus’ probable baptism of others (cf, John 3:22), or [in] the ‘first Eucharist’ (Mark 14:12-26),” he concedes that “there is no record of any follower of Jesus being baptized (even if it probably happened) or of a convert expressing faith and then going to ‘first Eucharist’” (2002:39).

3.1.1.1.1.3 Personal Decision

The personal decision orientation “emphasizes the importance of personal faith” of the convert, which some call “born-again Christianity”⁴⁷ (McKnight 2002:9). The emphasis on personal faith “concentrates on individual responsibility before God” (9) and suggests the necessity of a personal decision to “trust Jesus,” or to “ask Jesus into your heart,” or to “be saved.” This decision is commonly time-stamped and used to mark the moment of conversion. In an effort to emphasize the need to *personally* believe evangelicals have commonly incorporated the use of a slogan: “God doesn’t have any grandchildren, only children.” Balmer (2010), an Episcopal priest who was raised in an evangelical church, describes the use and intention of this slogan:⁴⁸

But one of the mottos of evangelical Christianity (the faith that [Franklin] Graham espouses) is that “God has no grandchildren.” I heard that refrain many, many times as I was growing up within evangelicalism in the 1950s and 1960s. The purpose of that statement was to impress upon young people in particular, but everyone in general, that a person’s religious identity is derived from claiming the faith for himself and was not ascribed by birth.

McKnight accurately describes this orientation’s emphasis on the decision:

These “decision converts” may or may not have been raised in the church, may even have been baptized as infants, perhaps were exposed to the doctrines of the church through “catechism” or an “instructional class,” but were not considered an acceptable Christian until they “made their decision for Christ.” And neither did they consider themselves Christians (at all) until they made that decision. (9)

Proponents of the personal decision orientation believe this position is grounded in both the Old and New Testaments as they see multiple examples of people being exhorted to make a decision. For example, decision is found in the words of Moses as he lays before the people the option to choose life and good or death and evil (Deut 30:15). Such a choice is predicated upon a decision. As

⁴⁷ The phrase “born again” is derived from John 3:3. See 3.1.2.1.1.1 below.

⁴⁸ For other examples, see Steve Ham (2011) “God has no grandchildren” and Michael Pearl (2008) “God doesn’t have any grandchildren.”

mentioned above, Joshua made a decision that he and his family would serve the Lord, and he exhorted Israel to make a decision as to whom they would serve, the gods from the other side of the river or the LORD (Josh 24:15). On Mount Carmel, Elijah offered the people a similar choice, which was predicated upon deciding who is God: “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD *is* God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kgs 18:21 NKJV).

In the New Testament, Paul gave a lengthy appeal to Agrippa to believe, yet, faced with a decision to believe or not, Agrippa said, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28 NKJV).

The positive attribute of this orientation is personal responsibility. Every person is exhorted to actually believe the gospel and not depend upon the faith of others, church membership, or personal works.

McKnight warns of some dangers that decision converts face. Perhaps primary for McKnight is the tendency to denigrate (or not validate) the conversion experience of the socialized and liturgical orientations, which he says happens “in part because of ignorance, in part because personal-decision converts supposed incorrectly that liturgy or socialization implies *impersonal* involvement, and in part because of the all-too-human desire for each of us to make others undergo our personal experience” (9, emphasis original). McKnight also suggests that in the decision orientation “not enough attention is given to either liturgy, sacrament, or church” and that “the emphasis on personal conversion can lead too easily to individualism . . . or to worship of the moment of conversion” (12).

Below in 3.1.3, these orientations are further discussed in terms of their practical applicability in the specific cultural context of this research. With the three conversion orientations described, I now survey the six dimensions that McKnight recognizes in each of the orientations.

3.1.1.1.2 Conversion Dimensions

McKnight's conversion dimensions (along with Rambo's stages) are the sociological elements that exist within the conversion experience. Rambo identifies them as stages, but McKnight fears this term suggests sequence in which "some people begin to see 'consequences' even before they have consciously made a 'commitment,' and some are still 'questing' and 'interacting' even after the commitment" (McKnight 2002:49).

McKnight's six conversion dimensions are described and analyzed below.

3.1.1.1.2.1 Context

"Converts are not isolated islands in the ocean of human experience. Instead, they are involved in a complex set of relationships we call *context*."

(McKnight 2002:59, emphasis original)

These relationships involve not only family and friends but also social constructs (e.g. individualism vs. communalism, male/female roles, nationalism vs. globalism, etc.) and the resulting expectations and ideals, whether implied or stated.

Gratian (1983) described context as ". . . multifaceted, embracing the political, social, economic, and religious domain in which a person is living" (157). Rambo (1993) is more succinct: context ". . . is the total environment in which conversion transpires" (20).

Rambo continues to explain the influence of context on conversion: "Context shapes the nature, structure, and process of conversion" because the context influences, among other things, how communication occurs, establishes the "range of religious options available," and how accessible people are to the advocate (see 3.1.1.1.2.4 Encounter) and the advocate to the people (20).

McKnight and Rambo both subdivide context into macro and micro as follows:

Macrocontext: “The Big Picture”

. . . refers to the total environment, including such elements as political systems, religious organizations, relevant ecological considerations, transnational corporations, and economic systems. These forces can either facilitate or obstruct conversion, and may have individual impacts as well as broad, societal ones. (Rambo 1993:21–22)

Microcontext: “The Local Setting”

. . . is the more immediate world of a person’s family, friends, ethnic group, religious community, and neighborhood. These immediate influences play an important role in the creation of a sense of identity and belonging and in shaping a person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. (Rambo 1993:22)

It is important to note that there is also overlap between the two categories: there is bi-directional influence as the environment influences the individual and the environment is, in turn, influenced by the individual.

3.1.1.1.2.2 Crisis

For a person to be open to, or susceptible to, a conversion experience, a crisis of some kind is almost always present - and that crisis can be fundamental to the person’s existence or relatively mild.

(McKnight 2002:66)

McKnight emphasizes that crisis does not always mean “. . . major traumatic experience” (67). “The crisis might be nothing more than a gentle nod of the soul, while walking in the park or commuting on the bus even if its implications are far-reaching” (67). It may come in the natural queries of teenagers like Sara and Lina who “. . . were ‘nominal Muslims’ and paid no attention to religion until they were around the age of fifteen, when they began to have existential questions about life, the self, and the universe” (Leman et al. 2010).

McKnight summarizes Rambo’s helpful list of ten catalysts for crisis that accompany conversion (67-68):

1. Some convert because of a mystical experience;
2. Some have near-death experiences;
3. Others find their way to conversion because of illnesses and the need of healing;
4. Conversions frequently occur to those who are in a crisis because of a general dissatisfaction with life;
5. Conversions are sometimes connected to a desire for transcendence;
6. Some find release from a crisis or an experience of an altered state;
7. Scholars today are aware that some persons have a “protean selfhood” that is quite capable, and in need, of conversion(s);
8. Some convert to the Christian faith because of the crisis resulting from a pathological condition and, by converting, resolve fundamental tensions or find fulfillment;
9. Apostasy can create a crisis and lead to conversion as a form of compensation;
10. Crisis can be generated by external factors (politics, international issues, encounter with the charismatic figure, tragedy and the family).

While this list illustrates a variety of crises, Rambo says “Two basic types of crisis are important to the conversion process: crises that call into question one’s fundamental orientation to life, and crises that in and of themselves are rather mild but are the proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back” (46).

3.1.1.1.2.3 Quest

The notion of quest begins with the assumption that people seek to maximize meaning and purpose in life, to erase ignorance, and to resolve inconsistency.

(Rambo 1993:53)

The quest is directly related to the crisis, for it is the pursuit of a solution to a problem or crisis. It may or may not begin as a religious pursuit. And, like the crisis, the quest exists on a continuum between mild to severe. “We need not think of a person, head down, braving the winds of spiritual opposition because the quest, too, can be of an aggressive or gentle determination,” says McKnight (2002:74-75).

3.1.1.1.2.4 Encounter

The encounter includes two related elements: an advocate and the encounter itself. In order for conversion to occur, the potential convert must encounter or be exposed to the new alternative. This is accomplished through an advocate who advocates on behalf of the new alternative.

In a religious context, the advocate is likely assumed to be a missionary or member of the clergy. However, that need not be the case. It is also likely assumed that the advocate is necessarily searching for others to convert. That also need not be the case, though often is the case. The advocate may be a professional or non-professional, active or passive, aggressive or docile. In some cases, the advocate is non-human: Bibles, gospel tracts, videos, and websites are all examples of inanimate objects that can function as advocates. Whether human or inanimate, McKnight says that advocates have only one necessary feature: “. . . for dynamic communication to take place, and for conversion to follow, the advocate *must correlate substantially* with the convert and his or her world” (84, emphasis original). The advocate must be able to *connect* with the potential convert.

Many factors influence the advocate’s ability to correlate substantially with a potential convert. Rambo (1993) lists five⁴⁹:

1. *Secular attributes*. These are social and cultural distinctions, like “ethnicity, class, and economic background” that will “influence many of his or her attitudes and strategies” (69).
2. *Religious beliefs*. Theological understandings and organizational structures influence the advocate’s view of the potential convert as well as the ways (i.e., methodologies) an advocate can engage a potential convert.

⁴⁹ For this list Rambo depends on T. O. Beidelman. See Thomas O. Beidelman, “Social theory and the study of Christian missions in Africa.” 1974; “Contradictions between the sacred and secular life: the Church missionary Society in Ukaguru, Tanzania, East Africa, 1876–1914,” 1981; and *Colonial Evangelism*, 1982.

3. *Theory of conversion.* The advocate's particular theory of conversion influences the advocate's choice of methodology and style of advocacy.
4. *Career patterns.* The advocate's career path (i.e., organizational affiliation and assignment) may influence the advocate's availability and specific activities of advocacy.
5. *Inducements to conversion.* The advocate's use of inducements will be directly influenced by the religious beliefs and theory of conversion. Inducements are those benefits that advocates are able to offer the potential convert. These benefits may be offered as a *quid pro quo* (e.g., "I will give you this if you convert"), as a cause and effect (e.g., "If you convert you will receive eternal life"), or as a demonstration of the advocate's better quality of life, presumably because of his/her affiliation with the particular religion being advocated (e.g., "We build hospitals and schools and develop infrastructure because of our Christian worldview"). The inducements are not necessarily tangible goods or necessarily attainable in this life (e.g., money, food, and clothing vs. heaven), though many times they are tangible.

Once the potential convert comes into contact with the advocate, the encounter ensues with an appeal, and like the advocate, the appeal can also be varied in substance and style. McKnight offers five types of appeals:

- 1) a cognitive appeal (a system of meaning),
- 2) an affective appeal (emotional gratification),
- 3) a pragmatic appeal (techniques for living),
- 4) a charismatic appeal (perceived or real satisfaction through a relationship to a leader), and
- 5) an appeal to power (social, cultural, or political control)" (2002:88-89).

3.1.1.1.2.5 Commitment

The commitment dimension is where conversion takes place. Here, is where a decision is made to turn “from one way of life to another” (McKnight 2002:98). The commitment may be a single decision or a series of decisions; it may be private or formal. The type or style of commitment usually is dictated by the guidelines of the receiving community.

McKnight says (98), “Commitment involves decision, surrender, and testimony”:

1. Decision. “Commitment of Jesus climaxes a decision-making process of the individual before God” (98).
2. Surrender. The process of accepting the requirements of entrance and continued existence in the receiving community is called surrender. Some consider this a giving-up of self to the control of others. In some cases the process of surrender may result in an emotional struggle. In other cases, the surrender may be nearly imperceptible because the convert is convinced of the validity of the new community’s claims.
3. Witness. “A convert’s witness essentially is the expression of one’s autobiography that divides life into pre-and post-conversion days. It functions to define that person’s identity as a convert to the Christian faith” (99).

3.1.1.1.2.6 Consequences

The dimension of consequences gives consideration primarily to the aftereffects of conversion. However it is possible that a potential convert will experience consequences as result of considering conversion. These pre-conversion consequences may include criticism, rejection, or attempts to persuade them against conversion.

When considering post conversion consequences, “Two aspects of the changes to converts are especially important: 1) the behavioral and identity

expectations of the religious group into which the converts are entering, and 2) the behaviors and stories of the converts themselves” (McKnight 2002:103).

3.1.1.2 A Review of McKnight’s Theory

McKnight’s theory contains two major category components. First, it recognizes three conversion orientations that sometimes overlap: socialization, liturgical, and personal decision. They may also be identified as styles or types.

Socialization includes those conversions that were the result of being raised in the context of a church community where the convert imperceptibly moved from unbelief to belief. Liturgical conversions are those that are directly connected to the rights performed by clergy in the church through which the convert moved imperceptibly from unbelief to belief. The personal decision orientation includes those conversions resulting from a personal decision to believe or trust in Jesus. The first two are often characterized by the statement, “I don’t remember ever not being a Christian,” while the latter typically marks a decisive moment, sometimes to the very day a person became a Christian.

Second, McKnight identifies six dimensions found within each of the three orientations listed above. The dimensions are, 1) context, 2) crisis, 3) quest, 4) encounter, 5) commitment, and 6) consequences. This list is not necessarily sequential, though often the dimensions do occur sequentially.⁵⁰

Context indicates the totality of the environment and its influences upon the potential convert’s worldview and understanding of self.

Crisis is an (emotional, physical, or psychological) event, whether large or small, or traumatic or gentle that causes the potential convert to reconsider the viability of their current worldview or understanding of reality or situation in life.

⁵⁰ In different contexts various sequences may occur. For example, the encounter may create the crisis or consequence may result from the quest. Examples like these will be seen below in the findings report.

As a result of crisis, the potential convert begins a *quest* to find resolution to the crisis.

Encounter occurs when the potential convert is engaged by an advocate while questing for a possible solution to their crisis. The advocate represents a new group to the quester (i.e., potential convert) who considers changing religious or relational affiliations.

Conversion happens when the potential convert commits to the new group, and thereby becomes a member.

Finally, those things that occur internally, externally, and metaphysically to the convert as a result of the conversion are labeled *consequences*.

3.1.2 A Nuanced Approach to McKnight's Theory: My Emphasis

This study utilizes McKnight's (2002) theory of conversion as a theoretical framework of conversion. McKnight's theory stands firmly on the shoulders of Rambo (1993) whose *Understanding Religious Conversion* is, according to McKnight, ". . . the most complete study of conversion in the last century" (49).

In this study, I propose that it is possible to utilize the McKnight theory of conversion without jettisoning the *emphasis* of my own supernatural presuppositions, which results in a nuanced approach to McKnight's theory of conversion. My nuanced use of McKnight's theory narrows the focus from conversion as a sociological phenomenon with certain religious applications to conversion from Islam to Christian faith, particularly within an evangelical context.

McKnight makes an important clarification regarding his use of social science language in the context of religious conversion: "I do not intend to override the convert's conviction that it is God who is working in his or her life. Nor do I intend to wipe out the mystery of the religious experience in spiritual awareness. We are looking at conversion from a different angle" (2002:59). This clarification from McKnight is understandable and appreciated. However, my own theological convictions and presuppositions require that I *highlight* both "the convert's

conviction that it is God who is working in his or her life” and “the mystery of religious experience in spiritual awareness.” This will result in my use of his categories to analyze my respondents’ testimonies of conversion, but with an emphasis on the convert’s understanding of supernatural involvement in their own story.

Furthermore, this study is not solely about conversion; it also is a consideration of demonstrably effective methodologies used to advocate for conversion to an evangelical Christianity. Thus, the framework of the project further limits my consideration of conversion.

3.1.2.1 A Natural-Supernatural Dichotomy

My supernatural presupposition is expressed well by Gaiser (1992) who says that a “. . . fundamental biblical observation [is] that God is active in human affairs . . .” (96). The basis for my presupposition of a supernatural dynamic in conversion that utilizes sociological, psychological and emotional issues to bring unbelievers to faith in Jesus is grounded in the New Testament. Furthermore, I believe that true conversion is a supernatural act that results from one placing faith in Jesus Christ based on a belief that the gospel is actually true.

My theory is in contrast to those social science theories that reject conversion as a supernatural act, and instead conclude that sociological, psychological, and/or emotional issues alone are the catalyst for conversion because of *natural* self-interest on the part of the convert. Social science theories typically see conversion as a utilitarian act to achieve self-interest without consideration of the truthfulness of the claims of the new group or that the convert may actually believe the message and give higher priority to the truthfulness of the message than to any perceived benefits.

My presupposition of a supernatural dynamic in conversion is grounded in the overall tenor of the Bible (both Old⁵¹ and New Testaments), but I will illustrate it

⁵¹ A small set of examples from the Old Testament includes the following: 1) Jonah’s

through two New Testament texts: John 3 and Matthew 16. In these two narratives, Jesus introduces the supernatural, or the spiritual realm, within the context of conversion.

3.1.2.1.1 John 3:1-21, Jesus meets Nicodemus at night

In his nighttime discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus used three statements that indicate a natural/supernatural dichotomy.⁵² These statements are found in John 3:3, 8, and 12.

3.1.2.1.1.1 John 3:3, “Unless one is born again . . .”

In his first statement, Jesus was not simply persuading Nicodemus of the existence of the natural and supernatural worlds; Nicodemus and other members of the Sanhedrin (Pentecost 1981:123) already recognized the contrast between natural and supernatural (Jn 3:2 NKJV): “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God . . .” In this encounter, “. . . the earliest of His one-on-one evangelistic encounters recorded in the Gospels,” (MacArthur 1988:37) Jesus was taking Nicodemus a step further. He was grounding *conversion* within the tension of a natural/supernatural dichotomy.

Jesus told Nicodemus, a Pharisee quite familiar with religion and Kingdom of God language, that it was necessary to be *born again* in order to see the Kingdom of God. This metaphor confused Nicodemus, who thought Jesus meant it was necessary to enter the womb a second time. Clearly, Nicodemus’ confusion was the result of his understanding that birth was limited to the natural

repentant statement in Jonah 2:9 (NKJV) that “Salvation is of the Lord.” The book as a whole illustrates the supernatural element as it describes God’s call upon Jonah to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh, as well as God’s intervention when Jonah was disobedient to God’s call. 2) Exodus 14:13 describes Moses’ command to the people to “stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD,” which was followed by the LORD causing “the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night.” 3) The Psalms also contain many examples of the supernatural dynamic in conversion. In Psalm 79:9 (NKJV), the Psalmist cries out “Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name’s sake.” Again, in Psalm 85:7 (NKJV), the Psalmist makes this same connection: “Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation.”

⁵² This dichotomy can also be identified as natural/spiritual, earthly/heavenly or flesh/spirit.

world alone. Therefore, Jesus clarified his point by giving a “. . . sharp contrast between flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*), [...] to remind Nicodemus of the crudity of his question in 3:4 about a second physical birth” (Robertson 1982:46): “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3:6 NKJV). Blum (1983:281) clearly summarizes the traditional evangelical understanding of this contrast, which is based on Jesus’ explanation: “There are two distinct realms: one is of fallen man (the flesh) and the other is of God (the Spirit). A fallen person cannot regenerate himself; he needs a divine operation. Only God’s Holy Spirit can regenerate a human spirit.”

3.1.2.1.1.2 John 3:8, “The wind blows where it wishes”

After Jesus established that conversion is a supernatural event, he used a natural/supernatural analogy for further clarification and emphasis: “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:7-8 NKJV). Jesus very cleverly used the natural phenomenon of wind to illustrate the supernatural phenomenon of conversion. The wind is not visible in the natural world but has visible effects, just as the invisible Spirit’s works are visible. This understanding of conversion as a supernatural phenomenon that occurs in the natural world is in contrast to those theories that suggest conversion is simply a convert’s pragmatic effort to change their circumstances.

The word play of the Greek text is not immediately obvious in English, but the Greek word πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) can be a referent for either wind or spirit. The interplay of natural and supernatural was not immediately understood by Nicodemus, which led Jesus to rebuke him for his inability to distinguish between earthly and heavenly things.

3.1.2.1.1.3 John 3:12, “How will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

Jesus' third and final statement in this context also indicates that both natural and supernatural elements coexist in the natural world (Jn 3:12 NKJV): “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” In this encounter with Nicodemus, early in Jesus' public ministry, Jesus clearly distinguished between the natural and supernatural paradigms. Interestingly, he did not present them as contrasting ideas separated by a large chasm. Rather, Jesus presented the natural and supernatural as contrasting ideas that are closely related, even coexisting in the world in which we live.

On another occasion, as Jesus was phasing into a period of private preparation of his disciples, he supported the same idea of the natural and supernatural worlds intersecting. This occurred in the report of Peter's great confession at Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16:13-17).

3.1.2.1.2 Matthew 16:13-17, Peter's Great Confession

As Jesus and the disciples arrived in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked the disciples whom people were saying that he was. The disciples answered with the various suggestions they had heard: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. In response to the incorrect identities offered by the people, Jesus asked a more pointed follow-up question specifically to the disciples: “But whom do you say that I am?” The only answer recorded is that of Peter, who said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). After commending Peter, Jesus added, “. . . for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (16:17). In other words, Peter did not arrive at his conclusion only by human reason. Rather, the conclusion was supernaturally revealed to Peter.

Although Jesus was not giving a long discourse on the realities and distinctions of the natural and supernatural worlds, his insertion of this concept at that moment clearly established his understanding of the coexistence of the natural and supernatural in his worldview, particularly as they relate to his identity and people believing in him.

Having demonstrated how Jesus informed his followers, and subsequently us, of a natural/supernatural dichotomy at work in the world, the important point to see and understand is the role that crises can play in leading individuals to a faith or belief-based conversion.

Life crisis is an important component in people making a decision to convert, both in traditional social science theories of conversion and my own. However, my theory is distinguished from those completely natural theories of conversion in that I am suggesting that crises are an instrument that God uses (i.e., supernatural involvement both in utilization and sometimes causality) to bring an unbeliever to the point of being exposed to the gospel, which subsequently leads to faith and conversion.

3.1.2.2 Crisis: The Intersection of the Natural and Supernatural

Crisis are personal; what is a crisis for one person may not be a crisis for another. And, while crises are colloquially associated with a particular level of severity in discomfort or as a “major traumatic experience” (McKnight 2002:67), I use it to mean any event or situation that results in a decisive turning point, *an eye-opening moment*. And in the context of conversion, a crisis is any event or situation, no matter how great or small, that gives a person pause or unsettles them in such a way that they come to consider their own standing before God.

This latter point – personal standing before God - is often not in mind in the initial stages of a crisis, but eventually comes into focus often by means of an advocate’s suggestion or simply the person realizing they are unable to control or manage the crisis. The crisis may come through an obvious event as illustrated by the death of Lazarus or it may come in subtle or not-so-subtle “existential

questions about life, the self, and the universe” (Leman et al. 2010) or through a “gentle nod of the soul” (McKnight 2002:67). Crises can be physical, emotional, psychological, or something other.

The following examples from the Gospel of John,⁵³ demonstrate how crises are instruments that Jesus used to bring people to a point of belief. In other words, crises are often the point at which the natural and supernatural intersect, which Woodberry described as “. . . the hand of God in the glove of human circumstances” (Larsen 2012:91).

3.1.2.2.1 John 4:46-52, Jesus heals the Nobleman’s son

In John 4:46-52, a Nobleman⁵⁴ had a crisis for which he sought relief. His son, who was in Capernaum, was sick, and the Nobleman apparently thought Jesus was the only source of help. After hearing that Jesus had returned to the region, the Nobleman sought him out in nearby Cana. Upon locating Jesus, the Nobleman “. . . implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death” (4:47 NKJV).

Up to this point in this narrative, there has been no mention of religion or conversion, only a life crisis from which the Nobleman sought relief. In response to the man’s request for aid for his dying son, Jesus introduced the issue of belief by protesting that without signs and wonders the people will not believe. When Jesus focused on believing, the man sensed that Jesus was refusing to help and implored Him once again to help (4:49 NKJV): “Sir, come down before my child dies!”

Mercifully, Jesus sent the man away with the promise that his son would live. On his return trip, the Nobleman’s servants met him with the good news that his

⁵³ This is not an exhaustive examination of all the gospel narratives that support my crisis theory. Rather, limiting the examples to those found in John’s gospel successfully grounds the theory in New Testament authority without becoming overwhelmingly large.

⁵⁴ βασιλικός (basilikos), only used in John 4:46, 49, is alternatively translated “royal official” as in the NIV and NASB, and “official” as in the ESV and RSV.

son, indeed, was alive! After enquiring of the hour of his son's recovery and realizing it was the same hour that Jesus had told him that his son lives, the Nobleman "believed and his whole household" (4:53).

By using this story, I want to establish a consistent pattern: Jesus uses the various life crises of individuals to bring them ultimately to believe in him as their Savior and Lord. Of great importance is the fact that the Gospel writers represent these people as being persuaded and believing something is actually true, acknowledging it is true, and then trusting in it, which is in contrast to those who suggest crisis conversions are only a utilitarian or pragmatic search for relief.

This latter point is evident in this story in that the Nobleman initially ". . . believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way" (Jn 4:50). At that point, the Nobleman had "instantaneous faith" (Robertson 1982:76) in the word that his son would live, but not salvific faith in Jesus. However, John concludes the story by reporting that after verifying that his son was healed at the time of Jesus' declaration, the Nobleman and his whole household believed in Jesus and were converted.

The conclusion that this latter reference to the Nobleman's belief was a conversion is based on three observations: First, John's ". . . absolute use of *pisteuō* [πιστεύω] as in [John] 1:7" (Robertson 1982:77) suggests the same outcome in 4:50 as that intended by the ministry of John the Baptist as mentioned earlier in 1:7, which was ". . . to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe."

Second, John's inclusion of a second reference to the Nobleman believing seems redundant and unnecessary unless it was in reference to something more than his original belief in the "word that Jesus spoke to him" regarding his son. This second belief is clearly in response to the persuasive effect of verifying Jesus' word regarding the healing of his son.

Third, in John's summation of this event he identifies this healing as the second *sign*⁵⁵ (4:53). This use of *sign* connects this event with those other *signs* that were recorded in the Gospel for the purpose of leading the reader to ". . . believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing [the reader] may have life in His name" (Jn 20:30-31).

These three points validate the conclusion that the Nobleman converted at the point of John's second mention of believing, and that conversion was initiated by an intersection of the natural and supernatural at the crisis of the son's illness.

3.1.2.2.2 John 9:1-41, Jesus heals the man who was born blind

In John 9:1-41, John tells of a man who was born blind. In that narrative, as Jesus and his disciples approached the blind man, the disciples wondered whose sin caused the man's blindness, his parents' or his. Jesus' answer very clearly makes the point that crises are tools that he uses as a point of intersection of the natural and supernatural: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (Jn 9:3 NKJV).

The works of God were revealed in the blind man when Jesus applied mud on the man's eyes and told him to go wash. The blind man obediently went to the pool of Siloam to wash his eyes, ". . . and came back seeing" (Jn 9:7 NKJV).

The middle part of the story focuses on the identity and means of the one who had given the blind man sight. Initially the man's neighbors asked how his eyes had been opened. His response was a simple, factual retelling of the event in which he identified Jesus as "a man" (Jn 9:11). This was his initial assessment of who healed his eyes, but he eventually moved well beyond that initial assessment. Through the stages of interrogation, the formerly blind man's understanding of Jesus' identity progressed in stages from "a man called Jesus"

⁵⁵ σημεῖον (*sēmeion*), is alternatively translated "miracle" in the KJV and "sign" in NKJV, NIV, ESV, NASB, and RSV. One of the themes John builds his Gospel around is a selection of specific miracles/signs with the intent of persuading his readers to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31). He admits that Jesus did more, but these specific miracles/signs were chosen with a purpose in mind.

(9:11) to “he is a prophet” (9:17) to “if this man were not from God” (9:33) to “Lord, I believe [in You, the son of God]” (9:38, 35),⁵⁶ which indicates his progressive understanding of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God.

Here, it is important to point out a few things that were not indicated in the above summary of the man’s conversion. First, this narrative demonstrates that the resolution of a crisis sometimes results in another crisis, which should give pause to those who see crisis conversion as a utilitarian, self-interest decision alone. In this story, John includes two related crises that resulted from a connection to Jesus.

The first crisis involves the blind man’s parents who limited their answers while being interrogated by the Pharisees about their son’s *alleged* healing because of fear of repercussion from the Pharisees (9:18-23). John highlighted this crisis by including an explanation of their careful responses to questions about their son’s ability to see: “His parents said these *things* because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed *that* He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue” (Jn 9:22 NKJV, italics original).

The second crisis that resulted from Jesus healing the blind man was like unto the first. After the formerly blind man refused to agree with the Pharisees’ assessment of Jesus, they cast him out of the synagogue (9:34).⁵⁷ In contrast to his parents’ *fear* of losing their community, this man *actually* lost his community. At that time, the community of Jesus believers was quite small and evolving from within the Jewish community in a way that would make it impossible to be described as a “well-established community” into which the man (or other

⁵⁶ The rendering of this confession is based on the totality of Jesus’ interrogation of the man, beginning in 9:35 and concluding in 9:38.

⁵⁷ Though 9:34 does not specify whether the man was excommunicated from the synagogue or simply cast from their presence, I present the former based on John’s explanation of the man’s parents’ fears in 9:22. In either case, the point is validated: the resolution of the blind man’s initial crisis resulted in another crisis.

converts) could find membership and a new “social identity” (see Maruna et al. 2006:174).

The second thing that should be noted is John’s and Jesus’ emphasis on the convert arriving at a genuine belief in the way John records the man’s stages of understanding Jesus’ identity until it reaches the climactic conclusion: “‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him” (Jn 9:38).

John’s point in selecting this story is not to illustrate how crisis conversion is simply an effort to find relief. Rather, his stated purpose in selecting this story is to lead his reader to the same *belief* that results in eternal life (20:30-31). Clearly, those in crisis often want resolution. My theory acknowledges that, but makes a further point: God uses and in some cases creates crises in the process of bringing people to a point of *right* belief and faith that results in conversion.⁵⁸

Note the parallels in this convert’s confession and that desired by John: In 9:35 Jesus asked the formerly blind man if he *believed* “. . . in the Son of God?” And after Jesus clarified his own identity as that of the Son of God, the man responded with a profession of his *belief* (“Lord, I believe!”) and “. . . he worshiped Him” (9:38). This could be restated as above: “Lord, I *believe* [in You, the son of God].”

In 20:30-31, John said that Jesus did many other signs, but he selected these specific signs that his reader “. . . may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that *believing* [they] may have life in His name” (NKJV).

Clearly, John selected this story for inclusion because it illustrates the element of belief in the conversion process and parallels his desire to lead his readers to the same belief.

⁵⁸ See a similar thought in Andreas J. Köstenberger (1999), *Encountering John*, 120: “. . . we may not always know the reason for someone’s – including our own – suffering, . . . the important thing is to maintain a humble, repentant attitude, and, like Jesus, to see instances of suffering around us as opportunities for the work of God to be displayed in people’s (or our) lives.”

3.1.2.2.3 John 11:1-44, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead

The third narrative from the Gospel of John that illustrates how Jesus' utilizes (and sometimes creates) crises in the process of conversion is the raising of Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11:1-44). While Jesus was ministering east of the Jordan River in Perea (Jn 10:40), he received word that his friend Lazarus had fallen ill. Jesus' reply to the news was similar to his answer to the disciples' question about the cause of the man's blindness in chapter 9: About Lazarus he said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (Jn 11:4 NKJV).

Instead of immediately making his way to Bethany, Jesus delayed his travel for two days, which might appear to be a strange and even cruel response to the news of Lazarus' condition (11:6). However, on the ascent from the Jordan Valley up to Bethany, an eastern suburb of Jerusalem, Jesus revealed to his disciples the motivation for his delay in traveling to Bethany: "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, *that you may believe*" (Jn 11:14-15 NKJV, emphasis added). The clear implication of this statement is that had Jesus been at Lazarus' side, Jesus would not have allowed Lazarus to die. Thus, Jesus' statement that he was *glad* that he was not there may seem cruel and uncaring. However, knowing what he alone knew was going to happen at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus explained to the disciples that he wanted to utilize this crisis to generate greater faith than they had at that moment (Robertson 1982:197).

The remainder of the narrative indicates that, in addition to the disciples, Jesus had in mind a number of other people as well. For Martha, the death of her brother and her private conversation with Jesus prior to Lazarus being raised provoked a ". . . confession of faith in words that outrank those of Peter in Mat 16:16" (Robertson 1982:200): "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (Jn 11:27 NKJV).

In his prayer just prior to calling Lazarus forth from the tomb, Jesus revealed another motive for his delay in coming to Bethany: “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *this*, that they may believe that You sent Me” (Jn 11:41-42 NKJV). At the time of this prayer, the stone had already been removed from the tomb, and though John did not record such a request, this prayer suggests that Jesus had already asked in the hearing of the crowd that his Father *in heaven* would grant the raising of Lazarus (Carson 1991:418; Robertson 1982:205).

After praying to his Father, Jesus commanded Lazarus to come forth (11:43) and Lazarus subsequently came forth, which resulted in Jesus’ desire for the onlookers being realized. For many of those who had come to mourn with Mary and Martha, *bewilderment* that Jesus, who had given sight to the blind, had allowed Lazarus to die (11:37) was turned to *belief* in him (11:45) when they saw Lazarus come forth.

My theory of conversion - that Jesus utilizes crisis as an intersection of the natural and supernatural for the purpose of bringing people to believe in him, which results in conversion - is firmly grounded in the New Testament. This third narrative supports this conclusion in the following ways: First, Jesus utilized crises - death, loss, sorrow, anger, and bewilderment - to lead people to belief. Furthermore, we see Jesus being a causal factor in the crisis for his greater purposes, which is perhaps more obvious here than any other miracle because Jesus contrived to make the crises greater by delaying his arrival until Lazarus had been dead four days (Köstenberger 1999:130). On two other similar occasions, Jesus raised the dead very quickly following their death: 1) the widow’s son (Lk 7:11-17) was raised on the same day he died, and 2) Jairus’ daughter (Mt 9:18-26, Mk 5:22-43, Lk 8:41-56) was raised certainly within a couple hours, and perhaps within an hour of her death.

Second, the natural and supernatural are present as Jesus introduces resurrection from the dead and calls on his Father in heaven.

Finally, John recorded this sign because, like the others mentioned above, it fits his purpose statement of leading one to believe Jesus is the son of God, as evidenced by Mary's confession (11:27) and the subsequent belief of many of those who witnessed Lazarus come forth (11:45).

The alert reader will notice that this miracle resulted in many believing, but not all. Some of the witnesses returned to Jerusalem and reported the event to the Pharisees (11:46), which resulted in a plot “. . . to put Him to death” (Jn 11:53 NKJV). Those people who walked away from Lazarus' empty tomb in unbelief require a further word.

3.1.2.3 A Further Word About Crises and Unbelief

Not all crises result in true conversion because true conversion does not occur without a living faith. Those who walked away from Lazarus' empty tomb without believing in Jesus' claims to be the Son of God, walked away unconverted.

While Jesus utilizes crises for the purpose of conversion as opportunities for people to consider their standing before God, they do not automatically result in conversion. The story of the rich young ruler (Mk 10:17-27) demonstrates this conclusion. After seeking to justify himself before the Lord, Jesus created a crisis by demanding that the young man sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. The end result was that the young man “. . . was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Mk 10:22).

Perhaps more importantly, Jesus explicitly says that people in crisis should examine their relationship with God. In Luke 13:1-5, a group of people told Jesus that Pilate had mingled the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. Interestingly, Jesus' answer was not focused on demanding social or racial justice. Instead, he told the people making the report that they should repent or, they too, would likewise perish. Jesus followed that response by mentioning eighteen people who had been killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. As he had done previously, Jesus once again warned his listeners that they should

repent, or likewise perish. So, while Jesus advocated for them to consider their spiritual condition, it is clear that the people were responsible to make the decision to actually do so.

Again, my theory does not suggest that all crises lead to faith. Rather, I propose that crises are events that unsettle an individual, and thus provide opportunity to reflect on their standing before God. And, provided the correct information (i.e., the gospel) is available to them, they have the opportunity to believe and be born again, which is true conversion.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that conversion is always for the benefit of the convert. The tension between my position and those theories that see conversion as only a utilitarian action is that I recognize that all people who convert (according to my use of the term) do so because they are convinced that to believe in Jesus is to believe in truth, and they often, but not always, do so with little or no regard for the other-than-spiritual consequences of such a belief. Again, as stated above, this is not to say that all converts begin their quest in search of spiritual answers. Instead, my theory recognizes without question that many people seek a solution to their crisis without any regard to spiritual considerations. However, my theory also posits that during their quest, the convert realizes a spiritual connection to the crisis and eventually comes to believe in Jesus. Ryle (1957:255-256) offers some helpful comments to this point:

We learn, thirdly, from this passage [John 4:43-54, regarding the healing of the Nobleman's son], what benefits affliction can confer on the soul. We read, that anxiety about a son led the nobleman to Christ, in order to obtain help in time of need. Once brought into Christ's company, he learned a lesson of priceless value: in the end, "he believed, and his whole household." All this, be it remembered, hinged upon the son's sickness. If the nobleman's son had never been ill, his father might have lived and died in his sins.

Affliction is one of God's medicines. By it He often teaches lessons which would be learned in no other way. By it He often draws souls away from sin and the world, which would otherwise have perished everlastingly. Health is a great blessing, but sanctified disease is a greater. Prosperity

and worldly comfort are what all naturally desire; but losses and crosses are far better for us, if they lead us to Christ. Thousands at the last day, will testify with David, and the nobleman before us, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." (Psa. Cxix 71.)

3.1.3 Application of the Blended Theory of Conversion

I will apply my blended theory in a Palestinian Arab Muslim majority context in the West Bank to examine the conversion stories of my respondents in an effort to discover effective evangelistic methodologies in this context.

Prior to any analysis it seems very likely that two of McKnight's three orientations will be completely impractical due to the particular context of this project. Both the *socialization orientation* and the *liturgical orientation* require exposure to a specific Christian environment for a conversion to occur. Without that specific Christian environment, it appears unlikely, if not impossible, for an individual to be sufficiently exposed to be nurtured into the faith or to sufficiently mark the liturgical acts performed by a member of the clergy to be converted. This limitation raises questions about the viability of either of these orientations in terms of evangelistic methodology beyond a decidedly Christian majority context.

The *personal decision orientation*, on the other hand, appears to have the most promising methodological implications within a non-Christian majority context.

Each of the conversion stories will be analyzed to determine which type of conversion it most closely examples. Also, each of the conversion stories will be examined against the six dimensions proposed by McKnight and how they may affect the effective communication of the gospel in this context.

Having surveyed the conversion literature and presented a theory of conversion, I will now turn to the methodological literature that is appropriate for the context of this study.

3.2 Methodological Literature

The previous section dealt with theoretical aspects of conversion, examining the sociological approach as well as presenting my own presuppositions and theory of conversion. This section deals with methodological considerations of conversion, focusing on specific evangelistic methods/strategies presented in the literature.

Though very little methodological literature specifically addresses Palestinian Muslims in Palestine, a broader body of methodological literature addressing evangelism among Muslims is available. Here, I focus my attention on two works that will help provide the methodological context of my research.

First, because evangelism occurs through a process of communication or interaction between Christians and non-Christians and there are a variety of types of interaction, I survey Dr. Martin Accad's (2012:29-44) *Christian Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach*. This article helpfully categorizes a variety of interaction types and gives the proper context of the evangelistic works evaluated in my research.

Second, I utilize *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues Among Muslims* (Woodberry 2008a). Concentrating on this volume locates my thesis in the most similar methodological research context because *Seed to Fruit* also uses an inductive research method to discover effective evangelistic methods among Muslims, though not specifically Palestinians in the West Bank.

3.2.1 Accad's Spectrum of Christian-Muslim Interaction

While Accad's SEKAM Spectrum of Christian-Muslim Interaction is a helpful and general framework from which we can gain a fairly holistic view of interaction types, there are certain limitations to its effectiveness. The limitation of this method of survey and evaluation is that Accad's categories are intended to be general descriptions that help frame the discussion while allowing for overlap

between categories, and all commentators would not agree on every detail or description provided by Accad or me. Nevertheless, I think his categories and descriptions are sufficiently accurate and detailed to be helpful in ordering a review of Christian-Muslim interaction types.

Rightly concerned about the nature of dialogue between Christians and Muslims as it exists today, Accad has created a helpful five-point spectrum to identify or categorize different types of dialogue/interaction that occur between Christians and Muslims. This framework will be utilized below to distinguish the various evangelistic approaches that fall within the category of methodological literature.

The SEKAP Spectrum of Christian-Muslim Interaction has five categories labeled D1, D2, D3, D4, and D5 (see Figure 6). Because “dialogue has often become a dirty word that insinuates either syncretism or polemics” (29), Accad uses those two types, D1 and D5, to

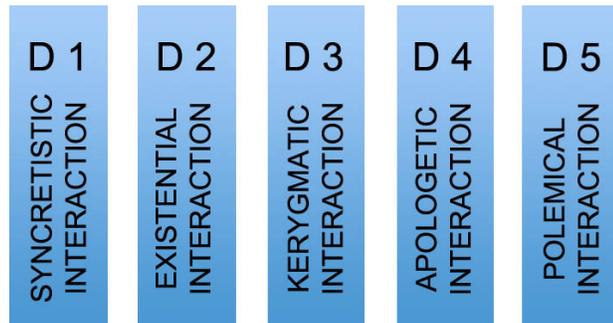


Figure 6 - *The SEKAP Spectrum of Christian Muslim Dialogue.* (Accad 2012:32)

represent the most extreme positions on either end of his spectrum. In Accad’s overall scheme he sees two sets of contrasting dialogue types (i.e., D1 vs. D5 and D2 vs. D4), while suggesting a *middle position*, D3, as the better and potentially the “most fruitful [approach to inter-religious dialogue] for Christ’s gospel as good news,” as well as the “most conducive to peace in our age of great conflicts” (37).

Accad’s five dialogue types D1) Syncretistic Interaction, D2) Existential Interaction, D3) Kerygmatic Interaction, D4) Apologetic Interaction, and D5) Polemical Interaction, are summarized below in the order he presents them, which preserves his preferred approach, D3, for last.

3.2.1.1 D1 - Syncretistic Interaction

Syncretistic Interaction (D1) recognizes all religions as being equal. Though this approach may view all religions “as a potential obstacle to peace between individuals, communities, and eventually between nations,” it also recognizes the positive contribution of religions, particularly in “the moral standards that they can instill in individuals within their societies” (33).

Accad suggests that from a Christian perspective “. . . syncretistic interaction is carried out with the purpose of inviting Muslims to be a positive part of a multicultural and multi-religious universal humanity in all of its rich plurality” (33). This approach relativizes religious differences by “dialoguing primarily about social, economic, and political topics, without necessarily requiring any deep knowledge of Islam”(33), and thus demonstrates itself to be a basically secular approach to religious dialogue. Syncretistic interaction has no interest in and sees no need for non-Christians to convert to Christian beliefs.

Accad did not offer examples of those engaging in D1, which can make his point more difficult to understand. Based on the organization’s own words, which are publically accessible, it is accurate to offer the international organization Religions for Peace as an example of a group of adherents of various religious affiliations who engage in syncretistic interactions. The *About* page on the Religions for Peace website describes the organization this way (Vendley 2013, italics original):

Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world’s great religions dedicated to promoting peace.

Respecting religious differences while celebrating our common humanity, *Religions for Peace* is active on every continent and in some of the most troubled areas of the world, creating multi-religious partnerships to confront our most dire issues: stopping war, ending poverty, and protecting the earth.

I generally agree with Accad’s assessment that syncretistic interaction is an essentially secular approach to religious dialogue that is typically uninterested in

causing conversion when used for the advancement of social or political issues. However, the risk of syncretism is a growing concern in evangelical missionary circles as demonstrated by the title of Schmidt's (2013) article "How Much Syncretism Is Allowed?"

3.2.1.2 D2 - Existential Interaction

Existential Interaction (D2) is focused on existential rather than rational concerns. Accad uses the term existential "in a non-technical and non-philosophical sense, as it pertains to human existence" (35). For example, "How can adherents of both Christianity and Islam live better side by side? How can they acquire the level of tolerance that will promote peace rather than conflict among them? How can we build a better society for the future, which respects pluralism and diversity?" (35).

Proponents of existential interaction believe that "goodness and morality are the essence of all religions" (35). And, because this approach allows for a divine role in the emergence of religions, it accepts that "Islam is a religion that originated from God, but like all religions, it underwent many human influences as well" (35). Furthermore, according to Accad, the existential interaction approach does not believe that Jesus Christ is necessarily the only way to God and salvation, therefore, "Muslims who have been faithful Muslims will be saved" (35).

This approach typically is utilized "in order to encourage mutual social and religious understanding and tolerance between Christian and Muslim communities" (35) and focuses on social economic and political issues, "affirming common ground and avoiding divisive issues" (35). Because existential interaction recognizes a relative equality among religions and focuses on social issues, similar to D1, it does not seek the conversion of non-Christians to Christian beliefs. It seems that most of the non-evangelical Christians in the West Bank have adopted major elements of this approach to Christian-Muslim relations, particularly when their focus is Palestinian Nationalism.

The remaining spectra, D3-D5, are more properly considered evangelistic approaches or at least include evangelistic elements and thus will be considered in more detail than either D1 or D2.

3.2.1.3 D4 - Apologetic Interaction

Apologetic Interaction (D4) contrasts with D1 and D2 in that it contends that there is “one ultimate truth: God,” a contention that, according to Accad, does not allow room for Islam, which it sees as “. . . a human phenomenon whose understanding of God is misleading, due to the fact that Muhammad himself was misled” (36-37).⁵⁹ According to Accad, D4 does not seek to understand or utilize what he calls the *positive aspects*⁶⁰ of Islam in order to work together toward a better society. Instead, interaction between proponents of D4 and Muslims is “. . . solely for the purpose of evangelism” (37). This approach seeks “. . . to demonstrate the truth of Christianity and to refute the validity of Islam.”⁶¹

Although Accad introduces D4 as being well attested in the New Testament as a method that is particularly used by the Apostles Paul and Peter to interact with non-believers (36), he also suggests that this approach has historically been used as a monologue approach to presenting what have become very standard and “sterile arguments that have been passed along over the centuries” (36). Because of this type of implementation – recycling “sterile arguments” - he seems to suggest such an approach is ineffective at best and illegitimate at worst because there are no new arguments being offered from either side. Of course, this argument disregards the possibility that any given argument may be new to a particular person. Even assuming all possible arguments for/against either side

⁵⁹ This description is according to Accad’s taxonomy. Others, particularly practitioners, may disagree with an element or nuance of this description.

⁶⁰ Accad does not define “positive aspects” here, but we can infer certain things from his description of the Kerygmatic Approach and his other articles, which will be done below.

⁶¹ Muslims often use this same method of engagement with Christians as well as the D5 Polemical Approach for the purpose of drawing them to Islam.

have been offered, it seems unlikely that every Muslim has been exposed to all of them.

In addition to his “there are no new arguments being offered” position, and perhaps more importantly, Accad believes D4 (and most certainly D5) tends to foster a negative attitude toward Muslims, which presents a serious challenge to Christians:

In the Christian church context, the attitude [toward Islam] is more often one of demonization. Christians have always advocated that we are to love sinners but hate sin. This is a moral distinction that is fairly easy to maintain, as it is accompanied by the notion that we are all sinners outside the grace of God. However, there is today a parallel notion, which is spreading alarmingly fast, that we are to love Muslims but hate Islam. This notion is disturbing, for it is a very short step from the demonization of Islam and Muslims altogether . . .

Your *view* of Islam will affect your *attitude* to Muslims. Your attitude will, in turn, influence your *approach* to Christian-Muslim interaction, and that *approach* will affect the ultimate *outcome* of your presence as a witness among Muslims. (Accad 2012:31, italics original)

That negative attitudes toward Muslims exist among some proponents of D4/D5 is without question. However, that either D4 or D5 is necessarily the cause of these attitudes needs to be better substantiated. I am aware of missionaries who have a great dislike, perhaps hatred, for Islam as a religious system, but who have great compassion for those they view as victims held captive by that system. Some of my respondents who were converted to Christ from Islam share these harsh feelings toward their former religion, but not necessarily their former co-religionists.

Public debate and apologetic arguments matched with private apologetics and polemics are very typical methods of D4 interaction. Accad’s description of D4 proponents using learned *arguments* and *counterarguments* gives the impression of two heavy weight boxers offering blow after blow to see who can cause the other to submit. While this pugilistic picture is no doubt accurate in certain cases, it need not be. As demonstrated by both Paul (Acts 26:28) and Peter (I Peter 3:15), a Christian should be able to present a rational apologetic

for the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ in an effort to persuade non-Christians to exercise faith in Christ without being mean or unnecessarily pugilistic. However, that does not mean passionate discourse is illegitimate; certainly, one can be passionate in their effort to persuade without being combative. The self-described Christian-Muslim dialogue website *Answering Islam* is possibly the most widely recognized English language, apologetic website designed to help Muslims understand the Christian faith and to help Christians be prepared to share their faith with Muslims. The articles and dialogue presented there are not, in my opinion, harsh and fit well within the context of D4. However, some observers would classify *Answering Islam* as an example of Polemical Interaction rather than Apologetic Interaction, which illustrates again the difficulty in drawing hard lines of distinction between the various categories.

3.2.1.4 D5 - Polemical Interaction

To the right of the Apologetic Interaction in Accad's taxonomy, is the *Polemical Interaction*, which, according to Accad, is a "seek and destroy" (33) approach to Christian-Muslim dialog. In this approach, each side "seeks to destroy and uproot the tenets of another in order to replace them with one's own" (33). Accad says, Christians who practice polemical interaction ". . . generally hold a triumphalist view of Christianity in total exclusion of other religions" (34). At this end of Accad's spectrum, "[a]ll other worldviews are seen as simply wrong and as having nothing good to offer to Christians through dialogue" and "Islam is viewed as an evil and a thorn in the flesh of Christianity" (34).

Winship (2008:194), a self-described former polemicist who converted to the Insider Movement, describes his former use of the kind of D5 approach that Accad dislikes: "Our missionary strategy was this: get a group of Muslims together, tell them that the Qur'an is from hell, that their prophet is not a prophet, that he's really a pedophile, and that he's deceived by Satan. After that we would invite them to come to church with us."

Accepting Winship's testimony at face value, I can say that I have never been exposed to such a harsh approach to Muslim evangelism in an Islamic context. While it is likely that some do approach their witness in that manner, it seems unlikely that very many do, and certainly not for an extended period of time. Rather, it seems more likely that Winship's original approach was more indicative of his lack of training to work in an Islamic context than illustrative of a *traditional* approach to evangelism in an Islamic context. Other portions of Winship's article also demonstrate that polemics is not exclusive to the traditional missionary practitioners upon whom he takes aim. In his case, he seems to have simply changed targets, switching from Muslims to Christians.

Accad's extremely negative description of D5 clearly demonstrates his distaste for this approach to Christian-Muslim interaction. However, in spite of potential negative outcomes (e.g., aggressive reaction from Muslims, inter-communal conflict, and the necessity of remaining secret believers), he concedes that it cannot be dismissed completely because ". . . many Muslims are won to Christianity" through the polemical approach and many of those former Muslims favor it (34). Additionally, he references a Coptic priest, Father Zakaria Botros,⁶² as an example of a polemicist that apparently has had great success at bringing Muslims to faith in Christ in spite of much "aggressive reaction" from the Muslim community (Accad 2012:34). Also acknowledging the effectiveness of Boutros' polemical approach, Stringer (2010:588) writes:

Coptic-Orthodox priest Zakaria, who speaks every day on satellite television in the Arab World and who is actually revealing very unflattering aspects of Muhammad's life from Islamic sources, has led *uncountable numbers* of Arab Muslims to Jesus Christ through his programs (emphasis added).

In spite of the apparent positive results of this approach, Accad fears the ". . . negative outcomes of this approach will probably mark religious communities in the Muslim world for decades" (34), and this fear has led him to propose what he deems a better way.

⁶² Boutros is a common alternative spelling.

3.2.1.5 D3 – The Kerygmatic Approach⁶³

Accad's proposed best approach is called the *Kerygmatic Approach* (D3) and is based on a "proclamation of God's good news concerning repentance, the kingdom, and Jesus" (37). He describes this approach as one that "relies entirely on the power of God's Spirit (1 Cor 2:4)" in contrast to those approaches that entice "through the use of wise human words" (37). The latter is presumably describing D4 and D5 and may demonstrate an overly broad and/or unfair bias against those approaches, depending on the particular practitioners.

Accad distinguishes his Spirit-dependent proclamation of the gospel from the apologetic defense of the gospel (i.e., D4 and perhaps D5) as ". . . the difference in attitude between an apologetic defense of one's beliefs on the one hand, and a positive proclamation of it on the other" (37). The end result, Accad says, is an approach to Christian-Muslim dialogue ". . . devoid of polemical aggressiveness, apologetic defensiveness, existential adaptiveness, or syncretistic elusiveness" (37). This projected outcome should not be interpreted as a declaration that any of the other approaches are *necessarily* wrong, says Accad, it simply reveals ". . . the nature of the *kerygma*: God's gracious and positive invitation of humanity into relationship with himself through Jesus" (37).

3.2.1.5.1 Kerygma and Ecclesiology

Though it appears that Accad wants to do so, the *Kerygmatic Approach* does not necessarily set itself apart from the *Apologetic* (D4) and *Polemical Approaches* (D5) in its main tenet, which can be summarized as *proclaim Christ not religion*, or "Christ-centered missiology" (Massey 2004:296). In fact, *proclaim Christ not religion*, appears to be a distinction without a difference when D4/D5 approaches are fairly assessed. Both D4 and D5 proponents describe their

⁶³ At the end of his chapter, Accad provides a benchmark test to determine the reader's attitude toward Islam and Muslims, which corresponds accordingly to his D1-D5 paradigm. For the sake of full disclosure, my test results revealed that I have a D4 attitude toward Islam and Muslims.

evangelistic efforts as calling people to place their faith in Christ and *not* in religion (Stringer 2010:588-591).

Although Accad never self-identifies as a proponent of *Insider Movements*, the tenet *proclaim Christ not religion* and his further description of D3 reflects much of the language and principles of the Insider Movement. Therefore, IM will be considered in conjunction with D3. I have no doubt that proponents of either D3 or IM will cry foul and say that they are different or that I have misunderstood a specific nuance or particular emphasis within their practice. I concede that D3 and IM are at points the same, at other points similar, and at still other points may be different. This can also be said by advocates of D4 and D5 in response to the description of them by proponents of other models. Here, I am interested in surveying the similarities of D3/IM, particularly as they apply to my specific research interest.

Both the Kerygmatic Approach and the *Insider Movement* appear to be grounded in an effort to disconnect Jesus from the Church or Jesus from religion (specifically Western forms of Christianity) or Jesus from the remainder of the New Testament. See, for example, Timmons' (2008:158) article *Christianity Isn't the Way – Jesus Is*:

So, now my focus and perpendicular learning curve have taken me to a simple understanding of Jesus and the Kingdom. I've spent so much time and energy unlearning a lot of my theological premises I received at graduate seminary while a student and professor. It's been a fresh look at Jesus and His message of the good news of the Kingdom. He only mentions "church" twice, yet we are all about building, preserving and uplifting the Church. *His message was not the Church, but all about the Kingdom* (emphasis added).

The D3 and IM application of "Christ-centered missiology" contrasts with that of D4 and D5 whose application of "Christ-centered missiology" suggests that,

Salvation in the New Testament means becoming attached to Jesus Christ and becoming involved in his transformative salvation by participating in the renewed community of believers, the Body of Christ. Salvation is described in terms of coming out of darkness and entering into the light. It entails a clean break with the past and a new beginning.

There must be a change and that change becomes visible in an allegiance to Jesus Christ *and his followers*. There is no Jesus without His body, the one new people of God. (Stringer 2010:591, italics original).

So, rather than indicate contrasting approaches to offering Christ rather than religion, the D3/IM methodology seems to reflect a different ecclesiology (DeYoung 2013).⁶⁴ In this regard, DeYoung asks some probing questions:

Proponents of the insider movement are quick to point out that insider believers belong to the church universal . . . and share in Christian fellowship with other insiders. And yet, doesn't the Bible understand the church in more robust terms than this? What about church officers, weekly preaching, the administration of the sacraments, membership, and church discipline? Are these all adiaphora? Doesn't Paul's missionary strategy and Jesus' Great Commission presuppose that believers will be gathered in visible, constituted churches?

IM proponent Rebecca Lewis (2007:75-76) is convinced that the New Testament “. . . also affirms an alternative church model, the *oikos* or household-based church, where families and their pre-existing relational networks *become* the church as the gospel spreads in their midst.” In these alternative models, she says, “Decisions to follow Christ are often more communal rather than individual (see NT examples in Acts: Cornelius, Lydia, Crispus, etc.)” and “the destruction of the families and the creation of semi-functional, extracted, new communities of believers-only is thereby avoided, and the gospel continues to flow along preserved relational pathways.” While acknowledging that these are not believers-only communities, Lewis suggests, “These believing families and their relational networks *are* valid local expressions of the Body of Christ, fulfilling all the ‘one another’ care seen in the book of Acts, and so they do not need to adopt the meeting and program structures common in Western aggregate churches.” In her explanation we see three things: 1) Lewis illustrates an anti-Western church disposition that is common among proponents of the IM, 2) she

⁶⁴ For a thorough analysis of the Insider Movement's ecclesiology see, Doug Coleman (2011), *A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives*, 194-245.

apparently rejects the necessity of regenerate church membership (Coleman 2011:226) and 3) she seems to suggest that “one-another care” is a sufficient ecclesiology.

Some advocates of IM also recognize the less than robust ecclesiology within their movement. For example, Higgins (2006:119) says, “Saying ‘yes’ to C-5⁶⁵ does not require a ‘no’ to church,” though he concedes that some IM proponents seem to think it does. He goes on to say, “some form of community of believers will need to take shape in an insider movement.” Also from within the ranks of the IM, Abdul Asad recognizes the validity of the critique regarding a less than robust expression of the church in the IM and offers the following constructive response (2009:141):

While fears of ‘Churchless Christianity’ are certainly valid in that MBB’s in C5 fellowships might seem to exist apart from the established church, we must remember that when C5 is practiced properly believers are indeed part of a church (in its barest form) in that they ‘meet regularly with other C5 believers’. In time, we should help them move toward a fuller expression of church.

Asad (2009:155-156) describes two variations of the C5 (or IM), which he labels Syncretistic C5 and Appropriate C5. Regarding ecclesiology he says that Syncretistic C5 has a low expression of church and *koinonia* [fellowship] is enough, thus “Churchless Christianity [is] a real danger because of [its] ambiguous goal for expression of church.” In contrast, he says that Appropriate C5 intentionally moves from “low expression to higher expression of church” because *ekklesia* is [the] goal, thus “Churchless Christianity [is] not likely because of [a] clear vision for C4/3 New Testament churches.”

While Asad’s distinctions do not completely alleviate the concerns of those who are principally against IM, they do demonstrate that some Insiders share the outsiders’ concern for ecclesiology within the IM.

⁶⁵ See John Travis (1998), “The C1 to C6 Spectrum.” C5 refers to a highly contextualized Christ-centered Community that is frequently equated with IM. The C-Spectrum is discussed more fully below.

The important theological difference between Accad's D3/IM and D4/D5 is not limited to ecclesiology, though. Kerygma's theology of religions not only is more generous toward Islam (and other religions) than D4/D5, but also is a driving force behind much of the methodology of D3/IM. In other words, their theology of religions permits or encourages their choices of methodology.

3.2.1.5.2 Kerygma and a Theology of Religions

Reflecting both his and IM's theology of religions,⁶⁶ Accad describes the kerygmatic Christ follower as one who believes that "God is the absolute truth," and is above religion, therefore, "no single religious system is infallible or completely satisfactory" (38). The kerygmatic Christ follower also recognizes that religions are "an essential part of the human psychological and sociological needs" and "that social organization is a natural phenomenon toward which we are all inclined," therefore, the "kerygmatic position and attitude does not consist in rejecting one's religious heritage" because "it would soon be replaced by another form of ideology" (38). Notice that this explanation makes no distinction between religions based on their sources and/or claims of revelation. Thus, it seems to suggest that all religions, or religious expressions, are equal and nothing more than sociological constructs.

"The principal difference between this position and the other positions on the dialogical spectrum," Accad says, "is that the conversation is removed entirely from the realm of institutionalized religious talk" (38). Unfortunately, Accad does not explain what "institutionalized religious talk" actually means, particularly as it applies to a proclamation of the kingdom of God. One might wonder, for example, where or how consideration of the *ekklesia* fits within the framework of a kerygmatic approach. Accad suggests that all topics - presumably topics like sin, atonement, salvation, and baptism, which could be construed as

⁶⁶ For a thorough analysis of the Insider Movement's theology of religion see, Doug Coleman (2011), *A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives*, 25-77.

institutionalized religious talk - are acceptable within his preferred approach, but only if certain *attitudinal* conditions are present: “This approach will not shy away from discussion forums on theological, doctrinal, social, cultural, and other issues. No topic is taboo, since a *respectful* exchange is prepared and assumed” (43, emphasis added). According to Accad, a respectful exchange is the result of a relationship of “respect and trust” (42), which lead to respectful dialogue based on a “. . . genuine desire to learn through a mutual exchange of perceptions about God and faith” (42-43). In other words, kerygmatic Christ followers demonstrate an attitude of openness and respect toward their Muslim counterparts, even when discussing difficult subjects, and are open to learn from them. This leaves one wondering: Can Islam provide theological truth to a follower of Christ that is not already available in the New Testament? This is a foundational question and is not meant to suggest that a particular Muslim could not teach a particular Christ follower anything about love or charity, for example. Instead, it goes to a deeper level, seeking to determine whether there is a distinction between what is claimed as divine revelation in the New Testament and what is claimed as divine revelation in the Qur’an. Here, it is helpful to see the outworking of the D3/IM theology of religion.

3.2.1.5.2.1 Kerygma and Islam

Because the D3 approach adopts a “. . . supra-religious approach to understanding and relating to God in Christ,” it sees Islam as “. . . an institutionalized religious phenomenon *par excellence* . . .” that successfully functions as a “. . . sociopolitical phenomenon dressed up in religious clothing” (39). Furthermore, without offering specifics, Accad says, “. . . the kerygmatic approach considers that Islam preserved many important and positive elements from the Judeo-Christian tradition . . .” while at the same time it “. . . also considers that Islam lacks many of the essential truths of God’s good news as revealed and proclaimed in and by Jesus Christ in the Gospels” (39).

This positive appraisal of Islam seems to suggest that the *problem* D3 has with Islam is not in what Islam teaches, but in what it does not teach. In contrast, D4 and D5 Christians typically believe the problem with Islam is not only that it lacks essential doctrines like the Trinity and Jesus' atoning death (i.e., crucifixion), but that it actively teaches against them as well. Recent scholarship (e.g., Reynolds 2009) suggesting that the traditional Islamic denial of the crucifixion is based on a misunderstanding of what the Qur'an actually says notwithstanding, proponents of D4/D5 have a large body of Islamic apologetics that evidence an Islamic denial of the crucifixion. For example, based on the Qur'anic verses 4:157-158, Yusuf Ali (1999:236) presented the traditional Islamic position when he wrote, "The Qur'anic teaching is that Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews" And, in his 1981 debate with Josh McDowell in Durban, South Africa, Ahmed Deedat (Deedat and McDowell 1981) was very adamant that Christ was not crucified:

"On the subject of crucifixion, the Muslim is told in no uncertain terms, in the Holy Qur'an, the last and final revelation of God, that they didn't kill Him, nor did they crucify Him. But it was made to appear to them so. And those who dispute therein, are full of doubts. They have no certain knowledge; they only follow conjecture, guesswork. For of a surety, they killed Him not."

3.2.1.5.2.2 Kerygma and Muhammad

The kerygmatic approach maintains that "Muhammad, Islam's messenger, believed that he received a genuine divine calling to be God's prophet to the Arabs" and "that he saw himself very much in the continuation of the Judeo-Christian prophetic line, whose mission was to turn his people away from idolatry and to the worship of the one God" (39). While acknowledging the sincerity of Muhammad's self-understanding and offering a positive appraisal of him, Accad stops short of recognizing Muhammad as a biblical-level prophet:

A kerygmatic approach believes in the finality of Jesus Christ, in whom the fullness of God's good news was revealed. But this needs not prevent us from admitting the greatness of Muhammad, and perceiving him, if not as a prophet, nonetheless as a *messenger*, a *rasūl*, who carried an important

divine message to his people, leading them away from polytheism and drawing them to the worship of the one God. (40, italics original)

From the D4 and D5 positions one must ask, even assuming that Muslims acknowledge the true and living God (and not all D4 and D5 advocates grant this assumption), does God accept worship other than through a relationship with Jesus Christ? And, if one cannot worship God except through Jesus Christ, his son, then in what ways are Muslims at an advantage over polytheists? An additional question is in what ways does Muhammad's sincerity regarding his self-understanding support the veracity of his self-understanding or claims that he was a prophet of God? Is it possible that he was sincerely mistaken?

3.2.1.5.2.3 Kerygma and the Qur'an

Though the kerygmatic approach's view of the Qur'an is less clear than its view of Islam and Muhammad, Accad's explanation says that D3 views the Qur'an primarily as Muhammad's ". . . genuine attempt to provide what he believed to be the essential elements of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures to his Arab people in a language they could understand" (40). While arguing that the earlier portions of the Qur'an reflect Muhammad's perception of his message to be ". . . a continuation of the Judeo-Christian tradition," Accad also says the later portions of the Qur'an reflect an effort by Muhammad to dissociate himself from the Judeo-Christian tradition," which was caused by disappointment with the way Jews and Christians rejected his message (41).

Perhaps a little more clear about the nature of the Qur'an than Accad, IM proponent Kevin Higgins says he ". . . believes Muhammad received 'direct inspiration' from God, although he is unsure which portions or verses should be classified as such" (Coleman 2011:121). Coleman summarizes Higgins' view of the Qur'an ". . . as a mixture of three elements: information Muhammad learned via oral traditions extant in his time (including those from Jewish and Christian sources); some direct, special revelation from God; and some of Muhammad's own thought." This view of the Qur'an, Coleman says, is consistent with Higgins' theology of religions, which proposes that ". . . God was actively involved in

placing ‘altars’ and ‘poets’ in the Qur’an as a means or [sic] preparing the way for the gospel.”

Altars and poets is a clear reference to Paul’s Acts 17 visit to Mars Hill, which is an IM apologetic for the use of Qur’an as a bridging tool (see, for example, Accad 1976:331).

Above I have surveyed Accad’s taxonomy of Christian-Muslim interaction, particularly as it relates to Christian evangelism toward Muslims. He correctly limits D3, D4, and D5 as those concerned about evangelism. Because he presented D3 more favorably than D4/D5, I offered some counter points or points for further consideration from those latter positions.

Determining which, if any, are the *best* approaches is beyond the scope of this thesis, therefore, I was intentional in providing only a survey of the positions in order to help locate the approaches used by the advocates mentioned in my research. Another helpful tool to this end is *From Seed to Fruit* to which I now turn my attention.

3.2.1 From Seed to Fruit

From Seed to Fruit is a compilation of the research results of the largest to date consultation of missionary practitioners among Muslims worldwide. Some “. . . 280 practitioners of thirty-seven nationalities and from fifty-six different organizations gathered” to evaluate a list of fruitful practices “. . . that had been gathered from surveys of 5,800 field workers” (Woodberry 2008b:viii).

In chapter two of *Seed to Fruit*, Liverman⁶⁷ (2008:21) acknowledges a shortcoming of evangelical efforts to reach Muslims with the gospel: “In spite of our best efforts, many have yet to hear the Gospel presented to them in a meaningful way – even once!” With this acknowledgement and his emphasis on the word “meaningful”, Liverman begins to frame the remainder of the

⁶⁷ Liverman’s chapter is an expansion of his article, “What Does it Mean to Engage a People,” MF, November-December 2006, 10-11, <http://tinyurl.com/bvdwv5k> (Accessed 12 APR 2013).

consultation report. The Seed to Fruit project was dedicated to discovering practices that effectively engage Muslims with the gospel in meaningful ways.

Definitions are important, thus Liverman explains what he means by effectively engaging a people (22ff.), which does not “. . . merely include ‘evangelistic activity.’ To consider a people to be engaged, there must be activity that is strategic and will most likely produce fruit that remains and multiplies” (22). He clarifies that “. . . engagement does not encompass the full cycle of church planting, but engagement does seek to establish a minimum benchmark that, when met, will help set the stage for thriving church planting and church-planting movements” (22). This clarification is helpful as it locates evangelism in the broader context (and goal) of church planting.

The focus of my project was discovering meaningful ways that Muslims are being effectively engaged with the gospel in the West Bank, and three of Liverman’s four criteria for determining whether engagement is effective were practiced to a greater or lesser degree by the advocates who engaged my respondents: 1) Apostolic Effort in Residence, 2) Commitment to Work in the Local Language and Culture, 3) Commitment to Long-Term Ministry, and 4) Sowing in a Manner Consistent with the Goal of Seeing a Church-Planting Movement (CPM) Emerge (23ff.).

While my advocates were interested and active in church planting, they did not see any evidence of a CPM emerging in the West Bank. Garrison (2004:2) says, “A Church Planting Movement is a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment.” Since none of my advocates had witnessed anything as described by Garrison, I will utilize only three of Liverman’s indicators to discuss the relevant parts of the *Seed to Fruit* report and other literature that are related to my research.

3.2.1.1 Apostolic Effort in Residence

Liverman describes the apostolic task as “. . . taking the gospel from where it is to where it is not” (23). In order to meet his criteria, he says, this needs to be done by “Gospel messengers [who] live among those upon whom their efforts are focused.” His emphasis on living among the people seems to eliminate short-term mission efforts, and this becomes more clear from his use of what might be considered pejorative terms when he quotes Ralph Winter who calls short-termers “amateur” or “drive-by” workers “. . . who blitz in and are gone in a few months” (23).

The majority of the advocates related to my research were living in the West Bank. However, the difficulty in drawing such distinct lines regarding residence is evidenced both in my findings and later in Liverman’s chapter. In the closing action points of his chapter, Liverman says (29),

We need to implement innovative strategies, while not abandoning proven missiological principles. Effective missions in the future will likely involve strategies such as the strategic use of the Internet and other technologies, the mobilizing of itinerant evangelists, and the utilization of “commuter apostles.”

Perhaps Liverman’s larger point could be better made with an acknowledgement that the body of Christ has many parts and that the parts function differently, but hopefully in unison (Rom 12:4-8 and I Cor 12:12-31). In other words, while it does appear that residence is helpful toward gospel advocacy – both in the *Seed to Fruit* findings and my own - there is no need to dismiss or denigrate the role of “commuter apostles” (or other short-termers) by describing them as “amateurs” or “drive-bys.”

3.2.1.2 Commitment to Work in the Local Language and Culture

This criterion gives consideration to contextualization. Register (2000:124-125) explains that contextualization “. . . is sharing of [the] gospel in such a way as to make it understandable and meaningful in the context, culture, and

language of the people we are trying to reach.” Liverman correctly observes that, “In order for the message of hope to be communicated effectively, it must be communicated in the language of the recipient culture” (23).

Living in the local language is widely accepted as an important step in crossing cultural gaps. However, while living in the local language may seem fairly self-evident, it may also be among the most controversial topics related to Muslim evangelism because the discussion and practice have moved well beyond whether one functions in the local language, though that is important. Now, the focus is asking to what degree one can use locally acceptable religious language and practice, which can mean things like new Bible translations or the utilization of a Muslim religious identity that has been infused with other meanings. Travis (2006:76) supports this conclusion when he says, “For a translation of the Bible to be meaningful to a particular faith community, it needs to take seriously both its language and *unique religious heritage*” (emphasis added).

Determining the appropriate level of consideration of non-Christian religious heritage that is necessary to adequately contextualize is both difficult and controversial. Liverman hints at the tension that surfaces when consideration is given to non-Christian religious heritage during Bible translation by explaining that effective communication “. . . requires the significant commitment and work necessary to acculturate oneself and one’s message to whatever degree possible (without falling into syncretism) in order to make the Gospel understandable and attractive in the recipient culture” (23). Syncretism is a concern among missiologists who are trying to determine how close an advocate may go in language and practice before they have crossed the line into syncretism.

Relative to my research, I address two areas of contextualization that are discussed heavily in the literature: Contextualization of the Bible and contextualization of self-identity.

3.2.1.2.1 Contextualization: The Bible

A major discussion among scholars relates to the kind of language that is appropriate for Bible translations for Muslim audiences. In broad terms, the translation discussion revolves around how much accommodation for Muslim religious and cultural sensitivities is necessary when translating the Bible into a local language or dialect.

The most sensitive and controversial issue in this discussion is how to handle familial terms, particularly the identification of Jesus as the “Son of God.”⁶⁸ Those unfamiliar with this discussion might be surprised that Muslims would be upset about referring to Jesus as the Son of God or that doing so could undermine one’s evangelistic efforts. While Brown (2007) suggests that many Muslims are open to the gospel, he also says that because of religio-cultural conditioning Muslims generally turn away once they encounter the phrase “Son of God.” He describes this type of encounter,

. . . which has recurred in history thousands of times in which a Christian develops a good relationship with a Muslim. They sometimes talk about spiritual things, and one day the Muslim asks the Christian for a Bible. The Christian lets his or her friend take a Bible home, and the Muslim reads it until he or she encounters the term “Son of God.” After that, he or she is no longer open to discussing Jesus with the Christian, and the relationship cools.

Abernathy (2010b:182) helpfully explains why “Son of God” is such a sensitive issue among Muslims: “[T]he Qur’an anathematizes the very idea that God could have a son, and devout Muslims state in prayer seventeen times a day that God did not procreate.” This complete rejection of the phrase “Son of God” is based on a Muslim misconception “. . . that Christians believe Jesus was God’s Son by procreation with Mary” (Piper 2012). Brown (2007) says that

⁶⁸ The challenge of contextualizing Bible terms is not limited to “Son of God.” Travis provides a list of other terms/phrases that should be considered when contextualizing. This list includes 1) the parts of the Bible like the Torah, Prophets, and the Gospels, 2) the names of the Bible characters, 3) the word “Lord” (*kurios* – κύριος), 4) the word “Allah”, 5) and Christian words like “Christian,” “Church,” and “baptism.” See John Travis (2006), “Producing and using meaningful translations of the Taurat, Zabur and Injil.” IJFM Sep-Oct, 72-77.

referencing Jesus in this way can make “. . . the Bible seem both unholy and untrustworthy . . .” to Muslims. Thus, in a sense, Muslims are pre-disposed to misunderstand and subsequently turn away once they encounter the term Son of God in relation to Jesus.

The reality of this negative reaction to a very common New Testament phrase raises the question of how to proceed. There are two primary suggestions. The first is well represented by Rick Brown (Brown 2000; Brown 2005a; Brown 2005b; Brown et al. 2009; Brown et al. 2011a; Brown et al. 2011b) who recommends using a synonym and then explaining the synonym in a footnote. For example (2005b:139), “. . . this means translating ‘Son of God’ as ‘Christ of God’ or ‘Christ sent from God’ in passages where that is the meaning . . . then providing explanations of the full intended meaning of these terms.” Travis has a similar suggestion (Travis 2006):

If there is a word in the local language that means son in a figurative or metaphorical sense that might be a good term to use. It seems, however, that few languages have such a “non-biological” term for son. If such a word does not exist, some translators contend that the title is theologically too heavy to touch and that we need to simply, woodenly, translate the words “Son of God” regardless of how it offends the sensibilities of a Muslim reader. Others have attempted (again, where there is no suitable word for the concept of non-biological son), to coin a term to help bring out the figurative or metaphorical dimension of the title, using phrases like “the Spiritual Son of God” or “the Beloved son who comes from God.”

According to Brown (2005b:143-144), the benefit of this approach is,

. . . in places where the meaning has been translated clearly [and explained with footnotes], many Muslims have been willing to read or listen to the Gospel and have responded to Jesus in a new way as their Lord and Savior, the divine Word of God incarnate as a man, who died for their sins, rose victorious from the grave, and reigns over all forevermore.

If Muslims have such a strong reaction toward the use of familial language, and some type of substitution is justified, how should one determine which phrases are suitable alternatives in a particular Muslim context? Gray and Gray (2008) suggest that Christian translators should seek the help of local Muslims in the production of “a translation of the bible [sic] that Muslims could call their own”

(2008:36). They explain that this strategy will provide “Muslim people groups with the best possible opportunity to engage with and be transformed by the Word of God” (2008:34).

Abernathy, Piper, and Houssney represent three of the many voices that oppose the above suggestion. Abernathy (2010a:328) explains that those who understand “Son of God” only as metaphorical limit themselves to two categories - metaphorical or physical/literal – and thus disregard a third possible category. To make his case, Abernathy references Bavinck (1972) and Murray (1982) and persuasively argues that “Son of God” belongs in a *metaphysical* category rather than a metaphorical one (2010a:330):

Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck said that when we refer to God as Father we are not using a metaphor, as though fatherhood is primarily an attribute of humanity, pertaining to God only in a secondary or derived sense. Rather, he says, the relation is reversed: “God is Father in the real and complete sense of the term.” His fatherhood pertains to his very eternal essence, and fatherhood on earth is but a dim reflection or shadow of God’s eternal fatherhood. The eternal character of God’s fatherhood then implies the eternal character of Christ’s divine sonship (Bavinck 1977:305, 307; Murray 1982:66).

“Consequently,” Abernathy continues,

. . . only God is father in the fullest sense; he was the first father. Bavinck goes on to conclude that whoever refuses to honor God as Father shows more disrespect toward him than the one who does not acknowledge him as creator. D. Kelly says that it is significant that both the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed mention the fatherhood of God before speaking of him as creator; that is, he was always Father, but he was not always creator (D. Kelly 2008:449).

So instead of seeing “Son of God” as a metaphor drawn from human experiences and relations, we should understand the phrase in terms of a prototype or archetype. This is an original pattern rooted in God’s eternal nature that was stamped upon humanity at the time of creation, giving humankind many, though not all, of those features of Christ’s own sonship (which, for humans, would include “daughtership” as well).

Abernathy suggests that translating around the “Son of God” controversy may cause one to miss the critical theological truth of the eternal Father-Son

relationship shared between the first and second persons of the Trinity. But Travis says that woodenly translating “Son of God” will offend the sensibilities of the Muslim reader and thus push them away from hearing the gospel. On the one hand, it is suggested that translating around “Son of God” will cause the reader to miss critical theological truth. On the other hand, it is suggested that translating “Son of God” literally will cause Muslims to refuse to hear the gospel at the outset. How should this dilemma be solved?

Piper (2012) addresses this contemporary debate by reflecting back some forty years to J. I. Packer’s (1973) comments on John 1. While acknowledging the good motives of those who seek “. . . to remove unnecessary stumbling blocks for Muslims” through translation, Piper pointedly says that translation has not historically been the solution to the problem of Jesus’ Sonship. Instead, he says (2012), “. . . the problem of ambiguity in Jesus’ Sonship has been solved by context and teaching, not translation.”

“What Packer contributes to the debate” says Piper, “is the observation that the apostle John already faced this ambiguity when he wrote his Gospel.” Summarizing Packer, Piper continues, “And he points out that the way John dealt with it was not by rejecting the terms Father and Son, but by making clear in the context what they mean.” In John’s day, “. . . the phrase ‘Son of God’ was tainted with misleading associations in the minds of his readers.” Many Jews understood the phrase as “. . . a title for the expected (human) Messiah,” while “Greek mythology told of many ‘sons of gods,’ supermen born of a union between God and the human woman” (Packer 1973:48, cited in Piper 2012). Rather than avoid the possible misunderstanding, John explains Jesus’ Sonship in the larger context of the prologue to his gospel (1:1-18). Packer (1973:48, cited in Piper 2012) says, “Nowhere in the New Testament is the nature and meaning of Jesus’s divine Sonship so clearly explained as here.”

Piper reveals his own theological commitment to the perspicuity of the Bible as he sums up his suggested approach:

J. I. Packer shows us that the potential misunderstanding of “Son of God” was there from the beginning. The remedy for it was not the rejection of the term. The remedy was the New Testament itself — in all its controversial and self-interpreting fullness.

Piper does not stop there. He argues for a holistic approach that includes the Bible, the advocate, and the command of Christ (2012): “In addition to context, there are teachers. The ascended Christ gave teachers to his church to explain things (Ephesians 4:11). And he sent us to the nations to proclaim and to teach (Matthew 28:20).”

Houssney, a Lebanese Christian scholar, helpfully addresses this topic with the reminder that the Bible is a spiritual book. While it does contain words and sentences and paragraphs like other books, Houssney says (2012), “The Apostle Paul recognized the non-cognitive element in the word of God when he stressed emphatically, ‘...our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction (1 Thessalonians 1:5).” He continues: “The author of Hebrews describes the Bible with these powerful words: ‘For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart’” (Hebrews 4:12).

Houssney also offers some instruction regarding translation theory based on his professional experience as a Bible translator. In contrast to those translators who stress “. . . starting from where people are,” Houssney stresses “the importance of communicating new concepts in new forms to avoid confusion in communication” (2012). He explains that among those translators who start where people are, “Bible terminology is selected from the repertoire of the recipient’s vocabulary” with the idea of bringing “. . . people from the familiar to the new.” However, in Houssney’s research of factors that affect attitude change he found “that familiarity is in fact a hindrance to change” (2012). “For transformation to occur,” Houssney says,

. . . the receiver needs to experience a change on three levels: cognitive, affective and behavioral. Cognitive change has to do with new information. The brain recognizes sharp differences more than similarities. Slight differences in information are decoded in the same area of the brain as the familiar information. For the brain to recognize differences the differences need to be stark.

Thus, Houssney concludes (2012):

A Quranic Style Bible will not be decoded appropriately by Muslims . . . For Muslims to truly understand the message of the Gospel, they need to receive it as a fresh and different message which is likely to prick them to the heart as the hearers of Peter on the day of Pentecost because they heard a shockingly new and different message about a resurrected savior, something that completely went against what they were familiar with.

Above I have surveyed two approaches to contextualizing the Bible that are being discussed in the methodological literature. The approach represented by Brown and Travis appears to be driven by a more pragmatic approach to eliminating a possible offense that can occur when a Muslim encounters the phrase “Son of God” or other familial terms. The approach represented by Abernathy, Piper and Houssney, appears to be more holistic as it is grounded in 1) theological concerns for the expressed Father-Son relationship that exists within the Trinity, 2) biblical precedent for using potentially difficult to understand phrases accompanied with in-context explanations such as is found in John 1:1-18, and 3) the supernatural nature of the Bible.

3.2.1.2.2 Contextualization: Self-Identity

Here, the discussion could be much broader than is necessary to provide context for this study. So, for the sake of clarity and brevity, I will limit this portion of my literature review to a summary of the discussion of the contextualization of a post-conversion self-identity, including both the *traditional* and *Insider* perspectives.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For a more complete analysis of post-conversion self-identity, see, J. Henry Wolfe (2011), *Insider Movements: an assessment of the viability of retaining socio-religious Insider identity in high-religious contexts*.

The degree to which a follower of Jesus should remain in their original socio-religious context and retain their original religious identity has become a very controversial topic among missiologists. The controversy stems from new models of ministry among Muslims that are primarily the result of a frustration with the historically low response to the gospel among Muslims and a desire to see greater response to the gospel. Dixon (2009:3) says, some of these models “. . . represent a sea change in mission theology,” which is disturbing to him and others who may be described as *traditional* in their approach. Two specific concerns raised by Dixon are 1) the models of ministry from which “. . . flow methods such as allowing converts to be both ‘Muslim’ and ‘Christian’ at the same time . . .” and 2) how “Some new Bible translations reconstruct the identity of Jesus in order to support these methods” (4).

On the other side, Travis and Travis (2005:15, emphasis added) recognize this *sea change* as well, but see it as something positive. “God is doing a *new* thing to reach these remaining [un-reached] nations (*ta ethne*) dominated by mega-faiths,” they say. The *new thing* is a far reaching contextualization that moves away from a Western individualism paradigm, which according to Lewis (2007:75), “. . . consists of gathering together individual believers (often former strangers) into new ‘communities’ of faith. . . .” In contrast, the new paradigm, sometimes identified as the Insider Movement is defined by Rebecca Lewis as:

. . . any movement to faith in Christ where a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible (2007:75)

Lewis emphasizes the retention of pre-existing communities, including family, religious, and social networks, which initially sounds reasonable. But practically, what does this mean? The linchpin in this paradigm, it seems, is the retention of the person’s original religious identity. Wolfe (2011:24-25) provides the rationale for this approach as he explains the complicated environment of high-religious contexts such as Muslim or Hindu dominant cultures:

The American mindset does not readily grasp the fusion of political, familial, and religious identities that results in an almost unassailable belief that to be Somali, Malay, or Moroccan is to be Muslim. Islamic religious forms, like Ramadan or Friday prayer, are not simply expressions of religious belief but a statement of community solidarity. Similarly, social forms, like weddings and harvest festivals, contain overt expressions of religious belief. When Hindus or Muslims refuse to participate in the social aspects of the religious forms, they effectively communicate dissolution of community, family, and even political ties.

At a basic level, Insider methodology seeks to remove the obvious problems inherent in religious conversion, particularly in high-religious contexts, by keeping the socio-religious community intact. Some of those problems are described by Travis et al. (2008:197): In certain settings, “leaving Islam is tantamount to social suicide resulting in divorce, loss of one’s children (if a mother makes this choice), loss of income and status, physical violence, or even honor killing within families.” Wolfe (2011:1-2) explains how some are maintaining their socio-religious identities in an Islamic context:

. . . Muslims who have turned to Christ for the forgiveness of sin and freedom from the bondage of Satan would remain Muslims in a merely cultural sense: they continue going to the mosque, using Islamic worship forms, observing Ramadan, giving alms, and even making the pilgrimage to Mecca like other devout Muslims. These Muslim believers still follow the forms of religion set down by Muhammad, with only slight modification to make the religious rituals Christ-centered. By remaining “inside” the religious structures of their birth and using religious forms meaningful to their community, these believers are able to boldly evangelize their family, friends, and neighbors without encountering any of the issues brought about by socio-cultural conversion.

Higgins (2004:156), an advocate of Insider Movements, suggests “. . . that followers of Jesus can continue to embrace at least some of their people’s religious life, history, and practice without compromising the gospel or falling into syncretism.” He believes that Scripture suggests, “. . . that, at least in some sense, the gospel can actually fulfill or complete certain aspects of the religion of a people group.”

In an Islamic context, to maintain or jettison one’s socio-religious identity is complex, and the determination of what to do will be influenced by one’s general

theology of religions, as well as their understanding of the specific nature of Islam – both as a religion and as a cultural framework. Additionally, consideration of how the gospel functions in culture is foundational. For example, Hyatt (2009) says “. . . we believe that the gospel aims to transform culture, rather than to simply redeem culture?” The practical outworking of Hyatt’s position is that “Some cultural practices must be abandoned as they are examined in light of the scriptures . . .” Hyatt’s position contrasts with those who seek to redeem a culture by inserting new value or meaning into a particular cultural expression. These foundational issues will influence evangelistic and post-conversion discipleship methodologies.

3.2.1.2.2.1 Evangelism and Self-Identity

Traditionally, the primary approach of Western missionaries among Muslims has been to reach *individual* Muslims for Christ and encourage them to come out of Islam (Richard 1996; Parshall 2003:91; Watson 2008). This paradigm, often called extraction evangelism by its detractors, has become a target of harsh criticism, particularly from those working in contexts that emphasize group or community cohesion (i.e., non-Western cultures). For example, Parshall (2003:91) says, “This approach should be repudiated,” and “New approaches must be probed that allow for whole groups to come to Christ at once.” Addressing evangelism among Muslims and high-caste Hindus, Richard (1996) says extraction evangelism “. . . can be considered neither wise nor biblical” because “. . . evangelists stand outside the society and call for individuals to profess Christ and come out to join the Christians. This means the extraction of new believers from their homes and society, and the destruction of bridges for the Gospel into those societies.”

In this same vein, Watson (2008), a strong advocate for the Church Planting Movement, which shares common commitments with proponents of Insider strategies (Flint 2010:890), expresses his commitment to reaching families, communities, and nations, by criticizing any effort to reach *individual* Muslims. He

says, “In extraction evangelism an individual is won to the Lord without serious regard for the family, community or nation.” He thinks the traditional extraction paradigm “. . . is the result of poor theology and an evangelism strategy that does not understand family/community/nation structures, or chooses to ignore these structures.”

While conceding that evidence of individual conversions *is* present in the New Testament – specifically referencing Paul’s Damascus Road experience and the Ethiopian’s encounter with Philip – Watson correctly points out that “A common Biblical statement in regard to commitments to Christ is ‘so-and-so and his/her whole family/household believed and were baptized.’” He also correctly indicates that this “pattern emerges in Acts 10 with Cornelius” before citing the Philippian Jailer and Lydia as evidence of his preferred ministry paradigm of families or communities coming to faith through the initial contact person in each story. What Watson and others fail to do in this line of argument is demonstrate that these stories are methodologically prescriptive.

Interestingly, while attempting to demonstrate that evangelism of individuals is the result of poor theology and strategic shortsightedness, he apparently overlooks the similarities between the conversion of the Ethiopian and Cornelius. For example, both had prepared themselves, even if unknowingly, for an evangelistic encounter. We see in Acts 8 that the Ethiopian, on his return from Jerusalem, was reading Isaiah 53. In Acts 10, Luke reports that Cornelius was a devout man who feared God and prayed regularly. Though neither were yet believers in Jesus, their hearts were being prepared for an advocate to engage them.

The second parallel between the two stories is the divine preparation and appointment of an advocate. In the Ethiopian’s case, “an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza’” (8:26 NKJV). When he arrived he saw the Ethiopian who was reading Isaiah. Upon learning of the Ethiopian’s inability to understand what he was reading, “Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture,

preached Jesus to him” (8:35 NKJV). This resulted in the Ethiopian’s placing his faith in Christ. In the case of Cornelius, “an angel of God” appeared in a vision and told him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter who would provide Cornelius with instruction in what he should do (10:4-6 NKJV). Meanwhile, in parallel with Cornelius’ encounter with an angel, Simon Peter was also being prepared to include Gentiles in his evangelistic preaching. The story concludes with Peter making his way to Cornelius in Caesarea and preaching an evangelistic sermon (10:34-43), which resulted in Cornelius and his household believing (11:14) and being baptized in the Spirit and in water. Below, I present a chart that summarizes the points outlined above, which clearly illustrates the similarities between these two conversion accounts.

	Ethiopian	Cornelius
Source	Acts 8:25-40	Acts 10:1-48, 11:1-18
Preparation of the person	Reading Isaiah 53	God fearing man, giving alms and praying regularly
Preparation of the advocate	Guided by an angel to engage the Ethiopian	Guided by the Holy Spirit in a vision to include Gentiles in his evangelistic efforts and to engage Cornelius
Immediate results	The Ethiopian believed and was baptized	Believed (along with household and friends) and was baptized in water and the Spirit
Long-term results	Not indicated	Not indicated

Figure 7 - Chart comparing the conversion stories of the Ethiopian and Cornelius

The striking similarities suggest that one should be cautious in criticizing those who seek to win *individuals* to Christ, particularly when no details regarding the long-term implications of the effectiveness of either strategy are provided in the Biblical text. In other words, the Biblical text does not reveal whether either conversion was instrumental in further evangelism or the establishment of a

church planting movement. Neither does it indicate the post-conversion social status of either the Ethiopian or Cornelius. An additional word of caution toward criticism is warranted since God arranged both encounters.

Further to the point of caution when assuming the potential long-term results from the conversion of any individual is the example of the 19th century conversion of Tunggul Wulung in Central Java. While apparently accepting their Christ, Wulung rejected the missionaries' extraction methodology and began teaching his converts that ". . . one did not have to leave the Javanese *adat* (ancient Javanese cultural and religious tradition, including Islam) in order to follow Christ" (Asad 2009:144). Thus, according to Asad, ". . . it appears Wulung's strategy marks the beginning of Insider Movement missiology long before the term existed" (144). Convinced of Wulung's Insider methodology, Sadrach Surapranata became a practitioner and at his death in 1924, ". . . his communities of Javanese Christ followers numbered around 20,000!" (145). The reference to Wulung and Surapranata is not intended to validate the Insider Movement; rather, it illustrates that one can never predict what will result from the conversion of any individual.

Watson (2008) demonstrates the danger of becoming overly committed to a particular strategy or paradigm when he says,

It is my opinion that Satan is at work in these extraction methodologies. Satan encourages the use of extraction evangelism and church planting strategies because these strategies do not take into serious account families/communities/nations, and will result in the "winning" of one at the loss of the rest of the family/community/nation.

To suggest that Satan is at work in an evangelistic methodology that the New Testament clearly supports and that was specifically arranged by God is reckless commentary, if not worse, and reveals the emotional nature of this discussion.

3.2.1.2.2.2 Post-Conversion Self-Identity

In reality, Muslims from a variety of backgrounds are positively responding to the gospel as it is presented through a variety of methodologies. Travis, Travis

and Parshall (Travis et al. 2008:193) explain that the relatively large numbers of Muslims who “have turned in faith to Jesus . . . has resulted in the formation of many hundreds of Muslim background Christ-centered fellowships (*ekkklesia*) worldwide.”

Among these hundreds of fellowships exist a variety of post-conversion socio-cultural and religious identities. John Travis (1998:407-408) created the widely referenced “C-Scale” that is helpful in understanding the various representations within the Islamic world.⁷⁰ However, while the C-Scale is helpful in getting an overview of different ministry paradigms, Travis’ taxonomy is neither binding nor accepted by all practitioners. Travis’ intent was to compare and contrast the “types of ‘Christ-centered communities’ (groups of believers in Christ) found in the Muslim world” for the purpose of addressing “. . . the enormous diversity which exists throughout the Muslim world in terms of ethnicity, history, traditions, language, culture, and, in some cases, theology” (407).

Each of the paradigms are labeled C1-C6 and are “differentiated by language, culture, worship forms, degree of freedom to worship with others, and religious identity” (407).

C-1: Traditional Church Using Outsider Language**

May be Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant. Some predate Islam. Thousands of C1 churches are found in Muslim lands today. Many reflect Western culture. The huge cultural chasm often exists between the church and surrounding Muslim community. Some Muslim background believers may be found in C1 churches. C1 believers call themselves “Christians.”

C-2: Traditional Church Using Insider Language**

Essentially the same as C1 except for language. No insider language is used, religious vocabulary is probably non-Islamic (distinctively “Christian”). The cultural gap between Muslims and C2 is still large. Often more Muslim background believers are found in C2 than C1. The majority

⁷⁰ A similar scale has been created for Hindu contexts. See “H Scale for Hindu Contextualization” in EMQ, July 2004.

of churches located in the Muslim world today are C1 or C2. C2 believers call themselves “Christians.”

C-3: Contextualized Christ-centered Communities Using Insider Language and Religiously Neutral Insider Cultural Forms

Religiously neutral forms may include folk music, ethnic dress, artwork, etc. Islamic elements (where present) are “filtered out” so as to use purely “cultural” forms. The aim is to reduce foreignness of the gospel and the church by contextualizing the biblically permissible cultural forms. May meet in the church building or more religiously neutral location. C3 congregations are comprised of a majority of Muslim background believers. C3 believers call themselves “Christians.”

C-4: Contextualized Christ-centered Communities Using Insider Language and Biblically Permissible Cultural and Islamic Forms

Similar to C3, however, biblically permissible Islamic forms and practices are also utilized (e.g. praying with raised hands, keeping the fast, avoiding pork, alcohol, and dogs as pets, using Islamic terms, dress, etc.) C1 and C2 forms avoided. Meeting is not held in church buildings. C4 communities comprised almost entirely of Muslim background believers. C4 believers, though highly contextualized, are usually not seen as Muslims by the Muslim community. C4 believers identify themselves as “followers of Isa the Messiah” (or something similar).

C-5: Christ-centered Communities of “Messianic Muslims” Who Have Accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior

C5 believers remain legally and socially within the community of Islam. Somewhat similar to the messianic Jewish movement. Aspects of Islamic theology which are incompatible with the Bible are rejected, or reinterpreted if possible. Participation in corporate Islamic worship varies from person to person and group to group. C5 believers meet regularly with other C5 believers and share their faith with unsaved Muslims. Unsaved Muslims may see C5 believers as theologically deviant and may eventually expel them from the community of Islam. Where entire villages accept Christ, C5 may result in “Messianic mosques.” C5 believers are viewed as Muslims by the Muslim community and refer to themselves as Muslims who follow Isa the Messiah.

C6: Small Christ-centered Communities of Secret/Underground Believers

Similar to persecuted believers suffering under totalitarian regimes. Due to fear, isolation, or threat of extreme governmental/community legal action or retaliation (including capital punishment), C6 believers worship Christ

secretly (individually or perhaps infrequently in small clusters). Many come to Christ through dreams, visions, miracles, radio broadcasts, tracts, Christian witness while abroad, or reading the Bible on their own initiative. C6 (as opposed to C5) believers are usually silent about their faith. C6 is not ideal; God desires his people to witness and have regular fellowship (Heb. 10:25). Nonetheless C6 believers are part of our family in Christ. Though God may call some to a life of suffering, imprisonment, or martyrdom, he may be pleased to have some worship him in secret, at least for a time. C6 believers are perceived as Muslims by the Muslim community and identify themselves as Muslims.

The tension regarding post-conversion self-identity revolves around an attempt to avoid persecution by maintaining some form post-conversion Muslim identity. But, is it appropriate or possible to self-identity in any way as a Muslim after trusting Christ for salvation?⁷¹ The theory of those who support this practice (i.e., Insider Movement) is that by maintaining a post-conversion Muslim identity (whether cultural, religious, or some variation) the convert avoids being exiled (whether physically or socially) and is thereby able to facilitate the flow of the gospel through their social/familial networks more easily because it does not appear to be foreign or suggest apostasy from Islam.

This project was focused on discovering effective evangelistic methods in the West Bank, thus determining which paradigm is *correct* is beyond the scope of this study. However, a survey of the tensions regarding post-conversion identity is important in that it helps locate my findings within the greater discussion.

3.2.1.3 Commitment to Long-Term Ministry

By *long-term* Liverman (2004:24) means “as long as it takes in order to see the Gospel understood and received by enough individuals in the recipient society” to plant churches. Effective evangelistic work among Muslims requires trust that is forged through “deep and demanding long-term relationships.” The burning desire to see Muslims come to faith in Jesus and the historically slow

⁷¹ For a comprehensive literature review of the C5/IM debate, see Matthew Sleeman (2012), “The Origins, Development and Future of the C5 / Insider Movement Debate” in SFM 8:4.

process of this happening often create disappointment and discouragement among field workers, which are frequently exacerbated by expectations from those who are sponsoring the work, whether individual donors or sending agencies who have certain expectations regarding results.

Liverman warns that “Too many have drawn the target around what they have been able to achieve through short-term efforts,” which is usually something short of church planting (24). The application of this principle is to commit to the long haul when possible. The practical reality is that due to the nature of politics, the ability of foreigners to enter or remain in a particular country may be fleeting at best. This suggests that while ex-pats should commit to long-term ministry among Muslims, it is imperative that they invest in discipling local believers who can stay if ex-patriots cannot. In the context of this research, Christians are fleeing to the West in increasing numbers, which not only increases the Muslim domination of the area, it also reduces the number of gospel witnesses present, particularly witnesses who can stay long-term regardless of political developments.

Above, I have surveyed three principles that helpfully define effective engagement of Muslims in an Islamic context: 1) Apostolic Effort in Residence, 2) Contextualizing in the Local Language and Culture, and 3) Long-term Ministry. These three principles were derived from the largest to date research similar to mine. Thus, they provide a nice framework to evaluate the work of my advocates, comparing their strategies to those found in the Seed to Fruit survey. While Seed to Fruit represents the largest research project of this kind, I expanded their findings with the broader discussion of contextualization. In doing so, I focused my attention on what I think are the main areas of controversy: contextualization of the Bible and contextualization of the post-conversion self-identity. Both of these topics reflect a theology of religions, which was discussed in relation to Accad’s D3 Kerygmatic Approach. These discussions, though only a survey by design, sufficiently represent the evangelistic methodology literature and provide the necessary background context for my research.

4. Preparing for Research . . . Methodological Considerations

Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought.

Albert von Szent-Gyorgyi

The reality in Israel, where I labored in gospel ministry for more than fifteen years, is that Arabs and Jews who have come to faith in Jesus still maintain a very high level of segregation. The most obvious factors that cause this reality are language, culture, and politics. In practical terms, this separation of brothers typically means that neither group knows very much, if anything, about the other's faith communities.

While my ministry efforts have been primarily on the Jewish side of this divide, I have intentionally built relationships with Arab pastors, too. Over the years, as opportunities permitted, I visited *their* churches and inquired about life in *their* context, and I was always fascinated at the dedication of Arab pastors, particularly their dedication to share the gospel with their Muslim neighbors.

4.1 Narrowing in on the Research Question

When I began to consider possible doctoral research ideas, my appreciation of these particular ministries to Muslims was coupled with my reading of the appropriately titled *Facts & Myths About the Messianic Congregations in Israel 1998-1999* (Kjaer-Hansen and Skjott 1999). If Kjaer-Hansen and Skjott could sort through the details of the Messianic Jewish community in Israel, I wondered if it would be equally possible to sort through the West Bank MBB community and gain any reliable information that could help us understand the Muslim-to-Christian conversion phenomena in the West Bank. How many converts? Where do they live? How are they coming to faith? Was there a need for such research, or had these questions already been answered?

There were so many questions to answer, but would it even be possible for me to investigate this community? If so, what would be the best way to do so? I

sought the counsel of Kareem,⁷² my best Arab-pastor-friend. I cautiously presented him my original idea, which was a *comprehensive survey of MBBs in the West Bank and Gaza*. I wondered aloud, whether it would be possible to come to any reliable, non-anecdotal conclusions about MBBs like how many, where they live, and how they are being evangelized. His answer was very encouraging: “Why not? I’m ready. Do you want to start this week?” At that moment, I realized two things: First, I had found a genuine partner in the project. Second, we needed to soberly think through the possibility of successfully completing such an enormous undertaking.

While I remain personally interested to validate claims of the abundance of Muslim-to-Christian conversions like those of Small (2007) and Rosenberg (2009) mentioned above, particularly as they might relate to Palestine, my initial research suggested validation may not be possible.

I started my exploratory research by consulting with several missionaries and mission agencies in the area. All of them were very interested in the topic. However, they were all in agreement that getting an accurate count of MBBs in the West Bank, similar to what had been done among Messianic Jews in Israel, would be very unlikely, probably impossible, because the flow of information regarding conversions is still more guarded in the West Bank than in Israel.

In parallel with those conversations, I did a preliminary literature review that seemed to validate the opinions I had received from the various missionaries and agencies with whom I had spoken. According to Kraft (2007:48), “There is no knowledge of how many converts there are in the Arab world, as it is almost entirely an underground movement.” Additionally, Woodberry reported that only one Palestinian Muslim-to-Christian convert was included in Fuller Seminary’s comprehensive survey of some six-hundred such converts, which is the largest study of this kind (Greenham 2004:103).

⁷² Kareem is the name I was assigned in Arabic language school. I use it here, as a pseudonym to protect my gatekeeper and respondents. This pastor is so well known that using his real name might make it very easy to recognize the respondents.

Since no numerical data regarding Muslim-to-Christian converts in Palestine existed or was likely to be gathered, I adjusted my research question. After discussions with Pastor Kareem and other missionaries about other potential research ideas, the consensus was that a survey of converts from different areas of the West Bank regarding how they were evangelized and came to faith was possible. Such a study, we thought, would reveal evangelistic methods that were demonstrably effective in the West Bank. Additionally, we concluded that a descriptive study of this type was not only worthy of doctoral research, but also could be helpful to the missionary efforts of the Church in the West Bank and Gaza. The question then became, how should the research question be worded?

Frankel and Devers (Frankel and Devers 2000a:118) suggest that readers can deem a research question important if in answering the question the researcher causes the readers' “. . . understanding of the problem or field under study [to] be significantly altered.” After several attempts to write an adequate research question, I finally settled on one that met the criteria of being interesting, worthy of doctoral research, and helpful to the West Bank Church: What are current effective methods of communicating Christ among Muslims in the West Bank since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in 1994?

With the research question formulated, I was faced with the question of how best to gather and process the desired information.

4.2 Quantitative or Qualitative Model

Assuming the data is collected systematically and in a manner appropriate to the selected model, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are recognized by the academy as legitimate approaches for social research (Neuman 2006:13-14). Both can be used to gain first person accounts, so in order to choose an approach, I had to carefully consider the type of information I would need in order to answer my research question.

Based on the conclusion that I would be unable to gather enough information about Muslim-to-Christian converts in the West Bank to provide any census type numerical conclusions, I changed the focus of my question from numerical data to descriptive data. With no base numbers to work from, I did not concern myself with generating probabilistic information regarding increase or decrease in the MBB community. Therefore, since I would not be pursuing a numerically based discovery nor attempting to predict future outcomes, a quantitative approach, “. . . which generally seek[s] to . . . predict phenomena, by using experimental designs and statistical analysis . . .” (Frankel and Devers 2000a:114) would not be needed for my study.

I discovered the model for my research while reading *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Rainer 2001), which is the popular report of Rainer’s research into why Americans decided to begin attending a specific church. He realized that individual churches, in some way, represent various ministry methods or models and he was interested to see if he could better understand why people chose one representative church over another.

In a previous unrelated study, Rainer discovered what he thought were mistaken assumptions that were foundational for the Seeker Sensitive movement in the United States, which is represented by churches like Willow Creek near Chicago. An underlying philosophy of the Seeker movement is that worship and evangelistic methodology could be more effective if the Church better understood the perspectives of non-Christians and unaffiliated Christians. Strobel (1993) created representative characters that he named *Unchurched Harry* and *Mary*. Although *Unchurched Harry* and *Mary* were fictional characters, they were intended to be representative of the average non-Christian American in terms of worldview, interests, and lifestyle. Motivated by Seeker conferences and a tremendous amount of promotion, many American pastors became consumed with learning about what interested and motivated *Harry* and *Mary*, and how their churches could reach them. Convinced of the accuracy of the assumptions of the Seeker approach, many churches converted from *traditional* ministry models to

Seeker Sensitive models and joined corresponding affinity groups like the Willow Creek Association. However, Rainer found in the previously mentioned study that possibly “. . . 80-90% of this group [the unchurched] may never attend church . . .” regardless of how much the Seeker strategy catered to their perspectives (Rainer 2001:20).

Once Rainer made the connection between his findings and certain assumptions of the Seeker philosophy, he initiated a new research project in which he asked a large group of recently unchurched what were the major factors in their decision to start attending a church. His findings confirmed his suspicion that a number of the foundational assumptions of the Seeker Sensitive movement were mistaken.

More important for me than confirmation of his theory was his use of a qualitative survey that, in the words of Sofaer (1999:1105), “. . . allow[ed] people to speak *in their own voice*, rather than conforming to categories and terms imposed on them by others” (emphasis added). Rainer’s recently unchurched were able to explain their own motivations, as they understood them, rather than be presumptively assigned motives based on the ideas of those unrelated to their story. In summary, Rainer says, “. . . when they tell us why they chose a church, we have an actual case study of someone moving from the ranks of the unchurched to the church” (21-22). Gillies & Edwards (2005 paragraph 13) support Rainer’s approach of using a qualitative, empirical study in this way because qualitative studies, they suggest, tend to “. . . expose the contradictory, tangled complexity of real life experience, which often stands in stark contrast to neatly packaged theoretical accounts of social change.”

Rainer’s approach is a case study approach that suited the context of his study. I adapted Rainer’s case study approach for the complex context of my research by incorporating elements of ethnographic methodology to aid me in better understanding the meaning my respondents gave to the various elements of their conversion testimonies. I did case studies of twenty-four converts, in which I interviewed them in a way that allowed them to speak in their own voice.

On a more general level, I did some participation research by making an effort to understand something of the daily lives of the respondents, which is difficult to do as an outsider. I accomplished the latter by, among other things, reading extensively about Palestinian history, life and culture (this is evidenced in chapter 2); learning Arabic; experiencing some of the daily struggles of Palestinian life like crossing the border into and out of the West Bank in the same way(s) the respondents regularly do and experiencing the difficulties and humiliation that accompanies such (for specifics see 4.8 The Identity of the Researcher: Insider or Outsider?); and by visiting in their homes and work places.

Adapting Rainer's model of letting the converts speak for themselves to my specific context required probing open-ended questions: how, what, when? For example: How did you come to faith? When was your first encounter with a Christian? When did you hear the gospel for the first time? What was your reaction at that time? What were your objections to becoming a Christian? How were those objections overcome? What drew you to the gospel? These are the types of questions - why, what, or how questions - that qualitative research is concerned to answer (Hancock 1998:2) and they allowed the respondent to speak in their own voices. This is explained in detail below in 4.3.3 Open-End Interviews.

Another argument for the use of qualitative research was context. Any effective method of evangelism that I might discover would have occurred in a specific context, which would require that I have an understanding of that context (Sofaer 1999:1105). Frankel and Devers (2000a:113-114) described such research contexts as ". . . the lived experience of persons who share time, space and culture." A qualitative investigation seemed to be the most appropriate way to investigate the context or *lived experience* of Muslim-to-Christian converts in the West Bank.

Based on some general reading in various mission journals and my limited knowledge of life in the West Bank, I suspected that certain evangelistic methods would be more prevalent than others. But, my prior knowledge of ministry

activities and conversion stories in the West Bank was fairly anecdotal and not at all empirical, which meant, my research would need to be flexible enough to allow me to “. . . explore new and unanticipated areas of interest” (Frankel and Devers 2000b:253-254).

In addition to the above reasons that suggest a qualitative approach would be the most suitable for this type of research, both Greenham’s (2004) and Kraft’s (2007) studies are empirical evidence of the potential effectiveness of a qualitative study in this particular area of research. They clearly demonstrate how qualitative studies “. . . provide an in-depth understanding of the world as seen through the eyes of the people being studied (Wilmot 2010:1),” which is what I had hoped to accomplish as well.

4.3 Choosing an Instrument

A variety of data gathering instruments, or approaches, can be effectively used in a qualitative study. Each instrument has its own strengths and weaknesses, which should be carefully considered before it is selected. The primary criteria for developing an instrument is whether the researcher can adequately answer the research question(s) by using the chosen instrument (Frankel & Devers 2000a:119).

The possibility of producing useful data is primary, but it certainly is not the sole concern. Other things that must be taken into consideration are cost and accessibility. For example, an ethnographic study of a particular village may likely produce rich useful data, but access to the village may not be possible for a variety of reasons: security, trust, cost, language or political barriers, etc.

4.3.1 Library Research

An exhaustive investigation of the literature was a possible direction to go in determining the effective evangelistic methods being employed in Palestine. However, the very limited amount of location specific literature (i.e., in Palestine) gave me caution. While there are many contemporary “How to witness to

Muslims” type works, both descriptive and prescriptive, Parshall, who has authored nine works on Muslim culture and evangelism, suggests that specific contexts vary and matter (Parshall 2003:23):

Though what I say is intended to have value for those working in many parts of the Muslim mosaic, the fact that the majority of my experience and study has been specifically to but two countries must be kept in mind. The reader with exposure to other Muslim countries will need to adjust for the differences between his situation and mine. Furthermore, many of my observations should be regarded as general.

According to Glasser (quoted in Greenham 2004:47, footnote 146), “. . . there may be as many as 3,500 Muslim sub-cultures, each of which would feature encounters with Christ in a slightly different way.”

Since context matters and the vast majority of literature dealing with evangelizing Muslims is not context specific to Palestine, I concluded that an empirical field study in Palestine would be of greater value than research conducted exclusively in the library (Parshall 2003:xiii). However, library research certainly proved valuable in gaining a better understanding of the broader context of methods of evangelism among Muslims, both historic and current.

4.3.2 Ethnographic Observations

Ethnography is a tested and accepted means of gathering rich information in specific contexts. But ethnography is often characterized by either observing from a distance or full immersion in the community of interest. Neither of these seemed to meet fully the needs of this study. For example, the protected nature of MBBs in the West Bank causes most of their activities to occur behind closed doors, which makes observation from a distance impossible. Becoming a part of this community, or immersing, in the way necessary to see and interpret and apply value to actions, would be impractical. Again, the protected nature of the community would almost guarantee this approach to be ineffective. If most of the evangelism took place within the church meetings, it would be possible for me with an adequate level of language proficiency, to integrate enough to make

appropriate observations. But, evangelism does not generally take place at church meetings; discipleship and encouragement were the main messages at all of the church services I attended. Evangelism is usually done quietly and privately in this community, which makes immersion alone an insufficient means of conducting a qualitative study in a timely and cost efficient way.

Though my model may not be strictly ethnographic since I neither observed from a distance nor tried to completely integrate, I did adopt some of the flavor of ethnography. In addition to studying a very specific people group, I made intentional efforts to identify with the community at large as well as the specific faith community of my respondents, both of which are typical characteristics of ethnography (Sandelowski 2000:337).

Attempting to identify with them was in some ways quite natural since my own life context was that of a religious minority. At that time, I was a gentile Christian living among a Jewish majority in Israel. Other efforts at identifying with the community were more demanding. For instance, enrolling in an Arabic language course at Al Quds University was not only expensive it was very time intensive. The upside was that an increased ability with the Arabic language helped me speak with the respondents outside the parameters of the research project, which increased their trust toward me. By intentionally crossing border checkpoints on foot, like so many Palestinians do, I was able to build credibility and trust in the eyes of my respondents. When they realized that I had intentionally lived *some* of what they live, they assumed that I understood the hardship that is so much of their daily existence. Making the effort to worship on Fridays was the most helpful thing I did to identify with them. My attendance at the Friday service not only required me to endure the hassle of crossing the border on the most stressful day of the week, it also served as a statement to them that even though I was neither a Palestinian nor an Arab, I still was willing to endure the hassles and invest the time and effort to identify and worship with them, thus, in this important way, I was one of them.

All of these efforts on my part to get close and analyze this group by seeing and hearing them live life gave the project an ethnographic tone.

4.3.3 Open-End Interviews

Library research was helpful in gaining some background and understanding of the broader context of evangelistic methods among Muslims, and elements of ethnography were helpful both in understanding the specific context of this study and in building trust with my respondents. But personal interviews were the primary source of rich data that is specific to the West Bank context.

Since I assumed that finding out from respondents how they came to faith, would give me an understanding of which methods of evangelism were demonstrably effective, I decided to allow the respondents to speak of their experiences in their own voices. I was most interested in certain topics (e.g. methods of evangelism, barriers to believing in Jesus, solutions to those barriers, etc), and hoped to hear about these from the respondents, but I was not certain that they would naturally talk about each of them. This suggested the use of a semi-structured, open-ended interview technique. Devers & Frankel (2000:268) support this conclusion: “When the study is more exploratory or attempting to discover and/or refine theories and concepts, a very open-ended protocol is appropriate to consider.” Sofaer (1999:1103), describing what she calls a developmental approach of inquiry says because there is uncertainty about the questions [to ask] and answers [being given] initial questions should be very open ended, asking, “. . . relevant individuals to describe, in their own way, their experiences and responses concerning a given situation or issue.” She suggests that over time, while remaining open-ended, questions will become more specific.

Following Sofaer’s developmental model, I opened the interview by asking the respondents to tell me how they came to faith in Jesus Christ. This approach gave them a chance to prioritize the events according to their own understanding

or criteria. Starting the interview in this way was helpful in at least three ways: First, it allowed me to better understand what each respondent understood to be the main events in their conversion story. Second, it allowed me to learn of themes that were important to them, but were not necessarily present in my initial theory of prevailing methodology. Finally, allowing the respondents to establish their story first, allowed me to probe further in the areas I was specifically interested in (either from my initial theory or things I had learned as the interviews progressed) without appearing to drive the respondents to a preferred version of their story. Another advantage of this approach, as Leung Ka Bo (2008:66) points out, was that it allowed me to immediately ask for clarification if needed. Such clarification is especially important in a cross-cultural, multi-lingual setting, where the chances for misunderstanding are increased.

4.3.4 Reliability Issues

Cooperative respondents asked about a past no longer much thought about will probably display . . . oases of vivid memories within a desert of uncertainty.

Robert Weiss (1995:148)

Weiss (1995:147) points out the irony of interviewing people to gain rich information: On the one hand, interviews are often the preferred method of gaining detailed insight into the lives of the respondents. Yet, on the other hand, even cooperative respondents have difficulty in telling “. . . the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

According to Weiss, there are a variety of reasons a respondent may not tell the “whole truth” such as: an unclear memory, the desire to conceal either the respondent’s or others’ unflattering actions associated with the events being reported in the interview, issues of a private nature that are beyond the level of

trust established between the interviewer and the interviewee, or less likely, but possible, biographical fabrication. Frankel & Devers (2000a:115) echo Weiss' concern that a disadvantage of interview surveys is the difficulty in “. . . assessing the overall accuracy of responses.”

Recognizing both the value and risk of personal interviews, I implemented a type of triangulation method through one of the purposive criteria. I required each respondent to have a testimony of conversion that was known to a gatekeeper (see 4.4 Purposive Sampling). While this method may not *guarantee* the accuracy or inclusion of every minor detail, the overall story of conversion could be verified by someone with prior knowledge who was not the interviewer or interviewee. This type of triangulation was helpful in affirming the reliability of the respondents' interview responses as well as in moderating researcher bias. Reviewing the interview testimony with the gatekeepers after the interview gave the gatekeeper the opportunity to verify my understanding of what the respondents reported.

About the midpoint of the interview process, a theme began to emerge, which caused me to start to wonder if my initial gatekeepers might also be influencing the findings. I began to wonder if the consistent pattern of conversion that was emerging was reflective of a general pattern of conversion in the West Bank, or was it merely the result of my choice of gatekeepers who were all from the same denominational background.⁷³ At the point I recognized this thematic pattern, I asked my gatekeepers if they were aware of any other methods of evangelism occurring in the West Bank. I was interested specifically in what is called the Insider Movement, which encourages converts to maintain a post-conversion Islamic cultural lifestyle that includes praying in the mosque, praying toward Mecca, reciting the Shahada (i.e., the Muslim confession of belief), and continuing to do ritual washing prior to prayer. In other words, I wanted to know if

⁷³ Each of the gatekeepers that I successfully recruited was directly or indirectly affiliated with a denomination that prefers not to be specifically identified for security and strategy reasons. However, I can report that this particular group is a Western evangelical denomination that has been working in the region for more than fifty years.

they were they aware of a C-5 ministry (see 3.2.1.2.2.2 above). They were unaware of anything like I described in my enquiry.

Although denominational lines are not observed as clearly in the West Bank as they typically are in the West, I asked for help finding other gatekeepers outside my gatekeepers' denominational affiliation. Unfortunately, additional gatekeepers never materialized. Some possible candidates never responded to my enquiries, some never responded to my gatekeepers' requests for their assistance, and others simply were not available when I was.

Recognizing these potential reliability issues caused me 1) to be more alert for potential problems in the respondents' answers, 2) to intentionally seek an accurate understanding of their answers, 3) to ask my gatekeepers for verification of the accuracy of the respondents' testimonies, and 4) to be cautious in coming to quick conclusions regarding the information provided in the interviews.

4.4 Purposive Sampling

Non-probability sampling techniques are the most common choice for qualitative research. Explaining why qualitative researchers are more inclined to seek non-probabilistic techniques, Neuman (2006:220), quoting Flick (1998:41), says that qualitative researchers are interested in a sample's ". . . relevance to the research topic rather than their representativeness."

A variety of nonprobability techniques (e.g. Convenience, Snowball, Deviant Case, Purposive, etc.) are commonly used in qualitative research. Each has its own purpose and characteristics, but each also may have some overlap or similarity with other techniques. Devers & Frankel (2000:264) explain that ". . . purposive sampling strategies are designed to enhance understandings of selected individuals or groups' experience(s) . . . by selecting 'information rich' cases."

The choice of purposive sampling was appropriate because, as its name implies, it is done “. . . with a purpose in mind” (Trochim 2006). In this case, the purpose was to identify effective evangelistic methods in the West Bank. Following the lead of Rainer (2001), I concluded that those who have actually been evangelized and converted (i.e., Muslim-to-Christian converts) in the West Bank are the best source for this information.

Neuman (2006:222) further confirms my choice of technique when he describes purposive sampling as appropriate “. . . to select members of a difficult-to-reach, specialized population.” Marpsat & Razafindratsima (2010:4) offer five *difficulties* that are used by researchers to classify a population as hard to reach. While even one of the five would qualify a group as hard to reach, Muslim-to-Christian converts in the West Bank regularly meet the following three:

Members of the population of interest are hard to identify; what they have in common is not easy to detect and is only rarely recorded.

The persons concerned do not wish to disclose that they are members of this population of interest, because their behaviour is illicit” or “socially stigmatized.

The behaviour of the population of interest is not known, which leads to a poor choice of places in which to approach them.

I chose three criteria to identify or qualify potential respondents. Each participant must:

- 1) Have been living and evangelized in the West Bank,
- 2) Be known to have a testimony of conversion from Islam to Christianity,
- 3) Be at least eighteen years of age at the time of the interview.

The first was required by the research question, which specifies the West Bank as the relevant geographical boundary for this study. While it was not necessary for the respondent to be living in the West Bank at the time of their interview, living in the West Bank at the time they were evangelized was required.

Even though this criterion would eliminate the possible participation of the majority of Palestinians, who live outside the West Bank, effectively reducing the number of potential research respondents, it was important to maintain the specific context of the research question as this serves to distinguish between this research and Greenham's research (2004), which included Palestinians who were residing and evangelized throughout Israel and the West Bank. It also addresses my theory that the culture of fear within the West Bank influences evangelism in different ways than would occur amongst Arabs living in Israel, for example. All of my respondents were residents of the West Bank at the time they were evangelized, and their evangelism also occurred in the West Bank after the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994.

In this regard, one other distinction between Greenham's study and this one is the issue of Israeli citizenship. Greenham chose to include Israeli Arabs who identified as Palestinians, which means they had the protection of Israeli citizenship. None of my respondents were Israeli citizens and thus did not have the political protection of the Israeli government. Instead, they were fully bound by the authority of the Palestinian Authority.

The second sampling criterion, having a known testimony of conversion, was important for the sake of reliability. In an effort to confirm an accurate retelling of their conversion experience, I required the respondents' testimonies to be known by the gatekeepers whom I had already vetted. This was a reasonable requirement because the gatekeepers were usually the evangelists and/or pastors who were involved in the process of the respondents' conversions, and when they were not the primary evangelist/pastor, they were still closely involved in the process.

In my many years of vocational missionary work, I have witnessed too many inflated or inaccurate conversion testimonies, and I believed the presence of an informed witness would help the respondent try to be as accurate as possible. After the interview, I could ask the gatekeeper to verify the validity of the testimony provided during the interview (see 4.3.4 Reliability Issues.) Although

this criterion reduced the number of potential respondents, it was an important means of increasing the reliability of the study because it allowed me to verify the testimony with someone who was already aware of the details.

In an effort to increase the number of potential respondents, Snowball Sampling was initially considered as a possible choice because of the interconnected nature of the community I wanted to study (Neuman 2006:222). Snowballing can be an effective technique in finding participants because, as Trochim (2006) explains, it is based on “. . . identifying someone who meets the criteria for inclusion, . . . then ask[ing] them to recommend others who they may know who also meet the criteria.” One of the advantages of snowballing within hard to reach target groups is the assumption that insiders not only can easily lead the researcher to others within the group, but also help recruit them for participation. Even though that may have potentially helped me easily gain additional interviews, respondents recruiting respondents would not have met this second criterion.

The third criterion, like the first two, reduced the number of potential participants. However, it was an important instrument that solved an ethical concern: What is the minimum age for participation? Setting the minimum age at eighteen years of age demonstrated proper consideration of the underground nature of the research group, the cultural context (i.e., Arab Muslim majority), and concern for the social and physical welfare of everyone involved in the project. This decision is explained fully in 4.6.5 Minimum Age of Participation.

In summary, while the three sampling criteria outlined above eliminated many potential respondents, they made the process more manageable by providing clear, unbending guidelines. These guidelines clearly indicated who could and who could not participate, which protected the contextual integrity of the study, increased the reliability of the interviews, and protected the study against issues of child endangerment.

4.5 Contextual Challenges

This project had to address at least three inherent contextual challenges if the study was to be successfully completed. The first was language, which had as much to do with the identity of the researcher as it did with the respondents. Since I spoke a limited level of Arabic, the respondents' mother tongue, it was important to give due consideration to managing the potential communication issues.

The other two challenges – access and trust – reflected the nature of the respondents' community. Personal risk can be very high for Muslim-to-Christian converts who live in a Muslim-majority context. Therefore, the respondents, for the most part, exist as an underground community. Concern for security creates a demand for trust, which is often only granted to others inside the community.

These issues regarding language, access, and trust necessitated the use of gatekeepers.

4.5.1 Language Barriers

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

The language context of this project was primarily Arabic because the mother tongue of all the anticipated respondents is Arabic. However, I suspected that many of the respondents would be multi-lingual because many of the Palestinians I have personally met are multi-lingual. Additionally, over the years I have heard in a variety of contexts, the claim that Gerner and Schrod (1999:1) make: "Palestinians are among the best educated people in the post-colonial world." Though I was not certain of which languages the respondents would speak in addition to Arabic, both my personal experience and anecdotal evidence suggested I might find many multi-lingual respondents.

Since some of them would likely have worked for Israeli companies in the past it seemed reasonable to expect that some would be able to speak Hebrew as well as Arabic. But given the political realities, I did not anticipate that any respondents would use Hebrew in the interview process. I also expected some respondents to be able to speak French, since some of the traditional Christian schools (i.e., Catholic) are bi-lingual, Arabic-French. In certain areas like East Jerusalem and Bethlehem it is not uncommon for Muslim families to send their children to Christian schools because they believe the prospects of a good education are better at Christian schools. Two of my respondents had attended Catholic school, one in Jordan and one in Jerusalem.

I also expected that many might be able to speak English because of the prevalence of western media, especially from the United States. However, I was uncertain how many would feel comfortable using English as the language medium for the interviews.

Finally, I suspected that at least a small portion of the respondents would be able to speak Arabic only. Specifically with these Arabic-only speakers in mind, but also others who would not feel comfortable being interviewed in a language other than Arabic, I arranged for a translator to be available when necessary, and although none of the translators I used were *professional* translators, all were very experienced ministry translators. The benefits of using ministry translators were twofold: First, their translation experience had been primarily within a religious framework, which made them familiar with the religious language and ideas being expressed in the interviews, thus providing a more accurate translation within this specific context. Second, desiring to express their approval of the project by translating for free, they helped minimize the cost of this study.

Although I knew I would not be able to conduct the interviews in Arabic without the aid of a translator, prior to commencing the study I enrolled in a spoken-Arabic course at Al Quds University. I had correctly assumed that improving my Arabic skills would not only help me connect with the respondents, but would also help me follow their answers prior to translation. It was also

helpful in guiding the translator when a basic familiarity with the language allowed me to insert an Arabic word into an English sentence as I asked questions.

I was completely surprised when the first two interviews of the project were conducted in Hebrew and English, respectively. While I had expected that some of the respondents would be able to speak Hebrew, given the political and social tensions in the area I never would have guessed that the first respondent would prefer to be interviewed in Hebrew rather than in Arabic.

This unexpected choice of language caused me to wonder what his choice indicated: Was he uncomfortable with the idea of a translator? Was he simply being polite by speaking a language common to me? Was he trying to impress me by showing me he could be interviewed in Hebrew? Discerning the motives of others is a very imprecise art, and something I did not really want to pursue. But it was important to know, as much as possible, if using a translator would influence the project in an unusual way (Temple and Young 2004).

As the project proceeded, I got a better feel for my respondents and am confident that my first respondent's choice to be interviewed in Hebrew was a sign of courtesy toward me. This same courtesy but in English, occurred on many occasions. In fact, thirty-three percent of the interviews were conducted in English. Two were conducted in Hebrew, and the balance in Arabic.

That so many of the interviews were conducted in English or Hebrew rather than the respondents' native language was a concern for me. I was concerned that the accuracy of their answers might be questionable due to a limited vocabulary or some other deficiency that can result from using a non-native language. For the duration of the project, I monitored this closely to make sure I was confident in the respondents' second-language-proficiency.

While I am not formally educated in either English as a Second Language (ESL) or Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), I have worked in a multi-lingual ministry for more than fifteen years. In our church in Jerusalem,

teaching from the pulpit is conducted in Hebrew and English and is accompanied by simultaneous translation via headphones into Spanish, Russian, Arabic, German and French. Oversight and coordination of our translation ministry was among my specific ministry responsibilities. This experience gave me confidence that I could effectively evaluate my respondents' ability to accurately communicate in English or Hebrew. It also is likely that my experience working in multi-lingual environments made it easier for me to understand what the respondents were communicating in their non-native language.

On a single occasion (Respondent Four), I realized the respondent was not able to communicate effectively in English, so I asked to switch to Arabic and the balance of the interview was conducted with the assistance of a translator. The rest of the interviews were started and finished in the same language. For a list of the language(s) used in each interview see Appendix 2.

4.5.2 Gatekeepers and Access

Generally, researchers prefer primary data gathered directly from the source. However, in many cases, access to the source is only available through a gatekeeper “. . . who serves to introduce the researcher to the community [i.e., the source] and officially endorses the research project, including the researcher's participation in community events and activities” (Lauder 2003:188). What a gatekeeper primarily does is control access to a setting (Neuman 2006:387), which Korczynski (Lewis-Beck et al. 2004:2) notes “. . . refers to a researcher seeking entry to an environment in which primary research data may be unearthed or generated.”

The *environment* may alternately be referred to as the *setting* or *field site*, which may be, as Neuman (2006:385) explains, misleading because the setting is only the context in which a researcher may locate a group of people with at least one commonly shared attribute. And while the setting may play a part in the research question (when the setting is the common attribute), the main focus is directed to the people group under consideration, which “. . . can extend [or exist]

beyond the boundaries of the site.” In this study, the environment (i.e., the West Bank) serves as a shared attribute of the respondents, and therefore, is also used to control participation.

A shared attribute can be anything that is common among the members of the group. For example, membership in a certain social or fraternal organization, employees of the same firm, members of a specific ethnic group, and five-year survivors of breast cancer are all examples of the kinds of attributes that might be held in common, thus creating a target group.

Certain sub-groups, like hidden or “vulnerable populations” (Fisher 2006) or those labeled “deviant” (Rodriguez 2000) generally require gatekeepers for access because their activities are usually “hidden event[s]” (Leung Ka Bo 2008). Simpson (2006), an international journalist for the British Broadcasting Company, used gatekeepers to gain access to the hidden events of the cooks and wholesalers working for the Colombian cocaine cartels. These cartel insiders fit well within the parameters of what Rodriguez (2000) describes as a deviant subculture. He explains that a “. . . deviant subculture may be considered ‘deviant’ because it is involved in behavior that threatens the mainstream population or because *it is labeled as deviant by the mainstream population*” (emphasis added). According to Rodriguez, examples of deviant sub cultures would include “. . . some musical groups, youth gangs, alternative lifestyles, and nontraditional religious communities.” The respondents in this project who are Muslim-to-Christian converts also fall within Rodriguez’s deviant subculture category because they are members of a nontraditional religious community that has been labeled deviant by the mainstream population.

In Simpson’s investigation of Columbian cocaine cartels, without the assistance of his gatekeepers it would have been very difficult to find the people he wanted to interview. It would also have been very dangerous, most likely deadly, had he simply stumbled upon them and tried to conduct an interview. Thus, his gatekeepers served multiple purposes, providing access as well as security and they adequately illustrate the value of gatekeepers.

In this study, similar to Simpson's, the gatekeepers served multiple purposes. As Palestinian pastors or evangelists who are leaders in the community I wanted to research, my gatekeepers knew both the identity and location of the potential interview candidates, so the most obvious service they could provide was access. But this access was not granted automatically. Because of the underground nature of the community my primary gatekeeper had to get the agreement of his ministry partners before he could bring me into the community. They agreed that I could ease into the community by allowing members of the community to get to know me at the Friday worship service and by accompanying Kareem on pastoral visits with families at their homes. Access would be gained in stages. Only after the gatekeepers felt like the first stage went well did they allow the recruiting of respondents to begin. At that point, the gatekeepers began to assist in recruiting individuals within the community. The success of this function was based *completely* upon the potential respondents' trust of the gatekeeper. Each request to be interviewed was accompanied by a statement of the gatekeepers' complete trust in me. The gatekeepers' "vouching" for my trustworthiness was crucial (Devers and Frankel 2000:266). Regularly visiting the church service, as important as that was, would not have, in most cases, built sufficient enough trust to allow me to recruit respondents. In the final analysis, the gatekeepers proved responsible for all recruitment.

In the process of recruiting, the gatekeepers not only solicited potential respondents, but also persuaded them to participate because the gatekeepers 1) believed the project would be beneficial for the community, and 2) they believed that I was a trustworthy brother. As a result, the response was usually immediate and positive, though a few needed more time for consideration or more clarification about the project. Thirty people were solicited for interviews, six declined and twenty-four agreed to participate. I was never given an explanation as to why the six declined.

Another important function the gatekeepers served in this project was verification. Greenham (2004:130, footnote 135) noted the difficulty of objectively

verifying the details of a respondent's testimony when the researcher does not know the individual prior to the interview and the researcher did not observe the event the respondent is describing.

In my fifteen years of ministry experience in the Israeli Messianic Jewish community, which is also considered a deviant subculture by the dominant culture, I experienced on a few occasions an intentionally deceptive conversion story. In one particularly damaging case, the man professed conversion in order to access our community and gather names, photos, and other personal information of the community members. He had been hired by an anti-missionary organization, which then used the information to harm a few of the members of the community. Alternative motivations for inflating a testimony might include personal pride, a desire to gain increased respect, possible financial gains, or even, in some cases, increased assistance in relocating to the West.

The gatekeepers were asked to try to solicit participation only from those in whose conversion the gatekeeper had been personally involved, which made it possible for the gatekeepers to corroborate the details of each testimony as shared by the respondent. Recruiting respondents with whom the gatekeepers had personal relationships not only helped insure the accuracy of the respondents' stories, it also increased the likelihood that a request to participate would be accepted.

Finally, my gatekeepers helped meet a further need: security. Some areas of the West Bank are known to be dangerous for outsiders. Political tensions in the region tend to cause unrest, and sometimes violent situations. Since the gatekeepers are local, they have a much better feel for these types of situations. Therefore, all interviews were scheduled with due consideration to a) the personal needs of the gatekeepers and respondents and b) the gatekeepers' analysis of the security situation. As a general rule, except in East Jerusalem, we did interviews during daylight hours because my gatekeepers deemed it unsafe to drive on the main roads with yellow (i.e., Israeli) license plates because of

snipers or stone throwers (Ben-Zur 2010). On other occasions, due to political unrest, interviews were rescheduled.

In summary, the gatekeepers for this project served at least four vital functions:

- 1) They provided access to the community.
- 2) They recruited all the respondents, without whom, research could not have taken place.
- 3) They served as cross-checkers, verifying the accuracy of the details provided by respondents.
- 4) They provided the necessary security assistance that insured the safety of all participants.

Without any of these vital services, this project could not have been successfully completed.

4.6 Ethical Concerns

Ethical research requires balancing the value of advancing knowledge against the value of noninterference in the lives of others.

W Lawrence Neuman (2006:131)

Professor Neuman superbly summarizes the monumental challenge that ethical researchers face while doing their work. How valuable are the potential results of a particular study? How much deception or risk to the subject(s), if any, is justifiable in order to gain new knowledge? How does one correctly balance those two essential, but often competing, interests? The answers to those questions sometimes require Solomonic Wisdom.⁷⁴ Lauder (2003:186), for example, citing Bok (1978) and Warwick (1973) argues that “. . . the use of deception in research may be defended on the basis that it produces definite social benefits, such as reducing violence or eliminating other socially destructive

⁷⁴ For a helpful summary of the historical development of ethical considerations in human subject research as reflected in various international declarations, guidelines and policies, see PA Marshall, “Ethical Challenges in Study Design and Informed Consent for Health Research in Resource-poor Settings,” in 2007:8-10.

behaviour, and that the benefits of the research outweigh that of the potential for harm to the subjects (in a cost–benefit analysis).” But a cost-benefit analysis in social research is seldom as simple as following a mathematical formula. How, for example, does a researcher *objectively* factor the influence of their self-interest in a desired research project into a cost-benefit analysis?

In cases where ethical boundaries appear to blur or overlap, the researcher’s prior knowledge of and experience within his subject group can assist in determining proper boundaries. But more importantly, if only to guard against the difficult-to-measure influence of self-interest, community leaders (Meadows et al. 2003:3), doctoral advisors, and university ethics boards should be regularly consulted. My university provides all researchers, prior to the commencement of study, a document that overviews the university’s commitment to ethical research based both on moral and legal principles (Louw et al. 2002).

In certain circumstances, researchers may also be required to secure the approval of government sponsored ethical review boards. For example, students doing research among the Northern Aboriginals of Canada “. . . are asked to obtain northern research licenses [from the Canadian government] as well as university ethics approval” (Davison et al. 2006:2).

When proposed studies are neither ethically complex nor require specific licenses or permissions, it is still important to soberly consider the ramifications, both positive and negative, of studies involving humans. The University of Pretoria offers this directive to their researchers: “. . . when embarking on research projects involving human subjects, the researcher should carefully scrutinise all ethical issues” (Louw et al. 2002:1). Whether the ethical issues appear to be complex or simple, the researcher must protect the *human subjects*. Neuman (2006:131) offers helpful guidance when he writes, “. . . the researcher’s authority to conduct research, [which is] granted by professional communities in the larger society, is accompanied by a responsibility to guide, protect, and oversee the interests of the people being studied.” In short: with authority comes responsibility.

Marshall, reflecting from a background in medical/health related research, suggests that one of the guiding ethical principles of medical researchers is beneficence/non-maleficence. She explains (Marshall 2007:7):

The principle of beneficence refers to the obligation of health-care providers and health researchers to act in a way that benefits the health and well-being of participants in scientific investigations; conversely, the principle of nonmaleficence concerns their obligation to do no harm. Taken together, the principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence emphasize the importance of maximizing benefits and minimizing potential harms.

Weiss, a social scientist, agrees with Marshall's principle of non-maleficence (i.e., do no harm), but apparently would take exception with her principle of beneficence (i.e., provide benefit), at least as far as being an obligation within social science research: ". . . unlike physicians, interviewers have no responsibility to benefit the people they talk with, but, like physicians, they do have a responsibility to do no harm" (Weiss 1995:130).

This disagreement should not be understood as suggesting that some researchers have higher ethical standards than others. Rather, it illustrates that not all disciplines (or studies) face the same level of ethical concerns. It also demonstrates that even within the internationally recognized ethical guidelines, there is complexity, which requires interpretation and negotiation (Neuman 2006:131). For example, in a hypothetical case, Marshall might be required to negotiate her principle of beneficence with her subject's right to self-autonomy. Both of these principles, beneficence and autonomy, are clearly within the proper bounds of moral and ethical principles. Perhaps, though, the subject does not want to be benefited personally. Which principle takes priority? If there is room for interpretation and negotiation in application of ethical standards, how do researchers settle on what is ethical behavior in their particular research project?

Typically, research ethics, in any discipline that includes human subject research, are primarily concerned with protecting the dignity of the human subjects participating in the study (Weiss 1995:127-134; Neuman 2006:129-147; Marshall 2007:7). Or, in the words of Marshall's principle of non-maleficence: ". . .

do no harm” (Marshall 2007:7). This protection is intended to be very broad with consideration of physical, psychological, and legal harm, as well as potential harm to a person’s career or income (Neuman 2006:132). “Respect for persons” (Marshall 2007:7) and “. . . fairness, honesty, and openness . . .” (Louw et al. 2002) represent positive statements of certain guiding principles in the ethical treatment of human subjects. Negatively stated, we may be warned, among other things, not to involve people in research that may cause *self-denigration* or *embarrassment* or an *unacceptable invasion of privacy* (Louw et al. 2002:1). In either case, the intention is to protect the human subjects from harm.

In designing this study, I did not have a particular allegiance to the principle of beneficence in relation to any specific respondent, though I was certain that each of the respondents would realize some very specific benefits. My core ethical principle was different. Because I believed that all of the human subjects who would participate in my research are bearers of God’s image (Gen 1:26-27, 5:1-3 and 9:6)⁷⁵ and thus have intrinsic value, I chose the protection of human dignity as the overarching ethical principle under which all other guiding principles would rest. In designing the study, I continually asked, “Will this approach properly protect the subjects’ dignity as a bearer of God’s image?” In what ways, though, might the dignity of my subjects be in jeopardy? I was particularly concerned with potential physical, mental, or financial harm, as well as related privacy issues.

At first, it appeared that each of these areas of concern (i.e., physical, mental or financial harm, etc.) was a stand-alone issue that could be safeguarded with the implementation of a single design consideration. However, it quickly became apparent that potential for physical, mental or financial harm fell easily across multiple design considerations - informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality,

⁷⁵ See J Waldron (2010), *The Image of God: Rights, Reason, and Order*. New York University: 216-25. Also see GH Clark (1969), “The Image of God in Man” in *JETS* 12/4, 215-22; JA Clines (1968), “The Image of God in Man” in *Tyndale Bulletin* 53:103; P Feinberg (1972), “The Image of God” in *BibSac* 129:235-46; AW Foster (2005), *What Does it Mean to Affirm That Man is Made in the Image of God*. Unpublished paper; BD Lockerbie (1986), “Thinking Like a Christian Part 2: The Means of Grace, the Hope of Glory” in *BibSac* 143:99-108.

financial compensation, or minimum age of participation - and should be given specific consideration.

4.6.1 Informed Consent

In its most basic form, the principle of informed consent refers to a human subject's right to voluntarily participate in a research project. However, Neuman (2006:135) helpfully clarifies that voluntary participation means more than non-coerced agreement, it also demands that subjects “. . . know what they are being asked to participate in . . .” Thus, informed consent should be understood to mean voluntary consent based on accurate knowledge of the research project. And, all of this should be clarified “. . . before the study begins.”

Arguments for the validity of covert research (e.g., Calvey 2000; Feenan 2002) notwithstanding, the principle of informed consent receives broad international consensus among social research scientists. This consensus is axiomatic and easily found published in the form of social science texts (Weiss 1995; Neuman 2006), guidelines published by research associations like the UK-based groups Social Research Association (Iphofen 2003) and Socio-Legal Studies Association, and university institutional review board guidelines (Louw et al. 2002; Harvard 2007).

Professor Nathan (Nathan 2006:159) effectively illustrates the difficulties arising from this consensus when she describes the constraints placed on her covert research among students at an American university. While her institutional review board (IRB) allowed her to covertly enroll as a student to do research on student life during her sabbatical from teaching at the same university, the IRB still required her “. . . to obtain written permission to interview and use the interviewee's words in publication.”

The University of Pretoria, provided me with a document (Louw et al. 2002) outlining the format and general content for an informed consent agreement that was helpful in completing both the institutional review board questionnaire and the informed consent form.

In addition to suggesting the appropriate content, the Pretoria document also suggested that informed consent should be in writing, which is standard protocol (Weiss 1995:214-215; Nathan 2006:159; Neuman 2006:135). However, since the Muslim-to-Christian converts in the West Bank are among what Meadows et al (2003:3) label *sensitive communities* I requested a waiver that would allow me to gain consent through an oral presentation of the consent protocol. I offered three reasons for my request: 1) Due to a fear of being discovered by someone outside the community, the requirement to sign a form would likely cause many respondents to refuse to participate. 2) Though unlikely, it is possible that the form could fall into the wrong hands, and result in harm to the respondent. 3) Considering the large disconnect between Western academic protocol and Middle-Eastern Muslim culture, it is likely that most respondents would not understand the meaning of an informed consent form, particularly in this context since our relationship is based on the respondent's trust in the gatekeeper's trust in me.

Weiss and Neuman argue that certain exceptions are acceptable when the standard protocol of a signed consent form “. . . would be inappropriate . . .” to a specific situation (Weiss 1995:214), or when “. . . there are good reasons for not obtaining it . . .” (Neuman 2006:136). Davison, Brown & Moffit (2006:7) also recognize certain exceptions as they discuss the ethical challenges associated with informed consent that student researchers faced when studying Aboriginal communities in northern Canada. All of these students were required to obtain consent, but half [six] received oral consent for at least portions of their research, and three received oral consent exclusively.

Additionally, I demonstrated precedence of accepting oral consent for doctoral research within a similar cultural context. Kraft (2007) and Greenham (2004) both completed Ph.D. research (University of Bristol and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, respectively) among Muslim converts to Christianity in Egypt, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine without requiring their participants to sign a consent form.

After receiving committee approval of my research proposal, including my request to receive oral rather than written consent, I followed the same protocol for all interviews. After the initial introductions of each of the parties present, and prior to asking any questions, I began with an introductory explanation of certain technical matters as required by the university. That explanation was followed by a pedantic recitation of the informed consent outline I had prepared for the ethics review board (see Appendix 1). Each recitation and acceptance was noted at the top of the interview journal.

The response to the informed consent presentation generally fell into two categories. The first group simply stared at me with a bored look in their eyes, as if to ask, “Is this really necessary?” However, they dutifully listened to the presentation and each agreed to be interviewed. This group’s general disinterest in the informed consent protocol, suggested to me that there was, in fact, a level of disconnect between Middle Eastern culture and Western academic protocol.

The second group were those who tried to stop me from reciting the information upon which their agreement to participate should be based. Sometimes they waved their arms, at other times they simply put up a hand to tell me to stop. In either case, the message was clear: such technical information was not necessary. This echoed the trust factor that was mentioned in my waiver request: “If he [the gatekeeper] says you are safe, I trust you,” sums up both the hand signals and what some of the respondents actually said. It was clear that their trust in me was based entirely on their trust of the gatekeeper.

4.6.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity deals with the protection of the identity of the respondent, which “. . . means that people remain anonymous, or nameless” (Neuman 2006:139). I suspected that anonymity would be important for my respondents, so I was a little surprised at how disinterested they appeared during the presentation of the informed consent protocol.

Interestingly, though, of those who appeared completely disinterested in this portion of the process, one actually said, “good,” and several others visibly relaxed when I assured them their names would not be used in any way. This change of demeanor, from anxious to relaxed, suggested that the respondents were actually nervous about how their identities might be used in this study. This observation made me more conscientious to assure anonymity multiple times prior to starting the actual interview in subsequent interviews.

Two cases were particularly exceptional in their responses to the content of the informed consent protocol. In fact, both interrupted the presentation when I promised not to record or use their names in any way. Both interrupted me saying not only did I have permission to use their names, but that they wanted me to use their names because they were “not afraid.” I explained again that I was not *allowed* to use their names in any way. While they reluctantly accepted my explanation that I could not and would not use their names, they wanted me to understand that they were not afraid to be identified by name in this study. I expressed my trust in their honesty about this matter as well as appreciation for their understanding the restrictions under which I was working.

One was male (Respondent One), the other female (Respondent Nine). Besides their willingness to be named, they shared another common factor: Both already had their names publicized as Muslim-to-Christian converts in their respective communities.

The Palestinian Authority police had arrested and imprisoned the male respondent because of his efforts to evangelize other Muslims in and around Bethlehem. According to his testimony, telling others about Jesus, not necessarily conversion “is the red line for the Palestinian Authority.”

As a result of her conversion and continued spousal abuse, Respondent Nine went through a very public divorce that involved the mayor and a local sheik. Additionally, a close family member of hers, a former member of the Palestinian

Authority security service, lives in exile because other security service members became aware of his conversion to Christianity.

So, it appears that already being publicly known as a Muslim-to-Christian convert reduced their fear of being identified in the research documents even though they had previously undergone a certain level of persecution as a result of their conversion.

These exceptional requests to publish their names notwithstanding, I protected the anonymity of all my respondents by not seeking their names, and when their names were offered, I did not record them. My intentionality in this was supported by a personal note from Greenham (2010a) in which he said not only was he unaware of the names of his respondents at the time of his interviews, he remained unaware afterward. Kraft (2007:55) also guarded her respondents' identities by using only initials or nothing in her field notes. Rather than pseudonyms in any of my reports, I chose to refer to the respondent by a code number (see 4.6.3 Respondent Identification System), their interview number, or by the appropriate pronoun he or she.

In order to protect anonymity, it was also necessary to consider the issue of confidentiality, which relates to the information gained during the interview (Neuman 2006:139). In this case, I needed to release certain pieces of information to produce a report, but I needed to release it in such a way that individuals would not be linked directly to the information they provided (Neuman 2006:139). During the oral consent protocol, each respondent was informed that their *story* would be published in a doctoral thesis and possibly a journal article or book, but in a way that protected their identity. And, each respondent gave consent for those uses of their stories.

The relatively small size of this community coupled with its vulnerability to be harmed by those outside the community made this a very important design consideration. I took several steps to avoid identifying any respondents: In

addition to not recording any names, I chose not to record, by audio or video, any interviews (see 4.6.6 Considerations for Audio or Video Recording the Data).

Weiss (1995:131) warns that “Nothing reported from the study, in print or in a lecture, should permit identification of respondents.” His warning drew my attention to a possible mistake I made in the early interviews by recording the number of children of the respondents and their current place of residence. Given the small size of the community, those two pieces of information might be easily linked back to the respondent and are irrelevant to the research question. As a result, I subsequently deleted those data from my interview report sheets.

I did choose to keep the marital status, which is a far less obvious marker than the current place of residence or number of children. And, the spouse was sometimes an important part of the conversion process; either as an asset or in some cases a hindrance.

In contrast to Greenham (2010b:117), my choice to keep the location of conversion in both the interview reports and the thesis was based on the way I divided the West Bank into districts that were sufficiently broad so as to avoid direct identification of the respondents, but in a way that would include urbanites, suburbanites, and village residents in the same district. The divisions are explained below in 4.7.4 Regional Districts. Another consideration that persuaded me that it was safe to retain the location of conversion is that many of the respondents no longer live in the district in which they were converted. Some have moved for vocational reasons, while others moved for security or other reasons.

Finally, it should be noted that the location of the interview does not necessarily reflect any connection to the location of conversion, nor where the respondent resided at the time of the interview. The interviews were conducted in a location convenient for the respondent, and this information is included in the interview reports and occasionally in the final report to indicate the various places where I entered the field. On certain occasions, the location of the interview

serves to illustrate the field context or how I tried to identify with respondents (see 4.8 The Identity of the Researcher: Insider or Outsider?).

4.6.3 Respondent Identification System

Rather than using their names, I gave each respondent a code number (Neuman 2006:139) for reference purposes. My code system indicates four things: 1) A regional district, 2) the interview number from that regional district, 3), the gender of the respondent, and 4) the interview number of that gender in that population center. For example, the first interview code was: Beth-01/M1. This code indicates that the respondent was: converted in the greater Bethlehem area (Beth), was the first interview from the Bethlehem area (01), and was the first male interviewed (M1) from the Bethlehem area.

4.6.4 Payment for Participation

Based on the biblical principle that a “. . . laborer *is* worthy of his wages” (1 Tim 5:18 NKJV), and the knowledge that many of my respondents would be unemployed, or at least very financially deprived, I had a great desire to offer some type of remuneration for their help in completing my research.

Depending on funding, it's not uncommon to pay, either as an incentive or reward, those who participate as subjects in research projects (Weiss 1994:58). Based on the project's goals and requirements, the payment may be a set, one-time fee, vary according to the amount of time invested or other criteria. However, not all respondents receive financial remuneration. There are occasions when paying subjects for their participation could be so potentially problematic (socially, emotionally or physically) that to do so would jeopardize the integrity of the project or the subjects, or both. After much deliberation and consultation with my gatekeepers, I determined that paying any subjects for participation in this particular study could potentially place the subject(s) at risk in a variety of ways.

In the early stages of working through the ethical challenges of this study, my gatekeepers advised me not to offer financial payment as compensation for participating in my survey since compensation may: 1) Be mistakenly perceived by some outside the project as paying for conversion, or 2) induce some to give a false or inflated profession of faith for the purpose of financial gain, or 3) reinforce a perception in this region that the Arab Christians' real connection to Western Christians is based on money coming from the West.

For those outside this social context the potential outcomes suggested by my gatekeepers may be disregarded as insignificant. But, public perception or honor is an important cultural reality in the Arab world. Nydell (2006:76) explains:

The reputation of any member of a family group reflects on all of the other members. One person's indiscreet behavior or poor judgment can damage his or her relatives' pride, social influence, and marriage opportunities. For this reason family honor is the greatest source of pressure on an individual to conform to accepted behavior patterns, and one is constantly reminded of his or her responsibility for upholding that honor.

In consideration of the reputations of both the gatekeepers and the respondents, I decided not to offer payment for participation. In lieu of a participation stipend my gatekeepers suggested that I utilize the well known custom of Arab hospitality (Nydell 2006:55-57, 59-62) by inviting each respondent to a restaurant for a meal after the interview was concluded. Another appropriate option was to present small tokens of appreciation such as chocolates or cookies (Kraft 2007:65).

The circumstances of the first two interviews made it impractical to invite the respondents to a restaurant, so I made arrangements to have a light meal of falafel sandwiches delivered to the interview location. From my perspective, the sandwiches seemed like an embarrassingly small remittance for what I received in return. From the respondents' perspectives, it appeared to be a little embarrassing to receive the meal even though it was quite modest. But, in spite of both sides being a bit embarrassed by the situation, we enjoyed our sandwiches and the interviews.

In some cases, I was able to arrange interviews only at the respondent's place of employment during an extended break, so there was no opportunity to offer a meal, either delivered or at a restaurant. And sometimes the gender of the respondent, and or the spontaneous arrangement of the interview made it difficult, if not impossible to invite the respondent(s) to a restaurant. For example, interview three took place at the office of a female respondent and was also arranged on very short notice. I happened to be visiting a gatekeeper, and when he thought of this particular individual he immediately called her to see if she would be able to participate. Since she had already been briefed on the project, it was easier for her to agree to meet on short notice, and she had a window of opportunity in the next five to ten minutes. So, in this case, I did not have the chance to even buy chocolates, which may have been uncomfortable for her to receive from a male. We only had time to get to her office. And, in spite of no type of payment or reward in hand, the respondent was very happy to share her story with me.

The joy and satisfaction that my first three respondents had in telling their stories caused me to realize that in the case of this particular community, the interview itself might actually be the reward for participating (Weiss 1995:58). The non-monetary reward for these respondents actually appeared to be twofold: one others-directed, one self-directed. The others-directed reward seemed to be the satisfaction of knowing their participation was helpful to the study, a cause greater than themselves (Weiss 1995:58). The self-directed reward, which was one of the proposed benefits of this study, was that each respondent's conversion experience was validated by telling it to someone who was listening closely with great interest (Weiss 1995:122; Dickson-Swift et al. 2007:331).

In my thesis proposal, I suggested that a benefit of this project would be that each participant would have the rare opportunity to share their testimony of faith in Jesus with someone willing to listen, and thus fulfill the Apostle Peter's admonition to ". . . *be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you*" (1 Pet 3:15 NKJV). Because the members of

this mostly underground community, by and large, keep the testimony of their conversion a secret, they have very few opportunities to testify to anyone outside their immediate circle of trust.

Before the interviews began, I was convinced that a friendly listening ear would be a great encouragement to members of this community, as well as a reward for participation. My first three interviews seemed to suggest that I was correct. Interview four solidly confirmed for me that any need to reward my respondents was fulfilled by simply giving them the opportunity to share their conversion story. When I arrived at the safe house near Ramallah, I expected to conduct a few interviews and afterward to invite the respondents to accompany me to a local restaurant. However, my expectations began fading within minutes of my arrival. I had briefly met this respondent about six months prior, and despite not having met his family, he whisked me away before I could manage to say hello to everyone. He took me to the local butcher and bought fresh chickens for the meal that I was going to be served. Upon our return, we spent the first couple hours warming up, meeting the children, telling them a bit about my family and learning more about theirs. Naïvely, I had not anticipated being served a meal. Nydell (2006:59) described my experience accurately when she wrote, “Sharing food together provides an Arab host and hostess with a perfect opportunity to display their generosity and demonstrate their personal regard for you.” Arab hospitality coupled with the joy of testifying gave plenty reason to serve a feast. So, while I was introduced to the children and shared more about my family, the mother of the home prepared a banquet meal fit for a king.

On another occasion a respondent agreed to meet me for lunch at a restaurant in Ramallah, and I fully intended to pay for the meal that served as a stage prop for our interview. However, when it came time to pay, I realized that Arab hospitality most certainly trumped my desire to reward the one who had so generously helped me. On still another occasion, I had timed my interview so that I could make my way to another interview later that day. Again, naïvely, I had not

planned to be served a meal after the interview, and was forced to rearrange my plans in order to receive the respondent's hospitality.

On only two occasions did I succeed in paying for a meal, and both times I was completely resolute and clever. I turned the tables by claiming to show them Arab hospitality, insisting they were my guests because I invited them. I think that their being at least twenty years younger than me also helped to persuade them to accept my efforts to reward them. I'm doubtful anyone near my age, and certainly not older, would have been persuaded to accept my *Arab hospitality* rather than offering it themselves.

The generous spirit of those who lavished on me whatever they could afford always moved me. But sometimes it was painful for me, knowing my respondents blessed me with Arab hospitality by lavishing me with food they could not afford. In every case, I was wealthier than my respondents, and could have easily provided a banquet for them, but doing so would have likely shamed them, thus harming them and the integrity of the study.

While receiving an amazing example of Arab hospitality from Respondent Four, not only was I offered wonderful food, I was given the opportunity to meet family members who had made the same transition from Islam to Christianity that my respondents had. And some of those family members were children, which raises another important ethical concern: How old must one be to participate in this project?

4.6.5 Minimum Age of Participation

Determining the minimum age for interview candidates for this project was a challenge. Ethical, practical and legal issues had to be considered.

It is common knowledge in the West Bank that children (i.e., those under eighteen years of age) often work rather than attend school. Unfortunately, instead of attending school, many Palestinian children, from necessity or choice, have dedicated their childhood to earning an income in a variety of jobs ranging

from selling gum or washing automobile windows at traffic lights to farming and construction. Studies of child labor in the West Bank often group children in age groups of ten-to-fourteen years and fifteen years and above, though there is mention of children even younger participating in the labor pool (e.g., Abu-Ghallow 2012:137). This reality argued for setting the age of consent at fifteen years, perhaps lower.

How, though, should informed consent as mandated by a research institution be dealt with in the case of children? In research like this, a parent may not be aware of their child's conversion, or may not want others to know, which would likely mean no parental-consent would be provided. But, is it necessary to get a parent's consent?

The ethical complexity of this issue is demonstrated in a paper by Heath et al (2004:4) that deals with accessing children: "In law, children and young people are fully autonomous in very few areas of life before their sixteenth birthday." On its face, that appears to be a solid warning to seek parental consent for children under age sixteen, but they further clarify their understanding of the law by adding, "According to Masson (2004), a researcher is not at risk of legal proceedings brought by parents merely through the involvement of an under-sixteen year old in social research without first seeking parental consent, although they would be so if a claim of harm were made by the young person (but not their parent/s)." And since a researcher may not be in legal jeopardy if a parent, who has not given consent on behalf of their child, claims harm to their children (legal risk is limited to claims by the child respondent), Heath et al suggest the implication is ". . . that it is entirely legitimate to involve consenting under-sixteen year olds in research without first seeking parental consent." That may be true in a theoretical sense, but I needed to give consideration to very real situations connected to the context of my research.

Discussing religious affiliation, particularly when talking about leaving Islam in favor of Christianity, isn't the same as deciding to go to work rather than school. And it is categorically different research than seeking to learn why children prefer

strawberry flavored yogurt to some other flavor. The delicate nature of conversion away from Islam coupled with the delicate nature of discussing personal matters with children, particularly as a foreign-adult-Christian, were very important matters for consideration. In fact, they seemed to have enough potential risk to warrant me making the decision without additional input. But in an effort to be as correct as possible in my decision, I chose to seek further counsel from my gatekeepers. In the end, as a result of discussing the matter fully with my gatekeepers, we decided the safest course was to set the minimum age of participation at eighteen years. This age follows the guidelines of the United Nations Convention on Child Rights (1989:Part I, Article 1), which defines a child as “. . . any human being below the age of eighteen unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” Although this decision would reduce the number of potential interview candidates, at least five that I am aware of, it would protect me from any type of emotional or possible legal accusations of proselytizing children.

More important than protecting me, though, was protecting any prospective respondents. Interview twelve demonstrated that my decision not to interview children was obviously the correct decision. This respondent was sixteen when she converted six years before our interview. The most vivid details of her testimony described the abuse she endured at the hands of her father and brothers because she was asking questions about Islam that were too difficult for her teachers and school headmaster to answer. The nature of her questions indicated to her father and brothers that she *might* be rejecting Islam. Other things she spoke about indicated to them that she *might* be looking favorably at Christianity. Her father and brothers were shamed by her actions and brutally beat her before locking her in a closet for sixteen days, providing her with only minimal amounts of bread and water. The end result of this physical abuse and lengthy deprivation was hospitalization and a police enquiry. Fearing for her safety, she refused to provide any information to the police, and the case was closed.

She eventually converted to faith in Christ and was publicly baptized. When I asked her if her parents were aware of her baptism, she answered, “My mother, but not my father.” When I asked why her father did not know, she matter-of-factly replied, “He would kill me.” For those unfamiliar with the Islamic world, her claim may sound exaggerated, but she was not the only respondent to express this type of fear. Additionally, Barnabas Aid (Honour 2006), an aid ministry to the persecuted church, confirms such fears as they explain in an online report that the “. . . highly emotive concepts of honour and shame are still an important component of Islam and of Muslim and Arab culture. In most Muslim societies it is still true that only blood can really wipe out shame and humiliation. The greater the shame, the greater the bloodshed needed to wipe it out.”

Respondents Six, Twelve, Nineteen and Twenty are examples of Palestinian Muslim children converting from Islam to Christianity, they were each at least eighteen years of age at the time of their interviews. Other children who had converted, but were still under the age of eighteen were eager to participate in this project. However, not of them were accepted as candidates because of the minimum age requirement. Based on the potential risk for both respondents and researcher, the decision to not interview them was correct.

4.6.6 Considerations for Audio or Video Recording the Data

Deciding on a means of recording data, whether by video, audio, laptop or notepad, was a serious matter that had to take into account both accuracy in detail and security (Devers and Frankel 2000:269).

Obviously, an audio or video recording of the interview, assuming either was set up properly, would include everything that was said in the interview. In addition to all the words spoken, either could also capture language markers like inflection and hesitation, and video would additionally capture posture, facial and hand gestures, as well as the atmosphere (Emerson et al. 1995:10).

All of these things might be helpful in coming to the best understanding of what was said in an interview, though that is not without question. Some social

scientists like Weiss (1995:53) and Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995:9) are concerned that recording an interview, either by audio or video, may in fact negatively influence the interview by causing the respondent to: be more self aware, thus less forthcoming; be focused on performing for the camera, thus less attentive to accurate answers; or simply be nervous because they realize that “. . . there will be a record of what they say” (Weiss 1995:53).

While all those concerns are valid, the latter issue of being *on the record* was the most serious consideration for this project. A video or audio recording preserves the likeness of the respondent, whether voice or photograph or both. These likenesses provide direct links to an individual, thus making identification much easier than words written on paper by someone else. In political affairs this consideration is generally referred to as deniability, which implies that while the appearance of connection may be present, a direct link is not.

An additional possible negative result of audio or video taping that was considered was the potential risk to others who have not consented to be part of the study. Though I knew prior to any interviews that this community is generally cautious and accustomed to speaking in a guarded manner, it seemed to be unreasonably stifling to demand that the respondents withhold names and specific locations of the events associated with their conversion in the interviews. Preserving the names of those who had not consented to participate and potentially exposing them to a security threat would be unethical. Obviously, I intended to take extreme caution in handling any disks or tapes, but I could not reasonably guarantee that Israeli or Palestinian authorities would not confiscate the disks as I crossed any of the border or security checkpoints.

I was less concerned about confiscation by Israeli security personnel because in countless prior crossings of an Israeli security checkpoint, I have never had audio or video recordings examined. Additionally, even in the very unlikely event that a recording was to be confiscated by Israeli authorities, it seems unlikely that an interview with a Muslim-to-Christian convert would be anything of interest to them. However, I suspected that the respondents themselves would generally

not be comfortable with their stories being shared among Israeli security personnel. This became more clear to me after the interviews had commenced and various respondents mentioned the shame that Mosab Hassan Yousef (2010) brought on the West Bank MBB community by combining his story of conversion with a confession in his book, *Son of Hamas*, that he had also worked with Israeli security services.

I was more concerned about the possibility of tapes being confiscated by the Palestinian security service, which felt strange because in the many times I have crossed Palestinian Authority security posts, I have never undergone anything similar to the level of scrutiny that I have at Israeli checkpoints; the scrutiny was always much lower. However, even though it appeared unlikely that any recordings would be confiscated at a Palestinian checkpoint, it seemed the potential risk to the respondents would be much greater than at an Israeli checkpoint *if* they were. I'm certain that the testimony of a Muslim-to-Christian convert would be of great interest to certain elements within the power structure of the Palestinian National Authority, whether at a national or more local level.

Of greater concern to me than confiscation, though, was the more likely possibility of losing a tape when getting in or out of a taxi, or possibly leaving a bag behind in a restaurant or on a bus. And, even though I had traveled quite extensively throughout the Palestinian territories and felt comfortable doing so, I was (and continue to be) seen as a foreigner, and as such, a target for pickpockets, which may actually have been the most likely risk.

Although a lost recording would *probably* not create a problem for any of the respondents, if it did create a problem, the problem would likely be severe. Wisdom and prudence suggested that not recording would be the best guarantee that voice and or photographs would not be preserved, and thus would eliminate the possible risk of incrimination such things may pose.

In the interview process some were more guarded with names, while others were much more free in sharing names and details. Whether free or guarded, I

wanted to let the respondents tell their stories in the manner they were most comfortable, so I was happy that my method of preserving their stories did not force their choice of detail. While the various arguments for or against the value of taping an interview are important, and were considered, they were not more important than security considerations.

Of all the possible options for preserving the interview - including, among other things, audio/video recordings, transcribers, or typing on a laptop (Frankel and Devers 2000b:259) - the only reasonable option for preserving the interviews was hand-writing copious notes and transcribing them as soon as possible after leaving the interview location.

Interestingly, Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995:20) suggest that choosing to record the interviews by hand actually offers a certain measure of security, even if the papers were to be misplaced. My penmanship is generally very poor, and much of the time legible only to me. Especially, when I am hurriedly taking notes. I am not trained in any form of stenography, but over the years have developed my own form of shorthand that includes symbols, abbreviations, codes and poorly defined pen strokes, all of which can be helpful in obscuring someone's identity.

Once each interview was completed, I transcribed the notes as soon as possible in order to prevent the loss of information through lapsed memory of details. "Writing fieldnotes immediately after leaving the setting," say Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995:40), will produce ". . . fresher, more detailed recollections . . ." because ". . . over time, people forget and simplify experience." Quickly transcribing the field notes also gave me a formal opportunity to review each testimony for themes while each interview was still fresh in my mind.

Hand-recording an open-ended interview, particularly one that might involve a lot of emotion, is challenging in several ways (Weiss 1995:54; Emerson et al. 1995:20). The researcher must focus not only on recording the content of the interview, but also on conducting the interview (i.e., choosing appropriate

questions to pursue, or guiding the interview in such a way that it stays relatively confined to the topic of interest while still allowing the respondent to feel free to tell their story).

The process of preserving the interview in writing is more than simply jotting down what is said. Though that is part of what it means to record an interview, hand writing the responses also means editing on the moment. Except in the most extreme cases, it is unlikely, if not impossible, to write down *everything* that is said. So one must not only employ rapid-writing skills, but also ask what portions of the respondents' descriptions should be included or omitted from the field journal. What if only a portion of a long, meandering answer is on-topic? How much should be recorded? What about pregnant pauses, stutters, or false starts? Do they have meaning in terms of the respondent's answers, or are they simply personal habits? Should they be included or omitted when transcribing field notes? Those are the kinds of interpretive and editorial decisions that must be made when taking notes.

In this study, I tried my best to structure the questions in such a way that minimal consideration would need to be given to things like pauses and false starts. The opening request of each interview was for the respondent to tell me how they came to faith. In that request, the respondent was offered the freedom to focus on whatever they thought most important. Once they had crafted their answer according to their own order of priority, I had the opportunity to pursue specific areas of interest. Had I asked more pointed questions at the outset, like "What was the most effective method of evangelism for you?" it is more likely that I would have needed to be more involved in interpreting the meaning or value of pauses or false starts, which might have raised issues of credibility with my results (Devers and Frankel 2000:269).

In summary, choosing to hand write the field notes gave me a greater sense of security, which eased the tension of handling what may have been very sensitive information. Writing was more difficult during the longer interviews, or

when the respondent spoke quickly. Transcribing the field notes soon after the interview seemed helpful in ensuring the accuracy of the report.

4.7 Demographic Issues

In this section, I explain my design rationale for selecting respondents as well as my division of the West Bank into regional districts.

4.7.1 Number of Participants

In purposive sampling, the number of respondents is “. . . less important than the criteria used to select them” (Wilmot 2010:3). The criteria for the respondents in this study are outlined above in 4.4 Purposive Sampling.

My goal was to gain detailed information from the various West Bank regions, which are described below in 4.7.4 Regional Districts. My attitude was the more participants I could find the better the study would be, but I also had to consider both time and expense. Additionally, since I was completely dependent upon my gatekeepers to identify and recruit respondents, I was limited by their availability and recruiting success.

With those considerations I set a goal of four to seven respondents from each region, totaling twenty to thirty-five interviews. My gatekeepers thought this was a reasonably achievable goal, and it is similar to Greenham and Kraft who interviewed twenty-two and thirty-three, respectively. This goal was also within the range of twenty to fifty that Wilmot (2010:4) suggests for in-depth one-on-one interview projects.

In the end, I was able to interview twenty-four respondents.

4.7.2 Gender

Since this is a non-probabilistic study, the gender sample was not an important consideration for answering the research question. That my research question did not seek to determine effective methodologies specifically among

men or women, only among Palestinians, further suggested gender samples were not necessary. However, I did hope for a fairly even sampling of men and women because such a mix might give more specificity to which methods have produced results among men and women rather than the generic *Palestinian*. But, due to the nature of the people group and my complete dependence upon gatekeepers to recruit respondents, it seemed unwise and impractical to attempt to set a number of male and female samples at the outset. Nevertheless, the interviewed respondents were fairly evenly mixed with thirteen males and eleven females.

4.7.3 Age Range

Similar to the issue of gender outlined above (4.7.2), the non-probabilistic nature of this study made age considerations unnecessary. Apart from the minimum age of eighteen to participate (see 4.6.5), the gatekeepers were not instructed to recruit respondents from any particular age group.

While there was no attempt to project probability in this study, it is interesting to see the ages of the respondents, which spanned from eighteen to fifty-three years of age, with the bulk of the respondents being between twenty and forty-nine years old (see Figure).

Figure 8 - Ages of the respondents at the time of their interviews.

	18-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
Males	02	03	04	03	01
Females		06	02	03	
	02	09	06	06	01

4.7.4 Regional Districts

Initially, I had divided the West Bank into regions with the following region/city pairings: North/Nablus, Central-West/Ramallah, Central/Jerusalem-Bethlehem, Central-East/Jericho, and South/Hebron. Since I did not need an even sampling to satisfactorily answer my research question, I did not try to pre-determine the sampling locations. However, because I was curious if similar methodologies would be represented in the various regions, I had hoped that I would be able to get fairly even sampling. Ultimately, though, the sampling locations would be determined by my gatekeepers' abilities to recruit respondents.

Jericho was a surprising disappointment and became the major alteration in my initial division of the West Bank. In spite of having contact with two gatekeepers in Jericho, I was unable to secure a single interview there. As a result of this lack of representation, I removed Jericho from my regional districts.

I also was surprised to see the connectedness of my respondents in Ramallah, East Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, which caused me to reevaluate and group them as one region rather than two as I had initially suggested.

The final regional divisions (see Figure 9) as represented by my respondents were North, Central, and South. The North region, which provided thirteen respondents, is paired with the city of Nablus and its surrounding villages. Ramallah, East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and their surrounding villages make up the Central district, and accounted for eight

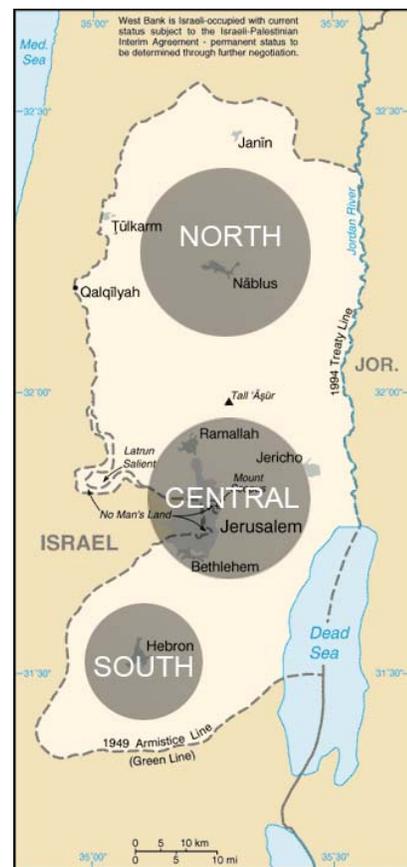


Figure 9 - West Bank region designations. Photo: Public Domain, Product of US Gov't. Modified by Craig Dunning

interviews. Finally, the Southern district, which accounted for three respondents, includes Hebron and its surrounding villages.

4.7.5 Gaza Withdrawn from Project

My original plan was to include Gaza in order to have a more complete response from all areas under the Palestinian National Authority. From the outset, as noted in my project proposal, it appeared Gaza would be difficult to access, if possible at all.

In spite of locating a gatekeeper for Gaza, repeated political problems made the safe inclusion of participants from this region impossible. In late January 2011, I explained to my supervisor that access to Gaza was not possible and that I feared the original title would create unattainable expectations; namely, readers would expect to find information about MBBs in Gaza in the final report. My supervisor accepted my rationale and agreed to the following modification: Palestinian Muslims converting to Christianity: effective evangelistic methods in the West Bank.

4.8 The Identity of the Researcher: Insider or Outsider?

In a way, the fieldworker's search for the status of an "insider" is like chasing a mirage.

MN Panini (Gubrium and Holstein 2002:338)

In an effort to gain ". . . an acceptance of the interviewer by the respondent . . ." and to increase the ". . . likelihood that the interviewer would be able to understand . . ." the respondent's meaning, Weiss (1995:136), reports that it has recently [circa 1994] been fashionable to try to match interviewers and respondents as much as possible ". . . at least in race and possibly in sex and social background as well." He says this raises the issue of how necessary it is for an interviewer to be an insider in order to be an effective interviewer. While acknowledging that, "Studies of survey interviewing have shown that respondents do use observable characteristics of the interviewer, including the

interviewer's skin color, dress, demeanor, age, and sex, to guess where they might find common ground, . . ." he also acknowledges that ". . . it is difficult to anticipate what interviewer attributes will prove important to respondents and how the respondent will react to them" (137). In fact, he concludes that, "There are so many different interviewer attributes to which a respondent can react that the interviewer will surely be an insider in some ways, an outsider in others" (137).

In her book *My freshman year: what a professor learned by becoming a student*, sociology professor Rebekah Nathan (2006) illustrates the sometimes-insider-sometimes-outsider dilemma that researchers face as she details her sabbatical research experience posing as a university student. The idea for her research gelled for her after auditing some continuing education and personal interest courses at her university. She noticed that behaving as a student (i.e., doing the required readings, attending classes, and occasionally raising her hand to ask questions) caused her to ". . . inherit a sort of transactional student identity." She added, "That is, because I related to the teacher as if I were a student, and behaved as students do, my default identity became that of the student. I found out quite unwittingly that if I walked like a duck and quacked like a duck . . . then people thought I was a duck" (ix). That her fellow students shared opinions and gossip with her in ways they certainly would not if her identity was that of a professor was the beginning of her realization that ". . . even after my 50th birthday, I could still be a student, and be treated by other students as, more or less, a peer" (ix).

Nathan appears to be saying that she is both an insider and outsider when she says that the way students relate to her in her identity as a fellow student is a bit enlightening to her since she has passed the age of fifty. Clearly, fifty-year-old students are anomalies on American college campuses, which seems to be why she qualified the way students treated her as "more or less, a peer." This conclusion is confirmed later in her book when she describes herself as a partial outsider: "As a partial outsider in college, owing to my age, I found myself drawn

to other partial outsiders, and vice versa. Those of us who in some way deviated from the norm perceived something in common and ended up, I noted, seeking one another out” (67).

Nathan’s experience is an important illustration of how I tried to manage my identity: In as many ways as possible, I tried to identify with the respondents, but I remained soberly aware that in so many ways I was not completely an insider. In other words, I hoped they would treat me, more or less, as a peer because they recognized that, in some ways, I was like them.

I believed it was important to become as much like them as possible 1) to earn their trust, and 2) to provide myself a better understanding of their lives and experiences. For example, prior to my research I came to understand the central role Israeli checkpoints play in the collective Palestinian psychology. Hammami (2010:47) explains this point:

There is a collective understanding that the checkpoints are there to stop life, to destroy livelihoods and education and ultimately defeat the will of a nation. Thus, simply continuing to cross them becomes encoded not as an individual experience of victimization but as part of a collective act of defiance and ultimately national resistance.

Elsewhere, Hammami (2001:9) suggests in addition to the collective experience of defiance, there remains a personal experience of crossing the Qalandya checkpoint, which “. . . is a seething mass of humanity - angry, frustrated, and mostly despairing . . .” that “. . . represents their own personal nightmare of Israeli vengeance.”

Prior to my research, I had gone through the Qalandya and many other Israeli checkpoints countless times, but always in a calculated way that would make the crossing as easy and time-efficient as possible. For example, I might exit Jerusalem toward the northern West Bank through the Qalandya checkpoint, which typically has a free flow of northbound traffic, but return through a different checkpoint that does not normally have Qalandya’s regular *two-hour wait* (Hammami 2001:9) in the southbound direction. I also used this same strategy

many times entering and exiting Bethlehem, a gateway to the southern West Bank.

Over the years, more politically left-leaning Israelis have utilized a similar strategy to access their Palestinian friends in the West Bank. A visit from Israelis or other non-Palestinians is usually appreciated. However, such visits, when accomplished without similar checkpoint struggles that Palestinians regularly encounter, often do not communicate solidarity to Palestinians in the way non-Palestinians might hope. Hamzeh-Muahaise (1999:28) spoke for many frustrated Palestinians when she lashed out at her Israeli-Jewish friend who, in a show of solidarity *but* without any complications getting through the checkpoint, came to visit her in Dheishe Refugee Camp: “Well, how in the hell are you going to really feel what we have to go through if you don’t go through it yourselves?”

It was clear to me that personally going into Area A (see 2.2.4 for an explanation of Areas A, B, and C) to meet my respondents would be important, but it was going to be equally important *how* I got there. So, I chose to travel from East Jerusalem to Ramallah and back on Arab bus eighteen. I needed to experience the checkpoint in a way that Palestinians do in order to somewhat understand the collective experience it had become for them. Hammami (2010:32) explains that crossing the checkpoints is such a collective experience that it is now “. . . a recurrent theme in Palestinian artistic practice including cinema, dance, poetry and music.”

I crossed the Qalandya checkpoint four times on bus eighteen. Each time I crossed from Jerusalem to Ramallah, the bus simply drove through the checkpoint as I would have had I driven my private vehicle. It was interesting that in each of my interviews conducted in Ramallah, I was asked how I got there. That I had arrived in Ramallah by bus was both a surprise and clearly important to my respondents. Although they had not all shared the personal experience of Qalandya, they all had certainly shared the personal experience of other checkpoints and were impressed that I would come to Ramallah by bus.

I became confident that this expression of solidarity, or attempt to identify and thus build trust with my respondents was effective when they wanted to know details of my experience in crossing borders.

The return trip from Ramallah *to* Jerusalem was quite different than the trip arriving to Ramallah *from* Jerusalem. The return trip means walking through the Qalandya checkpoint, which is one of eleven new high-tech terminals that is equipped with “. . . every conceivable form of Israeli high and low security technology [that is] exported around the world including: magnetic spindle gates, high speed x-ray machines, and biometric scanning devices” (Hammami 2010:49). Hammami goes on to describe the experience of crossing post-renovation Qalandya (49): “Now crossing involves navigating through a warren of cage like pens, between turnstiles that automatically shut or open by remote control, all to the disembodied din of soldiers screeching through a [public address] system.”

My respondents seemed to be surprised and drawn in as I detailed a previous experience returning to Jerusalem through the Qalandya terminal, enduring the press of people trying to push their way to the front of the line “. . . run[ning] about like mice in a cage desperate to get through the electrically controlled turnstiles” (Sherwell 2009:40).

I further identified with the respondents as their stories of crossing internal checkpoints expanded to traveling abroad, which meant crossing international checkpoints. Hammami’s (2001:15) description of the Palestinian experience at international borders, echoed my respondents’ experiences:

For the majority of Palestinians, queuing at passport control at any international border is always an experience of anxiety, often followed by removal from the queue while computers are checked and questions are asked. It is always a powerful reminder that one belongs to a community of failure - peoples who have failed to attain the signal political achievement of the 19th century the nationstate [sic] and formal citizenship. Our experience of being stopped at international borders is intimately linked to those myriads of checkpoints Israel imposes in, and around, our communities in the West Bank and Gaza.

More than half of my respondents mentioned traveling abroad, mostly to Jordan and Kuwait, but some to the West, so they were well aware of what it meant to receive extra scrutiny when crossing international borders, even in Arab countries. Assuming that I had never experienced extra scrutiny when traveling abroad, several respondents seemed pleasantly surprised when I shared of being delayed up to three hours several times at Israel's Ben Gurion Airport while security personnel examined my documents and baggage and person.

While I believe these experiences were helpful in building trust for my respondents and a better understanding of them for me, it remains abundantly clear to me that as much as I might try to identify with them - whether through learning Arabic or crossing a checkpoint in a similar manner to them or sharing the same faith - I would never be fully considered one of them. There will always be something that identifies me as Nathan's "partial outsider." I may walk through Qalandya's ". . . trough-like passageways, offer bags, fingerprints and documents for inspection by Israeli soldiers behind double-paned Plexiglass . . ." (Mandell 2009:89) like my Palestinian traveling companions on bus eighteen, but when I press my documents to the bullet-proof glass, the soldier will see a passport from the United States of America. And inside that blue passport is a residence stamp from the Israeli Ministry of Interior that identifies me as a pastor who has the right to reside *anywhere* in Israel. So, while I've had experiences similar to those of my respondents, my experiences were still different.

I'm different from them in many ways: I am a citizen of the United States. I do not live in the West Bank. I do not come from a Muslim background. I speak only a minimal level of Arabic. I am the interviewer; they are respondents. Because these things are always present reminders of my status as an outsider, I tried to use the ways that I entered and exited the field, like Nathan (2006:132) explains, as ". . . special moments, because these transitions often breed significant insights about the place called the field, the place called the home, and the relationship between them." My home was not the field, and the field was not my home. But, I tried diligently to use my transitions to increase credibility and

understanding. I tried, as much as possible, to view my respondents as peers from whom I could learn. And, these efforts proved beneficial in building appreciation and trust from the respondents, which led to a greater openness in telling their stories.

5. Analysis and Findings

Effectively evangelizing Muslims in dangerous or culturally sensitive contexts requires methodological considerations. These considerations are all the more important when an individual Muslim may be pre-disposed, for any number of reasons, to reject any Christian witness.

The apparent failure of a general Christian witness to effectively penetrate the Arab Muslim world (Thomas 1994) has led to further reflection in at least two ways: 1) It has provided a reason to critique the ways Christians have witnessed to Muslims, asking why the Christian witness has seemingly been ineffective in an Arab Muslim context (Anderson 1976), and 2) based on information gained through critique, missionaries (indigenous and ex-patriot) are re-thinking their strategy, where necessary, while trying to discover ways to be more effective in their witness.

The following analysis and findings report provides information that is helpful toward developing an effective strategy of evangelism within the West Bank context.

The primary source for this study was personal interviews with individuals who converted from Islam to evangelical Christianity in the West Bank. The summary interview reports are presented below as Appendix 4, while the analysis of those interviews, including excerpts, is presented here as my findings.

Bibby and Brinkerhoff (1974) did a four-year study (1966-70) of evangelistic methodology among a group of Canadian evangelical churches that examined the methods utilized by the churches to proselytize non-Christians into their faith and church community. They evaluated the success or failure of this enterprise based on information provided by the churches in three broad categories: 1) Contact: Reaching Out, 2) Bridging: Bringing Them In, and 3) Assimilation: Keeping [those who were brought in]. Except for assimilation, which I change to Conversion, I utilize these categories in my analysis below while also departing

from their model of using the churches as sources of information. Instead, I will follow Rainer's model (Rainer 2001) of self-reporting by the converts themselves regarding their experience and then draw conclusions from their testimonies.

5.1 The Influence of Context on Conversion Orientation Types

With consideration to McKnight's Conversion Orientations (see 3.1.1.1.1 above) all of my respondents represent *Personal Decision*⁷⁶ conversions, which reflects two contextual issues. First, it is easily understood that the conversion orientation types I had access to would be primarily, if not exclusively representative of the ministry style, or orientation, of my gatekeepers. After all, the gatekeepers provided access to converts who were the fruit of their evangelistic efforts.

The second factor regards the receiving church itself. Almost 80% of the respondents, nineteen of twenty-four,⁷⁷ were received, after conversion into a local church community⁷⁸ that is neither liturgical in style nor old enough to produce a significant number of socialized converts. In almost all cases, the respondents were first-generation believers. Among my respondents there were two groups of exceptions that included multi-generational converts: The first exception was two siblings, Respondents Twenty and Twenty-Four. They possibly could have been socialized, had their mother, Respondent Twenty-Two, not taken a passive approach in her witness for Christ during the children's earliest years, both in terms of home life and participation in a local church community. The mother's passive approach was evidence of her immature faith being lived out within a social context of fear. The feelings of isolation and

⁷⁶ I believe all conversions are the result of a personal exercise of faith and that without faith no one is truly regenerate regardless of conversion orientation classification. Here, I am using McKnight's (2002) orientations, which are an attempt to codify conversions within a sociological framework.

⁷⁷ The remaining 5 respondents remain unassociated with a local church. It should also be noted that among those who are officially affiliated with a local church, 3 qualified their answers: 1 said, "not in the West Bank", and 2 said, "loosely."

⁷⁸ The churches to which I was given access were identified as "MBB churches," which indicates that the membership consists primarily of first-generation MBBs.

insecurity were likely exacerbated by a lack of significant numbers of MBBs within this context. However, as the children grew older and the mother's faith matured, she shared her faith more openly with them and, here and there, began to include them in her church life. In the case of this family, the mother's witness was so late and so little that it would be impossible to consider either of these children socialized converts, though there was some element of social influence in their testimonies.

The second exception was a multi-generational family conversion that included Respondents Four, Five, Six, Nineteen, and Twenty-One.⁷⁹ While there is more than one generation represented in this conversion story, I categorize them all as personal decision. They are not socialized because they were not surrounded by Christian influence and their conversions occurred simultaneously or, with a single exception (Respondent Twenty-One), within a very short time span of each other. Respondent Twenty-One was the last to believe, which occurred about two years after the initial professions in her family. Similar to their counterparts mentioned above, there were elements of socialization present in the testimonies of the younger children. The time span and overall circumstances of their conversions suggest personal decision rather than socialization as the orientation type for all members of this family.

As predicted above in 3.1.3, analysis of the respondents' testimonies indicates that at this time the socialization and liturgical orientations are "impractical due to the particular context of this project." However, as the MBB community grows and more parents are born again, the evidence points to more children being raised in a family and church environment that will be conducive for socialized conversions. In the mean time, at least, the overwhelming majority of conversions will likely remain within the *Personal Decision Orientation*.

Similar to the socialization orientation's potential representative growth among the conversion testimonies within this context, one might predict that

⁷⁹ Other family members converted as well, but were too young to be interviewed at the time the family was interviewed.

growth in the numbers of MBBs would increase the number of liturgical orientation conversions as well. However, my observations indicate that the churches most involved in aggressive evangelism within the West Bank typically are not liturgical churches.

Furthermore, in terms of strictly evangelizing Muslims, McKnight's *Liturgical Conversion Orientation* still seems very unrealistic as a workable model within the West Bank because of the necessity to be regularly present and active in a liturgical church. This level of participation and public exposure seems unlikely to be very effective in a cultural context like the West Bank that forbids conversion away from Islam.

Without conversion orientation types that facilitate conversion within natural affiliations (i.e., family and/or socio-religious units), one must determine if the *Insider Movement* represents an acceptable evangelistic methodology or seek other effective ways to connect with non-believers outside such affiliations. Below, I explain what my respondents revealed about how initial contact between Christians and Muslims is made in the West Bank.

5.2 Contact: Reaching Out

In every Muslim country it is illegal to attempt to convert Muslims away from Islam. Though the legal response may vary, depending on the country, attempting to convert Muslims away from Islam is illegal and often carries harsh penalties. This reality illustrates the challenge of developing an effective evangelistic method that gives due consideration to effective means of initiating contact with Muslims within a difficult context.

My respondents revealed that no single method of initial contact was used. In certain cases the respondents initiated contact with Christians, while in other cases, Christians made the first-contact with the respondents, and the final group represents those cases that are less clearly categorized as either self or other-initiated.

5.2.1 First-Contact: Pre-Contact Preparation

Bibby and Brinkerhoff (1974) use *contact* to mark a “point of contact where the outsider becomes aware of the [specific] *group*” (190) or church. I use *first-contact* more specifically to mark a point of contact where the outsider becomes aware of the *gospel* as a result of contact with an advocate. The distinction is important because Bibby and Brinkerhoff focus solely on the process of bringing individuals (whether they are already Christians or potential converts) into contact with a particular church for the primary purpose of growing the specific church’s membership. In contrast, my thesis focuses on the process of evangelizing Muslims with the intent of conversion, which may or may not be related to the ministry of a particular congregation. Clearly these two approaches can complement each other in a broader study of the ministry of a local church, but here, they remain distinct, one from the other.

Interestingly, Bibby’s and Brinkerhoff’s concept of a more generic first-contact – i.e., becoming aware of a Christian community - is, in many cases, better understood in my context as a contact with a Christian that involves no element of overt evangelization, but prepares a potential convert for an eventual *evangelistic* first-contact. For example, from early childhood, Respondent Two⁸⁰ was encouraged by her educator father to read extensively beyond Arab and Muslim literature. This provided her the opportunity to read and think outside the parameters of Islam and to question her family’s religion. Freedom to explore beyond her own religious context does not constitute conversion or even a first-contact, but it informed her awareness of Christians and was an important early factor in preparing her for her eventual conversion and change of identity. I would label the influence of this freedom to explore as Stage One in this respondent’s preparation for the gospel.

The respondent’s initial contact with a Christian was during college when she roomed with a Christian, who sadly never spoke to the respondent about the

⁸⁰ For a very similar, yet unrelated, testimony see Respondent Seventeen in Appendix 4.

Lord or sin or salvation. In spite of her friend's lack of witness, this new experience of knowing a Christian moved Respondent Two toward her first-contact by providing her with a new way of thinking about religion in general, but also about Christians specifically. In other words, this positive experience with a Christian, though it was completely non-evangelistic, softened the respondent's culturally-shaped negative attitude toward Christians. We can identify this as Stage Two in her preparation for contact. Each of these stages can be understood as positive steps toward a willingness to hear and consider the gospel at a future point in time. The final number of stages may vary according to the circumstances of each individual.

Respondent Two's experience also verifies, in some ways, Waardenburg's (2000:149) observation of the changes in how Arabs (both Muslims and Christians) have modified or changed their identities⁸¹ during the last forty to fifty years of the 20th century. He believes these changes are the result of "reflection, better information and because of the fact of meeting others." Waardenburg's observations coupled with the responses received in my interviews suggest that positive pre-evangelism contacts can be important factors in evangelizing Muslims. While not salvific encounters themselves, positive *generic* encounters with Christians and the freedom to think outside the parameters of Islam can be important factors in the process of Muslims moving toward an open hearing of a Christian witness once gospel contact is established.

5.2.2 First-Contact: Self-Initiated⁸²

Among my respondents, the *self-initiated* contact always was the result of a

⁸¹ Waardenburg's observations were not specifically related to conversion, thus while the identity changes he discusses may certainly include conversion, the referenced changes may simply be a lessening or strengthening of religious self-identity within the same religious structure (e.g., becoming more secular, or conversely, becoming more religious).

⁸² For the sake of space and continuity, I will present illustrative examples of each category rather than provide a pedantic retelling of every interview. All the interview reports are included as Appendix 4 and may be used to provide broader context or as a resource for further research.

personal crisis⁸³ that pushed the respondent to seek relief. The pattern of conversion for this group was as follows: The respondent experienced a crisis in their life and initiated contact with a Christian in order to solve that problem. When the crisis was a tangible problem (e.g., personal safety, financial, medical, etc.) the Christian assisted in whatever ways possible to help alleviate the person's specific problem, but they did not stop at the point of only doing good works. Because these Christians believe that anyone who dies without faith in the atoning death of Christ will face eternal punishment, they approached the crises holistically. The advocates combined concern for the immediate physical or tangible problem with concern for the contact's spiritual condition. In other words, they advocated in some way for the gospel, which eventually led the respondent to faith in Jesus Christ. Mason (2012:308, endnote 2) labels this approach as "holistic Christian mission," saying, that it ". . . treats concerns of the 'body' and not just those of the 'soul.'" He expands this explanation by citing Heldt (2004) who "suggests, for example, that we must look at the human problem in the four basic dimensions of our human existence -physical, mental, spiritual and social."

In certain cases, the connection between the two realms – physical and spiritual – was more obvious because the individual's crisis was actually created by a Christian. Respondent Fourteen described how the consistent kindness and joy exhibited by a Christian youth group provoked him to want to know more about what they believed and why they regularly provided aid to the poor and suffering residents of his village. Though he was content in his fairly meager life, he saw something different in these young people. It was not that they were more satisfied with their lives because of being wealthy or they had everything that he did not have. It was something different. Though, at that time, he could not say exactly what, he recognized that they had something *inside* that he lacked.

In this case, the crisis, which evolved over a year, was existential in nature and resulted in the respondent asking one of the Christian youth why they kept

⁸³ For a clarification on my definition of crisis see 3.1.2.2 above.

coming to his village. The answer was simple: “We are a Christian youth group, and we want to love our neighbors by offering material help.” With that answer, the youth also offered an Arabic version of the book *God Loves You, My Muslim Friend!* (Tanagho 2004), which uses the Qur’an as a bridging tool to the gospel by presenting “a few important facts about Jesus Christ (*Isa AL Masih* in the Qur’an) found both in the Qur’an and the Bible” (2). The respondent said that reading this book caused him to have an increased interest in Christianity because it was a *Muslim-friendly* introduction to Christianity. He read the book very quickly and then became secretly absorbed in the Bible.

More details of Respondent Fourteen’s process of conversion are reviewed/evaluated in 5.3 Bridging: Bringing Them In. Here, it is important to recognize that as a result of an existential crisis – created by the good testimony of *non-Muslim background Christians* – the respondent initiated contact that eventually led to conversion.

Respondent Eleven made the initial contact on his own because he recognized a possible connection between his philosophical crisis and Christianity. However, his contact was not with a person, rather it was with the New Testament. As an atheist-Muslim he was interested in Islam as an ethical system and had grown concerned about what he perceived to be the negative status of women within the cultural context of Islam. This internal crisis caused him to set out on a search to better understand the status of women within the world’s major ethical systems. The most obvious first system to examine, he thought, was Christianity because “it is the largest ethical system in the world.”

He did not really have a plan of how he would examine Christianity’s view of women other than reading the New Testament. He did not feel it was necessary to seek the counsel of a pastor or priest. Instead, he was confident that a self-directed reading of the New Testament would give him a sufficiently clear understanding of the status of women in the Christian ethical system. However, he did not own a New Testament, so he went to a bookstore in Ramallah and purchased an Arabic Bible, including both Old and New Testaments. In

Respondent Eleven's testimony we see that a philosophical crisis led to a self-initiated first-contact that led to conversion.

The final example of self-initiated contact offered here, is that of Respondent Four. His story differs from the other examples in that his crisis was a medical need that had no apparent connection to religion or other philosophical matters. It was simply a medical issue.

As a result of a medical crisis (i.e., his daughter's need for eye surgery), the respondent was encouraged by a Muslim friend to meet with some Christian men, who worked at a Jerusalem eye hospital, and who regularly visited their area to distribute care packages for needy families. But, strongly committed to his Muslim faith, the respondent twice refused the suggestion to seek help from Christians. However, what he thought was simply a medical crisis was moved toward a religious crisis because of a series of three dreams or voices⁸⁴ over the course of three nights (see 5.3.6.2.3 A Voice for details of these dreams). That his crisis was transitioning from medical to religious became clearer to him once the Christian men had visited his home. In summary, a medical crisis coupled with a series of dreams prompted Respondent Four to initiate contact with Christians, who then used that opportunity to advocate for the gospel.

These three examples are representative of the entirety of the self-initiated contact group and illustrate 1) the diversity of crises that prompted Muslims to initiate contact with Christians, 2) the variety of advocates, both human and *non-human*, who were contacted, 3) the value of openly identifying as a Christian, which is closely related to 4) the availability of an advocate. While these important elements are discussed more fully below in 5.2.6 Summary of First-Contact Conclusions, the *content* of their advocacy is evaluated in 5.3 Bridging: Bringing In.

⁸⁴ The respondent was not certain how to categorize these phenomena. He initially identified them as dreams, but clarified that he never saw anything, he only heard a voice.

5.2.3 First-Contact: Others-Initiated

The *others-initiated* first-contact was typically initiated by the advocate (though not always⁸⁵), and usually occurred after the respondent knew the advocate for a period of time. This was the most frequently referenced type of first-contact, doubling the occurrences of the *self-initiated* contact group (fourteen vs. seven).

The basic pattern of conversion for this group was as follows: The respondent became acquainted with an advocate who initiated a gospel contact, which eventually led to the respondent's conversion.

While the details of the content of advocacy are more fully analyzed below, it is necessary to give some detail here in order to better understand the process of the contact. In certain cases a professional minister (i.e., an evangelist or a pastor) initiated contact with the respondent. For example, through his work at an automotive repair shop, Respondent Eighteen met a customer who, unbeknown to him, was a missionary evangelist. After their initial meeting, the evangelist began to regularly stop by the respondent's shop to say hello and talk.⁸⁶ As time passed, the topic of conversation broadened until they eventually began to discuss religion, specifically the respondent's religion. When discussing religion, the evangelist primarily focused on issues of sin and forgiveness.

The evangelist's vocation likely influenced their conversations to eventually focus on religion. This does not, however, suggest he was disingenuous about his desire to befriend the non-Christian or that contact or advocacy should be

⁸⁵ An obvious exception is the story of Respondent Four. While Respondent Four initiated contact with the advocates on his own behalf, making himself a self-initiated contact, doing so also made his family members (Respondents Five, Six, Nineteen, and Twenty-One) others-initiated contacts.

⁸⁶ This approach is sometimes referred to as "looking for a person of peace," which refers to a phrase Jesus used in Luke 10:6. It is a popular approach that is promoted for use in church planting contexts. Rohde (2011:comment 3) describes the person of peace as "the person God leads us to so that we can not only preach the Gospel to them but take it to their *oikos*, their household or sphere of influence. They are the human door opener into the network of relationships in a given place." See also, Pittman (2010) "The Person of Peace Principle" and Sternke (2011) "The Key to Recognizing the Person of Peace."

reserved for *professionals*. Non-professionals can (and should!) advocate for the gospel. For example, Respondent Three had contact initiated by a fellow college student who offered to help her improve her English. Spending time together during English lessons gave their relationship the opportunity to develop in ways that it otherwise probably would never grow. This deepening of their relationship provided the Christian an opportunity to explain her motivation in offering to help the respondent improve her English.⁸⁷ Granted, the Christian's explanation - "Because I see Jesus on you!" - initially was both shocking and confusing to the respondent. It did, however, open the door to further discussions and an invitation for the respondent to attend a weekend retreat where she would hear more from a pastor.

A variety of advocates, including both professional ministers and non-professional believers, started a dialogue that initiated contact with those who were classified as *others-initiated* contacts. For Respondent One, it was a co-worker who first talked with him about the gospel. The topic came up naturally in the course of conversation, though he was initially uninterested. In spite of his lack of interest, he was provoked to continue the conversations and to begin reading the Arabic Bible at home because his co-worker "loved Jesus very much" and seemed genuinely interested in him as a person. Some years later, as an advocate himself, he initiated gospel conversations with Respondent Two and her husband who were his personal friends. He regularly visited their home for meals and conversation, and he intentionally steered their conversations toward Jesus.

Respondents Twenty and Twenty-Four said that it was their mother who first began to tell them about Jesus after her faith had matured. A Christian tourist

⁸⁷ The current cliché for this approach of doing kind things in order to witness is "earning the right to be heard," which is often supported by arguments like, "they will not care how much you know until they know how much you care." See Reese (2011) "Must We Earn the Right to Share the Gospel?"

from Kenya, who ended up living with her Muslim family for nine years,⁸⁸ was the first person to tell Respondent Thirteen and her family about Jesus.

Each of these non-professional advocates had their advocacy supported at a later time by the witness of a pastor or missionary, which subsequently led to the respondents' conversions. Usually, after the conversations were initiated and the questions became too difficult for the non-professional advocate, or the conversation seemed too prolonged (e.g., sometimes the process of conversion lasted a few years or longer) the respondent was encouraged to speak to a more experienced believer, usually a professional pastor or missionary. For example, Respondent One was encouraged to speak to the Israeli-Jewish pastor of his initial advocate, and his conversion occurred after about two more years of group and personal Bible study, which were both guided by the pastor. Respondents Twelve and Thirteen were introduced to Jamilla,⁸⁹ a female evangelist and discipler, who led them to Christ after continuing to boldly evangelize them. An MBB made the initial contact with Respondent Fifteen, and recommended that he meet a pastor. The pastor led the respondent to faith after nine months of consistently sharing the gospel.

This pattern of handing off the potential convert from non-professional to professional advocates likely reflects the Arab cultural emphasis on honor and titles⁹⁰ as well as the culture's appreciation⁹⁰ for the knowledge and experience of professionals.

⁸⁸ While this may sound odd, certain Muslim families in this area demonstrate Arab hospitality by hosting Christian tourists in their homes, sometimes for rather lengthy periods. When I moved to Israel to work in ministry, I lived the first couple months with a different Muslim family not very far from Respondent Thirteen's home.

⁸⁹ Jamilla is a pseudonym that is used to protect the identity of the advocate and references the same person throughout this thesis.

⁹⁰ The value of a title within this context became clear to me when I met the respondents and explained that this research was related to my doctoral studies. Each of the respondents responded in ways that demonstrated their respect for the title of doctor or professor. Those who responded verbally, said something similar to "wow!" Non-verbal affirmation was demonstrated by sitting up straight and more formally in their seats or through a smile of approval and appreciation. It was also clear that they were happy to be involved in doctoral research.

There were exceptions to the typical pattern of *others-initiated* contact in terms of the advocate and the length of the conversion process. Respondent Sixteen was suffering through a religious crisis because the more observant she became the more Allah seemed absent. After attending some courses at a culture center, the respondent was invited to a Christmas party at the same center. A fifteen-minute recitation of the Christmas story in which a single advocate explained how Jesus is God who came in the flesh to die for the sins of the world sufficiently convinced her that she should believe in Jesus.

These examples of *others-initiated* contact demonstrate 1) the diversity in circumstances that provide opportunity to initiate gospel contact with a Muslim, 2) the variety and number of advocates who were involved in the evangelism process, and 3) the value of being willing to initiate gospel contact with a Muslim. These important elements are discussed more fully below in 5.2.6 Summary of First-Contact Conclusions and the content of advocacy is evaluated in 5.3 Bridging: Bringing Them In.

5.2.4 First-Contact: Blended - Self and Others-Initiated

A few other testimonies were more difficult to categorize according to who initiated contact, which is less important than the fact that gospel contact occurred. Respondent Seventeen, who at the time was an atheist, made friends with some MBBs while taking computer courses at a culture center. However, without a religious background to provide any context, she really had no understanding of what being an MBB was about. When she heard that a MBB group was going to Egypt, she asked to join them. Every day during this evangelistic ministry trip, she heard Bible lessons and personal testimonies of conversion from those who went on the trip. The experience in Egypt coupled with a week of intense reading and talking about the gospel after her return to the West Bank, led the respondent to believe in “Jesus as Lord.”

Respondent Twenty-Three was another unusual testimony. He said that he was surprised that one day he “suddenly felt drawn” to read the New Testament

that had been on his bookshelf for many years. Though he could not remember how he got it, he was certain that it had been gathering dust for many years. At the time he felt drawn to read the New Testament, he had a casual relationship with a bi-vocational Arab pastor. Over the years the pastor had been kind to him and occasionally suggested the respondent should read the New Testament. However, the respondent said he did not believe any of the pastor's suggestions were involved in this sudden prompting to read the New Testament. In fact, he could not identify anything external that had prompted him to want to read the New Testament.

After he was engaged in reading the New Testament for a couple months, he began to tell the pastor the things he was discovering. The pastor mainly encouraged him to continue reading until about three weeks after their conversations started. The pastor then wisely observed that the respondent was likely ready to trust Jesus for his salvation and asked him if he wanted to say the sinner's prayer. After receiving an explanation of what the sinner's prayer is, he prayed with the pastor.

Though these specific cases were difficult to categorize in terms of who initiated contact, they illustrate 1) the importance of a gospel contact, 2) a variety of advocates, and 3) the value of advocacy.

5.2.5 First-Contact Analysis

One of the dangers of researching mission methodology is to focus on a particular method. There is a tendency to draw certain conclusions that cause one to lock in on a single method as *the* way to evangelize specific people groups. Often driven by a desire to see more people place their faith in Jesus, we can be tempted to implement a methodology deemed successful in another context and thus implement a one-size-fits-all approach to evangelism that does not give due consideration to the diversity of contexts around the globe nor to the diversity of people even within a specific context. While certain elements of the evangelistic process remained stable within my study group, the respondents'

testimonies revealed that a variety of circumstances, crises, and advocates were involved in the process of them coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

At this point, based on the information gathered from my respondents, I can draw a number of conclusions regarding first-contact. These important principles are offered as tools to help others initiate contact with Muslims so that they might come to faith in Jesus Christ.

5.2.5.1 First-Contact: Who Initiates?

The person who initiated the contact between a potential convert and an advocate cannot be isolated to either the potential convert or the advocate. My respondents revealed that on seven occasions it was the potential convert who initiated contact with an advocate, and on fourteen occasions an advocate initiated contact. I was unable to clearly determine into which category the three remaining respondents most accurately fit.

Although the others-initiated contact group was double the size of the self-initiated contact group, the latter's representation was still significant. Therefore, self-initiated contact should not be dismissed as a consideration in developing a mission methodology for use among Muslims in the West Bank.

Based on this representation of self-initiated and others-initiated first-contact among my respondents, gospel advocates in the West Bank should 1) be prepared for Muslims to initiate first-contact and 2) seek opportunities to initiate contact with Muslims.

5.2.5.2 First-Contact: Motivations

Among the others-initiated contacts, the motivation to establish contact with a Muslim might be voiced in many different ways. According to my respondents, the essential motivations of others-initiated contact were the advocates' love for Jesus coupled with a belief that eternal judgment awaits all who die without a personal faith-relationship with that same Jesus.

Those who initiated contact themselves clearly differed from the others-initiated contact group in that they were primarily motivated by various crises. One hundred percent of those categorized as self-initiated contact respondents (4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, and 22), were motivated to initiate contact with a Christian in order to find relief from a crisis.

Interestingly, except for Respondent Eight, all of the self-initiated respondents *knowingly* initiated contact with a *Christian* in order to gain relief from their crises. Two of them, Respondents Four and Nine, considered themselves to be very religious Muslims. This not only illustrates the value of Christians having a Christian identity, it also suggests that a clear identity as a Christian may not be as much of an evangelistic stumbling block in the West Bank as might be assumed to be the case in other Muslim dominant areas.

Among my respondents a third group believed they had clear direction to specifically contact Christians. While all of the respondents would look back on their conversion and see the hand of God arranging for them to meet certain persons and have certain conversations, this group saw God's direction more clearly from the beginning. For example, Respondent Ten had recurring dreams in which he saw himself sitting in a church reading the Bible. Though he did not have complete understanding of the meaning of the dreams, he understood them to be directives from God to seek information *from Christians*. In this respect, Respondent Ten's story is similar to the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. (See 5.3.6.2.4.2 Dreams as Directives.) Respondent Fourteen could seek information only from Christians because it was those Christians' good works that created his crisis.

This survey of contact motivations suggests that no single motivation swept over the respondents, therefore, an advocate may expect to see a variety of motivations for contact between Muslims and advocates. The variety of motivations also revealed the importance of the availability of openly identifiable Christians, particularly for those Muslims who would self-initiate contact.

5.2.5.3 First-Contact: The Variety of Advocates

The respondents mentioned a variety of advocates who were either contacted or initiated contact, including professional ministers (i.e., pastors, missionaries, or Bible scholars), lay church members, and non-human instruments.

5.2.5.3.1 Advocates: Self-Identity Issues

Identity issues are an important theme among missiologists working in both Muslim and Hindu majority contexts.⁹¹ This raises the question of how the first-contact advocates in this study self-identified. In all cases where first-contact occurred in Arabic, it was made by or with an advocate who self-identified as a *Masihi* (مسيحي), which is the normal Arabic word for Christian (Stringer 2010), or as *Aaber* (عابر), which, like the Hebrew *Avar* (עבר), indicates crossing over (Gesenius 1985, see entry #5674). In this case, those believers from a Muslim background see themselves as having crossed over from darkness to light.

Even though this section focuses on the self-identity of the first-contact advocates, these same terms are equally applicable to all Arabic speaking advocates who were involved in the evangelism process of these respondents. Furthermore, none of the respondents self-identified post-conversion as a Muslim Background Believer, a Messianic Muslim (Travis 2000), or a Muslim Believer (see Rebecca Lewis in Brogden 2010:35), which are terms frequently used in the discussions related to the *Insider Movement*.⁹²

⁹¹ See, for example, Petersen (2005), "Foreigners, Pharisees and Foreskins"; Higgins (2006), "Identity, Integrity and Insider Movements"; Kraft (2007), "Community and identity among Arabs of a Muslim background who choose to follow a Christian faith"; Petersen (2007), "The Possibility of a 'Hindu Christ-Follower'"; Lewis (2009), "Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community"; and Wolfe (2011), "Insider Movements: An Assessment of the Viability of Retaining Socio-Religious Insider Identity in High-Religious Contexts".

⁹² Although none of my respondents self-identify as MBB, I use it in reference to them in this thesis because it is the most widely used term (in the literature and private discussions) to identify those who came to faith in Jesus from a Muslim background. It is simply used for the sake of convenience and clarity of communication, and its use does not indicate disrespect for or

This does not prove that the latter terms are not used in the West Bank, but I was unable to locate communities or ministries in which these terms were used. Furthermore, when enquiring of such usage among my gatekeepers and other contacts I was always told, “I’m not aware of anything like that in the West Bank,” or “We don’t emphasize those kinds of things.” One gatekeeper illustrated the concept through analogy: “In the same way you wouldn’t want to be identified as a prostitute background believer or a drug addict background believer, they don’t want to be identified with their past.”

While I never asked my respondents whether they viewed their conversions as a rejection of Islam, the negative comments many of them made about Islam, Muhammad, and Muslims as well as their rejection of any Muslim self-identity clearly suggest they have rejected Islam.

None of the respondents indicated any remaining appreciation for Islam during our interviews. Further to this point, I asked Respondents Sixteen and Seventeen why they were both still wearing a hijab (see Figure 10) after their conversions. Excitedly trying to reject this Islamic practice, they spoke over each other to explain that they would shed them immediately if it were not for local customs. Respondent Thirteen did remove her hijab. She said that when she realized Jesus had healed her (which resulted in her decision of faith in Jesus) she immediately removed her hijab and said, “Jesus healed me!” When asked to clarify what was the intended meaning of removing her hijab, she explained that it was “just an emotional response,” but it was also “symbolic of being freed from Islam and becoming a Christian.”



Figure 10 – Palestinian girls wearing the traditional head covering known as a hijab. Photo: Craig Dunning

disagreement with the respondents’ choice of self-identification.

Only three of Greenham's respondents (M4, M6, and W10) "cited rejection of Islam as an important conversion factor" (2010b:154), which appears to be a significant contrast with my respondents. However, although only three cited their rejection of Islam, most of his respondents "appeared to move away from Islam independently and often as a result of their conversions" (154). This latter clarification appears to bring our findings closer together, and may simply indicate differences in emphasis and methods of research.

5.2.5.3.2 Advocates: Gender and Marital Issues

I did not find any gender or marital status patterns. Both males and females, married and single, were among the first-contact advocates.

In honor-shame societies, particularly among Arab Muslims, contact between the sexes is generally strictly regulated. This suggests that a male initiating contact with males, and a female initiating contact with females⁹³ is the expected norm. My respondents revealed that while norms governing gender-mixing were relevant and basically followed, they were occasionally stretched in the following ways:⁹⁴ When gender-mixing involved females initiating contact with males, the male was an *unobservant* Muslim (e.g., Respondent One) or the son of the female (e.g., Respondent Twenty). Alternatively, on those occasions when males initiated contact with females, either the husband/father was present (as in the cases of Respondents Five, Thirteen, and Twenty-One) or it occurred in a group setting (e.g., Respondent Sixteen).

5.2.5.3.3 Advocates: Professional Qualifications

Among my respondents there did not appear to be any professional qualifications necessary to be a first-contact advocate: Of the seven self-initiated

⁹³ For examples of Christian women ministering to Muslim women see Strong and Page (2007), *A Worldview Approach to Ministry Among Muslim Women*; Loewen (2010), *Woman to Woman*; and Shelby (2011), *Behind the Veils of Yemen*.

⁹⁴ For an example of the controversy that can occur as a result of gender-mixing in a strict Islamic context see "Gender mixing sparks controversy . . ." in Al-Aribiya (2012).

contacts, four contacted professional ministers (though two did not realize they were contacting professionals), two contacted lay members, and one initiated contact by purchasing a Bible at a bookshop.

Of the fourteen others-initiated contacts, eight were initiated by lay members and six involved professional ministers (though four of those were initiated by the head of the house and not the ministers themselves).

Finally, among the remaining three uncategorized contacts (7, 17, and 23), one involved a professional minister, another involved a lay member, and one began reading the New Testament as a result of an inner prompting.

5.2.5.3.4 Advocates: Age Considerations

With regard to the honor-shame context of the West Bank, one might expect the age of the advocate would necessarily be greater than the potential convert. This was, however, not always the case among my respondents. In fact, none of the respondents mentioned the age of the advocate in a way that indicated it had any bearing on the advocacy whatsoever. Typically, the age of the advocate involved in the initial contact was fairly similar to that of the potential convert, but some respondents were older and others younger than their initial contacts. The actual ages of the advocates ranged from teenagers to mid-fifties.

5.2.5.4 First-Contact: Creating Opportunities

The importance of being available as a gospel advocate cannot be overstated. My respondents revealed that the advocates were not only available for contact, but created contact opportunities in a variety of ways. In the case of self-initiated contact, some advocates created contact opportunities by simply making their identities as *Christians* publicly known (e.g., Respondent Nine). Others made their identities as *Christians* known publicly by way of kindness and good works (e.g., Respondents Four and Fourteen). Some provided professional services (e.g., Respondent Eight) and others made non-human advocates

available, as was the case of the bookshop that sold Respondent Eleven a New Testament.

Among the others-initiated contact advocates, good works were also useful in creating contact opportunities. The good works included teaching English (e.g., Respondent Three) or providing self-enrichment and computer courses (e.g., Respondents Sixteen and Seventeen). Initiating contact by befriending a Muslim, as did the advocates who befriended Respondents One, Two, Twelve, Thirteen and Eighteen, also proved to be an effective way for an advocate to initiate a gospel contact with a Muslim. And family members initiating contact was the most frequent type of others-initiated contact, and included Respondents Five, Six, Nineteen, Twenty, Twenty-One, and Twenty-Four.

5.2.6 Summary of First-Contact Conclusions

This study produced the following first-contact conclusions:

1. Among my respondents contact was both self-initiated and others-initiated in sufficient representations that a gospel advocate should prepare for and reasonably expect either type of contact to occur.
2. The motivation for contact was very clear: those who self-initiated contact were motivated by a crisis and the others-initiated contacts were motivated by a personal love for Jesus Christ and a concern for the eternal destiny of those who do not have a faith relationship with Jesus Christ.
3. A variety of advocates, including professional ministers, lay members, and non-human instruments, were either contacted or initiated contact. Even though, in all cases where the lay members were the initial contact the potential convert was eventually handed off to a professional minister, it is clear from their representation in the respondents' testimonies that lay member involvement in the evangelism process is both normal and necessary, which suggests there are no required professional qualifications to participate in effective evangelism in the West Bank.

4. My respondents also revealed that all the advocates who were the first-contact - regardless of who initiated contact - were people who self-identified as *Masihi*, the Arabic equivalent of the English word Christian or as *Aaber*, which indicates crossing over. None of them identified as Muslims in any form, whether as Messianic Muslims, Muslim believers, true Muslims, or some other title indicating a Muslim self-identification.
5. The influence of the honor-shame culture was evident in that expected gender boundaries were basically observed, though not without minor exceptions. However, in terms of age, on occasion younger persons advocated to older persons, though usually the ages of the advocate and potential convert were fairly contemporary.
6. Finally, my respondents mentioned a variety of ways that initial contact between them and an advocate was created. Those included the advocate: a) making their *Christian* identity publicly known, b) being kind, c) doing good works, d) providing professional services, and/or e) genuinely befriending a Muslim.

5.3 Bridging: Bringing Them In

In the context of this thesis, bridging refers to the process of evangelism that occurred *after* the respondent had their initial contact. Clearly, some level of evangelism occurred during their initial gospel contact, but here, I focus more specifically on the typically longer and more thorough effort of an advocate to persuade a Muslim to believe the gospel and place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

With certain exceptions noted below, the process of evangelism that my respondents experienced can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Crisis: The respondent had a crisis – either prior to or as a product of advocacy for the gospel.
- 2) Advocacy: A crisis or an advocate prompted the respondent to read the Bible, often in bulk,⁹⁵ and to engage in more in-depth study with an

⁹⁵ While more is said about “bulk” below, Appendix 6 may be helpful in understanding the use of this word here.

advocate – usually a professional minister, but also websites, and literature.

- 3) Conversion: Prayer and the use of the Bible in advocacy persuaded the respondents to believe and place their faith in Jesus Christ.

Before analyzing the bridging process, I explain the influence of the context in which bridging occurred.

5.3.1 The Islamic Context's Influence on Bridging:

The process of evangelism in this context is heavily influenced by several factors related to Islam that include a pre-conditioned skepticism, hostility toward the gospel and Christians, as well as a culture of fear.

5.3.1.1 Skepticism and Hostility

Among my respondents, the strong presence of Islam conditioned them to be initially skeptical, if not hostile, toward Christians and the gospel.

5.3.1.2 Negativity Toward Christians and the Gospel

One aspect of skepticism and hostility was related to negative attitudes and emotions towards Christians and/or the gospel. These attitudes and emotions were frequently expressed through verbal attacks and/or harassment of the evangelists personally or by mocking Christians and/or Christian beliefs (e.g., Respondents Twelve and Thirteen, respectively).

5.3.1.3 Dismissive of the Gospel

Another aspect of skepticism and hostility evidenced was the religio-cultural influence of Islam. In this regard, Muslims, particularly in Muslim dominant contexts, are typically conditioned to reject the gospel or any other enticement to leave Islam. This type of rejection is based on the Muslim belief in the absolute superiority of Islam, the Qur'an, and Muhammad over any other religions, holy

books, or prophets (Geisler and Saleeb 2002:9). These assumptions were (and continue to be) present in the West Bank and were expressed by my respondents in a variety of ways. For example, they became uncomfortable or angry at seeing men and women pray or worship together (e.g., Respondents Sixteen and Twenty) or by comparing the Qur'an and the Bible with the assumption that a comparison of the Qur'an and the Bible would easily prove the Bible to be wrong (e.g., Respondents One, Four, Twelve and Thirteen). Interestingly, this pre-conditioning was equally evident in both the religiously observant and the non-observant respondents.

5.3.2 Islam Creates a Culture of Fear

Islam also influences the process of evangelism by creating a culture of fear. In many places, including the West Bank, the ruling government exacerbates this fear. Because there is no such thing as separation of religion and state in an Islamic context (Richardson 2003:19), a person's fidelity to Islamic teaching and life is not only judged in the afterlife, but also in this life through the laws established by Shari'a-based governments (see 2.3.2 Shari'a: The Rule of Law).

5.3.2.1 Fear's Influence on Evangelism

The culture of fear has two primary influences on evangelism: resistance to listen and constraint of communication.

5.3.2.1.1 Fear Creates Resistance to Listen

First, the respondents commonly experienced fear of retribution - from Allah (e.g., Respondents Thirteen and Sixteen) or a government (e.g., Respondents One and Eight) - for rejecting Islam. Often this type of fear causes individuals to disregard consideration of other religious beliefs by default or to resist consideration of other ideas even if the person is interested.

5.3.2.1.2 Fear Constrains Communication

The second effect is the way the culture of fear typically hinders the believer's ability to speak openly, and thus influences the *type* of information they can share as well as the *way* they can share information. For example, the advocates were always careful to speak positively about Jesus and the New Testament and avoided, when possible, criticism of Muhammad and the Qur'an.

In the early stages of contact between an advocate and a potential convert, most of the Bible studies were conducted privately in homes or cars. These meetings usually were not publicized, nor were others invited. At least in the early stages this was the protocol. As the individual became more comfortable with the idea of considering the claims of Jesus, other trusted individuals (perhaps a spouse, but not always) were sometimes invited to participate.

If the context was so toxic toward evangelism, one must ask how were the advocates able to work effectively. Here, I give consideration to the advocates themselves as well as to the content of their message.

5.3.2.2 Effective Advocates Were Flexible and Patient, Creative, Alert and Bold

A culture of fear such as exists in the West Bank requires an advocate to be flexible and patient, creative, alert and bold.

5.3.2.2.1 Flexibility and Patience

Advocates in Muslim contexts must realize that appointments to meet with unbelievers will be canceled or changed regularly, often at the last minute. Conversations or Bible studies will be ended abruptly or altogether because of fear that someone may be listening or because possible converts sense they are getting close to believing in Jesus. Respondent Two was suddenly sent to her father's home when her husband suspected she had converted. Her sudden departure interrupted her Bible studies.

For many, the possibility of believing in Jesus is a frightening proposition that demands sober consideration. In other words, they may back away from contact as they count the cost of true discipleship. Respondent Four invited advocates to teach him the Bible, and subsequently cancelled the meetings after becoming angry about what was taught. Later, he would reconsider and invite them back into his home. This pattern was repeated many times over several months.

These contextual realities meant that Jamilla, a female evangelist, had to endure a year of questions from Respondent Twelve who always responded to Jamilla's answers with another question. However, the questions were primarily driven by a fear that she was nearing belief and were her way of avoiding the truth of the gospel.

5.3.2.2.2 Creative

Creativity is an important consideration for the advocate that wants to be effective. When traditional forms of evangelism or church planting are impossible, the advocate must utilize other methods. Gray and Gray (2008:43) report that "new media" are growing rapidly in the Middle East, which suggests the increased role technology will have in fruitful practices:

Consider the importance of what are called "new media" in the Middle East: between 2000 and 2007, the growth rate for Internet use was 491.4 percent. Furthermore, as of March 2007, 10 percent of the population had access to the Internet. Mobile phone usage is widespread, with about one in five people owning mobile phones. Satellite television is considered a household necessity for even the poorest families, along with drinking water and electricity.

Technology aided my advocates' creativity and effectiveness. For Respondent Fifteen, a mobile phone was the way he met with his advocate for six months. The widespread use of the mobile phone in the West Bank provided many advocates the opportunity to meet with potential converts when security or other logistical issues prevented face-to-face meetings. Satellite television was instrumental for Respondents Five, Nine, and Twenty-One.

Sometimes, a respondent, rather than the advocate, is the creative catalyst. For example, Respondent Eighteen asked to be an advocate's designated taxi driver so that he could have safe and uninterrupted Bible discussions.

5.3.2.2.3 Alert and Bold

Finally, the culture of fear requires an effective witness to be alert and bold. The advocate must be alert for subtle cues from a person or prompting from the Holy Spirit that it is appropriate to witness. When the advocate recognizes the opportunity is available, they must be bold enough to speak the truth.

Respondents Twelve and Thirteen provided an illustration of boldness when they mentioned their advocate, Jamilla, who spoke kindly but boldly to them about the Lord. In both cases, her advocacy appeared to have stalled, so she boldly challenged them to go home and pray that God would show them the truth, even offering that they should ask God to direct them to choose between Muhammad and Jesus. The respondents also revealed that the advocate's willingness to openly identify as a Christian was both helpful and bold in this particular context. Many respondents (e.g., Respondents Three, Four, Five, Six, Thirteen, Fourteen, Fifteen, Twenty, Twenty-Two and Twenty-Four) said that as Muslims they were impressed with how Christians lived out their faith in the presence of Muslims.

To this point, much has been said about the advocate's mental, emotional, and spiritual preparation, but this should not be misunderstood to mean that it is all up to the advocate. God is at work, too! The advocates demonstrated the concept of man in partnership with God as the Apostle Paul captured it in 1 Corinthians 3:5-6 (NKJV): "Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase."

With the contextual considerations and influences presented above, I analyze the bridging process below with particular attention given to 1) the various crises

and barriers experienced by the respondents, and 2) the role of the Bible, dreams, miracles, and prayer in advocacy.

One New Testament theme that proved to be effective in terms of combatting the culture of fear as well as witnessing within a culture of fear was the love of God: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 JN 4:18 NKJV). Love served as both a foundation and guiding principle for the advocates. As a foundation, God’s love sustained them, providing courage and boldness to work in the environment of fear. As a principle, God’s love guided each of their efforts to engage Muslims with the gospel.

5.3.3 Crisis and Advocacy

Two types of crisis – non-religious and religious - occurred among my respondents. They functioned in similar but different ways. The first type was a personal, *apparently* non-religious crisis that included things like medical needs, financial ruin, philosophical tensions, existential questions, emotional struggles, and spousal abuse. Typically, these crises were sufficiently severe to cause the respondent to seek relief. Often, relief was sought from Christians who approached resolution of the crisis holistically by expressing concern for the whole person by providing physical, emotional, and spiritual help.

Respondent Eight’s testimony illustrates the transition from personal, non-religious crisis to religious crisis to conversion. He was a very successful businessman, who, as a result of local political tensions, lost his business and substantial wealth. His sudden change in financial security caused him to enter into severe depression. In the midst of his depression, Respondent Eight remembered some advertisements that he had seen while flipping through magazines he sold in his store. During the financial good times, the headline of those advertisements - “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” - never created much interest for him. But in the midst of his financial collapse, those words were brought back to mind: “I was weary and

burdened, but who could give me rest?” he wondered. So, he called the phone number listed in the advertisements and reached a crisis-counseling center.

An international Christian ministry sponsored the advertisements and Palestinian Christians staffed the crisis-counseling center, but that information was unknown to the respondent when he called. The counselor that answered his call was a pastor who revealed that it was Jesus of the New Testament who had offered rest to the weary. This information marked the transition from personal crisis to religious crisis because with that information, he had to make a decision to either dismiss the possibility of relief being found in the New Testament Jesus or pursue more information from a religion that his current religion had mostly rejected.

Respondent Eleven’s story is another example of the transition from personal, non-religious crisis to religious crisis to conversion. His initial crisis – a concern for the apparent low status of women in an Islamic context - could have been considered a religious crisis as it was for Respondent Twelve, except for the fact that he was an *atheist Muslim*. Culturally, he considered himself a Muslim. Religiously, he considered himself an atheist. Because of his mixed self-identity, he viewed the question of women’s rights and status in an Islamic context as an issue of ethics, not an issue of religion. Thus, he began his journey to test various ethical systems to see how each treated women.

He said he decided to examine Christianity first because “it is the largest ethical system in the world.” Though he was an atheist, he believed the best source material for understanding Christianity’s view of women would be the Bible. So, he went to a bookshop in Ramallah to buy a Bible and began to read the New Testament almost immediately. He started his research in the Gospel of Matthew, which he read in its entirety every day for six months. He did not intend to be so thorough from the outset, but while reading this book he experienced a religious crisis. He was captivated by the words of Jesus, particularly his “Sermon on the Mountain Top” and had to consider the implications of changing not only his Muslim identity, but also his atheist identity.

Other respondents experienced this pattern of non-religious crisis to religious crisis to conversion, too. The stories of Respondents Four, Five, Six, Nine, Fourteen, Fifteen, Seventeen, Nineteen, and Twenty-One were similar and are available in Appendix 4.

The second crisis pattern experienced by my respondents began with a religious crisis related to Islam. That initial crisis was heightened by the presence of an advocate for Christianity and was followed by conversion. This pattern of transition can be summarized as a religious crisis to a heightened religious crisis to conversion.

Problems with some element of Islam created the crisis for all seven respondents whose initial crisis was religious. Their complaints targeted the fairness or integrity of Islam itself (Respondents Five and Seven), the character of Muhammad (Respondent Five), fear of an Islamic political party (Respondents Twenty-Two and Twenty-Four), polygamy (Respondents Five and Twelve), the apparent absence of Allah in daily life (Respondent Sixteen), and fear of Allah's wrath because certain of her family members converted away from Islam (Respondent Thirteen).

Each of these concerns caused the respondents to seek answers or clarifications regarding the apparent problems (Respondents Seven and Twelve), to consider alternative beliefs (Respondent Twenty-Two), to lose active interest in religion (Respondent Five), to dismiss religion altogether (Respondent Twenty-Four), or to become more religious (Respondents Thirteen and Sixteen).

Respondent Seven encountered his religious crisis while memorizing the Qur'an as a twelve-year-old boy. When he came to the portion of the Qur'an that deals with the crucifixion of Jesus,⁹⁶ he noticed what he thought was a mistake.

⁹⁶ See, Sahih International Translation, Quran.com/4 [Accessed 10 Sep 2012]. 4:156-159 "And [We cursed them] for their disbelief and their saying against Mary a great slander, (157) And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah." And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain. (158) Rather, Allah raised him to Himself. And ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise. (159) And there is none from

He mentioned to his grandfather, who was the area sheik, that he had come upon a problem and asked if his grandfather could help him. Of course his grandfather said he would. So, the respondent explained to his grandfather that while reading the Qur'an he got the impression that the Qur'an teaches that, "Allah tricked people so that they *thought* Jesus was crucified on the cross, but it was really someone else." He asked his grandfather if that is, in fact, "what we believe?" His grandfather answered in the affirmative that, "Muslims believe Allah tricked those who thought it was Jesus who was actually crucified, and that Allah would punish those who believe the trick." The respondent's grandfather was very proud of his grandson's sharp mind. However, the respondent was very disappointed and troubled by this revelation, which he thought "made Allah look bad."

In addition to the most serious problem mentioned above, the respondent started finding other problems within the Qur'an. Many of those problems he characterized as "contradictions." Over the next couple years, while he was approximately thirteen to fifteen years old, he began to intensely study the Qur'an and seek out Islamic scholars who could answer his questions. He said, "I wasn't looking for a way out of Islam; I was trying to get answers that would help keep me in." He wrote to Islamic authorities at various centers and schools in a variety of countries, and only became more disappointed by each answer he received. This disappointment led him to be less observant, though certainly not an apostate.

He remained in this state of crisis regarding Islam until he received a New Testament from a Christian student group he encountered at his university. At that point, his religious crisis took on a new dimension as he was faced with a decision to continue as a dissatisfied Muslim or consider another way.

Though her specific issues differed, Respondent Twelve had an experience similar to Respondent Seven's. By the time she was fourteen-years-old she had

the People of the Scripture but that he will surely believe in Jesus before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection he will be against them a witness."

already experienced internal struggles regarding the status of women in an Islamic environment. She was particularly concerned with what she deemed women's second-class status as evidenced by the acceptance of polygamy.

Her crisis took on a new dimension when confronted with the gospel at a summer camp at the age of fourteen. She bristled at all the discussions and lessons about Jesus and believing in Him, and even mocked those who were interested in the subject. However, internal controversy set her on a path of pursuing truth that would eventually lead her by faith to trust in Jesus.

A third pattern of conversion was also present among the respondents. Like the other two, it also involves a crisis. But, whereas in the second pattern the advocate's witness *heightened* the respondent's crisis, here, the advocate's witness *created* the respondent's crisis. This third pattern can be summarized as an advocate creates a religious crisis and after further advocacy, the respondent converts. It is possible to describe this third group as basically satisfied with their life situation until an advocate initiated contact with them and began to witness about Jesus Christ. This does not suggest their lives were perfect. Rather, it means that their lives were sufficiently stable so that none of them were or had considered an alternative religion.

Respondent One illegally crossed the border from Bethlehem each day to work as a gardener in East Jerusalem. His job was neither prestigious nor one from which he would get rich. But, it was sufficient to provide for his growing family. He was raised in a traditional Muslim home that was not religiously active. His background created a general lack of interest in religious issues that was compounded by his negative experience both with religious Muslims and orthodox Christians in the Bethlehem area. One thing he was certain of was that he did not like the Christians: "They didn't care about the Muslims, only themselves," he said.

The respondent's indifference toward religious things began to change slowly after he met a "Jewish woman who believes in Jesus" at his work. She was

friendly and began to talk with him about spiritual things. At first he was not interested in such discussions, but because she seemed genuinely interested in him as a person and also “loved Jesus very much” he was provoked to continue the conversations and to begin reading the Arabic Bible at home.

Perhaps his religious crisis had already begun when the Jewish lady witnessed to him at work, but it happened in earnest after he began to read the Bible with the Qur'an and started to notice some problems in the Qur'an, particularly what he described as “logical problems and errors.” The internal tensions these discoveries created led him to seek other advocates who could explain the Bible better. His crisis stage lasted about three years, until finally, “all the pieces were in place” and he “believed that Jesus is God who died for [his] sins.”

Respondent Three also had a crisis initiated by an advocate. In her case, a college classmate offered to help her improve her English. Eventually, the advocate explained that her motivation to help the respondent was religiously motivated. She was a Christian and wanted the respondent to know about Jesus. The initial conversations were shocking, but did not create a religious crisis. The respondent was content with her Muslim identity even though she did not consider herself very observant. That began to change after she accepted an invitation to join her classmate at a three-day student retreat. These retreats are designed to provide Palestinian Christian and Muslim students the opportunity to spend time together in an environment that emphasizes Palestinian culture. Some, like this one, also include decidedly Christian themes.

The respondent's religious crisis was created by a Palestinian pastor who declared that “Jesus is God,” which is anathema among Muslims. Following the pastor's shocking statement, the respondent spent three hours asking him questions. However, the respondent said, “He could never give good answers. The best he could do was to encourage me to read the New Testament, particularly the gospels.” He also asked to pray for her, and in his prayer he

asked God to speak to her. The pastor's willingness to patiently engage with her so thoughtfully and for so long created a crisis in her heart and soul.

Other respondents whose stories parallel this third pattern of advocate created crisis are Ten, Eighteen, Twenty and Twenty-Three. Their testimonies are available in Appendix 4.

The variety of crises represented among these respondents validates my explanation of the range and severity of crisis in 3.1.2.2. These stories also validate both Rambo's and McKnight's emphasis on the role of crisis in the conversion process.

5.3.4 The Place of the Bible in Advocacy

There is a balm in Gilead, To make the wounded whole;
There is a balm in Gilead, To heal the sin-sick soul.

African American Spiritual, 19th c.

The central role of the Bible in advocacy cannot be overstated. For some this may seem so obvious as to be self-evident or assumed. However, I use it to distinguish the conversion motivations of my respondents from others who may have converted for reasons of social coherence or because they were attracted to certain religious rituals. By reading or hearing the Bible, these respondents were convinced that they had, in fact, found a balm that would make their wounds whole and heal their sin-sick souls.

5.3.4.1 Personal Bible Reading

Eighteen of my respondents mentioned *personal* Bible reading as a major element in their decision to believe in Jesus. While all of these respondents were influenced toward conversion by other means of advocacy also – e.g., question and answer sessions, dreams, Bible studies and the testimony of other converts,

etc. - many of their stories illustrate the primary role of the Bible⁹⁷ in their conversion process.

Respondent Twenty-Three was perhaps the most forthright in his declaration of the primacy of the New Testament in his conversion. For many years he had a New Testament on his bookshelf, but he never looked at it because he had never been interested in religious issues of any kind; if anything, religion was a turn off for him. However, one day he “suddenly felt drawn” to read the New Testament, so he picked it up and began reading. The respondent reported being “pulled by something” to read the New Testament a couple times over the course of two months. “Each day,” he explained, “I felt something, someone pulling me toward the New Testament.”

As he read more each day, he began to see logic in the New Testament that made it “a different world” from the Qur’an and Islam. He said he saw “love and forgiveness in the New Testament and in Jesus.” The more he read about Jesus, the more he felt drawn by Jesus himself. “Jesus’ teachings were so different and logical” he said, “I didn’t feel I was being drawn spiritually; it was so logical, I had to move toward it.” He certainly never expected to be interested in the New Testament, but he could not stop reading it.

Because he was so surprised by his new interest in the Bible, he began to ask an Arab pastor with whom he had a casual relationship for some guidance in this new pursuit. The pastor suggested that the Holy Spirit might be drawing the respondent to believe in Jesus, which surprised him because he had never given any thought to believing in Jesus. Over the course of about three weeks, the respondent and pastor spoke several times about what the respondent was reading in the New Testament. These were not particularly evangelistic

⁹⁷ All eighteen reported reading the New Testament. Seven of those also mentioned reading at least some portion of the Old Testament. In this context, unless the respondent specifically mentions the “Old Testament,” it should be assumed that “Bible” reading means New Testament. In some cases the respondents feel like Respondent Eight who said he never read the Old Testament because “It’s too close to the Jews.” Others simply see the New Testament as a replacement for the Old, or believe the New Testament has a higher priority for a Christian than does the Old Testament.

conversations; mainly they were comprised of the respondent reporting to the pastor the surprising things he had discovered in the New Testament like how “logical it was, and how everything fit together so well.” The respondent explained, “each conversation led the pastor to believe that I was a step closer to believing in Jesus, and the best part is that I was discovering this by reading the New Testament on my own, and not by him trying to persuade me.” When asked if the pastor never said anything but only listened, the respondent said, “I’m sure he said something, but I don’t remember anything specific. We had normal conversations; I told him about the things I was seeing, and he encouraged me to keep reading. Now that I look back at it, I think *he was letting the New Testament evangelize me* because he saw that it was already doing that when we first spoke.”

Respondent Eight had a similar experience. Following an advocate’s suggestion, he began to read the New Testament and could not put it down. Over the next two days he read all of the Gospels and “fell in love with Jesus.” “It was so *compelling and made so much sense*, I could not put it down,” he said. When asked to clarify his claim to have read all of the Gospels in two days, he reasserted the claim, and added, “I’ve done that five or six times.”

Respondent Ten was prompted by a series of dreams and an advocate’s assurance that many Muslims were having dreams to request a Bible. He immediately began reading the New Testament secretly, and in three months, he had read it five times. As a result of repeatedly reading the New Testament, he described himself as falling in love with Jesus. He said, “I loved what He taught. I loved Him. And I wanted to know more about Him, so I asked if I could attend a [Christian] meeting.”

Respondent Eighteen’s story illustrates how many of the respondents grew in their desire to read the Bible, even feeling a *compulsion* to read it. He received a Bible and other Christian materials in an aid box, and while there were no oral or written instructions or demands to read the Bible, the respondent understood the inclusion of such items in the aid boxes as a *quid pro quo*. Therefore, because he

wanted to please the Christians who were bringing him food, the material aid became the catalyst for the respondent to begin reading the Bible.

Each time a new box of aid arrived, the donors asked the respondent if he was reading the Bible, to which he always replied, “Yes, I’m reading it regularly.” He was actually reading the Bible, but he admitted that in the beginning, his “thoughts were more on the boxes than the Bible.”

Initially, and for some time, perhaps six months, he did not understand anything he was reading in the Bible. His assessment of what he read was that the Old Testament was for Jews and the New Testament was for Christians. The frustration that resulted from unintelligible reading eventually led him to stop reading the Bible for about two months. However, in spite of the frustration, his interest in the aid boxes caused him to begin reading the *New Testament* again. “This time,” he said, “I began to slowly understand a little more each time I read it, which made it more interesting.” And over the course of “about two years,” he realized his interest in the New Testament had become greater than his interest in the aid boxes: “Originally, I was motivated by the boxes, so I read more. But, the more I read, the less interested in the boxes I became,” he explained.

As his interest in the New Testament grew, the political tensions between Israelis and Palestinians flared up again and the Jewish man stopped visiting, as did the tourists. Even though the donors never showed up again, he continued to read because he felt compelled to read. He “spent long nights reading through the New Testament.” Of course he was still thinking about the aid boxes, but he “was [now] thinking more about the New Testament and Jesus.” In fact, he said he felt like he “was being drawn not just to the New Testament, but also being drawn to know this person [i.e., Jesus].”

The testimonies provided above accurately represent the group of respondents who personally read the Bible, each of whom was persuaded by their reading to place their faith in Jesus as Lord.

Not all of the respondents felt the same level of compulsion to read the Bible, nor did they all engage the text so thoroughly as did those mentioned above. However, even though their experiences were not identical, the importance of personally reading the Bible was a theme that clearly emerged from their testimonies.

5.3.4.2 Bulk Reading of the Bible

Another theme that emerged from this group of testimonies was *bulk* reading of the Bible. Many respondents emphasized personal Bible reading as a major influence, if not the primary influence, on their decision to place their faith in Jesus Christ. Based on my personal experience as a professional minister, I described this major or primary influence as “bulk” Bible reading when the respondent mentioned an amount of Bible reading that seemed large and/or intense in comparison to the reading habits of other Christians that I know.

While the complete list of bulk readers is provided in Appendix 6, some representative examples follow: Respondent Two “read the New Testament five or six times and the Old Testament three or four times” over the course of about twelve months. On five or six occasions, Respondent Eight read through the Gospels over a period of two days. Respondent Eleven read the complete gospel of Matthew every day for six months, and Respondent Twenty-Two initially read the New Testament in one week, then three more times over the next month.

5.3.4.3 Oral Delivery of Bible Content

Six of my respondents did not mention personally reading the Bible. Each of them received Bible content orally through Bible lessons and other means.

All twenty-four respondents participated in some type of Bible lessons through which a pastor or evangelist explained the gospel and other biblical themes to them privately or in a group setting. Some of these studies were formal presentations on a particular subject or passage and others were question and answer sessions.

For those who personally read the Bible, these Bible studies supplemented their reading or, in some cases, confirmed what they were reading personally. For those respondents who did not report personally reading the Bible, these studies were the main source of their Bible knowledge. A possible exception is Respondent Twenty-Four whose mother shared information – primarily the love of Jesus – with her, but never in a Bible study format.

Due to his poor reading skills, Respondent Fifteen experienced a more traditional form of oral presentation whereby the advocate read portions of the Bible to him, and followed up with explanations of what was read.

Respondents Six, Twenty, and Twenty-One viewed the Jesus Film (1979), which is “a two-hour docudrama about the life of Christ based on the Gospel of Luke.” Additionally, Christian broadcasting via satellite television was instrumental in the conversion of Respondents Five and Nine and was mentioned as influential by Respondent Twenty-One.

5.3.4.4 Other Means of Delivery of Bible Content

Respondents Six, Nine, Fourteen and Eighteen mentioned Christian literature as being helpful in their conversion process, but *Glad News! God Loves You, My Muslim Friend* (Tanagho 2004) was the only literature specifically identified. The journey to conversion for Respondents Four, Five, Six, Nineteen and Twenty-One all began with a gospel tract delivered by their advocates. Finally, Respondent Eight responded to an Arabic magazine advertisement that included the words of Jesus, “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28 NKJV).

5.3.5 The Use of the Bible in Advocacy

Each of the advocates connected to this research, believe the Bible – both Old and New Testaments – is inspired by God, making it unique from all other *holy* books. They shared a high view of Scripture, believing that the Bible is the prophetic word of God and that such “prophecy never came by the will of man,

but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21 NKJV). Thus, they used it in their advocacy as a reliable and authoritative word from God that testifies to the supremacy of Christ over all things, which requires all people to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal salvation.

5.3.5.1 The Bible vs. The Qur’an

Unsurprisingly, there were a number of cases where the claims of the advocate were both interpreted and managed by the respondent by turning them into a claim *against* the Qur’an. That Muslims typically believe in the superiority of the Qur’an over all other holy books is common knowledge. So, it was not surprising that as they considered the claims of their advocate(s), five respondents (One, Four, Six, Twelve, and Thirteen) admitted to comparing the Qur’an and the Bible with each other.

While comparing the two texts to see where they agreed and/or disagreed, Respondent One began to notice some problems in the Qur’an, particularly what he described as “logical problems and errors.”

Respondent Four began to read the Bible side by side with the Qur’an with the intention of disproving the Bible. Because he was certain that the New Testament had errors he was determined to find them and make notes to show his advocates why they were wrong to be Christians. When the advocates returned to visit, he presented his list, but was disappointed when they calmly explained why the perceived errors were not actually errors. He was also disappointed when the explanations were clear and persuasive.

Beginning at the age of fourteen, Respondent Twelve sacrificed her standing as first in her class while spending the next eighteen months searching for truth by “comparing the Qur’an and the New Testament for up to two hours daily.” In the end, she believed the sacrifice was worthwhile because of what she found in Jesus Christ.

After her mother's miraculous healing, Respondent Thirteen began "reading the New Testament and Qur'an side by side." Like Respondent Four, she hoped to find serious problems with the New Testament because she "didn't want to believe it."

Each time a respondent mentioned comparing the Qur'an and Bible, it was for the purpose of establishing the superiority of the Qur'an and Islam while delegitimizing the Bible and Christianity. None of them were seeking to leave Islam. To the contrary, each wanted to legitimize Islam. However, in each case of such a comparison mentioned by my respondents, the result of their comparison was that they recognized the Bible to be superior and the Qur'an was delegitimized.

In addition to the apologetic value of believing the Qur'an is Allah's revelation, Muslims typically argue for the superiority of the Qur'an based on its "literary beauty" in terms of "grammatical, rhetorical, linguistic & other perspectives" (Khan 2007).

Though logical coherence was mentioned, my respondents primarily considered the Bible's message of love and forgiveness what made it superior to the Qur'an. Speaking about his reading of the New Testament, Respondent Twenty-Three said, "Jesus' teachings were so different and logical" and "everything fit together so well." Respondent Eleven spoke of the contrast between what he read in Matthew and what he had read in the Qur'an: "I could not get past the words of Jesus in chapters five to seven, the Sermon on the Mountain Top. These words were so different than anything I had ever heard from Islam. They changed the way I viewed Christianity and life." He specifically mentioned the richness of Matthew five to seven, particularly the concepts of loving one's enemies and turning the other cheek. He explained that Islam teaches the opposite, that one should hate and strike back at their enemies.

There was also an existential element to some of my respondents' evaluations of the Bible's superiority over the Qur'an. For example, reading the

New Testament resulted in Respondents Eight and Ten falling in love with Jesus. Respondent Eighteen described the feeling of being drawn to the New Testament and to Jesus.

Although some of my respondents did not express the same high level of admiration for the Bible, none of them appeared to maintain any form of post-conversion appreciation for the Qur'an.

On a few occasions, advocates used the Qur'an in the process of advocating for Christ. There are basically two approaches to using the Qur'an in Christian witnessing, and both were found in my research. In the first approach, an advocate may use the Qur'an in their presentation to highlight differences between Islamic theology and Christian theology. For example, the deity of Jesus (Shamoun n.d.-a) and the Trinity (Shamoun n.d.-b) are common topics addressed when comparing the two texts during advocacy. Another common topic is the love of God in the Bible as contrasted with the lack of love presented in the Qur'an. For example, Mahally (n.d., brackets original) writes,

One of the most compact, penetrating discourses on love is found in I John 4:7-21. The word is used 27 times in these verses. The central basis for men to love one another is rooted in the nature of God Himself. "God is love." What is accepted as commonplace in Christianity is a dim reflection in the Qur'an. While "God is great" [Allahu akbar] is a statement of faith, affirmation and expression, "God is love" [Allahu muhibba] is absent from the attributes of God. Such a profound contrast between the two religions, Islam and Christianity, demands an inquiry as to why.

According to Respondent Six, his advocates effectively used this method of comparison on occasion. He appreciated their familiarity with the Qur'an because it gave him the impression that they were not outsiders from a distant land who had come to change the people's religion.

The second approach, often called *bridging* (Accad 1976; Gudel 2004; Sinclair 2012), uses verses from the Qur'an to encourage Muslims to read the Bible. These verses basically instruct Muslims to listen to Christians and/or the Bible. The Qur'an verses commonly used in this approach are 4:136, 10:94, 21:7,

29:46, and 5:146-147. The last reference offers a good representation of the others (Sahih International Version, available at <http://quran.com/5>):

“And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came before him in the Torah; and We gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirming that which preceded it of the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous. And let the People of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed therein. And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed - then it is those who are the defiantly disobedient.

This *bridging* approach occurred when Respondents Six and Fourteen received Tanagho’s (2004) book, *Glad News! God Loves You, My Muslim Friend* and when Respondent Ten’s advocates used the Qur’an to say it was okay for him to read the Bible.

5.3.5.2 The Advocate’s Use of the Bible

In addition to simply encouraging the potential converts to read the Bible, which was very effective, my respondents revealed two primary ways the advocates utilized the Bible in their evangelistic methodology.

5.3.5.2.1 Positive Proclamation of the Gospel

Based on the assumption that the Bible is the word of God, the advocates regularly employed a simple “thus sayeth the Lord” approach to engaging a Muslim with the gospel.

Though some of the respondents bristled at this approach, none of them indicated that it seemed hostile. In fact, the gospel message was the offense, not the person or the method of sharing it because it was often a friend who delivered the message. The most obvious examples of this type of proclamation were Respondents One, Two, Thirteen, Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen.

Apart from Respondent Sixteen who responded positively the first time she heard the gospel, all of the respondents required additional time and persuasion before they believed the gospel. The amount of time varied according to each

person's situation. Usually the persuasion came in the form of an apologetic defense of the faith that answered specific objections to the gospel.

5.3.5.2.2 Defense of the Faith

One half of my respondents mentioned engaging in question and answer sessions with their advocates. Their questions generally included standard Muslim objections that typically revolved around the person of Christ or the integrity of the Bible.

Eight respondents (2, 3, 7, 10, 19, 20, and 22) objected to the deity of Jesus, making it the most common objection. Another four (4, 10, 11, and 16) objected to the claim that Jesus is the Son of God, which is related to the issue of deity, but argued against in a different manner by Muslims. Respondent Eight specifically mentioned his objection to the Trinity.

Respondents Four and Thirteen expressed the common Muslim apologetic that the New Testament is filled with errors and read the New Testament in an effort to prove it wrong. Respondent Seven struggled with the idea that the LORD can be our friend. Respondent Nine thought that believing in Jesus seemed too easy.

The respondents typically mentioned their appreciation for their advocate's willingness to entertain questions or objections. Many indicated that discussing these issues with their advocate was a very important element of their conversion, though none said that the advocate had the perfect answer to their objection. Rather, the respondents tended to be persuaded by the cumulative effect of personal Bible reading, respectful Christian behavior by the advocates and other Christians, dreams, and reasonable answers to their questions.

5.3.6 Advocacy and Other Means of Confirmation

While there were some specific processes of confirmation utilized by the respondents, the general sense of their testimonies was that reading the New Testament provided them clarity and understanding regarding the person of

Jesus. Overall, reading the New Testament was generally more important and persuasive than any specific argument or answer to a question, though there was mention of certain events or comments that were the final push toward belief.

Respondent Sixteen was unique in that she believed the gospel and placed her faith in Christ the first time she heard the gospel. This seems to have occurred so rapidly because the gospel so obviously addressed her crisis.

5.3.6.1 The Christmas Story

Raised as a religious Muslim, Respondent Sixteen married a religiously observant man. She envisioned that together they would raise a family who would live the rest of their days as religiously observant Muslims. However, after a couple years of marriage she began to feel dissatisfied and empty in every aspect of her religious practices. Although she maintained all the expressions of her faith, like modest dress, eating only Hallal food, and praying daily, she continued to have a sense of emptiness.

In an effort to get rid of this feeling she began to pray more intensely and more than the prescribed five times daily. However, the more she prayed, the more distant she felt from Allah. Often after praying she asked herself, "Where is Allah?" But, "He was nowhere to be found," she said. Eventually she began to blame herself for Allah's apparent absence: "Maybe I have sinned in some way," she reasoned. Thus she entered a discouraging cycle of praying more, followed by an increased sense of being farther from Allah, which she summarized: "Every time I prayed, I felt Allah's absence more and more. But I didn't stop praying. How could I? Everyone knows that good Muslims pray. I was a good Muslim all my life, so why should Allah feel so distant?" Feeling frustrated and hopeless, the respondent entered into depression.

Her husband noticed her depression and recommended that she attend a culture center near their home. In this particular center, women were offered both computer courses and self-confidence courses. She enjoyed her courses and felt that she had gained some self-confidence, though she still struggled with

depression and a sense of loneliness. She continued to pray because she knew she was supposed to pray, even though the end result was more discouragement.

At Christmas, the center sponsored a Christmas party for all the students. Although the respondent was not a Christian she was interested in attending the party because she had become friends with a couple of the other students who would be attending, and also because she had never been to a Christmas party and wondered what would happen there. When the respondent entered the party, she saw an atmosphere of joy unlike she had ever seen or experienced. There were only a few people that she knew to be Muslims, and most of the people in attendance she did not know. She assumed they were Christians because they were singing songs about Jesus. This made her uncomfortable because she, a religious Muslim, was standing in the midst of Christians singing about Jesus, and she knew that Muslims should not be doing that. At the same time, she was amazed because she, a religious Muslim, was standing in the midst of Christians singing about Jesus in a way she had never imagined. They were passionate and joyful and fresh and free. It seemed that they had a connection to God.

After the group sang and prayed, the speaker asked the audience to give him their attention for the next fifteen or twenty minutes. "The next fifteen minutes changed my life," she said with big smile. The speaker began to tell the Christmas story. He spoke very carefully and passionately about Jesus, the Son of God. She knew that Muslims could not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but this man's passion seemed to override that objection. He continued to explain how *Son of God* doesn't mean that God and Mary had sexual relations (as many Muslims think), but rather that it was a way of saying that Jesus is equal with God. That explanation still did not settle her concerns because she knew equality with Allah was also contrary to Muslim belief. However, the speaker's passion and clarity were convincing.

The respondent was drawn in as the man began to read and explain chapter one of John's gospel. She described the process as follows: "Step by step I was coming to understand that Jesus is God. I was not afraid to find this out because each step led me to more understanding. The question I had asked each time I finished praying - "Where is Allah?" - was finally answered when he got to verse fourteen [JN 1:14]. God came to earth to live among his people in the person of Jesus. Finally, it became clear to me. I was so relieved when I realized this truth. Then he explained that Jesus died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world, and for the first time, Christianity became attractive to me. Very attractive."

5.3.6.2 Dreams

Twelve respondents (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21) experienced dreams related to their conversion. All of the dreams occurred while the respondents were sleeping, which contrasts with Greenham's (2010b) findings. He reported that among his respondents, "Most of these dream-like experiences took place when the individuals were awake" (167).

Among my respondents, all dreams except Respondent One's occurred prior to conversion. Only respondents Five, Nineteen, and Twenty-One reported not hearing any words in their dreams. Of the remaining nine respondents, eight heard a voice speaking their mother tongue, Arabic. The voice in Respondent Three's dream spoke French, a language she did not speak.

Each of the respondents described the messenger in their dreams as a symbol, a person of light, or a voice.

5.3.6.2.1 Symbols

Symbols were important elements of two respondents' dreams. Respondent Two reported that about ten years prior to her conversion, she experienced two dreams that involved stars. In the first dream, all the stars in the sky came together in a single bright mass before falling one by one to the ground beside

her. The second dream was once again of all the stars in the sky coming together, but this time, they gathered together in the shape of a Christian cross.

Many years later, after she had been introduced to the gospel and had been reading the Bible for about one year, the respondent experienced another dream. In this dream, she encountered “a person of light” whom she identified during the dream as God. That person of light said, “It's time to tell you about your first dreams. You can get the answer to your questions from Christians.”

A friend introduced her to a pastor in East Jerusalem who interpreted her first dreams about the stars. He told her “the stars falling from the sky to the ground represented leaving Jordan and arriving in Palestine,” and “the stars in the shape of the cross represented believing in Jesus.” This interpretation made some sense to her since she had come from Jordan to Palestine. The second portion was also reasonable, to a point. She could believe in Jesus, the man. However, she still could not accept Jesus, the God. Although she did not believe immediately, the suggestion that she would believe in Jesus continually replayed in her mind as she spent the next six months reading the New Testament in large quantities.

Respondent Five also experienced a dream that was connected to advocacy. In response to the things her advocates said during their visits, the respondent asked God to give her a sign, a dream that would confirm the things she was hearing from the visitors. On three occasions she had the same dream of three wooden crosses descending from the sky. The only thing she could conclude from these dreams was that they were confirming what she had heard from the Christian men about Jesus dying on the cross between two thieves.

5.3.6.2.2 A Person of Light

Respondents Two, Three, Ten, and Thirteen reported that Jesus appeared in their dreams. And, even though the person who appeared in the dream never identified himself, each respondent was certain, at the time of the dream, that the person who appeared was Jesus. In each dream, Jesus reportedly appeared as

a person of light dressed in white. Respondent Two said that, “Jesus appeared dressed in white with a glowing light in his face.” Similarly, Respondent Thirteen said Jesus was dressed in white, had golden hair, and the aura was so heavy around his face that no facial details were visible. Respondents Three and Ten did not see a light or aura, but Jesus was still dressed in white. Respondent Three said Jesus continually appeared in her dreams with long hair, brown eyes, a beard, and wearing a white robe. Finally, Respondent Ten described Jesus appearing as a man dressed in white.

Another group of respondents saw a similar man, but they either did not voluntarily identify him as Jesus or they did not recognize him at the time of the dream. Respondent One saw a man with a glowing face dressed in white. Respondent Eighteen saw a man in white clothes with a bright glow over his face and his advocate hinted at the identity of the person when he told the respondent, “God is trying to tell you something important.” Respondent Twenty-One had a silent recurring dream in which she saw “a man dressed in white surrounded by a bright light.”

In contrast to the person of light, Respondent Nineteen reported seeing a regular Christian man who was dressed normally, died and resurrected three days later. He further clarified that by “regular Christian man” he meant the man was *not* Jesus, even though the death and resurrection were reminiscent of Jesus.

5.3.6.2.3 A Voice

Twice in the same week, Respondent Twenty had similar dreams in which he heard a male voice say, “You can be certain.” When asked if it was an audible voice that he heard with his ears or only an inner voice, the respondent said, “It was an inner voice that sounded like it was on the phone.” When he told his mother about the voice, she suggested the voice might be that of Jesus, which seemed correct to the respondent.

Apparently in response to her desperate prayer for God to show her the way, Respondent Twelve experienced a vivid dream in which she saw the words, “Who am I?” Immediately afterward, a voice directed her to open a book that she saw lying in a toilet in front of her. Although she was initially hesitant to retrieve the book, she obeyed the voice. And while reading the book, she came across the words, *way*, *truth*, and *life*. As the dream came to an end, the respondent awoke with a desire to know the source of those words.

Remembering her advocate’s suggestion to ask God for direction, she began to read the Gospel of John and eventually came across John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” These were the words of Jesus and answered the question, “Who am I?” that she had seen in her dream.

Respondent Four’s experience was very similar to Respondent Twelve’s. Over the course of about one week, he was awakened by a voice three nights in a row, and then a few days later, he was awakened a fourth time. He was not sure whether he should describe his experience as a dream or a vision or something else because he never saw anything. He only heard a voice.

This series of dreams began the night after a friend suggested he ask some Christians for help with his daughter’s medical problem. The first night, he clearly heard in Arabic the words, “Your life is wrong.” The voice woke him and he was quite unsettled, wondering what was wrong with his life. He woke his wife and after telling her about the voice, asked how his life might be wrong. She assured the respondent that everything was okay because they were “100% observant Muslims.”

The next day, he spent the morning thinking about the meaning of the message. He initially thought it was a sign from Allah that he should initiate some political activities that he had been planning for some time. However, his organizational supervisor completely rejected his conclusions. Before going to bed that night, still confused about the words he had heard, the respondent went to the mosque and prayed that he could become “a soldier for Allah.” In the night,

he was awakened once again by the voice for the second time with a similar, but more emphatic message: “Your life is wrong, very wrong. I need you as a leader; many will follow you.” Again, he woke his wife and asked her what was wrong in his life and how he could improve, but she had no answer. The question plagued him throughout the following day, but he did not know the answer.

The next night, the third in a row, the same voice spoke again: “I need you somewhere else.” Although he did not understand what this meant he did not bother to wake his wife again.

After three consecutive nights of hearing the voice and not understanding the message, he happened to see the man who had recommended that the respondent seek medical help from the Christians for his daughter. For some reason, he felt differently about it this time, and told the man to have them come visit.

A few days later, three men came to visit the respondent and his daughter. The men told him that they were not connected to the eye hospital in Jerusalem, but that they would do their best to try to find help from someone who was connected. Before leaving, they also gave the respondent a tract with the following headline: “John 14:6 - I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man can come to the Father but by me.” He did not read beyond the headline, thanked the men for coming and led them to the door. He was not interested in the tract, but he thought it was appropriate to give it some attention in the presence of the men who might help get his daughter’s eyes repaired.

In the night, he was awakened the fourth and final time by the same voice, which said, “This is the explanation of the voice.” The message was short, but caused a different reaction than the previous three because he understood it to reference the Christian tract he had received. Tears flowed down his face as he woke his wife to tell her what had happened. Certain that he would find something important inside the tract, he asked his wife to come read it with him.

5.3.6.2.4 The Function of Dreams

The dreams of Respondents Twelve and Four presented above illustrate the confirmatory and or directive nature of the dreams reported by my respondents. For example, in the case of Respondent Twelve, when asked to clarify what she understood the meaning of her dream to be, she said the dream *confirmed* her advocate's answers about Jesus dying on the cross for her sins were the truth. She also indicated that the dream *directed* her toward reading the New Testament where she found the words that appeared in her dream: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."⁹⁸

Respondent Four's final dream *directed* him toward the gospel tract he had received from the advocates. Reading that tract led him to read the Bible.

5.3.6.2.4.1 Dreams as Confirmation

When categorizing a dream as confirmatory, I mean that it confirms what the respondent had *already* heard from an advocate or read in the Bible.

Respondent Thirteen, who was evangelized by the same advocate as Respondent Twelve, also connected her dream to the witness of her advocate as well as her personal Bible reading. However, her dream differed from Respondent Twelve's and all the others in that she also experienced what appears to be a supernatural healing during her dream. She reported that in her dream she encountered Jesus who was dressed in white, had golden hair, and the aura was so heavy around his face that no facial details were visible. He spoke in Arabic and said, "I am God" and touched her on her heart and said, "You are healed; I am the way, the truth and the life." After the dream, she went to the doctor to verify the claim that she was healed. The results were definitive: "Many doctors have confirmed the previous test results, but this test shows no infection," the doctor said in complete amazement. At that moment, she removed her hijab and said, "Jesus healed me!"

⁹⁸ Similar to my Respondent Twelve, Greenham's M5 reported finding words from his dream in the New Testament (2010b:125).

Interestingly, the healing that was proclaimed in her dream, pointed Respondent Thirteen to her prior reading of the New Testament and the witness of her advocate. When asked to clarify why this healing so strongly influenced her attitude toward Christianity – more than when her mother experienced healing – she said that she had “read the New Testament many times and understood Jesus to be different than he was represented as Isa.” As Isa, “he is only a prophet that can heal.” As Jesus, “he can heal because he is the Son of God. He’s the way the truth and the life. He died for my sins. He’s much more than in the Qur’an.” She continued, “At first, I didn’t want to accept the New Testament Jesus, but this healing *confirmed* what Jamilla had told me and what I had read about Jesus in the New Testament” (emphasis added).

Respondent Five understood her dream of three Christian crosses as confirmation of what she had heard from her advocates about Jesus dying on the cross between two thieves.

Respondent Twenty recognized his dreams as confirmation of the advocacy of his mother and other MBBs. In his final two dreams, he heard a male voice (there was no image) that said, “You can be certain.” When he told his mother about the voice, she suggested the voice might be that of Jesus, which seemed correct to the respondent. This voice was the final thing that moved the respondent from unbelief to belief. When asked what he thought were the important factors in his coming to faith, his first answer was “the power of the dreams.”

5.3.6.2.4.2 Dreams as Directives

When categorizing a dream as directive, I mean that the dream indirectly or specifically directed the respondent to the Bible.

Like Respondent Four’s dreams led him to read a gospel tract, Respondent Ten experienced two dreams that directed him to read the Bible. In 2006 his journey toward Christianity began with a dream. In his dream, the respondent was walking near the Flower Gate in Jerusalem where a man dressed in white

approached him. Immediately he recognized the man as Jesus, who said, “[respondent’s name], I want you to come with me.” According to the respondent, Jesus took him by the hand and traveling through the lower realms of the city, they arrived at the city wall. Then, Jesus reached through the wall and brought out a Bible and said, “Read this!”

After about two years, the respondent had his second dream, which was the first in a series of three. About one month later, he had the same dream in which he was sitting inside a church reading the Bible. In conjunction with these dreams he met a few evangelical, Arab Christians who were very friendly toward him. After the third dream in this series, which occurred about one month after the second, he asked to meet with the Arab Christians he had recently met. During their conversation, the respondent mentioned his dreams and that he thought it was odd for a Muslim to have a dream about Jesus. He was surprised when one of the Christians said, “You’re not the first Muslim to have a dream and you will not be the last.” He was also surprised when the man told him that “Muslims are getting a message” because he had not heard of others having dreams like he had. This prompted him to ask for a Bible, which he received the next day. He immediately began reading the New Testament secretly, and in three months he had read it five times.

5.3.6.2.5 Dreams: Conclusions

While dreams were important elements of the conversion testimony of each of the respondents who experienced a dream, in *no case* was the content of the dream sufficient for the respondent to convert. Additional advocacy was necessary. Whether the respondent saw a symbol, a person of light, or heard a voice, the dreams fell into two primary categories: confirmation or direction.

In the case of the former, the respondent understood the dream to be confirmation of what they had *already* heard from an advocate or read in the Bible. In the case of a directive dream, the respondents had not yet had

exposure to the gospel, but they understood the dream to direct them to read a gospel tract or the Bible, both of which were delivered by an advocate.

In summary, the pattern of the dreams described by my respondents is that dreams point to or affirm a messenger with a message about Jesus Christ.

5.3.6.3 Miracles⁹⁹

Respondents Five and Thirteen said that their personal experience of miracles was instrumental in their decision to convert. Klassen (2007:231) describes a miracle as “an unexpected and unexplained event, in which God reveals himself as the gracious redeemer of humanity.” He describes accurately one of the ways miracles functioned in the process of conversion of Respondents Five and Thirteen: A miracle, Klassen says, “. . . can provide a ‘power encounter’ which unlocks unbelief and makes a person receptive to the truth.” He helpfully clarifies the effectiveness of miracles by saying that “miracles will not convince someone who does not want to believe”; however, “they are able to deeply move those who are honestly seeking God” (232).

Respondent Five had been evangelized for about two years when her miracle occurred. Up to that point, she had experienced three dreams, had participated in countless Bible studies, and had many discussions with her husband who was also on a path to conversion. Yet, she still could not believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. The turning point in her decision to convert came while watching an Arabic language Christian broadcast during which, the television pastor said he wanted to pray for those viewers who were sick. For some time, the respondent had a tumor in her stomach that had not been helped through Muslim prayers for healing. In response to the television pastor’s message, the respondent touched the television and prayed for healing. She was surprised when she heard the pastor call her name and age, but believed that, like the dreams, this was a sign from God. Two days later, the tumor was gone and she “completely believed in Jesus.”

⁹⁹ Here, I present the *respondents’* understanding of these events as miracles.

Respondent Thirteen reported that when she was a teenager she had seen her mother's foot miraculously healed, but that experience only caused her to run away from Christian faith. Later, after she had heard the gospel many times and read the New Testament, in conjunction with a dream she experienced miraculous healing herself. Her reaction this time, though, was much different than before. As described in more detail above (see 5.3.6.2.4.1 Dreams as Confirmation) this miraculous healing confirmed the message she had received in a dream, which confirmed what she knew about Jesus both through the witness of advocates and by reading the New Testament.

Respondent Eleven's testimony is of having "believed on the Lord Jesus Christ" as a result of intense Bible reading. However, he also admitted that he "did not say a prayer of salvation," so he cannot mark a specific day on which he became a believer. In the absence of such a marker, it appears that he uses the occurrence of miracles in his life in a similar way of confirmation of his belief because they evidenced God's supernatural work in him.

The first miracle he experienced was being able to pass several hardships, including a failed business and personal betrayal by people close to him, without anger, bitterness, or denying God's existence. He recognized God's work in him, giving him "a peculiar ability to forgive" those that had hurt him, which he said, "would not have been possible when I was an atheist." The second miracle was connected to the death of his newborn baby. He said it was a miracle how God helped him (and his wife) through their grief. Once again the respondent saw evidence of God's work in him, changing the way he responded to severe heartache. The third miracle was more personal than the previous two and he did not want to elaborate more than saying that God had worked out some problems he had with his wife's family.

5.3.7 Christian Prayer and Advocacy

Bongoyok (2008:305) says that intense prayer is a fruitful practice that encourages Muslim receptivity of Christ. "Somebody," he says, "compared prayer

to the railroads and the train to God's blessings. The more that Christians pray, the longer the railroad is, and the further God's blessings go." Among my respondents, Christian prayer was an important element in the process of their conversions as demonstrated by the almost 60% (14 of 24) who mentioned being prayed for, witnessing Christians pray, or actually praying themselves.¹⁰⁰

Based both on knowledge of the advocates and personal conversations with them about this topic, it can be concluded that the general practice of the advocate was to pray prior to their appointment with a Muslim, asking God to bless their intended evangelistic efforts. In addition to their own prayer efforts, many of the advocates have a network of prayer partners who also regularly pray for God's blessings on the evangelistic efforts of these advocates. All of the advocates believe this type of prayer – by them and on their behalf – is essential to their effective witness. However, the focus here is on prayers that the *respondents* witnessed or prayed prior to their conversion.

5.3.7.1 Witnessing Christians Pray

Prior to their gospel encounters, some of the respondents had the opportunity to witness Christians praying and reported some interesting reactions. Respondent Fifteen was drawn toward Christians as he watched them pray in the dormitory at the police academy. Respondent Twenty-Four was also drawn toward Christians when she witnessed them praying for her sick brother because she saw their prayer visits as a demonstration of love. This kind of love affected her strongly: "When I saw this," she said, "something went out of me and joy came in. Real joy."

While some felt drawn toward Christians as a result of seeing them pray, others had mixed reactions. Though she was quite discouraged in her Islamic faith, Respondent Sixteen was an actively practicing Muslim when she first witnessed Christians praying. This happened at the first Christmas program she

¹⁰⁰ Here, I do not refer to the Islamic form of prayer (*salat*), which many of them had done regularly or at some time during their lives. Instead, I refer to a *Christian-type* of free prayer, though they had not yet placed their faith in Jesus.

ever attended. The program began with singing, after which the main speaker asked everyone to join him in prayer. She had never seen Christians pray, and was quite amazed that they did not have a ritual (i.e., specific form or words). Some believers closed their eyes while others kept their eyes open. Some held their hands high in the air while others held the seat back in front of them. Some looked to heaven while others bowed their heads.

She was somewhat conflicted in her reaction. She was partly annoyed that they would dare to pray so freely. At the same time, she was attracted to the idea of praying so freely.

5.3.7.2 Advocates Pray for the Potential Converts

The advocates connected to this research all affirm that, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jam 5:16 NKJV), and they implement this affirmation openly in a variety of ways in their evangelism.

My respondents mentioned a common use of prayer by the advocates. Prior to their evangelistic conversations or Bible studies, the advocates prayed for and in the presence of the respondents 1) for God to meet the respondents’ needs (emotional, financial, and medical), and 2) for God to open the respondents’ eyes and give them understanding of the truth recorded in the Bible.

5.3.7.2.1 For God to Meet Their Needs

In addition to her request for her daughter’s eye surgery, both for its provision and success, Respondent Five had a medical need of her own. As described more fully above in 5.3.4.3 Miracles, she experienced a turning point in her decision to convert while watching an Arabic language Christian broadcast. During that television broadcast the pastor prayed for those who needed healing and the respondent also prayed for healing. Two days later, the tumor was gone and she “completely believed in Jesus.”

In contrast, Respondent Thirteen’s reaction was to flee rather than believe when she witnessed the positive results of prayer on behalf of her mother. Her

mother suffered a serious burn when she spilled hot grease on her foot. After her mother returned from the hospital, a Christian man from Kenya, who was living with her family at the time, asked if he and his Christian friends could pray for her recovery. After receiving permission to do so, they prayed fervently for Jesus to heal her foot. After they finished praying, the respondent said that her mother pulled the blankets back and saw that “her foot had been miraculously healed.”

Respondent Twenty’s reaction to receiving prayer was somewhere between Respondent Five’s belief and Respondent Thirteen’s fleeing. When he was fifteen, Respondent Twenty suffered a serious and extended illness. The MBB community responded in ways that surprised him and would be instrumental in his conversion. Even though he was a Muslim, members of the MBB community visited regularly to pray for him and provide food for his family. They prayed openly and fervently for his full recovery, and he said, “God answered their prayer and healed me.” However, that did not immediately change his lack of interest in religion, though he admitted, “it probably softened me a little.” After seeing the Jesus Film about three months later, some of his mother’s friends came to visit. During their visit, they prayed for the family, and during the prayer, the respondent’s mind vividly replayed scenes from the Jesus Film. He called it “a vision.” Once again, he was very moved by the horrors of Jesus’ suffering. After the people left, the respondent told his mother about the vision and told her he wanted to know more so he could “know if Jesus is the right way.” He confessed to his mother that he felt like he needed to believe, but could not yet do so. “I need to be sure,” he insisted. This vision opened the door for fairly regular discussions with his mother about Jesus and how He died for the respondent’s sins.

Although she had heard the gospel several times, answered prayer seemed to be the instrument that effectively persuaded Respondent Five of the truthfulness of the gospel. Respondents Thirteen and Twenty needed further persuasion and confirmation for which advocates would pray specifically for God to open their eyes.

5.3.7.2.2 For God to Open Their Eyes

When the advocates prayed that God would open the eyes of those with whom they engaged, the answer was not always immediately positive. In many cases, the advocates still wait for God to grant their request in respect to some of their prospects. While ultimately being viewed as effective and important instruments in their conversions, the respondents revealed that such transparent prayers generated different reactions from the prospective converts.

In the case of Respondent Three, hearing a pastor pray for God to speak to her was viewed as very positive, particularly since it occurred in a combative situation. As previously detailed, Respondent Three was attending a weekend retreat and became angry when a pastor said, “Jesus is God.” Afterward, the pastor spent three hours trying to satisfactorily answer her questions about the Christian faith, but he never succeeded. However, during this encounter, he did encourage her to read the New Testament and asked for permission to pray for her. In his prayer, he said, “God, please speak to her.” These two things – encouraging her to read the NT and asking God to speak to her – would become the catalysts for her to come to faith in Jesus as savior and God.

As an unbeliever, Respondent Twenty-Four attended a MBB family conference with her mother. What she witnessed there altered her perspective greatly. At that conference, she saw MBBs as a living community for the first time as she watched the people sing and pray together. The way they loved each other was impressive and instrumental in her consideration of the gospel. She reported never witnessing community expressed through song and prayer before and was drawn to these people. That visible community brought her to the conclusion that “this was the real thing.” And that point became more clear when the worship leader stopped in the middle of a song to pray for “someone who is here today questioning whether they should believe in Jesus.” Though he did not call her by name, she said, “I knew he was praying for me.”

The advocates who were evangelizing the family that included Respondents Four, Five, Six, Nineteen, and Twenty-One eventually began to pray in the presence of the respondents prior to beginning their discussions or Bible studies. In their prayers, the advocates generally asked God 1) to help them teach clearly, and 2) to open the eyes of the respondents to the truth of the Bible.

While these prayers would eventually be viewed as important elements of their conversion process, initially the prayers were viewed as strange or even dangerous. Respondent Six, who was about fifteen when he first witnessed the advocates praying in his home, had a very strong and definite negative reaction to their prayer. He warned his family that they would “turn to monkeys” if they continued praying like Christians. These sentiments were more or less shared by the whole family. However, that progressively changed as the men continued to visit and share God’s word. Eventually, some of them began to pray themselves.

5.3.7.3 The Potential Converts Pray

Up to this point, I have only referenced prayer by the advocates, but a number of respondents revealed that they, too, eventually engaged in prayer prior to their salvation. There were basically two categories of non-Christians praying *Christian-type* prayers. The first group includes those whose prayer reflected that of their advocates. In other words, they had prayed for God to meet a need or for God to give them better understanding. The second group included those who prayed in response to an advocate’s challenge to ask God to show them the truth. Both groups acknowledged that God’s answers to their prayer - as non-believers - played an important part in their eventual decisions to believe in Jesus.

5.3.7.3.1 Mirroring the Advocates’ Prayer

After nearly one year of reading the Bible and occasionally visiting a MBB church, Respondent Fourteen thought he was “ready to believe in Jesus” and prayer was the way he chose to confirm his readiness. The first time, he prayed a prayer that reflected his advocate’s prayers on his behalf. He asked God to “help

me to know when to believe, and if this is the correct way, help me progress without fear.” The next morning he awoke with joy and no fear, which he interpreted as a clear sign from God that believing in Jesus was the correct way. So, he got dressed and called the pastor who had counseled him for nearly one year and told him, “I’m a believer!”

Privately and secretly, Respondent Nineteen began to read the Bible and pray for specific things as he had witnessed his advocates pray. He prayed for a solution to his sister’s medical problem. She was provided a surgery that was successful. He prayed for good grades at school and he received good grades. He also saw the positive changes that occurred in the lives of his family members who professed faith in Christ. For him, answered prayer was among the major catalysts that moved him to make a profession of faith.

5.3.7.3.2 Muslims Challenged to Pray for Understanding

In some cases, after an advocate felt they had exhausted their abilities to explain the gospel any further, the advocate challenged the respondent to pray and ask God to show them the truth. This approach was somewhat *similar* to I Kings 18 where Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to cry out to Baal while he called on the LORD to demonstrate who is God.

Respondent Ten’s advocates said, “There’s nothing more we can do or say to prove to you that Jesus is Lord. You need to pray and ask God to show you.” Often this challenge to pray was more specific. These prayers focused on asking God to reveal to the potential convert if Muhammad or Jesus is the correct way. The female evangelist who advocated to both Respondents Twelve and Thirteen advised them to seek God’s help to understand the truth.

After about one year of talking with a female evangelist named Jamilla, Respondent Twelve sensed that Jamilla’s answers and her private studies were starting to persuade her to believe in Jesus. However, converting to Christianity presented obvious social and family risks that were frightening. The respondent said that over a period of about two to three weeks she had internally accepted

Jamilla's explanations and encouragement to trust Jesus, but outwardly she rejected them because of fear that she might lose everything (i.e., family and community). Things appeared to be at a standstill. Jamilla had patiently answered the respondent's questions, absorbed her verbal blows, and repeatedly encouraged the respondent to trust Jesus for the outcome, yet she continued to hesitate. After one year of counseling, and realizing she had done all she could for the respondent, Jamilla finally told her, "There's no answer I can give you that will persuade you. You need to go home and pray to God and ask him to show you the truth. If it is through Muhammad, follow him, and if it is through Jesus, follow him." That night, while standing in the window looking to the sky with tears flowing down her face, the respondent cried out, "God, please show me the truth. If the truth comes through Muhammad, I'll become a good Muslim. If it's through Jesus, I will follow him." God answered her through a dream that is detailed above in 5.3.6.2.3 A Voice.

In completely unrelated circumstances, Respondent Thirteen was challenged to pray by the same advocate who challenged Respondent Twelve. At the Christmas party where they met for the first time, Jamilla initiated a gospel witness to the respondent, which she thought was "probably prompted by my wearing a hijab at a Christmas party." Although she had no specific rebuttals to Jamilla's biblical reasoning, the respondent was appalled that this lady was trying to convert her. Jamilla recognized the hardness of the respondent's spirit and challenged her to pray and ask God for direction. Jamilla specifically suggested that the respondent pray, "God of this earth, show me who you are. Is Muhammad the way, or is Jesus?" This challenge was the last straw for the respondent, who then angrily fled the party. However, about four months after Jamilla's challenge, Respondent Thirteen cried out, "God of this earth, show me who you are. If Muhammad is the way, I'll work harder to be a better Muslim. If Jesus is the way, I'll follow him." That night, God answered her prayer in a dream, which is detailed above in 5.3.6.2.4.1 Dreams as Confirmation.

5.3.7.4 Conclusions of the Use of Prayer in Advocacy

The information gained from my respondents illustrates the important role prayer has in evangelizing Muslims. My respondents revealed the value of prayer as a general practice of the Christian life. They also highlighted the value of advocates praying openly in the presence of or with those who are not yet converted. For some, doing so provided a critical step toward conversion. For others it was not so immediately apparent. However, even when the initial reactions to prayer were negative, in hindsight all of the respondents acknowledged that the advocates praying in their presence was an important element of their conversion to faith in Jesus Christ.

The respondents also demonstrated the value of advocates praying in the presence of unbelievers by imitating their advocate's prayer style. Prior to their conversions, some of the respondents began to pray for specific needs to be met by God or for better understanding of the gospel.

My respondents further revealed that advocates can effectively challenge a Muslim to pray that God will show them the way of salvation by asking God to clarify whether salvation is found through Muhammad or through Jesus. Finally, given the evidence of the positive use of prayer in the process of evangelizing Muslims, advocates should consider ways they can implement prayer in their own evangelism methods.

5.3.8 The Location of Advocacy

The respondents' testimonies illustrated the wide variety of specific places that advocacy occurred, both in private and in public.

In most cases the bulk of the advocacy took place through pastoral or evangelistic visits in the homes of the respondents. However, private conversations also occurred between friends at work and elsewhere. Two respondents experienced private advocacy by way of a crisis-counseling center

hotline, and Christian television broadcasting provided private advocacy for two other respondents.

Given the context of fear that exists in the West Bank it is not surprising that most of the advocacy occurred in private. However, the respondents revealed that advocacy also occurs in public venues. For example, two respondents were evangelized at a Christmas party. Others were evangelized at summer or weekend camps, and another initially watched the Jesus Film at a public showing. While the specific circumstances and opportunities must be soberly considered, the positive reference to public advocacy by these respondents suggests that advocates can seek opportunities to evangelize openly in the West Bank.

5.3.9 The Value of the Participation and Presence of Advocates

Without question the focus of missions is Jesus Christ, making Him known among the nations. However, we should not dismiss the valuable role of the advocate in the missionary endeavor. The Apostle Paul highlights the indispensable function of the advocate in the process of making Jesus known when he asks, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14 NKJV). Here, Paul impresses upon the reader the apparent impossibility of believing in Jesus without an advocate.

In this passage, *κηρύσσω* (*kérussó*) is typically translated into English as “preach” or “preacher.” Without suggesting this is a mistranslation, Kittel (1965:703) says that our typical modern understanding of *preaching* “is not a strict equivalent of what the NT means by *κηρύσσειν*. *κηρύσσειν* does not mean the delivery of a learned and edifying or hortatory discourse in well-chosen words and a pleasant voice. It is the declaration of an event. Its true sense is ‘to proclaim.’”

Certainly, proclamation can and does occur through traditional preaching, but it also occurs through other advocates – polished and unpolished – proclaiming

Jesus to others. In other words, people telling others how they came to believe in Jesus, or in some other way providing awareness of Jesus and his claims.

Most of my respondents did not experience sermonic advocacy prior to their conversion. Instead, they were told about Jesus in a variety of other ways that have been discussed above. The New Living Translation (Tyndale 2007, emphasis added) provides this broader range of advocacy in its translation of Romans 10:14 – “But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless *someone tells them?*”

In addition to the obvious role of advocating on behalf of Jesus, the advocates served also as a source of encouragement and security, which is critical in a context that is imbued with fear and risk. Because many of the respondents had never known of Muslims coming to faith in Jesus, personally meeting Christians – MBBs and non-MBBs – was an important step in their conversion process. While an analysis of their testimonies reveals the value of advocacy for *all* the respondents, seventeen specifically mentioned the importance they placed on meeting Christians. Many of Greenham’s Palestinian respondents also said that meeting other believers was an important element of their conversion process (Greenham 2010b).

When asked what was the most decisive factor in her coming to faith, Respondent Three noted several critical factors: An initial contact with her college classmate opened the door. A picnic retreat planted seeds. Devotions at work and Bible study with a pastor gave her information and answered most of her questions. Reading the Bible gave her greater understanding of God’s plan and Jesus’ identity. Dreams confirmed what she had been told and had read. And finally, a confession that “Jesus is God” was confirmatory evidence in her mind that the Holy Spirit was working in her, which had been her prayer request. Having noted all of those as important, she said that two factors were the *most* important in her coming to faith. Both were personal interactions with believers. First, that her boss (a non-MBB and a bi-vocational pastor) was patient, kind, and

not pushy while she considered the faith. Second, she added that consistently spending time with older female (non-MBB) believers made an important impact on her decision as they prayed with and for her, studied the Bible with her, and encouraged her to seek God.

When asked what he thought were the essential things that brought him to faith, Respondent Ten said, “dreams and having someone to encourage me to consider Jesus.”

In an effort to understand better what Respondent Twenty believed were the pivotal events that led him to believe that Jesus died for his sins, I asked him to fill in the blank in the following sentence: If it were not for _____, I don't think I would be a believer. He answered very quickly: “The power of the dreams, Jesus' help, and fellowship with MBBs.”

Respondent Seventeen, who began her journey to faith as an atheist, said that she doesn't know exactly when her atheism transformed into theism or a specific thing that changed her view, but she does connect it directly to the *personal* testimonies she heard daily: “Knowing them [MBBs] and hearing their testimonies was very important to me,” she said.

These four testimonies not only accurately represent and illustrate the testimonies of the remainder of the respondents, they also demonstrate the importance of Christians – MBBs and non-MBBs – risking their own personal well being to be involved in the process of advocating for the gospel in a hostile environment. Further, they illustrate the wide variety of advocates – professional and non-professional – and types of advocacy, ranging from sharing a personal testimony to teaching a formal Bible study to simply being present as a source of encouragement.

5.4 Conversion

As previously mentioned, all of my respondents were decision orientation converts. Through the process of evangelism described above, each respondent

was encouraged not only to recognize certain facts about Jesus, but also to make a personal decision to place their faith in Jesus Christ as lord and savior.

5.4.1. Struggles Against Conversion

Apart from Respondent Sixteen who believed the first time she heard the gospel, all of the respondents' testimonies can be described as a struggle against believing the gospel. Their context programed them to struggle against the gospel. Islam, the overarching cultural reality in the West Bank, forbids conversion away from Islam. Even in the case of moderate or non-practicing Muslims, there is an intrinsic understanding that conversion away from Islam is wrong. Among the respondents who had been non-practicing Muslims, religious indifference also programed them against the gospel.

Adding to the cultural programing against embracing a new faith, Muslims in the West Bank are subject to the retributive whims of a government and society that, by and large, accepts the Islamic prohibition against conversion away from Islam. This reality requires much patience and perseverance on the part of an evangelist. While I did find evidence of an immediate conversion, I found only a single occurrence. More common was the story of actively or passively struggling against conversion until the evidence became sufficiently overwhelming that 1) the respondent concluded that believing was the only reasonable alternative, or 2) the respondent simply realized they believed. The length of this process ranged from a few weeks to several years. See Appendix 7 for the length of each respondent's conversion process.

Some respondents said that while they were resisting conversion, they also felt like they were being drawn toward Jesus or the advocate in a way that was overpowering their resistance. Respondent Six's description of his struggle perfectly illustrates this dynamic. After a few months of sitting with his parents listening to evangelists explain the gospel, he began to secretly watch the Jesus Film. Over the course of several months of visits by the evangelists and occasionally watching the Jesus Film, he actually recognized his internal

struggle. On the one hand, he was very moved by the life of Jesus and how he was mistreated and punished. On the other hand, he felt guilty for thinking about Christianity. In fact, he said he regularly asked Allah to forgive him for sitting with the Christian men. While he was drawn to the message of the Jesus film, he also was afraid he would be kidnapped and tortured as Allah's punishment for his interest in the film. The idea of becoming a Christian was repulsive and frightening, yet each time he watched the film he felt more "drawn toward Jesus."

Respondent Twenty-Three lived a basically secular Muslim life without any interest in religion. His disinterest in religion created a natural aversion to the gospel and increased the surprise of being "pulled by something" to read the New Testament. The pull was so strong and definite that he read the complete New Testament a couple times over the course of two months. "Each day," he explained, "I felt something, someone pulling me toward the New Testament."

Respondent Ten said he had always wanted to pray, but not like the Muslims pray. As a result of a dream that coincided with his meeting some Christians, he asked for a Bible and began to read the New Testament. After repeatedly reading the New Testament, he described himself as falling in love with Jesus. He said, "I loved what He taught. I loved Him. And I wanted to know more about Him" However, as much as he felt himself falling in love with Jesus, he still had serious questions. He described his questions as "typical Muslim questions about the person of Jesus": "How can you call Prophet Jesus God? How can Jesus be God's son? How can you say God's Prophet, God himself, was killed on a cross?" Thankfully, Respondent Ten's questions were sufficiently answered so that he came to believe in the one with whom he "felt himself falling in love." The same was true for all the respondents, and in one way or another, they each made a profession of faith.

5.4.2 The Sinner's Prayer of Salvation

A very surprising discovery was the frequent reference to a "prayer of salvation" or a "sinner's prayer." This frequent reference – whether affirming or

denying the use of a sinner's prayer – may reflect the central place of a similar type of prayer in Islamic life. The Shahada, the Islamic confession of faith, is a short statement of belief: "*There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is Allah's messenger.*" Sarker (2004:171) says, "One needs merely to speak these few words, the shortest creed of any major world religion, to accept Islam and become Muslim." Rick Love (n.d.), blogging about his interfaith peacemaking efforts, suggests a parallel between a sinner's prayer and the Shahada:

At a Mosque during Ramadan this year a Muslim asked me to say the Muslim equivalent of the evangelical "sinner's prayer." He encouraged me to say the *Shahada*, the Muslim confession of faith: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Prophet of God." When you say this confession, you formally become a Muslim.

While saying a prayer of salvation is not *necessary* to receive salvation in the Christian paradigm, so many respondents mentioned these prayers that it is appropriate to address that here.

A "prayer of salvation" or "sinner's prayer" is a prayer that a repentant sinner says 1) to demonstrate their decision to trust Jesus Christ for their salvation, and/or 2) to mark the decisive moment when they believed. Sometimes the convert is guided in what to say in such a prayer. On other occasions, they are asked to simply pray in their own words from their heart.

While many things may be expressed in a prayer of salvation, it usually contains at least the following elements: 1) an acknowledgement that the person is a sinner who deserves punishment, 2) an acknowledgement that the person is unable to save themselves, and 3) a statement of faith or trust in Jesus' death and resurrection as the only sufficient source of atonement that can provide salvation. The latter is often accompanied by a request: "Please save me."

5.4.2.1 Twelve Respondents Did Not Mention a Prayer

One-half of the respondents (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 13, 15, 18, 20, and 24) did not mention using a prayer as an expression of faith or as a request for salvation. After a period of Bible study, sometimes accompanied by dreams or other

influences, these respondents realized they believed that Jesus is God or some variation of that statement and trusted him for salvation. The theological phraseology of all respondents' professions is discussed below in 5.4.3 Theological Details and a list of each respondent's phraseology is provided in Appendix 8.

The testimonies of Respondents One and Four adequately illustrate the way these twelve respondents realized they had come to believe. Toward the end of a three-year process of comparing the Qur'an and Bible, attending Bible studies and reading the Bible, Respondent One began to sense a confidence in what he was reading and concluded that, "Faith is the natural outcome of honestly reading the Bible." Finally, when "all the pieces were in place" he "believed that Jesus is God who died for [his] sins."

In a similar way, at the end of an intense eight-month period of Bible study, Respondent Four said, "I really understood in my heart who God is and believed in Him." And as soon as he realized that he had come to a personal faith in Jesus, he did not pray. He simply believed and then told his wife about his belief. Afterward, he told his advocate who then prayed a prayer of confirmation for him and the others in his family who had come to believe concurrently.

5.4.2.2 Seven Respondents Said a Prayer of Salvation

Of the twelve respondents who mentioned a prayer of salvation, seven (7, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, and 23) actually said one. These were usually prompted or led by an advocate, but not always.

Sometimes a sinner's prayer is used to pressure a potential convert towards conversion and can be very confusing. For example, Respondent Seven was directed to an evangelical scholar who could help him better understand the gospel. During their first meeting the scholar started to preach at him, saying, "You need the lamb whose blood protects us, the lamb who was resurrected after three days." Because he had read the New Testament several times, the respondent understood that the scholar was talking about Jesus, but the

approach was quite shocking. Additionally, he said, “I didn’t know how to believe in Jesus, so I asked him how can I believe?” The scholar’s answer was equally shocking and unhelpful: “Tell him you are a sinner and give him your sin,” he said. “But, how?” the respondent pleaded for clarification. The scholar gave another aggressive and unclear response: “Let’s pray! If you believe the words, accept them. If not, don’t.” The respondent followed in prayer not knowing whether he believed or not. In spite of the confusion created by praying the sinner’s prayer while he remained uncertain of his belief, he eventually decided to believe in Jesus about four years later. At that time, the respondent called the scholar who he had prayed with previously and said, “I’m ready to believe.” Immediately, the scholar prayed the sinner’s prayer with the respondent.

Respondent Twenty-Three also was initially confused by the mention of a sinner’s prayer. The pastor who was his advocate sensed he was ready to trust in Jesus and asked if he wanted to pray the “sinner’s prayer.” However, the respondent had no idea what that meant. The pastor explained that it was “a prayer in which a person admits they are a sinner and needs forgiveness, and that they believe Jesus died for their sins so they can be forgiven.” The respondent said that seemed a little odd at the time, but it did express what he believed, so he prayed with the pastor. It was short, “I just told the Lord that I was a sinner and believed that Jesus died on the cross for my sin,” he said.

Some seemed to gain a sense of security by saying a prayer of salvation. Respondent Nineteen made his first profession of faith at the age of thirteen without a prayer of salvation. For three years, he believed he was a Christian, self-identified as a Christian, read his Bible and participated in family Bible studies. However, because of a disturbing dream at the age of sixteen he concluded he was “away from Jesus” and not a Christian. When asked what the dream meant, the respondent said, “I felt away from Jesus when I had the dream, and it meant that Jesus is the right way.” He could not explain why he felt “away from Jesus,” but was certain that he was. As a result of the dream, he

prayed the prayer of salvation and began to distinguish himself as “a *real* Christian.”

5.4.2.3 Five Respondents Mentioned, But Did Not Say a Prayer of Salvation

In their testimonies, five respondents (Six, Eight, Ten, Eleven, and Twenty-Two) volunteered that they did not say a sinner’s prayer, though they were convinced they had converted. Respondents Eight and Twenty-Two expressed well how this group of respondents simply realized they had come to believe the message of their advocates even though they did not say a prayer of salvation.

Respondent Eight said he “did not pray the sinner’s prayer.” Instead, after about two years of pastoral visits and personally reading the New Testament, he realized that he had arrived at a point of believing that Jesus had died for his sins and that forgiveness was the way that Jesus was offering him rest, bringing him full-circle to the magazine advertisement that introduced him to Jesus’ offer of rest found in Matthew 11:28.

On the way home from a church service, thinking she might actually be on the right path, Respondent Twenty-Two began to cry. By the time she arrived home, faith and love and forgiveness had become clearer. She wanted them all, and clearly in her “heart and head, believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins,” she said. She clarified: “I didn’t pray the *sinner’s prayer* or talk with anyone at the moment, I just believed in my heart that Jesus died for my sins.”

There is a concern among certain Christians that the sinner’s prayer may be wrongly emphasized as necessary to salvation or wrongly understood as the object of faith, and thus produce false converts. Jared Moore (2013) expresses his concern this way: “For, if our hearer(s) trust in the prayer instead of in Christ, they are doomed for Hell while possessing assurance (false) of their salvation.” This type of concern coupled with the surprise of finding this western practice evidenced in the West Bank may raise questions in the minds of some regarding the fidelity of the conversions detailed by my respondents. Although I never had

the impression that any of the respondents had placed their faith in the sinner's prayer, consideration of the theological details mentioned in their testimonies may help alleviate such concerns.

5.4.3 Theological Details Mentioned in Conversion Testimonies

Before proceeding, it is important to establish a few cautions regarding analysis of the wording of these respondents' testimonies. First, all of the respondents were raised in an Islamic context without the benefit of a cultural awareness of Christian theological language or emphasis. Second, at the time of their interviews, only a few of them had any measure of formal training in theological formulations or language. Third, only a few of the respondents had much experience sharing their testimonies with someone from outside their culture.

These three cautions suggest that one must be careful in too finely analyzing the testimonies as improperly nuancing this element or that detail. Obviously, we should be concerned that true faith is placed in the proper object – Jesus Christ. But we must also be cautious not to conclude that a convert from this context who is unable to communicate like a seminary-trained pastor or fails to emphasize a theological point we think important necessarily means a false confession.

5.4.3.1 Belief

Perhaps echoing the Apostle Paul's answer to the Philippian Jailer's question regarding what he must do to be saved (Acts 16:30-31), all twenty-four respondents expressed in one formulation or another that they believed in Jesus.

Respondent Two described a dream as her final push toward believing in Jesus. In her final dream "Jesus appeared dressed in white with a glowing light in his face." In Arabic, he said to her, "I am the way." At that moment, she awoke from her sleep "believing in Jesus." She immediately got up and called the person who had been witnessing to her and whispered, "I believe Jesus is God!"

The use of the word “believe” or “belief” did not always occur in their description of the moment of salvation, though. Sometimes it was used as they described the lengthy process of coming to faith. For example, Respondent Twelve explained that the answers her advocate was providing were causing her to believe in Jesus. However, her description of the moment of conversion focuses on the persuasive nature of a dream she experienced, and does not include reference to belief. Rather than suggest she did not believe or perhaps made a false profession, I prefer to evaluate her testimony based on the totality of the elements included in her longer narrative of conversion.

5.4.3.2 The Deity of Jesus

Seventeen respondents (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 24) mentioned the deity of Jesus as part of their testimony narrative. Some used the phrase “Jesus is God” and others referenced Jesus as the Son of God or Lord. This seemed to be an important point of emphasis for the respondents. That may be true because of the Muslim rejection of the deity of Jesus. Several of the respondents initially resisted this doctrine.

Respondent Two admitted that well into her period of advocacy, she could believe in Jesus, the man. However, she still could not accept Jesus, the God. In fact, that was the last barrier she had to overcome. At the retreat where she was first evangelized, Respondent Three became very angry when the host pastor declared, “Jesus is God.” The deity of Jesus was also her last barrier. When she realized that she may *already* believe that Jesus is God, she was frightened because she was unaware of any other Muslims who believed this way.

The deity of Jesus was the major catalyst in Respondent Sixteen’s conversion. The details of how she progressively understood and accepted Jesus’ deity are provided above in 5.3.4.1 The Christmas Story.

5.4.3.3 Jesus' Death

Another common apologetic against Christianity is the Muslim denial of Jesus' death on the cross. Muslims typically insist that Allah would not allow a prophet to be shamed in that way. Thirteen respondents (1, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, and 24) included a reference to Jesus dying for their sins in their testimony narrative.

Respondent Twenty-One referenced Jesus' death when she explained what she said in her prayer of salvation: "I was a sinner and accepted the blood of Jesus as payment for my sins." Respondents Eight and Eighteen said they believed that Jesus died for their sins. Respondent Twenty-Three was more specific; he "believed that Jesus died on the cross for [his] sins."

5.4.3.4 The Resurrection

One area of concern regarding the testimony narratives was a glaring lack of reference to the resurrection. In only two cases was the resurrection mentioned. Respondent Seven included reference to the resurrection when he detailed his advocate's evangelistic presentation: "You need the lamb whose blood protects us, the lamb who was resurrected after three days." Respondent Three was the only other one to mention the resurrection, which she did as she described the content of the daily Bible study she attended at work.

I asked my gatekeepers for clarification on this point, wondering whether the evangelists did not consistently include the resurrection as part of their witness, or perhaps, the respondents did not see it as important as other elements of their stories. I also thought it was possible that after these respondents pass the deity and death barriers, the resurrection is a given, and thus not emphasized in their testimonies. The gatekeepers assured me that the resurrection is an important part of their evangelistic message. Further, they confirmed that my thoughts regarding the deity and death barriers were correct. One gatekeeper responded in private correspondence, "Since they [MBBs in this context] believe he is already alive they don't go over it too much." This clarification is helpful, but a

word of caution not to let the doctrine of the resurrection lose its importance seems to be in order.

The above analysis reveals that Muslims in the West Bank are coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Even though this thesis does not validate any claims regarding large numbers of conversions (e.g., Travis et al. 2008:193; Woodberry 2008b:vii), it does provide encouraging news that Christian evangelism is being effectively employed in the West Bank. And, while this thesis does not reveal a *best* evangelistic methodology, it does reveal some evangelistic considerations that have been demonstrably helpful in the process of evangelizing Muslims in the West Bank. This research also allows us to draw certain conclusions regarding an effective approach to evangelism in the West Bank. Those conclusions are presented in Chapter 6: My Final Word.

6 Conclusions: My Final Word

Though over one-third of all unbelievers in the world are Muslims, only .05 percent of all the Christian workers in the world have Muslims as their focus.

J.D. Greear (2010:11)

Muslims are embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This should encourage Christians to continue to bring the gospel to Muslims as well as pray for a continued and enlarged evangelistic enterprise among Muslims in the West Bank and beyond. In addition to the fact that Muslims in the West Bank are coming to faith in Jesus Christ, this research has revealed evangelistic practices that are effective in bringing West Bank Muslims to faith.

Perhaps the challenge in evangelizing Muslims is less about their resistance and more related to a lack of emphasis on the part of Christians. If Greear's statistics regarding the minimal number of Christian workers directing their attention toward Muslims is close to correct, Christians need a dramatic course correction. More gospel advocacy among Muslims is required.

It is difficult to say why more Christians are not involved in Muslim evangelism, but I hope the findings of my research can be helpful in encouraging more people to give their lives to the worthy pursuit of sharing Jesus Christ with Muslims. The following conclusions inform the church – both in the West Bank and globally - of effective methodological considerations and thus can serve as a practical resource for preparation to engage in this spiritual battle. In some sense, there is heavy irony in the previous sentence because the methodological considerations that follow are focused primarily on principles I discovered in this research and not on methods or techniques.

The motivation for this approach – principles over techniques - is multifaceted. First, I think the contemporary Church has made a major error in pursuing what is basically a marketing formula of "A+B=C," where A and B represent prescribed actions, and C represents the desired outcome. The result

of that approach appears to be a Church that focuses on *what we do* as opposed to *who we are* as the people of God. Not only does this approach produce a new form of legalism, it seems to produce adherents that are anemic in their faith as well. This critique does not suggest that Christians should cloister themselves away and not *do* anything. Rather, it recognizes that our actions should primarily be the result or outworking of who we are as the people of God. In contrast, the formulaic approach above seems to result in people trying to become the people of God by doing certain things.

The second motivation for my approach of focusing on principles over techniques is that a technique driven approach disregards the variety of people who make up the Church. The advocates related to this research did not fit a specific profile or skill set. They were professional ministers and lay members of the church. They were male and female. They were married and single. They advocated in a variety of languages, including Arabic, English, and Hebrew. They came from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds: some were former Muslims, others former Catholics, and three were Jewish believers in Jesus.

The following observations and conclusions are offered not only to report what I found, but also to encourage Christians to seek to be the people of God who share the love of God in Christ with unbelievers.

6.1 Evangelism is a Process

In the case of my respondents evangelism was generally a *process* and not a single event. It usually involves many parts. In only one case (Respondent Sixteen) did the respondent place her faith in Jesus Christ the first time she heard the gospel. Although this case suggests that a single presentation of the gospel may, in fact, result in conversion, the results of my research and the general global statistics of evangelism toward Muslims indicate that a quick decision is exceptional. The remainder of the respondents reported being in process from weeks to years, usually with several encounters with an evangelist or after extensive reading of the Bible.

Understanding this reality may provide more realistic expectations regarding anticipated response, particularly in comparison to other locations and people groups, and thus eliminate possible field worker discouragement if/when the process takes months or even years without apparent progress.

6.2. Three Considerations for Effective Advocacy

Using the above conclusion that evangelism is a process as an overarching principle under which the remaining conclusions rest, I want to focus here, on the advocate by offering three considerations for effective advocacy among West Bank Muslims: 1) Spiritual Considerations, 2) Methodological Considerations, and 3) Theological Considerations.

6.2.1 Spiritual Considerations

6.2.1.1 Commitment to Evangelism

As indicated above, perhaps the most important element of an effective evangelistic strategy is not the strategy itself. Rather, it is the commitment to evangelize. The advocates related to this research exhibited a foundational commitment to engage Muslims with the good news of Jesus Christ's atoning death in spite of the potential personal risk.

The advocates fully embraced the idea that God accomplishes His will on earth through the actions of His people and that Jesus had clearly expressed His will in Matthew 28:19 (NKJV): "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

6.2.1.2 All Hands On Deck

In addition to a principled commitment to evangelize Muslims, this research revealed that a variety of advocates were involved in the process. While professional advocates were involved in each of the respondents' stories, many

of the respondents were not only positively influenced by the advocacy of a non-professional minister, their initial contact came by way of a non-professional minister.

Reaching the Muslim world with the gospel requires every member of the church to fulfill their role (Eph 4:16). Some need to pray. Some need to provide financial support. Some should staff a bookshop that sells Bibles while others broadcast the gospel via satellite. Some can initiate contact while others do more of the formal advocacy or pastoral care. The largeness of the task of evangelizing the Muslim world requires an all hands on deck mentality because there is a job for everyone, which is appropriately illustrated in I Corinthians 12 by Paul's use of the analogy of a body. He compares unity in the Body of Christ with the unity of the human body as its parts function together and for the benefit of the whole body. Every part has its function. Every member of the Church has a function. This principle corresponds with the findings of the Seed to Fruit research. Greenlee and Wilson (2008:123) wrote that many practitioners who participated in that project considered it important to expect "every team member to be involved in evangelism, while recognizing that different team members may have different roles."

While the need for an all hands on deck mentality seems obvious, it is a mistake to conclude that this need is concerned only with the mechanics of an evangelistic methodology.

6.2.1.3 Evangelism is a Spiritual Activity

First and foremost, evangelism is a spiritual endeavor. Therefore, advocates need to approach it as such and focus on their own spiritual foundations before considering *how* they will evangelize others.

In reality, the commitment to evangelism mentioned above, was simply a reflection of the advocates' spiritual maturity. Although the respondents did not use the phrase spiritual maturity, they indicated such when they noted the advocates were patient, longsuffering, compassionate, generous, and exhibited

true love. Demonstrating the fruits of the spirit was helpful in their advocating for the gospel and the respondents' recognition of this suggests that other advocates who want to engage Muslims in the West Bank need to cultivate the fruits of the spirit in their own lives: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Gal 5:22-23 NKJV).

6.2.1.4 Prayer

Bongoyok (2008:307) says, "the best way to maximize non-Christians' receptivity to Jesus is to pray for them more regularly and more deeply, and to do it with pure hearts." The advocates who were effective with my respondents were people of prayer. They not only spent considerable time in prayer personally, they also developed prayer networks from whom they solicited prayer cover. This type of prayer focused on God's developing their own spiritual maturity as well as directing them to people who would listen and on whose hearts God was working.

6.2.1.5 Courage

Finally, in a context of fear, advocates need courage: courage to identify as believers and share the gospel even when doing so might result in persecution. This kind of courage, a courage that surpasses all human understanding (Phil 4:6-7), is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Repeatedly, my advocates illustrated the kind of courage Jesus spoke of as he prepared his disciples for his departure: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27 NKJV).

It is clear that these advocates effectively aided their advocacy by joyfully fulfilling their role in evangelizing Muslims, by developing their spiritual maturity, by praying, and by exhibiting a Holy Spirit sourced courage.

6.2.2 Methodological Considerations

After establishing themselves spiritually, advocates should begin to give consideration to various methods of evangelism. While the method(s) used by my advocates seemed less important than their personal commitment to evangelism, certain methodological considerations became apparent through the respondents' testimonies. Rather than methods, though, the following might be described more appropriately as foundational principles.

The first two principles concern the content of the message and how that content is delivered.

6.2.2.1 Bible Centered

Each of the advocates had an unwavering commitment to the primacy of the Bible in the evangelistic process. Whether they distributed gospel tracts, led Bible studies, or answered questions, the content was sourced from the Bible. Additionally, the advocates emphasized and encouraged concentrated Bible reading for the purpose of letting the Scripture evangelize the respondents. For those who struggled to read, the advocates presented Bible content orally through Bible lessons or reading the Bible to them.

6.2.2.2 Flexibility and Creativity

While maintaining the integrity of the content of their message, the advocates were committed to flexibility and creativity in how they delivered the gospel. In addition to what might be considered traditional methods of delivery like Bible studies and gospel tracts, they also utilized available technology. Satellite television, the Jesus Film, and mobile phones were all demonstrably helpful in evangelizing my respondents. Weekend camps, Christmas parties, and a community culture center also provided opportunities to share the gospel effectively.

6.2.2.3 Prayer

Finally, praying openly was another major element that emerged. Prayer was already mentioned above in terms of the advocate's spiritual preparation. In that regard, I included the advocate's personal, devotional prayer as well as the prayer support of friends. Both of these are private matters that may or may not be known to the respondents. Here, as a methodological consideration, I refer to the way the advocates incorporated prayer into their interaction with the respondents by praying *with* them and *for* them each time they met. Many respondents were effectively moved toward faith because the advocates prayed openly in their presence, generally beginning their visit with an enquiry of needs the respondent might have for which the advocate could pray. Additionally, it was common for the advocate to also pray that God would open the (spiritual) eyes and ears of the respondent, allowing them to understand the Bible.

When evaluating the advocates' methodology, I focused on foundational principles rather than specific techniques. These principles may encourage or negate the use of any specific evangelistic method/technique. As I surveyed the work of these advocates, I realized that the principles listed above – primacy of the Bible, creativity, and prayer – were helpful in shaping the specific techniques the advocates sought to implement. I suggest that they will serve as a strong foundation that will guide any advocate's choice of technique. Using these principles as guides for choosing evangelistic techniques allows appropriate leeway for personal conscience and spiritual gifting, as well as for the development of new theories and approaches to evangelism that will certainly come in the future.

6.2.3 Theological Considerations.

As new approaches to evangelism arise, the advocate must rely on their theological foundations and commitments to evaluate the validity of new approaches. Though only a minority of the advocates represented in this research had formal theological training and a variety of theological persuasions

were present (i.e., charismatic and non-charismatic, Zionist and anti-Zionist) all the advocates were committed to a conservative evangelical theology and shared certain core theological commitments.

6.2.3.1 Prayer

The advocates' commitment to prayer revealed a firm belief in God's active role among men as well as their own dependence upon His involvement in the evangelism process. By consistently praying for God to influence their activities and then actively engaging Muslims with the Gospel, the advocates demonstrated belief in God's sovereignty and man's responsibility working cooperatively in the conversion process. This kept them humble and actively engaged in evangelism.

6.2.3.2 The Bible

The central role of the Bible in their advocacy was based on their belief that 1) the Bible is God's authoritative word, and 2) it is a supernatural book through which God changes the hearts of those who read/hear it. All of the advocates represented in this research believed that the Bible is uniquely God's word that reveals God's will and love for mankind. As demonstrated by their evangelistic approaches, none of the advocates believed the Qur'an has the same authority or is of the same supernatural nature as the Bible. Therefore, they never had hesitations about the respondents comparing the two texts in their examination of the Christian faith.

6.2.3.3 The Deity and Exclusivity of Jesus

Each of the advocates emphasized the deity of Jesus, and this emphasis was reflected in the respondents' many references to Jesus as Lord and Savior and as the Son of God. In spite of the Muslim objection to this doctrine, the advocates maintained this evangelical theological commitment. And, while there were certain differences in nuance or emphasis in their understanding of their

evangelical theology, they all believed in the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior for all mankind. The advocates' exclusivist theology of religion was grounded in their doctrine of the Bible. They believed in the uniqueness of Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life and that no man comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). The uniqueness of Jesus as the *only* way was reiterated many times by the respondents. Indicative of their exclusivist theology of religion, the advocates did not believe that Muhammad was a true prophet nor that Islam was a source of truth, nor helpful toward the salvation of mankind and never utilized such an approach in their evangelistic efforts.

6.2.3.4 God's Love in Christ

Finally, their advocacy was grounded in a commitment to the New Testament doctrine of God's love in Christ, which is explained in two propositions. First, love is an essential attribute of God's nature: "God is love" (1 JN 4:8). Second, the incarnation and death of Christ together were the ultimate expression of God's love for mankind: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16 NKJV).

These advocates' were convinced of man's need for eternal salvation in Jesus Christ and they did not shy away from this truth. However, although their theology had much to say about heaven, it was not unconcerned about human suffering on earth. In fact, their effectiveness as advocates for Jesus Christ was enhanced by their concern for those who suffered the hardships of life.

6.3. Considerations for Conversion

Here, I move the focus from the perspective of the advocate to that of the respondent. Clearly, the advocates will be mentioned, but the conclusions drawn are from the eyes of the respondent as they considered conversion.

The respondents frequently commented on the kindness and compassion of their advocates. This compassion was grounded in the life of Jesus who regularly

showed compassion for those who were suffering as well as the advocates' own personal history of suffering, which was often related in some way to the Arab/Israeli conflict. Not only did the advocates pray for God to alleviate the suffering of the respondents they involved themselves personally, sometimes becoming God's source of help both pre and post-conversion. At times that meant purchasing groceries or paying a utility bill from their own resources for those who were unable to provide for themselves. It also meant, among other things, seeking medical care or personally delivering aid boxes donated by others.

Like Jesus, these advocates were also concerned with the spiritual suffering of those without Christ, even when the unconverted did not realize they were suffering in darkness (Luke 13:1-5). The advocates were certain they could help the respondents move from darkness to light if they could introduce the respondents to Jesus Christ who said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (Jn 8:12 NKJV).

Through the testimonies of my respondents it became clear that God was working in the hearts of Muslims in the West Bank to bring them to faith in Jesus.

6.3.1 Catalysts: Bringing Muslims in Contact with the Gospel

Among my respondents the two primary catalysts that God used to connect Muslims with a gospel advocate were Christians' good works and crises.

6.3.1.1 Good Works

Some of the respondents were drawn toward advocacy as a result of Christians doing good works. For example, Respondent Fourteen, witnessed a Christian youth group consistently provide aid to the needy people in his village. Their consistency and kindness made him wonder what was different about them. What did they have in their hearts that he lacked?

Other respondents mentioned being offered help with English by a college classmate, or being provided free crisis counseling through a telephone hotline, or being given access to free computer and self-confidence courses.

Respondent Four was motivated by a medical crisis to initiate contact with a Christian. Why a Christian? Because he had heard that they had helped the needy in his city and that they were connected to the kind of medical services his crisis required.

6.3.1.2 Crisis

Physical, financial, medical and existential problems all became catalysts for some of my respondents to contact a Christian. However, they did not contact Christians in search of religious help. Instead, the respondents had seen or heard of the Christians' good works and sought assistance for a particular need. Those Christians who were contacted did what they could to help with the respondents' needs and also shared Jesus Christ with them. All respondents who initiated contact with a Christian did so because of a crisis. These crises might be categorized as particularly difficult hardships that caused a person to be in distress at the apparent impossibility of resolution of their problem.

Another type of crisis that all respondents encountered was the result of an advocate engaging them with the gospel and may be categorized as a religious crisis. Although some had prior problems with some elements of Islam, here, I refer to a religious crisis that was directly related to becoming aware of the claims of Jesus. Is he really the Son of God? Was he really God in human flesh? Is it true that Jesus' died to pay for sin and that he rose from the dead? While they may offer great hope, such claims directly contradict Islamic theology and caused the respondents to seek the truth.

6.3.2 The Search for Truth

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except by me.” (John 14:6 NKJV).

This verse was one of the central elements of advocacy that my respondents heard repeatedly. It was used to headline gospel tracts. It was referenced repeatedly in Bible studies and discussions. It appeared in Respondent Twelve’s dream. This constant reference to the truth became the theme of their journey to faith in Jesus, which they labeled or described in some way as a pursuit of the truth.

This emphasis on *truth* as a basis for conversion contrasts with social science theories that typically see conversion as a natural utilitarian act to achieve self-interest without consideration of the truthfulness of the claims of the new group or that the convert may actually believe the message and give higher priority to that belief than to any perceived benefits or hardships that may be the result of converting.

The emphasis on *truth* also reflects the contradictory claims of Islam and Christianity. Islam claims that Muhammad is the final prophet and that salvation is found only in Islam. The New Testament claims that salvation is found only in Jesus. These contradictions appear to create a desire to arrive at a level of certainty that might not be the case in other contexts. Perhaps adding to these respondents’ *need* to be certain is the entrenched Islamic doctrine of punishment for those who reject Islam, both in this life and the one to come as well as the Christian doctrine of damnation for those who reject salvation through Jesus Christ. If both groups claim to exclusively offer the way of salvation and the result of rejecting their claims is damnation, it makes sense that one who is deciding between the two would think soberly about their decision. It is also understandable why people who had been in such a position would describe their conversions as a pursuit of truth.

The respondents were also driven to be absolutely certain of their decision to leave Islam and follow Jesus due to contextual considerations. In Islamic contexts it is usually assumed that leaving Islam to follow Jesus will result in some type of loss; if not the loss of life, certainly the loss of community and possibly family relations. This latter consideration is why so many respondents spent months to years counting the cost of following Jesus and making certain His claims were true (post-conversion realities are addressed more fully below).

Interestingly the process of validation for my respondents was both rational and experiential. And, it was the totality of their experience of advocacy that led each respondent to conclude the gospel was not only true, but also the truth.

6.3.2.1 Bible Reading

The most important element of advocacy among these respondents was Bible reading. Without undermining the important role of the advocate, it is clear that reading the Bible was the main means of persuasion and validation for this group of respondents. Many spoke of reading the Bible in large quantities and thus being drawn to Jesus or to read the Bible more.

For those that did not read the Bible in bulk, Bible content still played a critical role in their conversions. They heard Bible content repeatedly through personal testimonies, Bible lessons, question and answer sessions with an advocate, and some occasionally were directed to the Bible through dreams.

These case studies did not reveal a specific passage of Scripture that was the *evangelistic go-to* verse for Muslim evangelism. Bible content that was persuasive varied from respondent to respondent and thus revealed the variety of needs of the respondents as well as the variety of advocates involved. In these case studies, Hebrews 4:12 was repeatedly proven to be true: “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (NKJV).

While no specific passages appeared to be more effective than others in bringing my respondents to faith, the theme of love did repeatedly surface. Sometimes love was referenced in terms of specific Bible verses:

John 3:16 (NKJV): For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV): But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV): I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

I John 4:8 (NKJV): “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

I John 4:18 (NKJV): “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”

At other times, love in action as Christians helped needy people or prayed and visited the sick or simply loved one another in community validated the witness of the New Testament as the respondents read verses like John 13:34 (NKJV): “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” and Galatians 5:13 (NKJV): “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

6.2.2.2 Dreams

For half of the respondents dreams were an important experience that helped them confirm the claims of Christ. In these dreams, the respondents saw different symbols or a person of light, or they heard a voice. Regardless of the content, the dreams functioned as confirmation or direction. When functioning as confirmation, the dreams were understood by the respondents to confirm what they had *already* read in the Bible or had heard from an advocate. Alternatively,

the respondents understood the directive dreams to direct them to read a gospel tract or the Bible, both of which were delivered by an advocate.

While dreams were important elements of the conversion testimony of each of the respondents who experienced a dream, in *no case* was the content of the dream sufficient for the respondent to convert. Additional advocacy was necessary. In summary, the pattern of the dreams described by my respondents is that dreams point to or affirm a messenger with a message about Jesus Christ.

6.2.2.3 Answered Prayer

Prayer also was among the most frequent themes that emerged from the respondents' testimonies as almost 60% of them mentioned being prayed for and/or praying themselves. In many cases, the advocates prayed for the respondents' eyes and ears to be opened to the truth, which the above analysis (see 5.3.7.2.2) indicates was very important from the respondents' perspective. Additionally, the advocates prayed for the respondents' physical needs, and when those issues were resolved, the respondents' understood the results as confirmation of the advocates' message. The same is true for those who had emotional and other problems resolved.

Prayer requests for medical issues were the most common type of request mentioned, but another type stood out as well: a challenge prayer. After her advocacy appeared to stall, a female evangelist challenged two ladies to pray, "God of this earth, show me who you are. Is Muhammad the way, or is Jesus?" Both said that God answered their prayer in a dream, which led them to place their faith in Christ.

Above, I have explained from the perspective of the respondent how Muslims encountered the gospel and the process of evaluation that was utilized to determine its validity. For many, the process of evangelism would end there. For them it is sufficient to say, "Muslims are converting and here is how it is happening. Go and do likewise." However, while the conversion process has been the primary focus of this research, the Great Commission and the tenor of

the New Testament suggest that post-conversion life in Christ is not completely separate from conversion. Additionally, since great consideration of the context of fear has been given to the process, many are interested in what happens to the converts after conversion.

Although post-conversion consequences are beyond the immediate scope of this research, they are sufficiently related to the conversion process that a summary is appropriate.

6.4 Considerations for Post-Conversion Consequences and Care

6.4.1 Shari'a and Persecution

Much was made of the influence of Shari'a on the evangelistic process in the West Bank, both in terms of receptivity and delivery of the gospel. At conversion, the influence of Shari'a and/or a strong Muslim majority is still very evident, but perhaps not as strongly as I might have assumed at the beginning of the project. For example, while they, for the most part, remained somewhat secretive, the converts had not been driven underground to the degree that might be expected in other regions.

Among my respondents, twelve said they were persecuted as a result of their conversion. Although the traditional understanding of Shari'a law calls for execution of those who leave Islam, none of the respondents personally knew anyone who was executed as a result of their conversion. In spite of an absence of personal knowledge of executions or cases of harsh vigilante justice, fear of what *could* happen was pervasive among the respondents. Press reports of such things in Gaza (Christian Bookstore 2007) or elsewhere are ever-present reminders of what *could* happen in the West Bank.

The types of persecution mentioned by the respondents ranged from imprisonment by the government and family to strained family and community relations. Respondents One and Twelve were the most extreme cases of persecution. Respondent One testified of being arrested and imprisoned by the

PA. However, he said it was not his conversion, but his post-conversion evangelism that provoked the PA. Respondent Twelve's imprisonment was at the hands of her father and brother who locked her in a closet for sixteen days as a result of her conversion. Respondent Thirteen was abused by her classmates and unable to finish high school when her conversion was discovered. Respondent Fourteen lost his job and his automobile was burned, but he was not physically harmed.

Nineteen respondents said their families were aware of their conversions. Some of those qualified their answers to indicate a limited number of family members knew. Five said their families did not know, but two of those said their conversions were suspected. Respondent Seven lost his inheritance and certain family relations. Interestingly, he said he did an analysis of what he would gain and lose if he converted, and in spite of the chart being lopsided to the loss side, he chose Christ.

For the most part, the persecution mentioned amounted to strained family and/or community relations. Respondent Ten's father was angry at him for following Jesus, but asked for the sake of family honor that he not be seen in a church. The respondent has honored that request by not entering a *traditional* church building. The fellowship with which he is associated, meets in a type of building that is not traditionally associated with a church in this region. For those who have lost family and community relations, the believing community has become family and community.

6.4.2 Baptism and Church Affiliation

In this context, baptism and affiliation with a church or community of believers might be considered dangerous. However, twenty respondents said they are in some way affiliated with a church community. Some qualified their answer as "loosely," and one said, "not in the West Bank." These congregations, by and large, are not openly advertised and do not have legal status. They meet on Fridays or Sundays, depending on the background of the majority of the church

members. For example, a church that is made up primarily of MBBs will naturally meet on Friday because that provokes the least suspicion within that cultural subset.

Thirteen of the respondents were baptized, most of them outdoors. Because there is a recognized Christian population in the West Bank, baptizing in a publicly accessible pool of water is not completely without precedent. It also does not necessarily create suspicion that a Muslim has converted, which would likely create a negative response from Muslim onlookers. Some of the respondents were baptized at a park, others at the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee, and another in a public swimming pool. A few were baptized inside a church building, and one in a bathtub.

I found a closeness among these respondents that I have not seen in other more open societies. I think this level of camaraderie and fellowship reflects the personal cost of coming to faith in Jesus in a Muslim context. When people have gone through similar trials and share a similar risk they seem to develop a “we’re all in this together” mentality and a commitment to each other.

6.4.3 A Palestinian Christian Self-Identity

Palestinian nationalism was addressed as part of the cultural fabric of the West Bank and cannot be ignored post-conversion. Neither the advocates nor the respondents were neutral about Palestine, though not much was made of the issue in their advocacy or in the respondents’ post-conversion testimonies. They simply do not consider the issue of Palestine to be as important as the gospel, which they believe is better because it provides a genuine relationship with the living God.

As stated previously, though the advocates’ theology had much to say about justification and heaven, it was not absent of concern for the harsh realities of life in the present. Interestingly, none of the Jewish advocates represented in this thesis support a Palestinian state, but that did not negate, nor apparently negatively affect, their advocacy. I believe they were able to maintain their

witness in spite of their political positions because their theology and actions were consistent with the words of Jesus. In this regard, they loved their enemies (Mt 5:43-48).

Apart from the advocates' personal two-pronged approach to healing the broken – spiritual and physical – they also participate in issues of social justice more publicly through their support of the Christ at the Checkpoint conferences (see 2.5.3.4 above). These conferences represent an evangelical perspective of social concern that is often reserved for more ecumenical groups, which allows my advocates to work for social justice more broadly while maintaining their emphasis or priority on spiritual change.

In this way, they believe they fill the gap or division that exists between what Bosch (2011:303) labeled “conservative (or fundamentalist) mission advocates” and “liberals (or socialgospelers).” Heldt (2004:151) touched on this as well, describing the gap that exists “between advocates of *evangelism* aimed at conversion and salvation of souls, and advocates of *social action*, known for its focus on social transformation and political involvement.” Also, in this way, my advocates distinguish themselves from the advocates of vigilante justice (see 2.3.3 Vigilante Justice) who force social conformity through the threat of extra-judicial violence. In fact, my advocates argue that *true* social change occurs only as a result of spiritual change. This latter point is not only grounded in their theological commitments but also in their lived realities. They have seen the corruption of the PA and the harshness of Islamic rule in Gaza that has occurred *after* some measure of liberation from Israeli rule. While none would suggest that the Palestinians have experienced complete liberation, the abuse – of people, trust, and power – they have witnessed in the context of limited autonomy suggests it could get worse with complete autonomy because the hearts of their leaders have not been changed. These observations create feelings of complete helplessness, except for the hope that true change can happen as a result of their proclamation of a gospel message that can change hearts and in turn bring about true social change.

6.5 Future Research Considerations

The limited scope of this research naturally suggests other possible research that may broaden our understanding of conversion in the West Bank.

First, my research was limited to a decidedly evangelical understanding of conversion. An investigation of conversion from Roman Catholic or Eastern Church perspectives with consideration of if/how they evangelize Muslims may broaden our understanding of conversion activities within the West Bank.

Second, as a result of the specific gatekeepers I could access, this research was limited to an evangelistic model that encouraged a decidedly Christian post-conversion self-identity. Assuming there are models that encourage followers of Jesus to maintain a Muslim socio-religious identity, specific research of them can broaden our understanding of evangelism in the West Bank.

Third, all of the respondents who participated in this project had continued in their decision to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior as late as July 2013. The project focused on *successful* efforts to convert Muslims to faith in Jesus Christ, and therefore did not seek to interview those who were evangelized but never converted or converts from Islam who subsequently returned to Islam. However, during my interviews, I became aware of at least one convert who had returned to Islam, which suggests that some do ultimately return to Islam. A study seeking to understand why one who professes faith in Christ would return to Islam would provide helpful information in understanding conversion and perhaps improving evangelistic efforts in the West Bank.

Finally, this project was limited to a specific time frame – 1994 to present – and thus presents a limited historical perspective of evangelism in the West Bank. A larger or more complete perspective is possible by supplementing my findings with studies of other time frames. For example, two periods in the modern era could be reasonably added: 1) 1948-1967, the period of the Jordanian Occupation, and 2) 1967-1994, the initial period of Israeli occupation prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

My hope from the outset was that the end-result of this work would be not only an interesting read for a broad audience, but also a resource that is helpful to the Church, particularly the West Bank Church, in her calling to reach Muslims for Jesus Christ. I believe I have accomplished that, but expanding my results in the above ways may add to the value of this research.

Appendix 1: Oral Informed Consent Guide

University of Pretoria (South Africa) School of Theology Research Project

Craig Dunning is the student researcher responsible for this project, and his phone number is [redacted].

Title: Muslims Converting to Christianity: A survey of effective evangelistic methods in the West Bank and Gaza. [Gaza was later removed from the project.]

Purpose: To discover the effective evangelistic methods currently in use in the West Bank and Gaza.

Procedures:

1. Contact with participants for the research will be provided by local pastors/evangelists.
2. Each participant will be interviewed about how they came to faith in Jesus.
3. The information from each participant will be combined with the others and analyzed.
4. A final report will be produced in the form of a PhD thesis, which will be submitted to the University of Pretoria School of Theology.
5. All research materials will be submitted to the University of Pretoria for secure storage for a period of 15 years.

Risks: While every effort to maintain anonymity will be employed, it is possible that persons outside the project may find out about the survey.

Benefits: Each participant will have the rare opportunity to share their testimony of faith in Jesus with someone who is interested. Additionally, each participant will be helping create a knowledge base that will be helpful in training others who want to minister in this particular region, which may result in not only more Christian workers, but also more Christians.

Participant Rights: Each participant has the right to:

1. Have their anonymity protected with all due diligence.
2. Know the purpose and procedures of this study.
3. Ask as many questions as necessary to understand the purpose and procedures of this study.
4. Refuse to divulge any information for any reason.

5. Know what will happen with their interview information.
6. Know the final outcome of the research project.
7. Withdraw from the research project at any time without any repercussions whatsoever at which point their interview information will be destroyed.
8. Contact the researcher, Craig Dunning, at any time at 0528 595 591.

Confidentiality: Every participant will remain anonymous. The only type of identification used in this project will be gender, age range, and general area of conversion (i.e., North, South, etc.).

The only persons with any specific information on each participant will be the researcher (Craig Dunning) and the gatekeepers who provided the contact between researcher and participant, and the translator, if a translator is necessary.

Minimum Age: No one under age 18 years will be asked to participate in the research project.

Appendix 2: Languages Used in Each Interview

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| 1. Hebrew | 13. English |
| 2. English | 14. Arabic |
| 3. English | 15. Arabic |
| 4. English and Arabic | 16. Arabic |
| 5. Arabic | 17. English |
| 6. Arabic | 18. Arabic |
| 7. English | 19. Arabic |
| 8. Arabic | 20. Arabic |
| 9. English | 21. Arabic |
| 10. English | 22. Arabic |
| 11. English | 23. Hebrew |
| 12. Arabic | 24. Arabic |

Appendix 3: Powers and Responsibilities for Civil Affairs¹⁰¹

- Article 1 - Agriculture
- Article 2 - Archaeology
- Article 3 - Assessments
- Article 4 - Banking and Monetary Issues
- Article 5 - Civil Administration Employees
- Article 6 - Commerce and Industry
- Article 7 - Comptrol
- Article 8 - Direct Taxation
- Article 9 - Education and Culture
- Article 10 - Electricity
- Article 11 - Employment
- Article 12 - Environmental Protection
- Article 13 - Fisheries
- Article 14 - Forests
- Article 15 - Gas, Fuel and Petroleum
- Article 16 - Government and Absentee Land and Immovables
- Article 17 - Health
- Article 18 - Indirect Taxation
- Article 19 - Insurance
- Article 20 - Interior Affairs
- Article 21 - Labor
- Article 22 - Land Registration
- Article 23 - Legal Administration
- Article 24 - Local Government
- Article 25 - Nature Reserves
- Article 26 - Parks
- Article 27 - Planning and Zoning
- Article 28 - Population Registry and Documentation
- Article 29 - Postal Services
- Article 30 - Public Works and Housing
- Article 31 - Quarries and Mines
- Article 32 - Religious Sites
- Article 33 - Social Welfare
- Article 34 - Statistics
- Article 35 - Surveying
- Article 36 - Telecommunications
- Article 37 - Tourism
- Article 38 - Transportation
- Article 39 - Treasury
- Article 40 - Water and Sewage

¹⁰¹ Source: The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Annex III, 1995.

Appendix 4: Interview Reports

The central source for this study is the collection of personal testimonies of the respondents. Not only do these testimonies give a voice to Arabs in the West Bank who have converted from Islam to faith in Jesus Christ, they also provide insight into the process of conversion by highlighting those things the respondents understood to be important in their journey to faith. For example, the respondents explain how they were evangelized, the circumstances surrounding their conversion, and the information, feelings, and thought process that led them to place their faith in Jesus Christ, not only as a new religious identification, but more importantly as the source of salvation and forgiveness of their sin.

In this appendix the conversion testimonies of each of the respondents is presented as an independent source of information. Each testimony is followed immediately with a summary of the themes that emerged in the testimony.

Respondent One - Beth-01/M1

Respondent One was raised in a traditional Muslim home that was not religiously active, which created a general lack of interest in religious issues that was compounded by his negative experience both with religious Muslims and orthodox Christians in the Bethlehem area. One thing he was certain of was that he did not like the Christians; “They didn't care about the Muslims, only themselves,” he said.

About ten years prior to our interview while living in Bethlehem, he started working in Jerusalem and met a “Jewish woman who believes in Jesus.” She was friendly and began to talk with him about spiritual things. At first he was not interested in such discussions, but because she seemed genuinely interested in him as a person and also “loved Jesus very much” he was provoked to continue the conversations and to begin reading the Arabic Bible at home.

He read the Bible side by side with the Qur'an to see where they agreed or disagreed. In his studies he began to notice some problems in the Qur'an, particularly what he described as “logical problems and errors.” It is important to note that his personal studies were not guided studies; he simply read and compared both texts.

As questions about Islam and the integrity of the Qur'an began to mount, he started to attend a Hebrew language Bible study in West Jerusalem. At the Bible study he learned more and began to see “how the Bible fit together much better than the Qur'an.” The topics of study in the Bible study were the books of Genesis and Daniel. As he continued to read and study the Bible he began to sense a confidence in what he was reading, and he concluded that, “Faith is the natural outcome of honestly reading the Bible.”

The evangelistic stage lasted about three years, when finally, “all the pieces were in place” and he “believed that Jesus is God who died for [his] sins.”

Shortly after coming to faith, he arranged to be baptized a couple of times by different Arab pastors, but for various reasons the pastors backed out. Finally, the *Jewish pastor*, whose Bible studies the respondent had been attending for three years, baptized him in *West Jerusalem*. The respondent's family – wife and five children – witnessed his baptism.

Two days after his baptism, the respondent had a dream in which appeared a man with a glowing face dressed in white. The man told him two things: “You are on the right path, continue on” and “You need to tell others about your faith, don't stop.” In his mind, this dream served two purposes: To confirm his conclusions about Jesus and to give him a “calling” for his life.

The respondent has spent the last seven years learning more about Jesus and telling all who will listen. His witness has been effective in about fifteen others coming to faith in Jesus. He doesn't have a planned approach to evangelism, he “just starts talking about Jesus” to people as he visits their homes. His approach is to speak highly of Jesus and encourage others to read the Bible, which he assumes, will be as effective for them as it was for him. Along with printed Bibles he also distributes mp3 players loaded with audio Bibles and other Christian literature.

His conversion resulted in tensions with his family. The respondent's conversion to Christianity has been an open topic amongst his family – wife, children and siblings – all of whom have remained Muslims. Soon after his conversion, he told his wife that she could choose to let him stay at home or send him away. “But,” he added, “whatever you choose, I will always follow Jesus and tell others about him.”

His evangelistic efforts have also created tensions in his village and problems for him personally. He said that he was arrested, incarcerated, and beaten by Palestinian Authority police because he “would not stop telling others about Jesus.” According to his testimony, telling others about Jesus “is the red line for the Palestinian Authority.” He is currently in exile due to threats on his life as a

result of his evangelistic efforts. In this case, exile means that he does not live with his family. Instead, he moves about from host to host - both in the PA and Israel - staying a day here, a few days there, perhaps a week somewhere else.

The respondent said that the most important things for his conversion were Bible reading and an openness to listen. And he added that the latter was definitely the result of Christians showing a true interest in him as a person and being very patient with his questions. Arabic language Christian programs on satellite television also were helpful in building and maturing his faith, as has been his continued contact with believers in Jerusalem.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, formal Bible studies, the Qur'an vs. the Bible, doubts about Islam/Qur'an, the kindness of Christians, and dreams.

Respondent Two – Beth-02/F1

Respondent Two was born and raised in Jordan, a Palestinian in exile. Her father was a teacher who encouraged his children to read, especially in English. This emphasis on reading gave her the opportunity to think and explore things outside of Islam and to question her family's religion.

During her childhood years, her father's answer to any questions that were raised about Islam was always, "don't question Islam, just accept it." This answer did not satisfy her, so she continued to read and think independently.

When the respondent reached high school, she began to notice what she described as "contradictions, logical tensions, and other problems," in the Qur'an. However, she was always reminded that she should never "question Islam, just accept it" and that she should "believe in Allah, Muhammad, the Qur'an, and angels." The more she read, the more she noticed what she thought were problems in Islam and contradictions in the Qur'an. One specific issue she found objectionable was that "Allah can't forgive one mistake." She also mentioned that her mind would wander during prayer and that she started to think that Islam might not be true.

While studying in college she became friends with a Christian, which not only was a new experience for her it provided a new way of thinking about religion in general, and Christians specifically, even though her new Christian friend never suggested that she should become a Christian.

It was at that time that her initial set of dreams occurred, but it would be almost ten years before she understood their meaning. In the first dream of this set, all the stars in the sky came together in a single bright mass before falling one by one to the ground beside her. Having no idea what the dream meant, she asked trusted friends and family members who either laughed at her or said they could not interpret the dream. She wondered if the stars represented *jinn*s – evil spirits. The last dream in this series of dreams was once again of all the stars in the sky coming together, but this time, they gathered together in the shape of a

Christian cross. Like the previous dreams, she had no idea of the meaning of this dream, but this time she was too afraid to ask anyone for help.

About six years later, the respondent received an emotionally crushing blow when her six-months old son died suddenly. Many of the questions she had about her son's fate were answered in a set of dreams. In the first dream she saw a white dove that told her that her son was okay. This was both understandable and comforting to her. However, in the second dream, "a man dressed in white with a face of light" appeared and said in Arabic, "come to me," which did not make any sense to her at the time.

Although she was comforted by the thought that her son was okay, she did have a terrible nagging fear that he died because she "was not religious enough." That resulted in her praying more regularly and more fervently, but she never could get beyond the fear of death. She said that she constantly worried that "someone else might die because I was not religious enough."

During this episode of increased prayer and uncertainty, a family friend began to regularly visit the respondent and her husband. The focus of his visits was to talk with the couple about Jesus. It did not matter if they wanted to talk about Jesus or not, the visitor always seemed to get the conversation turned in that direction. This friend would regularly point out problems within Islam as well as testify of how his life was being blessed by Jesus.

Within a couple visits the friend gave the respondent and her husband a Bible, which she began to read immediately. Over the course of about twelve months, the respondent "read the New Testament five or six times and the Old Testament three or four times," and she sensed her thoughts about Christianity becoming more positive. However, even though she was starting to gain a level of acceptance about Christianity and the possibility of becoming a Christian, the deity of Jesus remained a major barrier. She simply could not embrace the idea that God could come to earth in human flesh.

Soon after that first year of reading the Bible, she had her third set of dreams. The initial dream of this set took her to a large mountain upon which stood “a person of light” that spoke to her in Arabic. She asked the person of light, “Who are you?” Immediately, without giving the person of light an opportunity to answer, she answered her own question: “You are God.” Then she asked her final question, “What do you want from me?” The person of light answered, “It’s time to tell you about your first dreams. You can get the answer to your questions from Christians.”

The family friend introduced the respondent to a pastor in Jerusalem who interpreted her first dreams. He told her that, “the stars falling from the sky to the ground represented [her] leaving Jordan and arriving in Palestine, and that the stars in the shape of the cross represented [her] believing in Jesus.” This interpretation made some sense to her since she had come from Jordan to Palestine. The second portion was also reasonable, to a point. She could believe in Jesus as a man. However, she still could not accept Jesus as God.

This internal tension lasted another six months, but she continued to read the New Testament in large quantities. The more she read, the more she loved Jesus, the man and the prophet. However, the more she read, the more clear it was to her that “the New Testament presents Jesus as more than a man and more than a prophet. It presents Jesus as God, too.” “Obviously that’s one of the parts of the New Testament that Muslims believe was corrupted,” she offered as an apologetic against what she was coming to understand at that time.

Her husband had lost interest in their friend’s regular discussions about Jesus and Islam within the first three months, but she had not. In fact, she had become more interested, but she had to be cautious in order to avoid upsetting her husband, who eventually suspected she had become a believer and sent her to her father to be sorted out. Since she had not yet believed, her father could not get a confession from her, and with a stern warning sent her back to her husband.

Immediately upon her arrival, the respondent's husband warned her that if she ever became a Christian he would divorce her and send her back to her father, who would certainly kill her for the family's honor. Fearing for her safety, she replaced the Arabic Bible that she carried in her purse with an English one since her husband could not read English. She also began listening to the New Testament on an mp3 player, which gave her safer and easier access to the New Testament while riding the bus or cleaning the house.

Shortly after her return home from her father's home, she informed the man who had been witnessing to her and her husband that she was "really close to believing," but that she still could not believe Jesus is God. Within a couple days of this conversation, she had her final dream, in which "Jesus appeared dressed in white with a glowing light in his face." In Arabic, he said to her, "I am the way." At that moment, she awoke from her sleep "believing in Jesus." She immediately got up and called the person who had been witnessing to her and whispered, "I believe Jesus is God!"

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, doubts about Islam/Qur'an, dreams, a crisis, uncertainty, and common objections to the gospel.

Respondent Three – EJer-01/F1

Respondent Three was born and raised in a Muslim family in Jerusalem's Old City. Her parent's and siblings were observant Muslims, but not overly religious, as demonstrated by her learning in a Christian school near her home.

In fact, she said that many moderate Muslims learn at private Christian schools based on the idea that Christian schools provide better educations than public, or even Muslim schools. She was quick to point out that her parents allowed her to attend the Christian school for this reason and because “it was well known that none of the [traditional] Christians would speak to her about becoming a Christian.” And they did not. From elementary through high school, no one ever spoke to her about becoming a Christian.

During the respondent's final year of college, a CBB (Christian Background Believer¹⁰²) classmate offered to help her improve her English. After a short period of practicing English together, the Christian asked the respondent, “Do you have any idea why I offered to help you with English?” Having no idea, the respondent asked, “Why?” The Christian girl's answer was shocking: “Because I see Jesus on you!” “I am a Muslim not a Christian!” the respondent said to herself, as many questions came to mind. For example, she wondered, “How can she see Jesus on me?” and “What does that even mean?”

Soon after, the CBB invited the respondent to a three-day student retreat. These retreats are designed to allow Palestinian Christian and Muslim students to spend time together in an environment that emphasizes Palestinian culture, though some also include decidedly Christian themes.

At this particular retreat, the respondent became very angry when the host pastor declared, “Jesus is God.” Among Muslims, the idea that Jesus is God is

¹⁰² Within the Palestinian Evangelical paradigm, a Christian Background Believer (CBB) is a person from what is considered a “traditional Christian background” (e.g., Catholic or Orthodox) who becomes a “born-again” (i.e., Evangelical) Christian.

anathema and often one of the primary barriers to faith in Jesus, and it certainly was for this respondent.

Following the pastor's shocking statement, the respondent spent three hours asking him questions. However, the respondent said, "He could never give good answers. The best he could do was to encourage me to read the New Testament, particularly the gospels." He also asked to pray for her, and in his prayer he said, "God, please speak to her." These two things – encouraging her to read the NT and asking God to speak to her – would become the catalysts for her to come to faith in Jesus as savior and God.

After returning from the retreat, the respondent began to read the New Testament and think about Jesus a lot. In fact, for the next year, she read the New Testament diligently, seeking to hear God speak to her. Additionally, she worked for a Christian businessman who had daily devotions with the staff. In those devotions she heard a regular gospel witness, focusing on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Still, the deity of Christ was offensive to her. "A prophet? Yes. God? Definitely not!" she remembered thinking at that time.

During her year of Bible reading, in addition to the staff devotions at her workplace she also attended Bible studies with an Arab pastor, and on occasion, she also discreetly visited his church services.

Toward the end of her year of reading the New Testament, she had several recurring dreams that lasted throughout the night. Jesus continually appeared in her dreams with long hair, brown eyes, a beard and wearing a white robe. In all but one dream, He remained silent. In the one dream in which Jesus spoke, He said a single word: "father."

Interestingly, that word was spoken in French, a language she recognized but did not speak. This required her to find someone who spoke French, which was a fairly easy task in East Jerusalem. When she found out the word Jesus spoke was "father," she felt like she was getting close to believing in Jesus, God's Son. However, rather than be relieved to finally come to this conclusion, particularly

given these circumstances, the respondent was quite unsettled by what she thought she now believed because she was the first Muslim that she knew who might believe that Jesus is God's Son and that He is God. She had never heard of a MBB, which indicated another barrier to her coming to faith: ignorance of the possibility.

Realizing that she may actually *already* believe that Jesus is God frightened her for a few reasons: 1) she had never heard of a Muslim becoming a Christian, 2) she felt like becoming a Christian might be betraying her family, and 3) she worried what others would think of her. This fear of the unknown caused her to cry for hours each day for one week, asking God to give her the Holy Spirit. Throughout the day she would cry and pray and read the New Testament. Finally, at the end of the week, the words "Jesus is God" finally escaped her mouth, confirming for her that she really believed because those words so closely matched what she read the day before: ". . . and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3 NKJV).

When asked what was the most decisive factor in her coming to faith, the respondent noted several critical factors: The initial contact with her college classmate opened the door. The picnic retreat planted seeds. The devotions at work and Bible study with the pastor gave her information and answered most of her questions. Reading the Bible gave her greater understanding of God's plan and Jesus' identity. The dreams confirmed what she had been told and had read. And finally, the confession that "Jesus is God" was evidence in her mind that the Holy Spirit was working in her, which had been her prayer.

Having noted all of those as important, she said that two factors were the most important in her coming to faith. Both were personal interactions with other believers. First, that her boss (non-MBB) was patient, kind, and not pushy while she considered the faith. Second, she added that consistently spending time with older female believers (non-MBB) made an important impact on her decision as they prayed with and for her, studied the Bible with her, and encouraged her to seek God.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, formal Bible studies, Q and A, the kindness of Christians, the witness of a friend, prayer, dreams, retreats/conferences/special events, meeting Christians/MBBs, uncertainty, the deity of Jesus, ignorance of other Muslims believing in Jesus, and fear or shame as a barrier to the gospel.

Respondent Four – Nab-01/M1

Respondent Four was raised in an observant Muslim home. As an adult he avoided pork and alcohol, faithfully prayed five times per day and observed Ramadan. He was satisfied with his life as a Muslim. In fact, after returning from a lengthy stint working in the Arabian Gulf, he was involved in a religiously motivated political group that he described as actively seeking the establishment of a *truly* Muslim nation beginning in all of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean [i.e., modern Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza] and spreading throughout the region.

Since there was no work available when he returned from the Gulf, the respondent depended on aid from organizations like the UN to survive for more than two years. This lack of work gave him a lot of free time, so in addition to his political activities and daily prayer ritual, he had plenty of time to participate in a Qur'an study group, which, in his estimation, made him "a better Muslim, a stronger Muslim, and a Muslim more determined to see the end of Israel and the establishment of a truly Muslim nation."

The respondent's introduction to the gospel was the result of what appeared to be a chance encounter. He was perfectly satisfied with his life as a Muslim. His wife and kids were happily involved in the Muslim community. He was satisfied with his political activities, and though he was still having difficulties providing for his family, the lack of work afforded him the opportunity to continue in the Qur'an study. Life was good, except for one thing: His young daughter had a serious eye problem that medicine could not fix; she needed surgery.

About five years after returning from the Gulf, a Muslim friend told the respondent that he had recently met some Christian men from Jerusalem who work for an eye hospital, and suggested that they could probably get the respondent's daughter the surgery she needed. Though he desperately wanted

his daughter's eye problem to be repaired, he was adamant that he did not want and would not allow the Christian men to help. So, he refused to see them.

A week later, the respondent, once again, saw the man who had suggested getting help from the Christian men who were visiting their area and distributing care packages to the needy. The respondent was still adamant: "No help from Christians!" he shouted.

The next night, the respondent began to experience a series of dreams or voices in the night. The respondent was not certain how to label the events, except to say that he never saw anything; he only heard a voice. This happened on three consecutive nights, and then once more a few days later.

The first night, he clearly heard in Arabic the words, "Your life is wrong." The voice woke him and he was quite unsettled, wondering what was wrong with his life. He woke his wife and after telling her about the voice, asked how his life might be wrong. She assured the respondent that everything was okay because they were "100% observant Muslims."

The next day, he spent the morning thinking about the meaning of the message. The only thing he could think of was that it was a sign from Allah that it was time to start the uprising against Israel that his political group had been planning. Without revealing anything about the voice, he contacted his immediate supervisor, who lived abroad, to see if it was time to implement their plans. Thinking he had solved the riddle, the respondent was quite surprised when his supervisor did not hesitate to say that it was not time. The supervisor's answer caused the respondent's day to be very long; he could not think about anything but the words he had heard the previous night and what they meant.

Before going to bed that night, still confused about the words he had heard, the respondent went to the mosque and prayed that he could become a soldier for Allah. In the night, he was awakened once again by the voice for the second time with a similar, but more emphatic message: "Your life is wrong, very wrong. I need you as a leader; many will follow you." Again, he woke his wife and asked

her what was wrong in his life and how he could improve, but she had no answer. The question plagued him throughout the following day, but he did not know the answer.

The next night, the third in a row, the same voice spoke again: "I need you somewhere else." He did not understand what this meant, but did not bother to wake his wife again.

After three consecutive nights of hearing the voice and not understanding the message, he happened to see the man who had recommended that the respondent seek medical help for his daughter from the Christians. For some reason, he felt differently about it this time, and told the man to have them come visit.

A few days later, three men came to visit the respondent and his daughter. Unknown to the respondent at the time, one of the men was a MBB, the other two were evangelical Christians, one Palestinian, the other American. During the visit, the men told him that they were not connected to the eye hospital in Jerusalem, but that they would do their best to try to find help from someone who was connected.

Before leaving, they also gave the respondent a tract with the following headline: "John 14:6 - I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man can come to the Father but by me." He did not read beyond the headline, thanked the men for coming and led them to the door. He was not interested in the tract, but he thought it was appropriate to give it some attention in the presence of the men who were going to help get his daughter's eyes repaired.

In the night, he was awakened the fourth and final time by the same voice, which said, "This is the explanation of the voice." The message was short, but caused a different reaction than the previous three because he understood it to reference the Christian tract he had received. Tears flowed down his face as he woke his wife to tell her what had happened. Certain that he would find something important inside the tract, he asked his wife to come read it with him.

He read the tract to her and said, “I know it’s supposed to be the explanation of the voice, but I still don’t understand the meaning.” Since the information in the tract came from the New Testament, his wife encouraged him to call the men and ask for a Bible, so that he could read more to try to better understand the tract’s meaning. He followed her suggestion, and within a day, the men had returned with a Bible.

The respondent began to read the Bible side by side with Qur’an, intending to disprove the Bible. Since the tract included a verse from John’s gospel, he initially thought he should read that first. However, he decided to read from the beginning. After reading one chapter, he concluded that “Genesis was just a storybook” and he pushed it aside. He happily returned to the Qur’an for a day. However, the next day, he felt compelled to try reading the Bible again and he began reading in Genesis chapter two this time.

The story of Adam and Eve caught his attention because God spoke to them. Since he still had no steady work, he had time to read the Bible and attend the mosque. No one, except his wife and children, knew he was reading the Bible. He certainly did not tell the men at the mosque. He was also captivated by the story of Abraham, particularly the land promise that Abraham received. As he finished Genesis and continued reading the Old Testament, he expanded his reading to include Matthew’s gospel. For some reason he could not bring himself to read John.

Certain that the New Testament had errors, he was determined to find them and make notes to show the men from Jerusalem why they were wrong to be Christians. When the men returned to visit, he presented his list, and was disappointed when they calmly explained why the perceived errors were not actually errors. He was also disappointed when the explanations were clear and persuasive. The disappointment turned to anger when one of the men began to speak of Jesus as the Son of God. That was totally unacceptable and the respondent evicted the men from his home, forbidding them to ever return.

In spite of his anger with the Christian men, he continued reading the New Testament. Still wanting to prove it wrong, he read Matthew's gospel again. This time, though, he started to have a sense that something was wrong in the mosque. The words of Jesus in Matthew were quite different than the words he regularly heard in the mosque. For example, Jesus said, "love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you" [Mt 5:44]. The sheik continually encouraged his listeners to "destroy the enemy." This contrast was hard to manage. On the one hand, the respondent had great admiration for the sheik. On the other, Islam believes Jesus is a prophet. "That means," according to the respondent, that "Jesus has a higher status than the sheik, and should be listened to more than the sheik." However, it was not so easy to dismiss the words of the sheik because of their personal relationship as well as the sheik's status in the community.

Another indicator that something was wrong in the mosque was the message of James 1:27, which describes pure religion as caring for widows and orphans. That was in contrast to his own experience of watching his sister, a widow, being neglected by other Muslims.

These two things – Matthew's gospel and James 1:27 - were drawing the respondent toward Christianity, but that was such a discouraging idea that he thought he should continue reading the New Testament in order to find the errors so that he could dismiss the whole thing.

The respondent said the most difficult barrier to becoming a Christian was "the idea of Jesus being God's Son." However, that problem began to subside as the respondent read Genesis 22 and considered the story of Abraham being willing to sacrifice his son. This was the first time the respondent thought as a human and not just as a Muslim. Prior to this, everything had been considered through the filter of being a Muslim. Now, he could simply read the story as a person, a human. And suddenly, the story of God sending His only Son to die on the cross was a story of hope and *not* of blasphemy.

At this point, the respondent called the Christian men he had previously evicted and told them that he felt like he was “about 70% Christian” and that he wanted them to come to his home again. They were happy to resume their visits, and with each Bible study the respondent gained more joy and peace. However, he still remained somewhat conflicted about where he seemed to be heading, which contradicted everything he had been taught and believed in the past.

The men eventually began to pray with the family, which was quite disturbing for them. In fact, the respondent’s son warned that the family would “turn to monkeys” if they continued praying like Christians. This sentiment reflected the feelings of most of the family.

One mitigating factor, though, was the behavior of these Christian men who had been visiting their home. They were consistently kind, patient and forgiving toward others. Additionally, the Christians were helpful toward the needy; in this case, they were helpful in getting eye surgery for the youngest daughter of this family.

The respondent’s daughter’s successful eye surgery notwithstanding, the respondent still felt an obligation to Islam and the Qur’an, so he initiated a personal daily Qur’an study with the sheik. In hindsight, he thought his motivation for these studies was less to re-affirm his prior belief in Islam but more to confirm the rightness of Christianity.

In these studies, he began asking the sheik about Christianity. In the respondent’s estimation, the sheik was unable to satisfactorily answer any of his questions. For example, the sheik could not explain why the church was still present so long after the establishment of Islam. He could not explain why the gospel is wrong. Neither could the sheik explain why the ostensibly Islamic Palestinian government recognized Christian weddings or allowed Palestinians to use a Bible. While each unsatisfactory answer seemed to solidify the respondent’s thoughts about believing in Jesus, one of the sheik’s answers was very unsettling. “Can a Muslim who believes in the New Testament go to

heaven?” the respondent asked. Emphatically and without hesitation, the sheik angrily shouted, “No! No Muslim who believes in the Christians’ book or the Jews’ book can go to heaven!”

That was a pivotal study for the respondent because it was the last private Qur’an study with the sheik and it clarified for the respondent that his departure from Islam was definitely underway. He began to skip praying with increasing frequency. The more he met with the Christian men, the less he desired to attend the mosque.

For another eight months the respondent consistently read the Bible in increasing amounts, “almost non-stop, day and night.” For the first two months, he read the Bible in conjunction with Qur’an studies, but he had no memory of reading the Qur’an in the final six months. During this period of intense Bible study the respondent saw that God actually related to humans, which contrasts with what he had been taught in Islam. That God would relate to humans was actually very comforting and appealing for the respondent once he had adjusted to the possibility. And, as he read the New Testament he got a sense that Jesus was actually speaking to him personally.

Also, during this eight-month period, the Christian men continued to visit and answered the questions that resulted from the respondent’s study of the New Testament. The respondent said, “It was at the end of this period that I really understood in my heart who God is and believed in Him.”

As soon as he realized that he had come to a personal faith in Jesus, he told his wife. Doing so was really frightening because of the fear of losing his family. However, he felt so compelled to tell her, that he was willing to take the risk. To his shock, his wife responded that she too had come to believe as had two of their children as well. That three other members of his family had come to faith confirmed in his heart the rightness of his decision because it reminded him of stories in the New Testament when whole families believed. The respondent called the Christian men who had been visiting to tell them the news. They

immediately came to the house and the group prayed together to confirm each of their decisions.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, formal Bible study, Q and A, the Qur'an vs. the Bible, doubts about Islam/Qur'an, the kindness of Christians, prayer, dreams, crisis, family/group conversion, gospel tracts, pastoral/evangelistic visits, and common objections to the gospel.

Respondent Five – Nab-02/F1

Respondent Five's testimony is intimately connected to the conversion process of her husband, Respondent Four. Their daughter had an eye problem that required corrective surgery. A family friend directed their attention to some Christian men who had been in their area, suggesting that those men could help the respondents' daughter get the needed surgery at a Jerusalem hospital. As it turned out, the men did not have any direct connections to the eye hospital, but promised to do what they could to secure some help.

Before leaving, the Christian men also gave the respondent's husband an Arabic tract with the following headline: "John 14:6 - I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man can come to the Father but by me." At the time, the tract was not important to the respondent or her husband; they simply wanted help getting their daughter's eyes corrected. However, while they did not understand the tract to be important, it was one of the instruments God used to get her husband's attention, which resulted in them inviting the Christian men to visit and talk about spiritual matters.

As a result of her husband's interest in, or sometimes consternation with the things the Christian men were telling them, the men were asked to return on multiple occasions to explain more about their beliefs. The invitations were not always open, though. At times, the respondent's husband would forbid them to come to the home anymore. Alternately, he would revise his decision and allow them to resume their visits.

Although she never told her husband, the respondent enjoyed hearing the men talk about Jesus and the Bible and was always sad when they left. In many ways, she was the opposite of her husband as they each moved toward conversion. He was always troubled by the men's visit; she never was. He respected Islam and enjoyed being at the mosque; she had internal conflicts with Islam and did not enjoy going to the mosque. And, while her conversion was intimately associated with her husband's, she had her own personal experience,

which involved dreams, Christian broadcasting on satellite television, a miracle, and personal dissatisfaction with Islam.

Prior to considering Christianity, the respondent had issues with Islam that had to do with the life of the prophet and the lives of Muslims. Muhammad had been presented to her as a model of how to live. Yet, he had a child bride. When the respondent gave some thought to the issue of a child bride, she began to question a number of things. For example, allowing men to have up to four wives was impossible in her mind, particularly for her personally. She also felt like Islam demanded that its adherents not think outside Islam, which means blindly accepting anything Islamic tradition or leaders teach and disregarding anything positive that was said about other religions. She thought this was an attempt to hide “the bad side of Islam.”

As a result of things the Christian men had said during their visits, the respondent asked God to give her a sign, a dream that would confirm the things she was hearing from the visitors. On three occasions she had the same dream of three wooden crosses descending from the sky. The only thing she could conclude from these dreams was that they were confirming what she had heard from the Christian men about Jesus dying on the cross between two thieves. However, even though they appeared to be God’s response to her request for a sign, she was not yet convinced.

In addition to the respondent’s personal reading of the New Testament and visits with the Christian men over an almost two-year period, the most persuasive influence in her decision to convert came through watching Christian broadcasting via satellite. Though she watched English broadcasts, too, she primarily watched Arabic language broadcasts, which were fairly charismatic in style and theology.

The turning point in the respondent’s decision to convert came while watching an Arabic language Christian broadcast during which, the television pastor said he wanted to pray for those viewers who were sick. The respondent had, for

some time, had a tumor in her stomach that had not been helped through Muslim prayers for healing. In response to the television pastor's message, the respondent touched the television and prayed for healing. She was surprised when she heard the pastor call her name and age, but believed that, like the dreams, this was a sign from God. Two days later, the tumor was gone and she "completely believed in Jesus."

Due to her husband's ongoing struggles between Islam and Christianity, the respondent did not tell him of her healing or conversion for about a week. And that occurred in conjunction with him telling her that he had converted.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, formal Bible studies, doubts about Islam/Qur'an, the kindness of Christians, prayer, dreams, crisis, family/group conversion, Christian broadcasting, gospel tracts, and pastoral/evangelistic visits.

Respondent Six – Nab-03/M2

Respondent Six's conversion was closely connected to the conversion of his parents, Respondent Four and Respondent Five. His first encounter with the gospel was the result of his parents inviting some Christian men to their home in order to solicit some medical assistance for the respondent's sister. Over time the men discussed their Christian faith with the respondent's family and provided him the Jesus Film and the book *Glad News! God Loves You My Muslim Friend*.

Initially the respondent was unhappy about the meetings with the Christian men, which began when he was about fifteen-years-old. He had two main issues with the visits. First, though not overly religious, he considered himself a faithful Muslim, and he was not interested in becoming a Christian or even hearing about Christians. He was satisfied with being a Muslim. Second, he feared that word may spread that Christians were coming to their home regularly, which might result in some type of retaliation or punishment from the community. The last thing he wanted was for his family to be branded as traitors to Islam.

The respondent said that in spite of his anger about the meetings and lack of desire to hear about Christianity, he also felt drawn to sit with his parents as they met with the Christian men. At the time of his interview, the respondent still was not sure if this desire was the result of actually wanting to know more, though unwittingly, or if he simply desired to protect his family. At one point, he warned them that they were going to turn into monkeys if they continued meeting and praying with the Christians. The longer the Christian men continued to visit, the more he did not want them to visit, and, ironically, the more he wanted to sit with them.

After a few months, he began to secretly watch the Jesus Film. He had received an Arabic version of the film, which was very important for him to be able to understand the dialogue. He had several months of internal struggle, being moved by the life of Jesus and how he was mistreated and punished while at the same time feeling guilty for thinking about Christianity. In fact, he said he

regularly asked Allah to forgive him for sitting with the Christian men. While he was drawn to the message of the Jesus film, he also was afraid he would be kidnapped and tortured as Allah's punishment for his interest in the film. The idea of becoming a Christian was repulsive and frightening, yet each time he watched the film he felt more drawn toward Jesus.

The respondent's conversion came about in stages. At times he felt drawn toward Jesus, which usually occurred while watching the Jesus Film or after certain visits from the Christian men. At other times the respondent felt shame and remorse for watching the film or asking questions of the men, so he moved alternately closer and farther from Jesus from week to week.

Though it was often upsetting to meet with the Christian men, he now sees how important it was because from the outset they gave a good first impression, and they continued to do so. "They acted like believers by being kind and patient even when I spoke harshly to them," the respondent said. He sensed a genuine love for his family from these men, and "not because they were trying to convert us." The Christian men built a relationship with the family that did not fade when the respondent insulted them or his father forbid them to return.

During their visits, the Christian men did not seem to have an organized plan, other than to be patient and show Christ any way they could. Sometimes, they taught something about Jesus from the Gospels. Alternatively, they might simply answer questions about Christianity, or compare the Qur'an with the Bible. Whatever the situation dictated, the men were flexible and faithful in showing patience and love. The respondent also noted that the Christian men were very familiar with the Qur'an and Islamic teaching and culture, which suggested they were not outsiders from a distant land who had come to change the people's religion.

As a result of the home meetings, the respondent was invited to meet some MBB young people (teens to early twenties) to play basketball and volleyball. He assumed these young people would be social misfits and unhappy because they

were living outside the parameters of Islam. But, to his surprise, they seemed normal and happy. After a few meetings he became friends with a couple of the guys and began talking to them on the phone every few days.

A turning point came in his journey toward conversion when his friends invited him to a MBB conference. Afraid that his parents would not approve, he only told them that he was going to visit his friends. He said, “At the conference, everything seemed to come together. My fears were taken away and I became convinced of what I had been learning while listening to the Christian men who were visiting our home. The testimonies that I heard at the conference were similar to what I felt and saw in the Jesus Film. I didn’t say the sinner’s prayer, but I was definitely a believer in Jesus,” he concluded.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Formal Bible studies, being “drawn/compelled,” being “moved,” Q and A, the Qur’an vs. the Bible, evangelists familiar with Islam/Qur’an, the kindness of Christians, prayer, retreats/conferences/special events, Group/Family conversion, the Jesus Film, Christian literature, meeting Christians/MBBs, the “sinner’s prayer,” pastoral/evangelistic visits, satisfaction with Islam, fear or shame as a barrier to the gospel, and negative assumptions about Christians/MBBs.

Respondent Seven – Nab-04/M3

Respondent Seven was raised in a very religiously observant Muslim family. Not only did he pray five times daily, he awoke early to pray with his grandfather who was the area sheik. At the age of twelve he had memorized half of the Qur'an, and fully intended to memorize the whole text. However, while reading and memorizing the Qur'an, he came upon some troubling things, which eventually led to his openness toward Christianity.

When the respondent came to the portion of the Qur'an that deals with the crucifixion of Jesus,¹⁰³ he noticed what he thought was a mistake. He mentioned to his grandfather that he had come upon a problem and asked if his grandfather could help him. Of course his grandfather said he would. The respondent explained to his grandfather that while reading the Qur'an he got the impression that the Qur'an teaches that "Allah tricked people so that they thought Jesus was crucified on the cross, but it was really someone else." He said he asked his grandfather if that is, in fact, "what we believe." His grandfather answered in the affirmative that "Muslims believe that Allah tricked those who thought it was Jesus who was actually crucified, and that Allah would punish those who believe the trick." While the respondent's grandfather was very proud of his grandson's sharp mind, the respondent was very disappointed and troubled by this revelation, which he believed "made Allah look bad."

In addition to the most serious problem mentioned above, the respondent started finding other problems within the Qur'an. Many of those problems he characterized as "contradictions." Over the next couple years, while he was

¹⁰³ See, Sahih International Translation, Quran.com/4 [Accessed 10 Sep 2012]. 4:156-159 "And [We cursed them] for their disbelief and their saying against Mary a great slander, (157) And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah." And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain. (158) Rather, Allah raised him to Himself. And ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise. (159) And there is none from the People of the Scripture but that he will surely believe in Jesus before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection he will be against them a witness."

approximately thirteen to fifteen-years-old, he began to intensely study the Qur'an and seek out Islamic scholars who could answer his questions. He said, "I wasn't looking for a way out of Islam; I was trying to get answers that would help keep me in." He wrote to Islamic authorities at various centers and schools in a variety of countries, and only became more disappointed by each answer he received. This disappointment led him to be less observant, though certainly not an apostate.

About three years later he was introduced to some members of the Christian Student Association at Bir Zeit University. It was these students who presented the respondent with the first New Testament he had ever seen, which he read several times within a year. He explained his experience of reading the New Testament as a process of increasing attraction: "Though I read it from a Muslim mindset, each time I was more attracted to it than each previous time." When asked what he meant by "Muslim mindset" he clarified: "Still believing in Islam and the basic teachings of Islam, especially that God can not be a man."

After about one year of continuously reading the New Testament and becoming friendlier with the Christian students, the respondent thought it would be good to meet with a priest to get some answers. He made an appointment and eventually went to meet with a Catholic priest in Ramallah, who politely listened to his first few questions. Very quickly, though, the priest asked the respondent to go to the Palestinian Authority ministry of religious affairs to change his religious status from Muslim to Christian so that they could continue their discussions. The respondent refused to change his religion and demanded to know the answers to his questions. The priest's response was to refuse to continue talking with the respondent. In hindsight, he suspects the priest was afraid of being accused of converting Muslims.

After the failed effort to get some answers from the priest, one of the Christian students offered to introduce the respondent to "a[n evangelical] scholar." During their first meeting the scholar started to preach, saying, "You need the lamb whose blood protects us, the lamb who was resurrected after three days."

Because he had read the New Testament several times, the respondent understood that the scholar was talking about Jesus, but the approach was quite shocking. Additionally, he said, “I didn’t know how to believe in Jesus, so I asked him how can I believe?” The scholar’s answer was equally shocking and unhelpful: “Tell him you are a sinner and give him your sin,” he said. “But, how?” the respondent pleaded for clarification. The scholar gave another aggressive and unclear response: “Let’s pray! If you believe the words, accept them. If not, don’t.” The respondent followed in prayer not knowing whether he believed or not.

One thing became clear, though: there were some definite cultural and religious issues to overcome. “How could I view the Lord as my friend?” he asked. “Islam believes that God is untouchable, unreachable by humans. So, how could I relate to Jesus, who Christians believe is God, like a friend? It was hard enough to think about Jesus, a man, being God. But it was nearly impossible to think of him as a friend.”

Still unclear of his status, believer or unbeliever, the respondent “read the New Testament faithfully for the next three years, or a little more.” During this period, he came to think that he “already knew everything [he] needed to know,” so he was puzzled why it was “so difficult to follow Jesus.” As he thought through the decision, he decided to make a chart listing all that he might lose or gain if he decided to follow Jesus.

What he saw was a lopsided chart that revealed overwhelming risk and no gain, which helped the respondent push away the idea of believing in Jesus. But only temporarily because the thoughts of following Jesus continued to regularly resurface, often with thoughts of how his original chart was incomplete. On the gain side, he realized he should have listed peace, love, eternal life, forgiveness, and honor through humility. Finally, after four years of consideration, he firmly decided to believe in Jesus. At that time, the respondent called the scholar who he had prayed with previously and said, “I’m ready to believe.” Immediately, the scholar prayed the sinner’s prayer with the respondent.

When asked if there was a decisive event or specific information that changed his mind, the respondent said his conversion was dependent on several things: A personal problem with Islam; the willingness of Christians to give him a New Testament and his own desire to read it; the availability, willingness and patience of a Christian to answer his questions; and a Christian's willingness to challenge him to believe in Jesus.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, Q and A, doubts about Islam/Quran, the kindness of Christians, the witness of a friend, meeting Christians/MBBs, the "sinner's prayer," and common objections to the gospel.

Respondent Eight – Nab-05/M4

Respondent Eight was raised in a fairly observant Muslim home, which he explained meant his father would wake him each day for the early-morning prayer and that he fasted during Ramadan. As an adult, his commitment to prayer had relaxed, but he definitely viewed himself as a committed Muslim.

By the time he was thirty years old, he had become a wealthy business owner. However, within the next five years, the Second Intifada (Arab uprising) would affect his business in ways he could not have imagined five years prior at the height of his success. In response to the Intifada the Israeli military moved their checkpoint in such a way that the respondent's business was on the other side of the border, unreachable by his customers. The misfortune of his business' location coupled with some bad business decisions led to the collapse of what had been a very lucrative business. This reversal of fortune led to great stress and financial burdens for the respondent, which eventually developed into bankruptcy and serious depression.

Prior to the collapse of the respondent's business, among his customers were three American Christian ladies who were "probably in their twenties." He later came to realize they were missionaries, but in their regular interactions with his sister, who worked for him, he only saw "friendly ladies who were willing to live among the Arabs." He did not know exactly why they lived in his area, or exactly what they did, but he thought they were there to help the needy in some way. He, too, had helped the needy in his area through charity. "But these ladies were different," he said. "They were Americans. They were Christians, not Muslims. And they were helping mostly Muslims by living among them and not just giving money."

In their regular interactions with his sister, who was a very devout Muslim, more devout than he, the Christian women gave her an Arabic Bible. He also noted that the Americans would not accept a Qur'an. They talked openly with his sister, in English, about how much Jesus loves the Arab people. They were also

very friendly toward him and made a point to greet him each time they stopped to visit his sister. Their openness toward him, a fairly observant Muslim, was considered a breach of cultural etiquette, “but small enough to be excused since they were foreigners.”

In the midst of the respondent’s financial success he regularly flipped through various Arabic language magazines and on several occasions had noticed an advertisement that focused on the words of Jesus found in Matthew 11:28: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”¹⁰⁴

While things in his life were good, the advertisements never created much interest for him. But in the midst of his financial collapse, the words came back to his mind. “I was weary and burdened, but who could give me rest?” he wondered. At the time, he did not know the source of such hopeful words was the New Testament, but he was able to locate a similar advertisement and call the phone number that was listed. Later, he found out the advertisements were sponsored by an international Christian ministry and that he had called a Christian crisis-counseling center. The phone bank counselor, who was also a pastor, told him that the words he had read were spoken by Jesus and could be found in the *Christian Bible*.¹⁰⁵

They spoke about a number of things during that and subsequent calls (one to two times per week for about eighteen months), but the most important thing was that the respondent remembered his sister had previously received a Bible from the three American ladies. He contacted his sister to see if she still had the Bible, which she did. The next day, he visited his sister so that he could get the Bible and read more of “the words Jesus.” Over the next two days he read all of the Gospels and “fell in love with Jesus.” “It was so compelling and made so much sense, I could not put it down,” he said. When asked to clarify his claim to

¹⁰⁴ The advertisements were in Arabic.

¹⁰⁵ In this region, “Christian Bible” is often code for New Testament. Similarly, the Old Testament is referenced frequently as the Jewish Bible.

have read the Gospels in two days, he reasserted the claim, and added, “I’ve done that five or six times.”

After reading the Gospels the first time, the respondent called his sister to see what she thought about his new interest. “Maybe we [Muslims] are wrong,” he suggested. His sister raised some common objections like “they believe in three Gods, we don’t.” Her suggestions seemed to make sense, so he called the counseling center to ask questions. The counselor/pastor clarified that Christians, in fact, do not believe in three Gods and explained the concept of the Trinity.

Having not realized it so clearly in the past, the respondent was, at that time, beginning to realize he had already, particularly as a teen, had doubts about Islam. The early-morning prayer during the winter months was particularly bothersome because it meant he had to wake up *very* early. He thought that was unreasonable, particularly on cold, wet mornings. He was also troubled by Islamic rules regarding inheritance, which were directly connected to the financial difficulties he faced at that time.

Through a contact from the counseling line, the respondent began to regularly meet with two Christian men, one Palestinian and one American, to discuss these particular issues and the Christian faith.

The process of conversion, or being convinced that Christianity was the correct way, took about two years of additional, regular (i.e., weekly) pastoral/evangelistic visits and daily Bible reading. When asked if by Bible reading the respondent meant the whole Bible or just the New Testament, he answered, “The New Testament. I don’t read the Old Testament because it is too close to the Jews.”

In the end, he said, “It came down to one question: Can I judge God?” He concluded that even though all his questions may not have been answered, he could not question God, whom he had come to believe was speaking through the New Testament. He could not remember a specific question that was not

answered, which he noted, “doesn’t matter anymore.” He explained that sentiment by saying, “I believe in Jesus now, that’s all that matters.”

He said he “did not pray the sinner’s prayer,” rather he simply realized he had come to a point of believing that Jesus had died for his sins, and that forgiveness was the way that Jesus was offering him rest, bringing him full-circle to the magazine advertisement that included Matthew 11:28.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, Q and A, doubts about Islam/Qur’an, the kindness of Christians, crisis, the “sinner’s prayer,” an open witness, crisis counseling center, advertising, pastoral or evangelistic visits, and common objections to the gospel.

Respondent Nine – Ram-01/F1

Respondent Nine was raised in a Catholic family in Bethlehem. She was educated in Catholic private schools and was very familiar with the ritual of traditional Catholic life. As she described her early years, she also added that she “unfortunately never knew the Lord personally.”

While in university, she fell in love with a Muslim man and eventually married him at the age of 22. Her family was distraught over this decision and considered her as dead. The loss of her family was emotionally devastating, and that devastation was multiplied when she almost immediately relocated with her new husband to Saudi Arabia, which she described as “an oppressive Muslim nation.” As a Catholic, life in Saudi Arabia was very difficult for her because of “all the pressure from every side to convert.” “My husband, my neighbors, people who didn’t know me, all pushed me and pushed me to convert,” she said. Finally, exhausted from the pressure, the respondent went to the religious court and formally converted to Islam. She said her conversion was followed by “intense courses on how to be a good Muslim in an oppressive Muslim country.”

She thought that converting to Islam would make her life easier. However, she was terribly mistaken. She became very disillusioned when she realized her life would continue to be miserable. She was still an outsider and shortly after arriving in Saudi Arabia, her husband became physically abusive.

After a few years in Saudi Arabia and a few more in Jordan, the respondent’s husband decided to return to Palestine with the family, which now included three children. They moved around the West Bank, spending a few years at a time in different places. Her husband continued to be physically abusive to the respondent and the children. After almost sixteen-years of suffering abuse, the respondent was emboldened to leave her husband by her children’s demands: “If you don’t leave him, we are going to run away,” they threatened. She took the children and secretly fled back to Jordan, only to eventually be discovered and forcibly returned to the West Bank to live with her husband’s family. She

described life with her in-laws as “like being in prison. They didn’t like me and were always watching me. It was unbearable, but un-escapable until the abuse became so severe that my in-laws couldn’t bear it any longer.” She said, “They finally told my husband that we could not stay with them any longer, so he took us to a different city.”

After leaving her in-laws’ home, the abuse escalated to the point that her husband broke her nose and gave her other wounds on her head. Fear of almost being killed emboldened her to turn to a pastor and his wife whom she had met through her job. She was welcomed into the safety of the pastor's home where she found peace and comfort. During her first stay with the pastor, she received a Bible, books about faith in Jesus, as well as some testimonies of Muslims who had come to faith in Jesus. But most important she said, “was his gentle spirit, so different than [she] had seen in Islam.” She had already spoken with the local sheik, who offered no help, and had been to divorce court where the judge laughed at her and told her to go back to her husband. She also contrasted this pastor with the Catholic Church: “He [the pastor] didn't torture me or shame me for having converted to Islam as my Catholic family and church had done.”

While the respondent was happy to have a place of refuge, she was torn because she had left her children behind when she fled. The pastor was sensitive to that matter as well, and after several days of persuasion by the local sheik and the mayor, the pastor reluctantly allowed the respondent to return to her husband and children. However, her return was met with more abuse and suffering, and a pattern was established: abuse, escape, then returning to her husband and children. Eventually, the physical abuse reached the point that she was able to persuade the mayor to get involved, and he was finally able to persuade the sheik to release the respondent from her husband through divorce. The abuse was so severe that the court, in an unusual ruling, allowed the children to live with their mother, the respondent.

Through all of these trials, the respondent tried to be a more faithful and committed Muslim. Thinking her devotion to Islam would eventually bring relief

she grew very skeptical that Islam had any answers for her life. “One day,” she said, she “hoped to find the real thing.” Whatever that was, she wanted it.

After the divorce, she basically let go of Islam and allowed her children to make their own decisions regarding their observance of Islam. She refused to fast, pray, or cover her hair. She wanted nothing more to do with Islam. Remembering her encounters with the pastor and his wife, she began to wonder if Christianity might be the answer she was seeking. However, she thought Jesus was only for the good people, not people with big problems like hers.

At work, she overheard conversation about some Christian programs being broadcast on satellite television. She wondered about the programs, but those thoughts passed quickly because she did not have a satellite, neither could she afford one. Shortly after she heard about the satellite programming, a friend suggested she prepare for the coming snowstorm by getting some food and making sure she could clear the snow off her satellite dish. When she said she did not have a satellite dish, the friend was shocked and offered to help her get one. She accepted his offer, and had the service within one day. Now, she could see the programs she had heard about at work. While watching one of the Christian broadcasts she thought to herself, “I wonder if it [salvation through Jesus] could really work for me?” About that time, she saw an advertisement for a Christian counseling service in Jerusalem. She did not take down the phone number the first time because she was afraid, but after giving the idea more thought she saw the advertisement again. This time she recorded the number.

Her first conversation with the female counselor made her optimistic that Jesus could make a difference in her life. Eventually, she became hopeful that the Lord would accept her. She began accepting visits from pastors of a specific church in the area. During these visits she was able to get her questions answered and learned about Jesus in a way she never had, even as a Catholic.

She was moved to think that God cared for her personally. But, thought that “accepting and trusting the Lord was too simple.” In Islam, she needed to work

hard to be accepted by Allah. After what seemed like a lifetime of hard work and cruel suffering, though, she never felt accepted by Allah.

It took her approximately one year to be fully persuaded that Jesus' death on the cross was able to give her a way to have peace and a relationship with God. A few months later, she was baptized in the West Bank.

When asked for three essential elements in her conversion experience, the respondent said: "Acceptance [accompanied] with the love of the Lord, peace, and relationships," were the things without which she doesn't think she would have converted.

She has maintained her faith for seven years, the last four years publicly.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Being "moved," Q and A, doubts about Islam/Qur'an, crisis, Christian broadcasting, Christian literature, meeting Christians/MBBs, crisis counseling center, advertising, pastoral/evangelistic visits, and common objections to the gospel.

Respondent Ten – Ejer-02/M1

Respondent Ten was raised in a moderately religious home that self-identified as Muslim, but did not live “like good Muslims.” However, the respondent was “always uncomfortable with Islam.” He said, “I always wanted to pray, but not in the Muslim way.” Though he was not a very observant Muslim, he knew enough about Islam to have certain objections. Specifically, he was troubled by what he thought was the cruelty of Sharia. He also was quite perplexed why millions of people would venerate at the Kaaba in Mecca, which he said, “is just a stone.” Any time he tried to raise these objections to his parents, he was told, “Don’t ask questions!” This type of response to his questions only served to push him further from Islam.

In 2006 the respondent’s journey toward Christianity began with a dream. In his dream, the respondent was walking near the Flower Gate in Jerusalem where a man dressed in white approached him. Immediately he recognized the man as Jesus, who said, “[respondent’s name], I want you to come with me.” According to the respondent, Jesus took him by the hand and traveling through the lower realms of the city, they arrived at the city wall. Then, Jesus reached through the wall and brought out a Bible and said “read this!”

The respondent awoke from his dream confused, but with a good feeling about what had happened. However, he did not tell anyone about the dream, neither did he begin reading the Bible.

After about two years, the respondent had his second dream, which was the first in a series of three. About one month later, he had the same dream in which he was sitting inside a church reading the Bible. In conjunction with these dreams he met a few evangelical, Arab Christians who were very friendly toward him. After the third dream in this series, which occurred about one month after the second, he asked to meet with the Arab Christians he had recently met. During their conversation, the respondent mentioned his dreams and that he thought it was odd for a Muslim to have a dream about Jesus. He was surprised when one

of the Christians said, “You’re not the first Muslim to have a dream and you will not be the last.” He was also surprised when the man told him that “Muslims are getting a message” because he had not heard of others having dreams like he had. This prompted him to ask for a Bible, which he received the next day. He immediately began reading the New Testament secretly, and in three months, he had read it five times.

As a result of repeatedly reading the New Testament, he described himself as falling in love with Jesus. He said, “I loved what He taught. I loved Him. And I wanted to know more about Him, so I asked if I could attend a [Christian] meeting.” A few days later, the respondent went to a Christian concert, which was followed by a meeting. During the concert, one particular song repeated the words “God is with you” several times, which the respondent understood to be a message similar to the dreams he had experienced three to five months prior.

After the concert, he attempted to hide in the meeting by blending in and not speaking to anyone. However, many people greeted him warmly, which surprised him because he hadn’t expected that. In describing the meeting, he said, “I was touched by the message, and at some point I realized it was okay to relax and even thought it would be nice to return again.” Between meetings, he continued to secretly read his Bible at home, which he thought gave him more confidence because the next week he made no effort to hide and sat in the front.

For the next two months he continued to interact with these Christians, regularly asking them to explain more and to convince him. Some of the Christians stayed late to speak with him. One even used the Qur’an to suggest that reading the Bible is okay. He described his questions as “typical Muslim questions about the person of Jesus”: “How can you call Prophet Jesus God? How can Jesus be God’s son? How can you say God’s Prophet, God himself was killed on a cross? “

After two months the men who had been so patient with his questions finally said, “There’s nothing more we can do or say to prove to you that Jesus is Lord.

You need to pray and ask God to show you.” This bold approach calmed the respondent, and after returning home, he began to pray as they had suggested.

One week later, he experienced his final dream. In that dream, Jesus appeared and said, “I want you to help spread my word.” The respondent understood this dream as the confirmation he was seeking and responded audibly in his dream, “I believe now. Jesus is Lord!”

The respondent said he did not pray a prayer of salvation, “I just believed Jesus is Lord and began calling myself a Christian.” In response to a follow up question, the respondent said that when he says, “Jesus is Lord,” he means that he believes “Jesus is God and that he died on the cross to pay for my sins.”

When asked what he thought were the essential things that brought him to faith, Respondent Ten said, “dreams and having someone to encourage me to consider Jesus.”

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, being “drawn/compelled,” Q and A, doubts about Islam/Qur’an, the kindness of Christians, prayer, dreams, retreats/conferences/special events, meeting Christians/MBBs, the “prayer of salvation,” the Qur’an as a bridge, and common objections to the gospel.

Respondent Eleven – Nab-06/M5

Respondent Eleven spent much of his life in Kuwait, but returned to the West Bank in 1990. He returned as an atheist, believing completely in Communism. His religious and political views were not held secretly, neither were they unusual in his social circles. He said that while his family was non-religious, they were respectful of Islam, if for no other reason, because that is the context in which they lived in Kuwait and the West Bank.

Very early in the interview the respondent listed his major complaints with Islam: 1) the status of women, 2) Islam's apparent hatred for those outside Islam, 3) the violent nature of the religion, and 4) a complete uncertainty about the future. He also mentioned a general dislike for the Qur'an. And, since he had been an atheist, he was also quick to point out that he had also had some objections to Christianity: 1) Christianity's apparent identification with the West, over and above eastern cultures, 2) Christianity's belief that God has a Son, and 3) Christianity's belief that God made man, rather than his then belief that man made God.

The respondent's motivation to investigate Christianity was not religiously driven. In fact, it was a sociological or philosophical concern for the status of women within the Islamic cultural context that motivated him to examine other ethical systems in order to see what their view of women might be. The most obvious first system to examine, he thought, was Christianity because "it is the largest ethical system in the world."

The respondent did not really have a plan of how he would examine Christianity's view of women other than reading the New Testament. He did not feel it was necessary to seek the counsel of a pastor or priest. Rather, he was confident that a self-directed reading of the New Testament would give him a sufficiently clear understanding of the status of women in the Christian ethical system. However, he did not own a New Testament, so he went to a bookstore in Ramallah and purchased an Arabic Bible.

Knowing nothing about the New Testament, he thought the best approach would be to start at the beginning. So, he began reading the gospel of Matthew slowly and intentionally, and was so moved by the words of Jesus, that he “could not put it down”; he read the whole book (all twenty-eight chapters) every day for six months. While he found something precious in every chapter, he said, “I could not get past the words of Jesus in chapters five to seven, the *Sermon on the Mountain Top*. These words were so different than anything I had ever heard from Islam. They changed the way I viewed Christianity and life.”

Throughout the six months of reading the gospel of Matthew, the respondent desperately wanted to talk with someone about the things he was learning. However, he did not know any Christians, and he thought no one from his atheist circles would be interested. As the months moved forward, he became less and less afraid that others would find out that he was fervently reading the New Testament. Slowly, he started to leave the Bible sitting on the counter in open view at his work. Occasionally, others would see it and look at him as if to ask, “what’s this?” However, no one ever said anything until a doctor saw it and said, “I know someone who can talk with you about this book, if you want.” The respondent was not sure what he should do, but he was so taken with what he had read daily for almost six months, that he blurted out, “sure, I would like to talk to someone who knows something about it.”

This was a very important event in the respondent’s conversion because it gave him the opportunity to meet someone else who had walked the path he found himself walking at that time.

As he began embracing Jesus’ teaching in Matthew’s gospel, particularly chapters five through seven, he recognized the change in his life. And his wife noticed, too, though she had no idea why he was changing. He understood his wife’s recognition of changes as a sign of confirmation that he was on the right path. So, not only had he and others recognized these attitudinal and behavioral changes, he also “found the answers to [his] objections to Islam.” The major contrast he noted was love: “Christianity is based on love. Love your enemy. Be

kind to others. Forgive those that hurt you. It's about love; God loved the world. That's so different from Islam," he concluded.

The respondent met with the doctor's friend, who was a MBB, every few weeks for about one year. At the end of that year, the respondent was convinced that he had become a believer in Jesus and made it known to his wife and others. He said that he "did not say a prayer of salvation," so he can't mark a specific day on which he became a believer, but he is certain that he has "believed on the Lord Jesus Christ."

In addition to personal Bible reading and meeting with the doctor's friend the respondent said he was influenced by three miracles that occurred in his life during the period with the doctor's friend. He understood these miracles to be confirmation that he was a believer.

The first miracle was that the respondent passed several hardships, which included a failed business and personal betrayal by people close to him, without anger, bitterness, or denying God's existence. He recognized God's work in him, giving him "a peculiar ability to forgive" those that had hurt him, which he said, "would not have been possible when I was an atheist."

The second miracle was connected to the death of his newborn baby. He said it was a miracle how God helped him (and his wife) through their grief. Once again the respondent saw evidence of God's work in him, changing the way he responded to severe heartache.

The third miracle was more personal than the previous two and he did not want to elaborate more than saying that God had worked out some problems he had with his wife's family.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, being "moved," doubts about Islam/Qur'an, crisis, miracles, meeting Christians/MBBs, the "prayer of salvation," and common objections to the gospel.

Respondent Twelve – Ejer-03/F2

At the age of fourteen, Respondent Twelve attended a Christian summer camp with her mother and sister. A Swiss ministry that was working in the West Bank organized the camp specifically for Palestinian teens. Although her family had not been particularly religious – more accurately, a culturally Muslim family – soon after the camp began, the respondent started to think it was a big mistake to attend. Not only was the emphasis on religion a strange environment for the respondent, all the discussions and lessons about Jesus and believing in Him made her very uncomfortable. Her response was to mock those who were interested in the subject.

In spite of her reservations about being at this camp, though, the respondent became friends with a seventeen year-old girl who spoke passionately about Jesus. They did not attend the same school, so after the camp ended their personal contact was limited to occasionally seeing each other in town and semi-regular phone calls. Even though they had limited contact after the camp, the older girl's faithful conversations about Jesus during the camp planted seeds in the respondent's heart. These seeds seemed to be watered by the respondent's already present personal objections and questions about Islam. Together, the external witness and internal questions led the respondent into another eighteen months of searching for the truth by “comparing the Qur'an and the New Testament for up to two hours daily.” Her search was so intense that her standing as first in her class began to slip to fifth or sixth. But, her desire to find the truth was now greater than her desire to be at the head of the class.

In addition to her personal Qur'an and New Testament studies, the respondent regularly asked her teacher questions about Islam as well. Her dissatisfaction with Islam or Islamic culture revolved primarily around the life and role of women. She struggled with the possibility of sharing her husband with three other women in a formal marriage, and perhaps more through a type of

concubine system. It appeared to the respondent that women in Islam are, at best, second-class.

The respondent's internal struggles eventually became expressed externally through questions to her teacher whose response to every question was "silly and unsatisfying." Unsatisfying answers were frustrating for the respondent because "for every question that was given a silly answer," she "had another question that wasn't asked yet." The respondent said she thought the problem for her teacher was that the teacher was comfortable with or had dutifully accepted the role of women in Islamic society, thus she simply did not recognize the problems of women in that society.

Eventually, another teacher was brought in to answer the respondent's questions. The new teacher's efforts, though more loud and forceful than the previous teacher's, were no more successful at answering the respondent's questions than the first teacher's.

Finally, a male teacher entered the conversation and ended it by striking the respondent across the face. This happened more than once. The respondent's refusal to accept the woman's role in Islamic culture was deemed insubordination and merited a stern rebuke.

In spite of the harsh responses, the respondent's questions did not go away. In addition to her dissatisfaction with the role of women in Islam, she had questions about apparent contradictions in the Qur'an and Islam's view of Hell.

The respondent spent about six months in very frustrating self-guided study. She wanted answers, but could not find them on her own, and her teachers at school offered no substantive answers either. She needed help, but did not know where to turn. Eventually, feeling quite desperate, the respondent called the older girl from the previous summer's camp and asked if she knew anyone who could answer some questions about Islam and Christianity. That question of desperation opened the door to a mature female MBB who was known by the girl from camp.

Jamilla, the female MBB, understood the difficult emotional, social, and familial realities of questioning Islam and eventually leaving Islam for Jesus because she had done both. She had the reputation of being intelligent, patient, and understanding of what ladies like Respondent Twelve were going through when they spoke with her, even when they spoke to her with much anger and bitterness as result of “Jesus turning their worlds upside down.” Repeatedly demonstrating patience and understanding had given Jamilla a strong reputation as one who could help Muslim women in their transition to faith in Jesus. According to Respondent Twelve, Jamilla lived up to her reputation, “patiently answering question after question. No question seemed too silly or threatening.” In this way, Jamilla demonstrated the character of Jesus and was unlike the respondent’s teachers who were impatient, caustic, and sometimes violent in their defense of Islam.

After about one year of talking with Jamilla, the respondent sensed that her studies and the answers from Jamilla were starting to persuade her to believe in Jesus. However, converting to Christianity presented obvious social and family risks that were frightening. Over a period of about two to three weeks, the respondent said that she had internally accepted Jamilla’s explanations and encouragement to trust Jesus, but outwardly rejected them because of fear that she might lose everything (i.e., family and community).

Things appeared to be at a standstill: Jamilla had patiently answered the respondent’s questions, absorbed the respondent’s verbal blows, and repeatedly encouraged the respondent to trust Jesus for the outcome, yet the respondent continued to hesitate. After one year of counseling, and realizing she had done all she could for the respondent, Jamilla finally told the respondent, “There’s no answer I can give you that will persuade you. You need to go home and pray to God and ask him to show you the truth. If it is through Muhammad, follow him, and if it is through Jesus, follow him.”

That night, while standing in the window looking to the sky with tears flowing down her face, the respondent cried out, “God, please show me the truth. If the

truth comes through Muhammad, I'll become a good Muslim. If it's through Jesus, I will follow him.”

After falling asleep, the respondent had a dream in which she saw the words, “Who am I?” In the dream, she noticed a book lying in a toilet, and a voice speaking Arabic told her to “go open the book and find the answer.” She was hesitant, but eventually retrieved the book. Noticing that it remained dry in spite of having been in the toilet, she began to flip the pages looking for the answer to the question, “Who am I?” She came across the words, “way, truth, life.” As the dream came to an end, the respondent awoke with a desire to know the source of those words.

Remembering Jamilla’s suggestion to ask God for direction, she began to read the Gospel of John and eventually came across John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” These were the words of Jesus and answered the question, “Who am I?” At that point, she returned to the window, and looking to the sky, she said, “I asked you to reveal the truth and you did. I will follow you no matter what.”

When asked to clarify what she understood the meaning of her dream to be, Respondent Twelve said the dream confirmed that Jamilla’s answers about Jesus dying on the cross for her sins were the truth.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, Q and A, the Qur’an vs. the Bible, evangelist’s familiarity with Islam/Qur’an, doubts about Islam/Qur’an, the kindness of Christians, prayer, dreams, retreats/conferences/special events, meeting Christians/MBBs, an open witness, pastoral/evangelistic visits, and fear or shame as a barrier to the gospel.

Respondent Thirteen – Ejer-04/F3

Respondent Thirteen's childhood home was near a Christian church and tourist site, and her father regularly invited Christian pilgrims into their home. Sometimes he even invited them to stay in their home, and occasionally, some of the guests stayed for lengthy periods. One of these tourists, a Christian from Kenya, ended up living with them for nine years, and he is the one who had the largest Christian influence on the respondent and her family. Over the years, the Kenyan man was allowed to share Bible stories each night with the children and pray for the entire family. He was a very likable man, soft-spoken, and won the hearts of all the family members.

On one particular occasion the Kenyan man invited seventy Christian tourists to their home for a traditional Arab meal. While preparing the meal, the respondent's mother spilled hot grease on her foot. The respondent said, "the damage was so bad, we thought her foot melted to the floor." It did not, but the injury required serious medical attention. After the respondent's mother returned from the hospital, the Kenyan man asked if he and his Christian friends could pray for her recovery. After receiving permission to do so, they prayed fervently for Jesus to heal her foot. After they finished praying, the mother pulled the blankets back and saw that "her foot had been miraculously healed" the respondent said.

The respondent had no problem accepting the fact that Jesus healed her mother's foot. For her it was not a compelling argument that she should believe in Jesus in the way that Christians do because "Muslims also believe Isa can heal."¹⁰⁶ However, the respondent's parents saw things very differently and converted to Christianity, which terrified the respondent.

¹⁰⁶ Isa (عيسى) is the name the Qur'an uses to identify Jesus. However, there is much debate within the Christian community about the use of the name Isa verses the use of the Arabic form Yesua (يسوع).

In response to her parents' conversion, the respondent became an increasingly observant Muslim. Very quickly she started wearing a hijab to cover her hair and neck. She repeatedly told her parents of how they would be “burned to a crisp in Hell,” and warned them that after the first burning, Allah would recreate them so that he could burn them again. “I was very hard to live with,” she admitted, “but I was so angry with them because I was scared of what would happen to us [the whole family] since my parents were *murtadin* [مرتدين].¹⁰⁷ I was really afraid that Allah would cause our house to fall on us.” In addition to becoming more religious and dressing more conservatively, the respondent became involved in a fundamentalist Islamic youth movement, going to both public and secret meetings in which she was indoctrinated into more strict and zealous forms of Islam.

For the next two years, between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, as her involvement in the Islamic youth movement increased, her presence at home decreased. However, she admitted with an embarrassed smile, “When I was there, I was very mean to the Christians who visited our home.” She would only acknowledge the Christian visitors in her home by teasing and harassing them. For example, she might “put salt rather than sugar in their tea.” Or she might “mock them for believing in a man instead of the truth of Islam.” The only exception to her anger was the Kenyan man, whom she loved and respected in a special way: “I was never mean to him. I couldn’t hurt him; he was different,” she said. In fact, she continued to allow him to remind her daily that Jesus loved her.

Her involvement in the youth movement eventually led to volunteering to be a suicide bomber against Israel. From the handful of girls who volunteered to become suicide bombers, the respondent was selected for “the honor of becoming a *martyr*.” Over the course of a few weeks, she was prepared for a

¹⁰⁷ Murtad (مرتد - sing.) and Murtadin (مرتدين - pl.) refer to those who have left Islam for another religion. Kafir (كافر - sing.) and kuffar (كفار) refer to those who remain within Islam, but maintain unacceptable (or heretical) beliefs.

specific operation that had been planned by someone else. “I was fitted with the explosives vest and was only one day away from the big day when I would make international news as a martyr for Islam and [an Islamic religious and political movement], but God interrupted” she said.

In a bizarre turn of events, the respondent’s mother was blinded when a board fell and hit her head. She called her daughter’s mobile phone to tell her the news, and when the respondent saw her mother’s number, she uncharacteristically answered the phone. The respondent was shocked by the news, and asked her handlers to delay the operation so that she could visit her mother. She said, “I felt bad leaving her the way I was since she was in that condition.” When the respondent returned home to visit her mother, she rang the doorbell and waited while her mother clumsily found her way to the door to unlock it. When her mother opened the door, her sight was instantly restored, and her mother proclaimed it a miracle. Immediately, the respondent accused her mother of lying, but her mother had medical reports that confirmed the blindness.

In describing the anxiety this miracle caused her, the respondent said, “It scared me so severely, that I began to cling more strongly to Islam!” The respondent was shocked to find out that, in spite of her greater commitment to Islam, her handlers expelled her from the suicide bomber program because she had asked for a delay in order to visit her sick mother. She explained that after her conversion she came to understand that her rejection from the suicide bomber program was another way that God *interrupted* because “the reality of my mother’s miracle caused me to begin fervently reading the New Testament and Qur’an side by side, hoping I could find serious problems with the New Testament. I didn’t want to believe it! But God knew what I would find in the New Testament.”

Approximately three months later the respondent’s mother invited her to a Christmas party and the respondent agreed to go on the condition that she could attend in full hijab and that no one would talk about her clothes or presence at the party. Her mother agreed to those conditions.

At the party, the respondent met Jamilla, a lady who was so nice that the respondent “could not resist speaking with her.” They talked about many things, but eventually the conversation turned to religion, and Jamilla revealed that she had converted to Christianity from Islam, which was quite shocking for the respondent. At that point, Jamilla shared the gospel with the respondent and pressed for a reaction. This quick presentation of the gospel, she smiled sheepishly and said, “was probably prompted by my wearing a hijab at a Christmas party.”

Although she had no specific rebuttals to Jamilla’s biblical reasoning, the respondent was appalled that this nice lady was trying to convert her. Jamilla recognized the hardness of the respondent’s spirit and challenged her to pray and ask God for direction, specifically suggesting that she pray, “God of this earth, show me who you are. Is Muhammad the way, or is Jesus?” This challenge was the last straw for the respondent, who then angrily fled the party.

Shortly after this encounter at the Christmas party, the respondent was shocked to learn that she had what she described as “a possibly fatal blood infection.” Not only was she afraid of dying, but also disillusioned because “after doing everything possible to be a good Muslim, Allah had allowed me to get so sick.” In spite of this disillusionment or because of it, she is not sure, she continued, “testing the New Testament.” She thinks continuing to read the New Testament was a “reaction to Jamilla’s challenge” to her at the Christmas party to pray, “God of this earth, show me who you are.” When the Respondent stiffened at that challenge, Jamilla semi-scolded her, “Don’t be stubborn,” which was a significant enough push for the respondent to follow through.

About four months after Jamilla’s challenge, the respondent cried out, “God of this earth, show me who you are. If Muhammad is the way, I’ll work harder to be a better Muslim; if Jesus is the way, I’ll follow him.” After falling asleep shortly afterward, she had a vivid dream in which Jesus appeared to her: He was dressed in white, had golden hair, and the aura was so heavy around his face that no facial details were visible. He also spoke Arabic. In the dream, Jesus

said, “I am God” and touched her on her heart and said, “You are healed; I am the way, the truth and the life.”

The next day, she pressured a doctor to re-test her blood to see if the dream was accurate. The results were definitive: “Many doctors have confirmed the previous test results, but this test shows no infection,” the doctor said in complete amazement. At that moment, she removed her hijab and said, “Jesus healed me!”

When asked to clarify why this healing was different, in terms of influencing her attitude toward Christianity, than when her mother’s foot had been healed, she responded that she had “read the New Testament many times and understood Jesus to be different than he was represented as Isa.” As Isa, “he is only a prophet that can heal.” As Jesus, “he can heal because he is the Son of God. He’s the way the truth and the life. He died for my sins. He’s much more than in the Qur’an.” She continued, “At first, I didn’t want to accept the New Testament Jesus, but this healing confirmed what Jamilla had told me and what I had read about Jesus in the New Testament.”

When asked to clarify what was the intended meaning of removing her hijab, the respondent explained that it was “just an emotional response,” but it was also “symbolic of being freed from Islam and becoming a Christian.”

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, the Qur’an vs. the Bible, doubts about Islam/Qur’an, prayer, dreams, crisis, meeting Christians/MBBs, an open witness, and fear or shame as a barrier to the gospel.

Respondent Fourteen – Nab-07/M6

Respondent Fourteen was raised in a traditional family that was moderately religious. He described his family's religious activities as observing Ramadan and his parents regularly praying, but not requiring the children to do so. He self-identified as a Muslim, but was not particularly interested in religion.

As an adult, the respondent's main interests were focused on providing a modest living for his family as a farmer. Like the rest of the people in his village, he worked the land and did his best to make ends meet. Much of the time they got by, though just barely. At other times, everyone suffered the hardships and shortfalls together. A prolonged period of shortfall was the context in which the respondent came to faith.

Over the course of a year, the respondent's thoughts about religion, in general, were changed by the actions of a Palestinian Christian youth group that provided material help to residents in the respondent's Muslim village. Each week the youth entered the village with food and clothes and freely offered them to anyone who was in need.

The respondent never accepted help; he simply watched with great interest as the youth distributed their charity. He listened carefully to the recipients as they spoke of their benefactors' generosity and kindness. He said he always wondered and sometimes asked what the teens wanted in return for their generosity. But people throughout the village always said the youth did not want anything in return because "these things are from the Lord."

In addition to the youth group's generosity, the respondent also noticed that they always seemed happy. Two things motivated the respondent to specifically enquire about their religion. First, their consistent generosity, kindness and joy were so different than he saw in the teens in his village and elsewhere. Though he was content in his fairly meager life, he saw something different in these young people. It was not that they were wealthy and had everything that he did not have, and thus were satisfied with their lives. It was something different.

Though he could not say exactly what, he recognized that they had something inside that he lacked.

Second, on one occasion, the youth group was accompanied by an American Christian tour group as they handed out food and clothing. In the respondent's village resided an elderly woman that did her family's laundry by hand. At her advanced age a difficult job had become near impossible due to severe arthritis in her hands. The tour group met the woman and heard of her hardships. Members of the group were so moved by her story that they took up a collection from among themselves and returned to the village the next day with a washing machine for the elderly woman.

The way the tour group changed this woman's life really made an impression on the respondent, and he wanted to know more about their religion. The respondent's interest in their religion was prompted because the members of both the youth group and tour group always said the things they provided were "from the Lord." "If they are infidels like Islam teaches, why do they do these kind things?" he wondered.

Eventually, he stopped one of the teens as they walked past his home and asked whom they were and why they kept coming back to the village. The answer was simple: "We are a Christian youth group, and we want to love our neighbors by offering material help." With that answer, the youth also offered a book: *Glad News! God loves you, my Muslim friend*.

This book caused the respondent to have an increased interest in Christianity because it was in Arabic and a *Muslim-friendly* introduction to Christianity. He read the book very quickly and then became secretly absorbed in the Bible.

He admitted to struggling with the idea of changing one religion for another, but continued to be impressed by the generosity of the Christian youth group and their tourist friends. He lingered over the question, "How could they be infidels?" He also had a serious battle with his family's traditional Muslim identity, which was the motivating factor for reading his Bible secretly. He feared losing his

family if they found out he was reading the Bible, and was certain that conversion would cost him his family. “What I was doing had the potential to change my life in dramatic ways,” he said.

He started reading the Bible in Genesis and read it through completely along with *Glad news!* Interestingly, he said that he “enjoyed and learned from the Christian literature, but was more interested in the Bible because it is the source.” He also was in regular contact with a pastor who encouraged him to keep reading the Bible and answered his various questions about Christianity. Early in the process, his questions dealt more with Islam vs. Christianity. The more he read the Bible the more his questions evolved toward curiosity about life as a Christian. He was particularly interested to know about life as a former Muslim and the routine of the Christian life.

After nearly one year of reading the Bible and occasionally visiting a MBB church, which required six hours to commute there and back, he thought he was “ready to believe in Jesus.” The first time he prayed, he asked God to “help me to know when to believe and if this is the correct way, help me progress without fear.” The next morning he awoke with joy and no fear, which he interpreted as a clear sign from God that believing in Jesus was the correct way. So, he got dressed and called the pastor who had been counseling him for nearly one year and told him, “I’m a believer!” Over the phone, the pastor led the respondent in a prayer of salvation.

When asked to clarify what he understands it means to be a Christian, the respondent said, “To believe that Jesus came to save me from sin.”

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, Q and A, the kindness of Christians, prayer, crisis, Christian literature, meeting Christians/MBBs, the “prayer of salvation,” an open witness, pastoral/evangelistic visits, and fear or shame as a barrier to the gospel.

Respondent Fifteen – Nab-08/M7

Respondent Fifteen grew up in a large family whose religious identification was Muslim, though they did not participate in any religious activities, including Ramadan. According to the respondent, the family values as expressed by his father were simply to work hard and make a living. In fact, the respondent began working at the age of twelve, which meant that he did not finish school.

Wanting to please his father “more than anything else in this world,” the respondent said he happily began working on Jewish farms at the age of twelve. He moved around between farming and construction work through his teenage years, always for Israeli (i.e., Jewish) companies. Since his labor was illegal he always received his salary in cash, and upon arriving home, immediately handed it to his father. Each time he gave his salary to his father, he hoped it would make his father proud and draw them closer together. The only thing he wanted was his father’s love.

Unfortunately, each time he surrendered his salary his father demanded more. The lack of parental encouragement and approval, which he equated with love, was emotionally devastating for the respondent. He never acted out, but he definitely grew more bitter and wounded each week as he repeatedly felt the sting of his father’s lack of love.

Even though his father was not religious, in the respondent’s eyes, his father represented Islam, and his father’s lack of love meant that Islam did not love him either. By the time he was twenty, he had no interest in religion, especially Islam. He did not pray. He even intentionally avoided common Islamic phrases like “Insha’Allah,” meaning “if Allah wills.” He wanted nothing to do with Islam or any other religion.

By age twenty-one, the respondent had married, and though brokenhearted from his father’s lack of love, or betrayal as he labeled it, the respondent was forced by financial realities to stay in the patriarchal home. This living arrangement meant most of his meager salary was still surrendered to his father.

He was comfortable working hard to provide for his wife, which was “the one good principle I learned from my father” he said. Tensions over finances eventually became the breaking point in the respondent’s relationship with his father. The respondent asked his father to reduce the amount of money he demanded so that the young couple could get started establishing their own family. When his father refused to grant the respondent’s request, the relationship was completely broken. “I was in need, and he turned his back on me. I felt betrayed,” he matter-of-factly explained.

At that point, the respondent felt he and his new wife could not remain in the patriarchal home, but he did not have sufficient financial independence to leave. This inability to leave coupled with the sting of betrayal created a sense of desperation that caused him to consider a change in vocations. He realized that he would always be tied to his father’s house if he continued in what was essentially day to day jobs in construction or farming.

The respondent’s decision to try to leave his father’s home was emboldened by an advertisement for a police officer course in Bethlehem. The Palestinian Authority was expanding their police force and was recruiting officer candidates for training. Not knowing what to expect, the respondent applied for a position in the police course and was accepted, which meant that he had to move temporarily to Bethlehem and live with the other students in an open dormitory. This was a new experience for him because the students came from a variety of backgrounds; they were a mix of religious and non-religious Muslims and Christians.

The respondent had always been a fairly private person who tried to mind his own business and avoided paying too much attention to others around him. However, the open dorm environment made it very difficult to not watch others. In fact, he could not avoid listening to and watching the other residents, though he did not socialize with them.

The dorm was filled with energetic young men who filled their time playing games (backgammon and cards), telling jokes, and roughhousing. All of the activity gave the respondent much to watch, but the thing that captured his attention most was watching the Muslims and Catholics pray according to their specific protocols. Beyond that, he also watched how they lived when they were not praying. His observations led him to conclude that “the way Christians pray is much more free” and that “among the Christians, there is more love and less gossip” than in the Muslim community. What the respondent observed made a big impression on him.

The more time the respondent spent among the other police recruits, the more open and interested in Christianity he became. Admittedly, he was not looking for religion, but the actions of those Christians he had been observing intrigued him. Over time, the respondent became friends with one of the Christians who was a MBB. “At the time,” explained, “friendship was the thing I desired most because I was so lonely. I missed my wife so much.” His feelings of loneliness and isolation were exacerbated when some Muslim recruits made fun of him when they saw him trying to pray according to Catholic form, the only Christian form he had ever seen. He did not know why he tried to pray, but felt compelled to pray. The respondent’s new friend was sympathetic to the situation and offered to introduce him to a pastor that might be able to help him understand more about Christianity. The offer was accepted and the introduction made the respondent very happy.

At their first meeting, the pastor spoke with the respondent about the love of God, and apparently touched on an open wound by doing so. His words were strange and comforting to the respondent and opened the door for deeper conversation. The respondent felt abandoned by his earthly father, and the sting was almost more than he could bear. That God loved people was something the respondent had never heard before, and he said, “It was exactly what I needed to hear.”

This initial conversation led to more conversations in which the respondent began to ask questions about things he had come to notice about Islam. Specifically, he noted that even though religious Muslims fasted during Ramadan and abstained from alcohol and pork, *in his observation*, they were less honest and ethical than the Christians that he had come to know during his police course.

The pastor steered the respondent away from critical comments about Muslims, emphasizing that Jesus should be his focus, not people. Eventually, the respondent dropped out of the police course and returned home near Nablus. The move made it more difficult to meet personally with the pastor, so their relationship moved primarily to the phone, with occasional in-person meetings.

The respondent's lack of education made it very difficult for him to read the Bible. So rather than direct him to the Scriptures, the pastor spoke with him once a week, explaining the gospel and always trying to emphasize the love of God as demonstrated through New Testament stories about Jesus.

After their meetings during the respondent's three months in Bethlehem, the pastor met or called him weekly for another six months before the respondent was able to say that he truly believed in Jesus. He said the steady stream of Jesus stories - how he loved people - were very compelling, but he said he took a "long time to really believe" because of his negative view of religion, which was the result of his own personal experience as a non-practicing Muslim.

The respondent's observations of good Christian behavior while in Bethlehem was very instrumental in his decision, as was satellite television programming because it gave him more opportunities to hear Jesus stories.

When asked if reading the Bible had any part in his conversion he said, "no, I never read the Bible. But I heard a lot of stories and teaching about Jesus." He appeared embarrassed about his answer, and quickly added "I have a Bible and am starting to read it now." And to prove his claim, he quickly retrieved his Bible and showed it to me. Clearly, he had some Bible knowledge; it was simply

delivered orally by the pastor and Christian television programming, which was on in the background during the entirety of our interview.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Oral Bible, doubts about Islam/Qur'an, crisis, meeting Christians/MBBs, pastoral/evangelistic visits, and lack of interest in religion.

Respondent Sixteen – Nab-09/F2

Respondent Sixteen was raised in a very religious Muslim home. She married a religiously observant Muslim man and proudly maintained her home in the religious ways she had learned as a child. She dressed modestly, including the hijab (see Figure 10). She was very happy to find a man who felt the same way about religion that she did and who wanted to raise children as observant Muslims. However, after a couple years of marriage she began to feel dissatisfied and empty in all of her religious observation. While she maintained all the expressions of her faith, like modest dress, eating only Hallal food, and praying daily, she had an empty feeling that she could not shake. She wanted to get rid of this feeling no matter what it took to do so, but the only thing she could imagine doing more was praying more. So, she began to pray more intensely and more than the prescribed five times daily.

She could not remember how long she followed this plan, but does remember that she noticed the more she prayed, the more distant she felt from Allah. Often after praying she asked herself, “Where is Allah?” But, “He was nowhere to be found” she said. She struggled terribly with why she felt so distant from Allah. Eventually, unable to solve this riddle, she began to blame herself: “Maybe I have sinned in some way,” she reasoned. However, she could not think of any way that she had done anything to merit Allah’s distance.

She was desperate to feel the closeness of Allah? “What could I do?” she wondered. Again, praying more was the only answer that came to mind. She was afraid to speak with her husband about her crisis, so she did the only thing she could think of: She prayed more. However, praying more did not offer the closeness she desired. In fact, she said, “Every time I prayed, I felt Allah’s absence more and more. But I didn’t stop praying. How could I? Everyone knows that good Muslims pray. I was a good Muslim all my life, so why should Allah feel so distant?” she added to explain her frustration. This feeling of distance from Allah led the respondent into a form of depression.

Her husband noticed her depression and recommended that she attend a culture center near their home. In this particular center, women were offered both computer courses and self-confidence courses. She was somewhat hesitant to attend the courses because she did not know anyone there. However, the self-confidence course sounded interesting, and she decided to enroll. She really enjoyed and benefited from the confidence course, which lasted two months. Afterward, she enrolled in the computer course and found that she was starting to make friends at the center and wanted to be there outside her scheduled class times.

Although she was enjoying her courses and felt that she had gained some self-confidence, she still struggled with depression and a sense of loneliness. But she continued to pray because she knew she was supposed to pray, even though the end result was more discouragement.

She thought that one of the men who ran the programs was a Greek Orthodox Christian, but did not realize that a number of the *Muslims* were actually MBBs. As Christmas approached, the center sponsored a Christmas party for all the students. Though the respondent was not a Christian she was interested to attend because she had become friends with a couple of the other students who would be attending, and also because she had never been to a Christmas party and wondered what would happen there.

When the respondent entered the party, she saw an atmosphere of joy unlike she had ever seen or experienced. There were only a few people that she knew to be Muslims, and most of the people in attendance she did not know. She assumed they were Christians because they were singing songs about Jesus. She was both uncomfortable and amazed at the same time. She was uncomfortable because she, a religious Muslim, was standing in the midst of Christians singing about Jesus, and she knew that Muslims should not be doing such a thing. She was amazed because she, a religious Muslim, was standing in the midst of Christians singing about Jesus in a way she had never imagined and

in a way that was passionate and joyful and fresh and free. She never joined in the singing, but she did enjoy watching the others sing.

After the singing, the Greek Orthodox man (whom she did not know had been born again) asked everyone to join him in praying. She had never seen Christians pray, and was quite amazed that they did not have a ritual (i.e., specific form or words): some closed their eyes, others did not; some held their hands high in the air while others held the seat back in front of them; some looked to heaven while others bowed their heads. She was partly annoyed that they would dare to pray so freely, while at the same time she was attracted to the idea of praying so freely. After the prayer, the Greek Orthodox man asked everyone to be seated and give him their attention for the next fifteen or twenty minutes. "The next fifteen minutes changed my life," she said with big smile.

The man began to tell the Christmas story. He spoke very carefully and passionately about Jesus, the Son of God. She knew that Muslims could not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but this man's passion seemed to override that objection. He continued to explain how *Son of God* doesn't mean that God and Mary had sexual relations (as many Muslims think), but rather that it was a way of saying that Jesus is equal with God. Again, she knew this was contrary to Muslim belief, but the man's passion and clarity were convincing.

The respondent was drawn in as the man began to read and explain chapter one of John's gospel. She described the process as follows: "Step by step I was coming to understand that Jesus is God. I was not afraid to find this out because each step led me to more understanding. The question I had asked each time I finished praying – 'Where is Allah?' - was finally answered when he got to verse fourteen [JN 1:14]. God came to earth to live among his people in the person of Jesus. Finally, it became clear to me. I was so relieved when I realized this truth. Then he explained that Jesus died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world, and for the first time, Christianity became attractive to me. Very attractive."

Though she had heard little about Christianity or Christians in her village, every reference she had heard was in a negative context. That changed at the Christmas party; her view of Christians and Christianity were now very positive. She said, she “felt the depression leave; everything was different!”

As the speaker closed his sermon, he suggested that any who might have made a decision to believe in Jesus or had more questions about believing in Jesus should speak with one of the leaders of the center. She had been enrolled at the community center for four months, and everyone had become like an extended family, but she was still cautious about revealing to others her new beliefs. Soon after the sermon ended, she casually approached one of the leaders whom she trusted and explained all that had happened. She detailed her strict religious observance, her disappointment that Allah seemed distant, and the relief she had in her new understanding that Jesus was God who came to earth. The counselor discreetly prayed for her then asked if she wanted to pray a “prayer of salvation.” She agreed, and discreetly, in the corner of the room, he led her in the following prayer: “God, I am a sinner and I need forgiveness. I have longed for your presence and now I have found you in Jesus. I believe that he died for my sins and that He is God. Amen.”

Themes that emerged in this interview: “Drawn/compelled,” doubts about Islam/Qur’an, crisis, meeting Christians/MBBs, “prayer of salvation,” culture center, and common objections to the gospel.

Respondent Seventeen – Nab-10/F3

Respondent Seventeen was raised in a secular Muslim family. She was the odd member of the family who was interested in politics, believing political activism was the gateway to freedom. She identified herself as an atheist communist who was interested only in “political activism against the Zionist occupation.” When the respondent was in high school, she attended anti-occupation conferences throughout the Arab world, and eventually spent her college years studying in Jordan.

It was in Jordan that the respondent was first exposed to Christianity. Her college roommate was a Christian who became a good friend, and while she never evangelized the respondent, neither did she appear to be embarrassed or try to hide her Christianity. During the respondent’s studies in Jordan, she learned English. And, even though she had no religious interests, she read the Bible to practice her English and to gain general knowledge of Christianity.

Upon completion of university, the respondent returned to Palestine with the assumption she would become involved in the movement for the independence of Palestine on university campuses in the West Bank as well as in Europe and the United States. Equipped with her English skills and personal experience of the occupation, she pictured herself to be an indispensable member of the “voice of Palestine.” She said, “I wanted to use my English skills to inform the West of the realities of the occupation. I wanted to be *the* voice of Palestine that convinced America and Europe to stop supporting the occupation.”

In hindsight, she said she held the “naive belief” that the people were waiting for her to step forward, education and experience in hand, to be the one who would finally succeed in convincing the West to stop supporting Zionism and liberate the oppressed. However, reality was something different: “No one doubted my academic credentials or English language skills or my experience of the occupation, but it became clear that no one was interested in my help. These were people who knew me because, as a youth, I had volunteered in different

anti-occupation movements. So it was not that they needed to get to know me before they could trust me. Then the light came on: the people I thought were fighting on behalf of Palestine and the Palestinian people, were actually involved for themselves. That's why they were not interested in me; they saw me as competition, not as help. I could not believe it and refused to believe it for a couple months. But it was true and I could not deny it any longer. What made it worse was to realize that, as a youth, my idealism and belief in Palestine were exploited for the personal gain of the leaders of our movement. How could they do that? They were worse than the Zionists!"

Suddenly, the respondent's "world came crashing down. All of life was crashing in on" her. The only thing she knew to do was to hide herself away in her bedroom. She hibernated for two days and began entering into severe depression. During this time, she repeated the same questions over and over: "How could they do that to the people? How could they do that to me?" Every explanation she could think of was void of any comfort. And each cycle of questioning increased her sense of betrayal and drove her closer to despair.

Because her family had never believed in political activism as she had, they did not realize how hurt and crushed she was. She said, "They could not understand that my whole world had suddenly crashed. I had dreams of changing the realities of Palestine. I had envisioned being part of the movement that broke the occupation. That's what my life was about. And all of that was gone! Did it ever really exist? I don't know. Perhaps in other areas or movements, but not in the one I was in."

After more than one month of hiding away in her bedroom, the respondent realized she needed to find a job and start moving on with her life. This was really difficult because she felt like her life was totally upside down. She eventually got a secretarial job, doing a variety of office tasks. In many ways it was mindless work, so she was able to manage without too much trouble. A couple months passed before someone told her about a place where she could learn computer skills from teachers who were really nice people. Since she did

not have any other real vocational options, she thought she might as well give it a try. Eventually, this decision would change her life in ways she could never have imagined.

The courses she attended gave her the opportunity to meet a MBB for the first time. Over the course of a month she had become close enough with a few MBBs to ask to join them on a group trip to Egypt. By this time, she knew all those who would be going on the trip were believers in Jesus, though she did not fully understand what it meant to be a believer in Jesus. The group was traveling to Egypt to encourage fellow believers and to share their testimonies with whoever would listen, and the respondent ended up being one of the listeners.

Each morning the group began the day with devotions led by the group leader who was also the founder of the learning center (See Respondent Eleven). The morning devotions were followed later in the day with a group Bible study. The devotions and Bible studies were primarily directed toward the believers for the purpose of encouraging them in the faith, but they were also intended to challenge the respondent to consider belief in Jesus. The bulk of the day was spent around Cairo witnessing wherever possible, and the evenings were given to group time with local brothers and sisters in the Lord.

On the sixth morning, in a private conversation, the group leader spoke directly to the respondent about salvation - her need for and the way of salvation. In this conversation, which was prefaced with six days of morning devotions and daily Bible studies, the group leader explained from the New Testament how the respondent was a sinner and in need of forgiveness. He contrasted the certainty of Jesus' forgiveness with the uncertainty of Allah's final judgment as presented by Islam. He also emphasized how each of the MBBs on the trip experienced personal peace when they "accepted Jesus as Lord."

For the first time, the respondent actually considered the existence of God. In fact, the existence of God, though a new thought for her, simply became a reality as she listened to the testimonies of her fellow travelers. She doesn't know

exactly when her belief about the existence of God happened or a specific thing that changed her view, but she does connect it directly to the *personal* testimonies she heard daily: “Knowing them and hearing their testimonies was very important to me,” she said.

After returning from Egypt, the respondent wanted to know more about believing in Jesus. She said, “I wanted to believe, but I needed more assurance that I was on the right path.” During the next week she had “non-stop conversations about believing in Jesus” with the group leader. When they were not talking, she was reading the Gospels. “Finally, after a week of talking and reading,” she told the group leader that she “believed in Jesus as Lord.” He said that he was not surprised that she had come to believe in Jesus and led her in a prayer of salvation.

When asked what she thought was important for others to know about her conversion experience, she said, “Jesus is the right way of salvation. Don’t stop hearing about Jesus. He gives peace if people believe.”

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, formal Bible studies, crisis, meeting Christians/MBBs, the “prayer of salvation,” culture center, lack of interest in religion.

Respondent Eighteen – Nab-11/M8

Respondent Eighteen introduced himself by giving some details of a hard teenage life, most of which were related to the family not having much money. While he worked during most of his teenage years, going to work at an automotive repair shop in his village at age eighteen was the beginning of his journey to faith in Jesus. Shortly after he began working there a Messianic Jewish¹⁰⁸ customer began to regularly stop by to say hello. Eventually the Jewish man began to ask questions about the respondent's religion, primarily focusing on issues of sin and forgiveness.

Soon after the Jewish man started asking these questions, perhaps a month later, the respondent began to have a series of similarly themed dreams. In the dreams, a man in white clothes with a bright glow over his face asked the respondent in Arabic, "Are you chosen?" The respondent was confused because he originally thought the man in the dream was asking if he was the village chief, which he was not. So, he answered the man in white, "no." He always awoke from this recurring dream frightened and sweating.

In the final dream, the fifth or sixth, the same man in white appeared, but this time he placed his hand on the respondent's shoulder and said, "You are chosen," and the respondent replied, "No!" At that point he awoke, again frightened and sweating and confused about the meaning of the dream. After this last dream, the respondent told the Jewish man about the dreams. His response was, "God is trying to tell you something important." Then, the Jewish man began to tell him about Jesus and encouraged him to read the Bible.

At the time, the respondent considered himself a religious Muslim, so he was a little confused that a Jewish man kept telling him about Jesus and suggesting that he should read the New Testament.

¹⁰⁸ In this context, Messianic Jewish means a Jewish person who believes Jesus is the Messiah. Though the phrase has mostly gone out of use, Jewish-Christian has also been used in reference to Jews who believe in Jesus.

The Jewish man also introduced the respondent to a Christian couple that regularly brought Christian tourists through the area. The respondent noted that this contact was very important in his coming to faith. “Once, they stopped by my work with a group of fifty-one tourists who brought boxes filled with clothes and food items.” Almost as an afterthought, the respondent added that the boxes also included Arabic Bibles and Christian books amongst the food and clothes. Even though there were no oral or written instructions or demands to read the Christian materials, the respondent understood the inclusion of such items in the aid boxes as a *quid pro quo*. Therefore, because he wanted to please the Christians who were bringing him food, the material aid became the catalyst for the respondent to begin reading the Bible. Each time a new box of aid arrived, the respondent was asked if he was reading the Bible, to which he always replied, “Yes, I’m reading it regularly.” He was actually reading the Bible, but he admitted that in the beginning, his “thoughts were more on the boxes than the Bible.”

Initially and for some time, perhaps six months, he did not understand anything he was reading in the Bible, and his assessment was that the Old Testament was for Jews and the New Testament was for Christians. The frustration that resulted from unintelligible reading eventually led him to stop reading the Bible for about two months. However, in spite of the frustration, his interest in the aid boxes caused him to begin reading the *New Testament* again. “This time,” he said, “I began to slowly understand a little more each time I read it, which made it more interesting.” And over the course of “about two years,” he realized his interest in the New Testament had become greater than his interest in the aid boxes: “Originally, I was motivated by the boxes, so I read more. But, the more I read, the less interested in the boxes I became,” he explained.

As his interest in the New Testament grew, the political situation flared up again and the Jewish man stopped visiting, as did the tourists. Even though they never showed up again, he continued to read because he felt compelled to read. He “spent long nights reading through the New Testament.” Of course he was still thinking about the aid boxes, but he “was thinking more about the New

Testament and Jesus.” In fact, he said he felt like he “was being drawn not just to the New Testament, but also being drawn to know this person [i.e., Jesus].”

Eventually he changed careers and started to drive a taxi, which he really enjoyed because it gave him many opportunities to read the New Testament secretly. On many occasions he simply stopped his taxi on the side of the road so he could read the New Testament, which continued to draw him toward Jesus.

An important turning point in his conversion came when he picked up a MBB for a fare. During the commute the MBB began to witness to the respondent, which he enjoyed very much, though he did not tell the MBB about his obsession with reading the New Testament. After meeting a few times, the respondent asked if he could become the MBB’s regular driver, hoping that they could have more conversations. Their conversations eventually turned more personal, including discussions about life as a MBB and the deity of Jesus and a confession by the respondent that he was reading the New Testament. After a few months of conversations, the respondent was invited to visit a MBB church, which led to an invitation to a MBB couples retreat. Though he was still an unbeliever, he convinced his wife to attend with him, ostensibly “to pray.” She had no prior knowledge of his reading the New Testament, nor his consideration of conversion. When she witnessed people worshiping Jesus, she refused to stay, declaring the meeting “*haram!*” [forbidden] for Muslims. And because of his wife’s negative reaction, the respondent kept his further study and eventual conversion to himself.

After returning from the conference, the respondent realized he believed Jesus died for his sins. He was by himself when it occurred to him, so he phoned the MBB to tell him the news.

The respondent said the love that he discovered in Jesus and Jesus people compelled him to believe. While admitting there was some level of hesitation in the beginning, he also said, “believing was easy because one thing led to another.” The initial seeds that were planted by the Jewish believer and the

tourists were watered by the reading of the New Testament and conversations with the MBB, and ultimately drew him to believe in Jesus.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, “drawn/compelled,” the kindness of Christians, dreams, retreats/conferences/special events, meeting Christians/MBBs, an open witness, and common objections to the gospel.

Respondent Nineteen – Nab-12/M9

Respondent Nineteen was thirteen years old when he made an initial profession of faith.¹⁰⁹ His profession of faith was connected to his family's conversion process. Initially, due to a medical need, his parents began visiting with some Christian men from Jerusalem who gave them Bibles, Christian literature and told them Bible stories.

In the process of his parents and siblings coming to faith (see Respondents Four, Five, and Six) he repeatedly heard the gospel from about the age of ten. However, as a result of the religious environment in which he had been raised, even as a pre-teen, he had certain objections based on the teachings of the Qur'an and general Muslim culture. For example, he knew that Muslims did not believe that Jesus is God and he had heard that Christians prayed differently than Muslims. He was also afraid of the social problems that could result from converting. Specifically, he was afraid of losing his friends, but only occasionally did he voice any objection to the process his parents were undergoing.

As the meetings continued, several things lessened his concerns: he specifically mentioned the teaching of the Christians, reading the Bible, and the conversion of other family members. Privately and secretly, he began to read the Bible and pray for specific things. He prayed for his sister's medical problem to be solved. It was. He prayed for good grades at school, and he received good grades. He also saw the positive changes that occurred in the lives of his family members who professed faith in Christ.

At the age of thirteen, he considered the things he had heard in the family Bible meetings during the past three years, the things he personally read in the Bible, the answered prayer, and the changes he saw in his family and made a profession of faith in Jesus, which was cause for celebration among the other family members who had already done the same.

¹⁰⁹ The respondent was age 19 at the time of his interview.

Shortly after his profession of faith, his family he was relocated to a safe house and given a recreated identity. In that context, the family participated regularly in a fellowship of MBB believers. In fact, all members, except the pastors, were from a Muslim background. For approximately three years, the respondent lived with a Christian identity, and during that time, he experienced no serious doubts, regularly participated in the fellowship, and read his Bible. However, at the age of sixteen he had a disturbing dream that he marks as a turning point in his faith.

In the respondent's dream, a regular Christian man [i.e., not Jesus], who was dressed normally, died and resurrected three days later. When asked what the dream meant, the respondent said, "I felt away from Jesus when I had the dream, and it meant that Jesus is the right way." He could not explain why he *felt* "away from Jesus," but was certain that he was. As a result of the dream, he prayed the *prayer of salvation* and began to distinguish himself as a "real Christian."

The respondent was unable to distinguish what made this profession of faith different than the first. It was not clear if the lack of a *prayer of salvation* on the first occasion was an issue. Neither could he say that anything in his life - sin of some kind - convinced him that he had not believed on the first occasion. Everything rested on a single dream that he understood to mean that he was "away from Jesus."

In an effort to clarify what he saw as the pivotal points of his conversion, the respondent was asked to fill in the blank: If it was not for _____, I don't think I would be a believer. The respondent quickly answered, "family." He went on to explain that had he not seen his "family go through the process of believing in Jesus, going from darkness to light," he would not have been able to believe himself.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, formal Bible studies, prayer, dreams, crisis, family/group conversion, the “prayer of salvation,” common objections to the gospel, and fear or shame as a barrier to the gospel.

Respondent Twenty – Heb-01/M1

Respondent Twenty was raised by a single mother who became a MBB when he was about three years old. However, his mother had a very laissez-faire approach to passing her faith to her children, preferring to allow them to choose for themselves, which meant the children received no direct Christian instruction and only passive Christian influence. Instead, he had mostly Islamic influences from the neighborhood and Islamic teaching from school. However, occasionally, his mother did try to offer opinions from the New Testament when the children brought Islamic ideas into the house. In spite of the two varying religious views that were available to him, the respondent was not interested in religion. And while he recognized himself as a Muslim, he was not an active Muslim in any meaningful way during his early-to-mid teen-years.

When he was fifteen, the respondent suffered an extended and serious illness. The MBB community responded in ways that surprised him and that would be instrumental in his conversion. Even though he was a Muslim and did not believe the way they did, members of the MBB community visited regularly to pray for him and provide food for his family. They prayed openly and fervently for his full recovery, and he said, “God answered their prayer and healed me.” However, that did not immediately change his lack of interest in religion, though he admitted, “it probably softened me a little.”

About a year later, he went to a MBB family conference with his mother and sister. This was the first time he had been in an environment where MBBs expressed their faith in Jesus so openly. Of course, a number of them had openly prayed for him during his illness, but that was confined to his home; this was occurring in a semi-public gathering. When asked why he went to the conference, he said, “I was curious about my mother’s beliefs.” However, what he saw made him angry since he “was still a Muslim.” Although he was not religious, he did not like to see men and women praying and worshipping together, and he was bothered by the free references to Jesus as God, as well.

When the respondent and his family returned home from the conference, he asked for explanations of what he saw at the conference. What was all the singing? What was all the teaching? His mother tried to explain, but he dismissed her explanations. When his mother's explanations proved unsatisfactory, he called a young man about his age that he met at the conference, to see if he could explain things any better.

As the respondent looked back on these events, he came to realize that calling this young man was an important event in his conversion process. "When [name redacted] answered my questions, I was partly convinced," he admitted. Somehow, that a middle-to-late teen from a Muslim background could believe in Jesus made the answers more palatable for the respondent and lessened the anger he had toward his mother.

Although he did not immerse himself in this new community, the respondent did begin visiting his mother's church and remain in touch with the teen that had somewhat satisfactorily answered his questions. This same young man invited the respondent to view the Jesus Film, which, looking back, he marked as another very important event in his conversion process. In fact, he said, "I was very influenced by the abuse Jesus suffered. No one suffered like him. And this drew me toward him."

He began reading the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, but admits, "It didn't seem like a special story and was difficult to understand." His mother's explanations about what he was reading were helpful, but not enough to maintain his interest in reading.

About three months after seeing the Jesus Film, some of his mother's friends came to visit. During their visit, they prayed for the family, and during the prayer, the respondent's mind vividly replayed scenes from the Jesus Film in what he called "a vision." Once again, he was very moved by the horrors of Jesus' suffering. After the people left, the respondent told his mother about the vision and told her he wanted to know more so he could "know if Jesus is the right

way.” He confessed to his mother that he felt like he needed to believe, but could not yet do so. “I need to be sure,” he insisted. This opened the door for fairly regular discussions with his mother about Jesus and how He died for the respondent’s sins.

A short time after his mother’s friends visited and he saw the vision of the Jesus Film, the respondent began to have a series of nightmares in which a power was controlling him, holding his body, and pressing him to the bed. These dreams were terrifying and vivid. He could not discern the identity of the power that was controlling him, and each time he awakened in a pool of sweat and breathing hard as if he had been in a struggle for his life. After a few occurrences, he told his mother about the dreams; she told him to “demand that it go away in the name of Jesus.” Within a few days he had the same dream again, but he was afraid to say the name Jesus in his dream. However, in the next dream, the third, which occurred about one week later, the power was strangling him to the point he thought he was going to die, and in desperation he began to speak the name of Jesus. Each time he said, “Jesus,” the power weakened until it eventually released him.

Once he spoke the name of Jesus and the power subsided, he had a different type of dream twice within the next week. In these dreams, the respondent heard a male voice (there was no image) that said, “You can be certain.” When asked if it was an audible voice that he heard with his ears or only an inner voice, the respondent said, “It was an inner voice that sounded like it was on the phone.” When he told his mother about the voice, she suggested the voice might be that of Jesus, which seemed correct to the respondent. This specific dream was the final event that moved the respondent from unbelief to belief.

In an effort to understand better what the respondent believed were the pivotal events that led him to believe that Jesus died for his sins, he was asked to fill in the blank in the following sentence: If it were not for _____, I don’t think I would be a believer. He answered very quickly: “The power of the dreams, Jesus’ help, and fellowship with MBBs.”

He was asked to elaborate briefly on those answers, which he did: “The dreams were so real and powerful and frightening that they grabbed my attention. Jesus helped me when I was sick and also in my dreams, the Qur’an and Muslims didn’t. When I was sick, the believers came to help my family and pray for me. They were also patient with me when I was angry about my mother’s belief. All of those things were important in me coming to believe in Jesus.”

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, “moved,” Q and A, the kindness of Christians, prayer, dreams, retreats/conferences/special events, the Jesus Film, meeting Christians/MBBs, an open witness, common objections to the gospel, fear or shame as a barrier to the gospel, and a lack of interest in religion.

Respondent Twenty-One – Nab 13/F4

Respondent Twenty-One's conversion was intimately associated with the mass conversion of her family; she was the last of her immediate family to convert (See Respondent's Four, Five, Six, and Nineteen).

The family's introduction to Christian faith occurred due to a health issue of the respondent's younger sister. At the time, they were a family that was satisfied with their Muslim identity and involved in the community; the father was very religiously observant and becoming more so, the mother was less interested in religious things, but not completely uninterested. However, that would start to change, though unknown at the time, when a Muslim friend suggested the respondent's father meet some Christian men who had been in the area recently. The friend said those men were from an eye hospital in Jerusalem and might be able to provide an eye surgery the respondent's younger sister required.

In summary, the respondent's father initially rejected the offer to meet the Christian men, but eventually agreed to meet them. The family's conversion was not immediate. In fact, the respondent's father went through a lengthy process of alternately inviting and forbidding the men to come to his home. In the end, as a result of the men's continued witnessing, the influence of Bible reading, the Jesus Film and other Christian broadcasting, as well as dreams, all the members of the respondent's family came to faith in Jesus one by one.

The conversion process of the various family members was pretty openly displayed in the home in that the Christian men were allowed to teach the Bible, distribute literature, and pray openly. Because Respondent Twenty-One was the last person in the family to believe in Jesus, this open display played an important role in her conversion. She was able to hear the various arguments and answers presented by the Christian men, and as each family member came to faith, they also tried to persuade her.

When the Christian men were allowed to visit the home, the respondent listened respectfully, but completely refused to accept their testimonies and

arguments because she was a committed Muslim. She hated that the men were allowed to visit, and rejoiced inwardly during the times her father was angry with them and refused their visits.

She described the process of her family members coming to faith like a wave approaching the beach: “You see it in the distance coming toward you. At first it appears to be coming slowly, but the closer it gets, the bigger and faster it appears until it covers you over.” She explained that in the beginning she feared that someone in the family would believe, but it looked so far off that maybe it really would not happen. However, each time the men came to visit, the wave appeared to be bigger and coming faster until it finally overtook them. Eventually, like dominoes, one falling into the next, family members started believing. That led to more open sharing in the home, which eventually resulted in more pressured sharing of the faith.

As each domino fell, the respondent became more angry and depressed. She worried for her future: “How can I get a good husband if people know about my family? How can I remain part of a family like this? How can I continue to share a room with my sister who has shamefully betrayed Islam? I felt ashamed, angry, isolated, and even considered suicide or divorcing the family, if it was possible.” Perhaps more realistically, though, she said, “I worried the family would kick me out if I would not believe.”

The more the family pushed her to believe the angrier, more discouraged, and more depressed she became. Though her family members did not notice, the respondent’s emotional changes were so obvious that teachers and school officials became concerned and called a doctor and the police who initiated an investigation. They asked the respondent if anyone had done anything to her, or something had happened at home, but she protected her family. She thinks she refused to say anything partly because she would have been humiliated if anyone found out her family had left Islam, and partly because she still hoped they would return to Islam.

When the family found out about the investigation, they realized they had pushed too hard, and subsequently stopped pushing the respondent to believe. They continued to speak openly of their faith in the home, but they stopped directing religious comments toward the respondent. While this change was somewhat helpful, it did not prevent the respondent from feeling like the odd member of the family. “But it was better than before” she said. They continued to read their Bibles and she continued to pray, wear the hijab, and read her Qur’an.

After a few months in this new environment (i.e., no persuasion to convert to Christianity), the respondent began to have a series of dreams, which occurred over a period of about one month. She had the “same dream three or four times,” in which appeared “a man dressed in white surrounded by a bright light.” He did not speak, and she did not know his identity at the time. When she mentioned the dreams to her family, they concluded the reason for the dreams was her rejection of Jesus. Though she did not like their conclusion or the possibility that they may be correct, she had no alternative ideas about the source or reason for the dreams. After the third or fourth occurrence, the dreams stopped for about four to five months.

During this four to five month period, which was leading up to the family’s relocation, the respondent’s thoughts about the dreams were continually provoked when she heard members of the family discuss the Bible or pray. When the Christian men visited, which they did fairly often during this time, her thoughts returned to the dreams. Eventually, word of the family’s conversion spread through the area and a mob of teens attacked their home. These external threats necessitated the relocation of the family to a new area as well as a reconstructed identity.

In the new location, the respondent continued to wear the hijab, pray five times each day, and read the Qur’an. Shortly after their relocation, the family, including the respondent, went to a MBB family conference for the weekend. At the conference, one of the leaders politely asked the respondent to remove her hijab. Although the request to remove her hijab was offensive, the respondent

complied. However, the request and her compliance somewhat dazed her. As she sat in the meeting, many thoughts raced through her mind as she witnessed uncovered women mixing with men who were not their husbands or family members: “How can these women feel so comfortable among these men while uncovered? How could he ask me to remove my hijab? How could I remove it?” The respondent said she wanted desperately to run away, but she did not. She remained at the conference and listened and observed what was happening there.

During the program, the respondent sat dutifully with her family, though she did not participate as the crowd worshiped the Lord in song. During this time, she prayed, “God, what are they doing? If this is the way, please convince me.” And within minutes, “the worship leader stopped and said, ‘someone here is asking to be convinced. Listen to the Holy Spirit.’” Then he continued leading worship. Immediately, the respondent said to herself, “That’s me! He’s talking about me.” However, she did not immediately tell anyone else because she wanted to process what had happened.

Later that night, she privately “prayed the prayer of salvation” that she had heard mentioned many times in her home, and that her brother, Respondent Nineteen, had reported praying. When asked to explain what she meant by “prayer of salvation,” she said that it was a spontaneous prayer in which she admitted to God that she “was a sinner and accepted the blood of Jesus as payment for [her] sins.”

Themes that emerged in this interview: Q and A, prayer, dreams, crisis, retreats/conferences/special events, the Jesus Film, meeting Christians/MBBs, an open witness, and fear or shame as a barrier to the gospel.

Respondent Twenty-Two – Heb-02/F1

Respondent Twenty-Two grew up in a non-observant Muslim home. Her knowledge of Islam did not come from the home or the mosque, rather it came from school, “where everybody learned about Islam.” Her interests, though, were much more focused on politics, not religion.

At the age of sixteen she was very involved in the political process, supporting the PLO and publicly identifying herself as a Marxist. Though she was not certain of the existence of God, neither could she deny God’s existence. So, through her teen years she fasted and prayed during Ramadan “just in case.” However, politics was the main focus of her life, and continued to be throughout the remainder of her teen and early college years.

In her work with the PLO, she had her first personal encounter with a Christian: she met a Christian girl from Nazareth whom she liked, and even spent the night in the girl’s home. However, distance and other issues prevented them from becoming close friends.

By her early-to-mid twenties, the respondent was married and the draw of political issues began to fade in favor of the pressing necessities of being a mother. In an effort to help support her children she took on a professional career. Eventually, her husband abandoned the family and she was left with the responsibility of raising her children alone.

Because she had no religious interests, she provided no religious training for her children, though they, like she had been, were taught about Islam in school. By the time her children were in school, she no longer fasted or prayed during Ramadan. Though she was still agnostic in her belief about God, she no longer felt the need to do religious things “just in case.” Raising her kids had become the main focus of her life.

In the midst of her daily struggle to raise her children, two particular things caused her thoughts about religion, especially Islam, to start changing: The first

was the growing presence and influence of Hamas in her neighborhood. She noticed that her neighborhood was growing increasingly more religious, or as she put it, “more restrictive.” More women were “covering up,” and the parade of men going to pray at the mosque was growing larger and larger.

Observant women began to visit her home in an Islamic version of door-to-door evangelism, encouraging her to become religious and dress the part. These visits grew more frequent and intense as she refused their efforts to persuade her to their point of view.

In concert with the regular visits from the women, the respondent could hear the sermons being broadcast by loudspeaker from the nearby mosque. She said she began having emotional problems because of the harsh messages coming from the mosque coupled with “the pressure from the women to conform to an Islamic lifestyle.”

The second influence on her thoughts about religion was what she observed at her place of employment. Both Christians and Muslims worked in her office, and as much a reaction to the increasing Islamization of her neighborhood as an interest in religion, she began to actively evaluate their lives. She never told them; she simply listened to the things they said and watched the things they did.

Her observation was that the Christians with whom she worked “were much more calm and peaceful” than their Muslim counterparts. Additionally, from observing and interacting with her Muslim co-workers, she concluded “Muslims are angry and complicated.”

These observations coupled with the growing influence of Hamas in her neighborhood caused her to “consider looking at Christianity as a possible religious alternative.” Shortly thereafter, she met the headmaster of a Christian school in her region who, in turn, introduced her to a local pastor.

The respondent asked the pastor to introduce her to some believers with whom she could speak. As it turned out, he introduced her to the Christian girl (now woman) with whom she had spent the night in Nazareth almost fifteen

years prior. This woman now lived in the West Bank near the respondent. The respondent was excited to now be able to develop a relationship that she had longed for as a teenager. In hindsight, she said she came to realize that her desire to get to know that Christian girl back then was so that she could actually get to know Christ.

The pastor also gave the respondent a New Testament, which she read without any understanding in about a week. Over the next month she read the New Testament three more times, each time with improved understanding. The more she read, the more she wanted to read and the more questions she had. Her questions reflected her understanding of Islam and the social context that she knew. For example, she wanted to know if it was really possible for Muslims to become Christians. What would happen if they did? How could Jesus be God?

During the second month of reading the New Testament, the pastor invited her to church even though she was not yet a believer so that she could see the community. During the sermon, which was about faith and love and forgiveness, she “sensed a change in her heart toward the idea of religion,” and specifically toward Christianity. She reported actually feeling peace enter her heart, but she still did not understand enough.

On the way home from the church service, thinking she might actually be on the right path, she began to cry. By the time she arrived home, faith and love and forgiveness became clearer. She wanted them all, and clearly in her “heart and head believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of [her] sins.” She clarified: “I didn’t pray the *sinner’s prayer* or talk with anyone at the moment, I just believed in my heart that Jesus died for my sins.”

The implications were many. She lived near a mosque in a neighborhood that was increasingly displaying the influence of Hamas. What if they found out? What about the kids? What about not being a Muslim? Even though she had never really practiced Islam, there was still an internal tension about leaving it. As each of these issues were raised in her mind, she reminded herself of what she

had come to believe: “Jesus died for me and my sins had been forgiven.” She said that she never had anything like that in Islam, “so why worry about Islam?” Continued reading of the New Testament settled those kinds of issues as they occasionally popped up. In addition to the tensions related to leaving Islam being settled, she realized that her pre-conversion emotional problems were no longer an issue either.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, Q and A, crisis, meeting Christians/MBBs, the “sinner’s prayer,” common objections to the gospel, and lack of interest in religion.

Respondent Twenty-Three – EJer-05/M2

Respondent Twenty-Three was raised in a secular Muslim home in East Jerusalem. Religion never was very important to him. In fact, he said that he had different ideas (apparently unflattering, though he would not say what they were) about Islam. While he personally identified himself as a Muslim and continues to be registered with the Palestinian Authority as such, he said that Islam never had any active meaning in his life.

At the time of his interview, he had adult children and had been widowed for some years. Together, he and his wife had maintained a secular Muslim home.

The respondent said that he was surprised that one day he “suddenly felt drawn” to read the New Testament that had been on his bookshelf for many years. He was not sure how long it had been on the shelf because he could not remember how he got it, but was certain that it had been many years. At the time he felt drawn to read the New Testament, he had a casual relationship with a bi-vocational Arab pastor. Over the years the pastor had been kind to him and occasionally suggested the respondent should read the New Testament. However, the respondent said that he did not believe any of the pastor’s suggestions were involved in this sudden prompting to read the New Testament. In fact, he could not identify anything external that had prompted him to want to read the New Testament.

The respondent reported being “pulled by something” to read the New Testament a couple times over the course of two months. “Each day,” he explained, “I felt something, someone pulling me toward the New Testament.” This particularly surprised him since he had never been interested in religious issues of any kind; if anything, religion was a turn off for him.

Each day, he read more and began to see logic in the New Testament that made it “a different world” from the Qur’an and Islam. He said he saw “love and forgiveness in the New Testament and in Jesus.” The more he read about Jesus, the more he felt drawn by Jesus himself. “Jesus’ teachings were so different and

logical” he said, “I didn’t feel I was being drawn spiritually; it was so logical, I had to move toward it.” He certainly never expected to be interested in the New Testament, but he could not stop reading it.

Because he was so surprised by his new interest in the Bible, he began to ask the pastor for some guidance in this new pursuit. The pastor suggested that the Holy Spirit might be drawing the respondent to believe in Jesus, which surprised him because he had never given any thought to believing in Jesus or being religious.

Over the course of about three weeks, the respondent and pastor spoke several times about what the respondent was reading in the New Testament. These were not particularly evangelistic conversations; mainly they were comprised of the respondent reporting to the pastor the surprising things he had discovered in the New Testament like how “logical it was, and how everything fit together so well.” The respondent explained, “each conversation led the pastor to believe that I was a step closer to believing in Jesus, and the best part is that I was discovering this by reading the New Testament on my own, and not by him trying to persuade me.” When asked if the pastor never said anything but only listened, the respondent said, “I’m sure he said something, but I don’t remember anything specific. We had normal conversations; I told him about the things I was seeing, and he encouraged me to keep reading. Now that I look back at it, I think he was letting the New Testament evangelize me because he saw that it was already doing that when we first spoke. I didn’t have any real issues about leaving Islam like some do because I never was really in Islam, so he didn’t really need to answer a lot of questions.”

According to the respondent, the pastor was very patient, allowing things to develop according to the speed God was bringing the respondent along through his reading the New Testament. Eventually, the pastor sensed the respondent was ready and asked if he wanted to pray the “sinner’s prayer,” but he had no idea what that meant. The pastor explained that it was “a prayer in which the person admits they are a sinner and need forgiveness, and that they believe

Jesus died for their sins so they can be forgiven.” The respondent said that seemed a little odd at the time, but it did express what he believed, so he prayed with the pastor. It was short, “I just told the Lord that I was a sinner and believed that Jesus died on the cross for my sin.” After praying, the respondent said he “never felt better” in his life.

Themes that emerged in this interview: Personal Bible reading, “drawn/compelled,” the kindness of Christians, the “sinner’s prayer,” and lack of interest in religion.

Respondent Twenty-Four – Heb-03/F2

Respondent Twenty-Four began studying Islamics in school at the age of ten. Her teacher was very firm and somewhat persuasive as she explained all the “bad things about Christianity.” Each day the respondent would return home and tell her mother, who was a MBB (See Respondent Twenty-Two), the bad things she learned about Christianity that day. Her mother tried to counter the charges from the New Testament, but never pushed Christianity on the respondent. She said her mother’s approach was more of “allowing everyone to decide for themselves without pressure.”

Some of the things the respondent learned in school were that “Hell is mostly full of women,” and that “in Hell, Allah will hang women by their hair or eyebrows, especially those who were not interested in being good Muslims.”

For many years the respondent lived next door to a mosque, and countless times heard these and similar things being broadcast from the mosque during the weekly Friday sermon. Eventually, during her mid-teen years, the respondent lost interest and grew very passive about religion, though her mother continued to occasionally share thoughts from the New Testament. This was her mother’s way of keeping the door open, and it was the only opposition she ever heard to what she was told in Islamics class at school and what she heard broadcast from the mosque next door.

In her late teen years, the respondent grew weary of the constant denigration of women that was generally present in her surroundings, but particularly offensive, she said, was the repeated message of “hate toward women” that she could not avoid hearing through the broadcasts from the mosque. The continual bombardment of hate caused the respondent to grow more and more concerned for her personal safety, eventually resulting in emotional problems and panic attacks.

The feelings that were being generated inside her brought her from a passive position about Islam to a very negative opinion. She definitively transitioned from

“Islam is not for me,” to “Islam is wrong.” Even though the process was slow, due to the pervasive and negative presence of Islam in her surroundings, it was ultimately unavoidable.

At the same time her feelings about Islam were changing, Her mother tried to calm and comfort her by sharing things from the New Testament with her, especially the love of Jesus. Her mother focused on how much Jesus loved the respondent, so much that he died for her sins. In contrast to what she deemed “hate flowing from the mosque next door,” the respondent started to appreciate the love her mother shared from the New Testament. “In Islam, they want you to die for Islam. In Christianity, Jesus loved us and died for us” she added.

In addition to the love her mother was regularly sharing with her from the New Testament, local believers demonstrated much love toward her brother (See Respondent Twenty) by coming to their home to pray for him when he was sick. This kind of love affected her strongly: “When I saw this, something went out of me and joy came in. Real joy.”

Eventually, as an unbeliever, she attended a MBB family conference with her mother. At that conference, she saw MBBs as a community for the first time. She watched the people sing and pray together. The way they loved each other was impressive and instrumental in her consideration of the gospel. She had never seen anything like that before and was drawn toward them. She was impressed that “this was the real thing.” And that point became more clear when the worship leader stopped in the middle of a song to pray for “someone who is here today questioning whether they should believe in Jesus.” Though he did not call her by name, she said “I knew he was praying for me.”

At that moment, she trusted Jesus and realized that she was no longer a Muslim. She immediately told her mother that she “believed in Jesus as Lord.” Of course her mother was ecstatic, but was also concerned that her own witness to the respondent was not sufficiently clear. So, she asked the respondent to speak with a pastor to make sure she “understood everything.” The respondent was

already convinced that Jesus had died for her sins and that she believed in Jesus, but she accepted her mother's request to "make sure."

When asked to fill in the blank: If it were not for _____ I do not think I would be a believer," she answered thoughtfully and deliberately, "Love. My mother. Prayer."

Since she had only mentioned prayer in relation to her brother's illness, she was asked for more clarification: "What do you mean by prayer?" She said that she knew her mother had been praying for God to open her eyes for many years. The respondent was asked for further clarification, "How do you know that she had been praying for you?" "She told me and she prayed for me while I was sitting in the room," she answered with a frustrated tone that suggested the question was unnecessary because the answer was self-evident. Apparently, in an effort to tie all her answers together, she voluntarily explained, "If my mother had not been praying for me, and she had not kept telling me how much Jesus loves us, and I didn't see the Christians loving each other and me, and I didn't go to the conference to see all of this come together at the same time - love and my mother and praying - I don't think I would be a believer today. Maybe God would have shown me some other way, but that is how it happened for me."

Themes that emerged in this interview: "Drawn/compelled," doubts about Islam/Qur'an, the kindness of Christians, prayer, retreats/conferences/special events, crisis, meeting Christians/MBBs, and an open witness.

Appendix 5: Crises Experienced by the Respondents

1. None indicated, advocate created religious crisis
2. Death of a child and dreams
3. None indicated, advocate created religious crisis
4. Medical need, dreams, advocate created religious crisis
5. Medical need (daughter and own), advocate created religious crisis
6. Medical need, advocate created religious crisis
7. Religious crisis – an element of Islam seemed unfair
8. Bankruptcy
9. Spousal abuse
10. Dreams created religious crisis
11. Philosophical/ethical crisis
12. Religious crisis – problems with Islam
13. Religious crisis – conversion of parents created fear of Allah
14. Existential crisis – Christian youth had something inside he did not have.
15. Hurt by father, lonely
16. Religious crisis – Where is Allah?
17. Emotional crisis – dreams/ambitions crushed
18. None mentioned initially, advocate created religious crisis
19. Medical need
20. None mentioned initially, advocate created religious crisis
21. Medical need, but advocate created religious crisis

- 22. Religious crisis created by growth of Hamas
- 23. None indicated
- 24. Religious crisis created by growth of Hamas

Appendix 6: Reading the Bible in “Bulk” Illustrated

Many respondents emphasized personal Bible reading as a major influence, if not the primary influence, on their decision to place their faith in Jesus Christ. I have described this major or primary influence as “bulk” Bible-reading when the respondent mentioned an amount of Bible reading that seemed large and/or intense compared to my personal experience as a pastor and Bible teacher. I include the list below to help illustrate my use of that term. This is how the respondents described their Bible reading:

2. Over the course of about twelve months, she “read the New Testament five or six times and the Old Testament three or four times.”

After the initial year of reading, for another six months, she read the New Testament in large quantities.

3. For one year, she read the New Testament diligently, seeking to hear God speak to her.
4. After more than one year of reading the New Testament, the respondent began to read the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, in increasing amounts, “almost non-stop, day and night” for another eight months.
8. On five or six occasions, he read straight through the Gospels in a period of two days.
10. He read the complete New Testament five times in three months.
11. Read the complete gospel of Matthew every day for six months.
12. She Qur’an Qur’an d the Qur’an and New Testament for up to two hours daily for about eighteen months.
13. In an effort to test the New Testament she read it several times.
14. He was “absorbed in the Bible.”
15. While he did not *read* the Bible, he said that over nine months he “heard a lot of stories and teaching about Jesus.”
16. After she believed, she spent “long nights reading through the New Testament,” to confirm her decision to believe, which was initially made the first time she heard the gospel.
22. She initially read the New Testament in one week, then three times over the next month.

23. She read the New Testament “a couple times over two months.”

Appendix 7: Approximate Length of Conversion Process

1. Three years
2. One year, though had dreams as much as five years prior
3. One year
4. Twenty months
5. Twenty months
6. Nineteen months
7. Four years
8. Two years
9. One year
10. Two and one-half years
11. Six months
12. Two years
13. Nine years, but intensely for about four months
14. One year
15. Nine months
16. Fifteen minutes
17. Two weeks
18. Twelve years
19. Six years
20. One year
21. Three and one-half years

- 22. Two months
- 23. Three months
- 24. Five years

Appendix 8: Specific Theological Details Mentioned

1. “. . . believed that Jesus is God who died for my sins.”
2. “I believe Jesus is God!”
3. “Jesus is God,’ which is very close to “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3).
4. “. . . understood in my heart who God is and believed in Him.”
6. “a believer in Jesus”
7. “. . . decided to believe in Jesus.”
8. “. . . believing that Jesus died for his sins, and that forgiveness was the way that Jesus was offering him rest.”
9. “. . . accepting and trusting the Lord was too simple.” Jesus’ death on the cross was able to give her a way finally to have peace and a relationship with God.
10. “I believe now. Jesus is Lord.”
11. “believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.”
12. “Jesus is the truth” and “died for my sins.”
13. “Jesus died for my sins.”
14. “To believe that Jesus came to save me from sin.”
16. “I believe that he [Jesus] died for my sins and that he is God.”
17. “believe in Jesus as Lord.”
19. “going from darkness to light”
21. “I was a sinner and accepted the blood of Jesus as payment for my sins.”
22. “believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins” and believed in her heart that Jesus died for her sins.
23. “I just told the Lord that I was a sinner and believed that Jesus died on the cross for my sin.”

Appendix 9: The Use of Prayer in Advocacy

Prayer was mentioned by several of the respondents as an important part of the process of their conversion. Below is a list of the ways that prayer was mentioned.

3. The pastor prayed for God to speak to the respondent.

The respondent prayed for God to fill her with the Holy Spirit.

4. The Christian men prayed for the family in the presence of the family.
5. The Christian men prayed for the family in the presence of the family.
6. The Christian men prayed for the family in the presence of the family.
10. The advocate told the respondent, "You need to pray and ask God to show you."
12. The advocate told the respondent to, "Ask God to show you."
13. The advocate suggested the respondent pray, "God of this earth, show me who you are."

The respondent prayed, "God of this earth, show me who you are. If Muhammad is the way, I'll work harder to be a better Muslim; if Jesus is the way, I'll follow Him."

14. The respondent asked God to "help me to know when to believe, and if this is the correct way, help me progress without fear."
19. Prayed for specific things, which were apparently granted by God.

The Christian men prayed for the family in the presence of the family.

21. The Christian men prayed for the family in the presence of the family.

After their conversions, the family members prayed openly and for the respondent in her presence.

At a family conference, the respondent prayed to God, "If this is the way, please convince me."

Appendix 10: Prayer of Salvation or Sinner's Prayer

The “prayer of salvation” or the “sinner’s prayer” was specifically mentioned by the respondents in the following ways:

Prayer of Salvation

Respondents Fourteen, Sixteen, Seventeen, Nineteen, and Twenty-One said that they “*said* the prayer of salvation.”

Respondents Ten and Eleven said they “*did not* say the prayer of salvation.”

Sinner's Prayer

Respondent Twenty-Three “*said* the sinner’s prayer.”

Respondents Six, Seven, Eight, and Twenty-Two said they “*did not* say the sinner’s prayer.”

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