

Resources for Christians Wishing to Understand the Qur'an

Just as reading the Bible straight through (from Genesis 1:1 to the last verse of Revelation) is not the most fruitful approach for a newcomer to Christian scriptures, so it is with the Qur'an—Islam's holy book. Although the Qur'an is much shorter than the Bible (it's' about the same length as the New Testament), it is not a "quick read". The newcomer to it may be bewildered by its structure, which is quite different from that of the Bible. It helps to know that the Qur'an first appears in human history in a time and place very different from twenty-first century America, in a language very different from English—and that it is read by Muslims within the framework of diverse, complex traditions of interpretation.

So, where to begin? Here are some recommendations to Christians and other non-Muslims who wish to better understand the Qur'an and how Muslims read it.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, et al., editors, *The Study Qur'an* (HarperOne, 2015). The best one-volume Qur'an translation-commentary available in English, created by a team of diverse scholars (both Sunni and Shi'a), with several helpful essays providing background and context. If you'll have only one Qur'an translation in your library, start with this one. However, as is true also for Bible study, it is best to consult multiple translations. So, also highly recommended: M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, translator, *The Qur'an: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

Carl Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011)

A distinguished professor of Islamic studies summarizes the latest research into the historical and literary dimensions of the Qur'an from a Western academic standpoint.

Mustansir Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture* (Routledge, 2007)

Mir, a Pakistani–American Islamic scholar, gives in–depth exegesis of Qur’anic passages central to Islamic theology, ethics, and spirituality, rooted in traditional Islamic commentary.

Michael Birkel, *Qur’an in Conversation* (Baylor University Press, 2014)

Quaker scholar Birkel interviews various Islamic imams and scholars in the West, asking each to explain what one of their favorite Qur’anic passages means to them.

Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations*, second edition (White Cloud Press, 2007)

A scholar of Arabic and Islamic literature, Sells translates the shortest and, by Islamic tradition, earliest surahs of the Qur’an, bringing a keen poet’s sensibility to his rendition and commentary on each of these surahs. Accompanying the book is an audio CD of Qur’an recitation.

Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur’an Side by Side* (Brazos Press, 2010)

Nazarene theologian Michael Lodahl reads Biblical and Qur’anic narratives side–by–side, elucidating theological nuances from the differences between stories of shared prophets such as Mary, Jesus, Noah, and Abraham.

Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur’an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*, Second edition (Wiley–Blackwell, 2013)

Mattson, a Canadian–born convert to and scholar of Islam, narrates the story of the Qur’an both in the life of Islam and the lives of individual Muslims.

Walter H. Wagner, *Opening the Qur’an: Introducing Islam’s Holy Book* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2008)

A beautifully–written (albeit lengthy), step–by–step guidebook by a Moravian scholar, aimed at the serious Christian reader seeking in–depth understanding of the Qur’an’s context and contents in a comparative mode.

Michael Ipgrave, ed., *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims studying the Bible and the Qur'an together*. Church House, 2004.

This short book both reports on the Building Bridges Seminar held in Qatar in 2003 and serves as a handbook for Christians and Muslims wishing to engage in dialogical scripture–study.

Koran by Heart (HBO documentary, 2013),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptHdmw57rzM>

This documentary follows three children in an international Qur'an memorization and recitation competition, along the way providing an insight into the deep piety and complicated technique of Qur'an recitation.