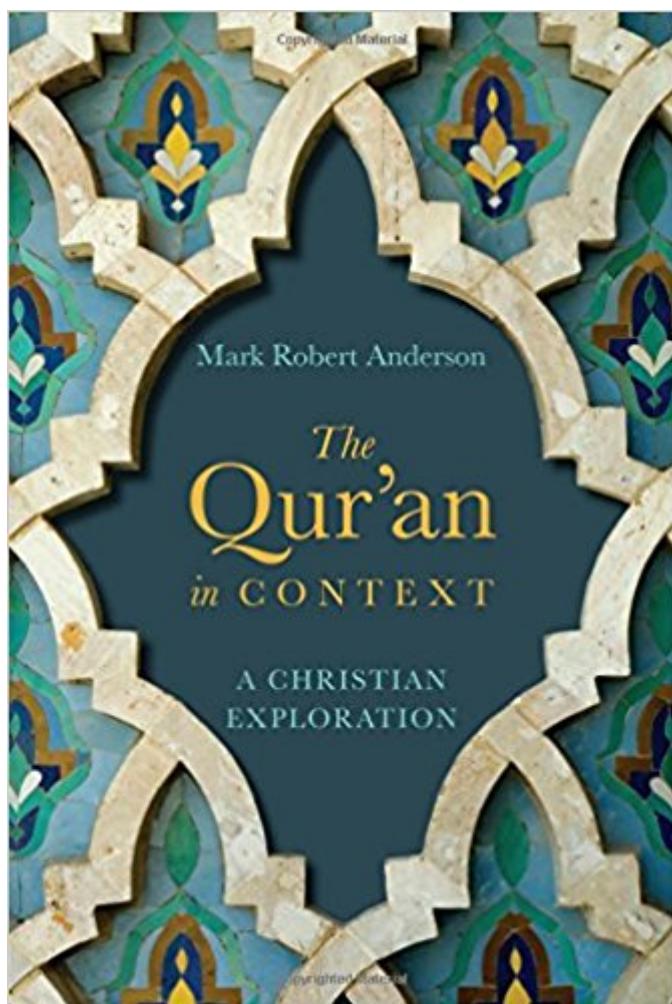


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# The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration



## **Synopsis**

For most Westerners, the Qur'an is a deeply foreign book. Christians who venture within this sacred scripture of Islam encounter a world where echoes of biblical figures and themes resound. But the Qur'an speaks in accents and forms that defy our expectations. For it captures an oral recitation of an open-ended drama, one rooted in seventh-century Arabia. Its context of people, events and ideas strikes us not only as poetically allusive but as enigmatic. And yet the Qur'an and its contested interpretations scroll in shadowed text between the headlines of our daily news. In *The Qur'an in Context* Mark Anderson offers a gateway into the original world and worldview of the Qur'an. With keen attention to the Qur'an's character, reception and theology, he opens up a hermeneutical space for Christians and others to engage its fabric of religious claims. The Qur'an's theology, anthropology, soteriology, spirituality as well as its portrayal of Jesus are all carefully examined. Finally, the Qur'an's claim to be the Bible's sequel is probed and evaluated. Forthright in Christian conviction and yet sympathetically open to dialogue, *The Qur'an in Context* is a reliable guide for those who want to explore the holy book of Islam in its varied facets.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Mark Anderson has produced an excellent, incisive, well-researched book highlighting similarities and distinctives between the Qur'an and the Bible. His research is impeccable and his conclusions will stand the test of scholarly investigation. Anderson avoids the pitfalls of inflammatory us-them polemics. He enters into the realities of the Muslim worldview by exploring the seventh-century context of the Qur'an, on which Muslim belief and behavior is built. Without reservation, I commend

Anderson's work to all who desire to move beyond 'breaking news' and sensationalism and come to grips with the inside story of who Muslims really are." (Phil Parshall, SIM USA)"Demonstrating a familiarity with contemporary scholarship and respect for Muslim sensitivities, Mark Anderson describes the context in which the Qur'an arose and how it both reflected and challenged that world. While comparing and contrasting Qur'anic and biblical theology and the character of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible, he shows how close and how far apart they are. This study provides an excellent foundation for an informed and sensitive discussion with Muslims." (J. Dudley Woodberry, dean emeritus and senior professor of Islamic studies, Fuller Theological Seminary)"As well as providing a well-informed and nuanced introduction to the current scholarly debate over Islamic origins, The Qur'an in Context offers a substantial, theologically serious and at points provocative discussion on the Qur'an in its interface with the Bible and the core themes of the Christian faith. This lucid and thought-provoking study makes a significant contribution from an Evangelical and Reformed perspective to the wider field of Christian engagement with the scripture at the heart of Islam." (David Marshall, Duke Divinity School)"This is a theological and academic evaluation of the Qur'an and its teachings. It's a scholarly but worthwhile read. Recommend to missionaries, evangelism and apologetics professors, and laypeople serving Muslim peoples." (David Mundt, Christian Market, December 2016)

Mark Robert Anderson is the author of *Faithsongs: Ancient Psalms for Today* and lives in Vancouver, Canada. For over ten years, he lived and worked in the Middle East, teaching in a university and seminary. Anderson has been a member of Jacob's Well, a faith-based organization seeking mutually transformative relationships with marginalized residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and for two years he was part of a team helping homeless people find sustainable housing and employment. He has an MA in Islamic studies from McGill University and an MA in Christian religion from Westminster Theological Seminary.

The Qur'an for many Christians is a very foreign book. Some people have tried to read it and yet have not made it past the second sura. The style of writing is different to most Christians and does not seem like an engaging work, but the reality is that Christians need to understand this work. Whatever you think of Islam, the Qur'an is the holy book of this faith and it has shaped the world greatly. Anderson has written a book to help us in its text. Anderson urges us rightly to try to drop our preconceptions and approach the book seriously and seek to understand the way it was written, the why, and the historical context. Even if you don't think it's holy Scripture, the Qur'an still should be

understood on its own terms. That requires work, just like understanding the Bible does. I have been a long opposition to people not bothering to study the historical context of the Bible and yet speaking on it. I say the same for the Qur'an. Anderson goes through piece by piece and then compares what he finds to the Bible. There is no doubt on my part he wants to be as fair as he can to the Qur'an. He also addresses the question of if we worship the same God or not. I think we could say that we have that as our intention and I think that Anderson does argue that, but there can be no doubt the descriptions of Allah and YHWH are vastly different. Anderson also wants us to study the world of 7th century Arabia. What was going on? What were Christians and Jews and pagans all saying? How did Muhammad approach this world? Next comes a long look at the worldview of the Qur'an. What does it say about evil? What does it say about Adam? What must one do to be saved? All of these have marked differences and Anderson has many questions about whether the system in the Qur'an is really coherent or not. Jesus is a big topic. The problem for the view of Jesus in the Qur'an is that it's really downplaying. Very little is said about the ministry and teaching of Jesus. Much comes from non-canonical sources and its depiction of the Trinity is highly lacking. The Qur'an says Jesus is the Messiah, but divests this of any real meaning at all. Amazingly, you can have many in-depth looks at the lives of other people in the Bible, but with Jesus, you get nothing like that. You don't understand what His ministry was and why He came. It simply looks like Jesus is only there to point to Muhammad. Ah yes, but what about the crucifixion? The Qur'an is clear on that and that's that Jesus did not die on the cross. Anderson disputes that and I have to say he makes a highly compelling case. I have long thought that Islam denies that Jesus was crucified, and many Muslims do, but Anderson made a case that made me rethink if that's what the original Qur'anic author intended and I dare say I will not be as strident until I find a better response to that claim. Anderson bases his claim on what he considers a better reading of that text in light of other texts he thinks are clearer. He contends that others are reading the clear texts in light of this one and changing those in ways that don't fit. Finally, he wraps things up by asking if we could say the Qur'an is the sequel to the Bible. The answer is decidedly, no. There are too many differences across the board. Still, we should strive to understand the Qur'an in its historical context to have better discussions with the Muslims we encounter. Anderson's book gives a lot of food for thought. He is kind and fair in his treatment and there is nothing here I can think of that would be seen as "Anti-Muslim" or dare I say it, Islamophobic. I look forward to even seeing what some Muslims think about the material in here.

In Christ,  
Nick Peters  
Deeper Waters  
Apologetics

The bio of Mark Robert Anderson on states: "Mark Robert Anderson has completed graduate degrees in Islamic Studies at McGill University and Christian religion at Westminster Theological Seminary. For nearly a decade, he lived, studied and taught in Egypt and Jordan. Mark lectures and writes on Islam, the Quran and spirituality." The Quran in Context provides background information on the Quran and compares the Quran with Anderson's Christian interpretation of the Bible. Anderson weighs in on scholarly debates and issues. He offers a historical defense of the traditional narrative of the Quran's origins against scholarly ideas to the contrary. As a Christian, Anderson probably does not believe that Muhammad received the Quran from God, but he agrees with the traditional narrative in that he holds that the Quran was the product of a historical Muhammad and addressed issues in the Arab world of Muhammad's day; not every scholar believes in a historical Muhammad. Occasionally in the book, Anderson argues against scholarly ideas that Muhammad was challenging specific Christian sects: in many cases, according to Anderson, Muhammad was lampooning Christianity rather than discussing an obscure sect that actually held the position Muhammad was attacking. Anderson also discusses current debates on Islam. For example, Anderson acknowledges that there are peaceful sects of Islam, but he does not agree with apologists who claim that Muhammad's wars were purely defensive on his part. For Anderson, Muhammad initially sought peace with Jews, Christians, and pagan Meccans but became more belligerent and militaristic over time, as Muhammad sought to spread the religious-political regime of Islam. Anderson takes care to distinguish the Quran from subsequent hadith and Islamic interpretations. What you think you know about Islam is not necessarily what the Quran teaches. According to Anderson, the Quran does not argue that the Bible is corrupted, Muhammad in the Quran is not believed to do miracles, the Quran does not hold that Jesus escaped death at his crucifixion, and Jesus does not have the eschatological significance in the Quran that later Islam ascribes to him. (As Anderson says, the Quran calls Jesus the Messiah, but it does not describe what that means.) And, yes, Anderson offers his interpretation of passages that have been interpreted to suggest these things. The book also explains how the Quran reflects cultural ideas and concepts within the Arab culture of the time. No, Anderson does not say that Allah was originally a pagan moon-god, but he does contend that Muhammad's conception of Allah's transcendence reflects Arabic pagan ideas about their gods. Anderson also draws contrasts, as when he compares Muhammad's prophetic experience with the prophetic experiences of pagan Arabs at the time. In comparing the Quran with his understanding of what the Bible teaches, Anderson's version of Christianity

comes out looking better. The God of the Quran is distant, is a judge, and accepts people only if they repent, although Anderson acknowledges that the Quran often calls Allah merciful and compassionate. The God of Christianity, by contrast, is loving towards all and desires a relationship with God’s creation. Christianity believes that the Fall corrupted humanity such that it needed a Savior to be forgiven and spiritually transformed. The Quran, according to Anderson, is not as dramatic about the Fall, and it holds that humans can save themselves by repenting. Anderson does acknowledge nuances, though, which was why his introduction at the beginning of each chapter was helpful: it provided a summary that served as a sort of roadmap for the discussion that would occur in that chapter. In addition, while one might think that Anderson’s idea that God wants to be our friend is a modern evangelical concept, Anderson takes great pains to demonstrate that it comes from the biblical narrative itself. In terms of critiques, Anderson does seem to proof-text, and I am saying

“seem” because readers could come back and say that he does not, and offer reasons that he does not. In terms of the Bible, Anderson prooftexts, or, at least, he employs a synchronic approach that does not fully appreciate the diversity of the Bible or tie its writings to their historical contexts. One can get the impression that he does the same thing with the Quran: he pulls out passages throughout the Quran and claims that they teach a specific doctrine about God (or salvation, or anthropology, or politics, etc.). This criticism would not be entirely fair, for Anderson does root the Quran in its historical context and discuss changes in ideology that occur within the Quran, which occurred as the historical context changed. Perhaps Anderson should have made more of a conscious effort to tie each chapter in the Quran with the historical context.

Moreover, Anderson should have been more vivid about Muhammad’s motivations: what exactly Muhammad was protesting, and why. In some places, Anderson was rather elliptical. For instance, he was trying to explain how Christianity balances and preserves both God’s transcendence and God’s immanence, while claiming that the Quran sacrifices immanence in favor of transcendence. I am still unclear about how Christianity preserves both simultaneously, in Anderson’s view. Anderson also could have been clearer in explaining the passage of the Quran that many Muslims interpret as saying that Jesus escaped death at the crucifixion. Anderson makes a convincing case that Jesus dies in the Quran, but the road leading up to his conclusion about that particular passage was bumpy and technical. There is nothing wrong with technicality, but interspersing the discussion with lucid summaries would have been helpful. The book was more conservative than I expected, in the sense that Anderson essentially argues that moderate Islam does not coincide with what the Quran

actually teaches, particularly on jihad. I call this "conservative" because it coincides with what right-wing Americans say about the Quran. At the same time, Anderson encourages understanding on the part of Christians, and his discussion on whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God was thoughtful. He did not exactly say "no," and he acknowledged the difficulty of this question, in light of the subjectivity that accompanies attempts to understand God. I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher. My review is honest!

I found Part III on Quranic Jesus is most valuable and enjoyed the comparison between Islam point of view and Christianity on who is Jesus. I noticed your kindness and soft approach when questioning Islamic teachings in contrast to Christian fundamental doctrine. Your book will be a valuable source for future research on the subject.

A timely, scholarly, and very important book, especially in our time of increasing anti-Muslim sentiment. Anderson says "...we must read it [the Qur'an] in a manner that is faithful to its historical context..." while keeping in mind how meaningful and central it is to Muslims everywhere, including those we work with and walk alongside almost daily. In a time of so much anti-Muslim rhetoric, this book is a "must read" for any person serious about their Christian faith. The author shows great respect for the scripture of a people that he clearly cares about. He makes no call to evangelize Muslims while noting that "a fervent desire to see Muslims evangelized can skew a Christian's reading of the Qur'an."

Mark Anderson has a long history of interacting with Islam. I remember attending a university debate in Ontario Canada that he had with a Muslim cleric almost 30 years ago! His scholarly research and approach has matured and deepened since then, making this book an excellent read.

I've only read a few chapters so the book is not very engaging. I may not finish it. For that reason I have to give it 2 stars. this review is 2-3 months after I bought it.

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