

Extras. Additional items from the Tunisia/Istanbul trip of late May and most of June 2023

Our trip was organized by Pinnacle Teaching, the same (under a different name) that sent me to teach English in China for seven consecutive Summers. The several teams met at a coastal hotel west of Istanbul, Turkey, for briefing and team-building activities prior to being deployed to Kurdistan, Iraq, and Tunisia, all Muslim areas.



Our training room



Starting a team sand sculpture on beach



Praying over team prayer requests

Most of the teams were made of college students and recent graduates, with a leader already experienced in the destination country. Our team of five were more mature adults, destined to coach the English of Ph.D. science candidates at the university in Monastir, Tunisia, North Africa.

During 27 June we went into Istanbul and visited the Blue Mosque and the adjacent converted Byzantine Hagai Sophia. The latter had long lines waiting to get in, so I did not try and did not photograph its interior.



Prayer for each team being sent



Blue Mosque exterior



Blue Mosque courtyard



Hagai Sophia, former cathedral



Blue Mosque interior



Blue Mosque decorations



At the left is a Yellow-legged Gull at Hagai Sophia. At the right is an obelisk near the Blue Mosque.





While wandering around the area of the more famous buildings some of us noticed this Catholic church. Inside a Mass was being done, and the singing was beautiful. It was a nice location for relaxation.

Three teams flew westward to Tunis and I took photos of things on the ground along the route, 28 June.

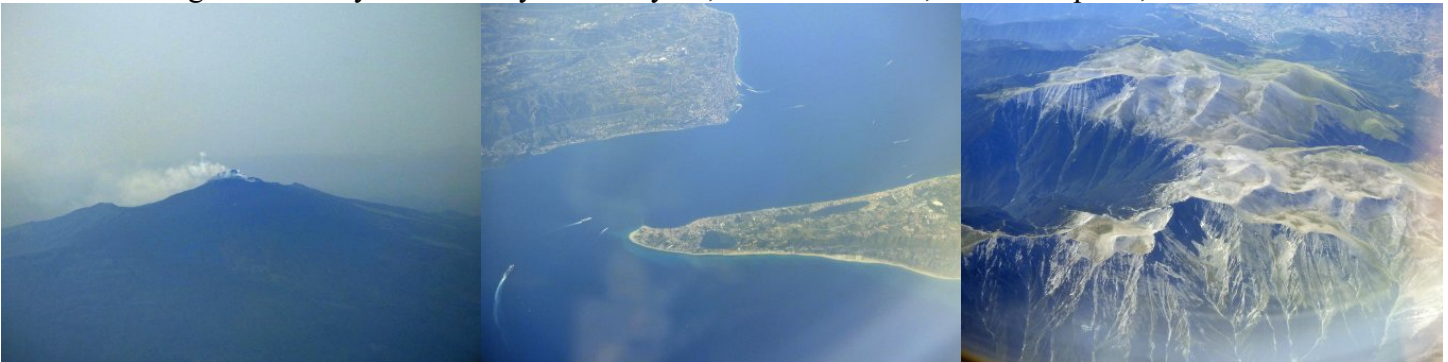


The gray area right of center is Thessalonika, visited by Paul in Acts 17, to which 2 letters were written that are now in the Bible.

This is the island of Stromboli, Italy. The white plume is the eruption of volcanic ash.

The right side is the location of ruins of Carthage, described in a separate report. To the left is Tunis, the capital of Tunisia.

The reverse flight on 22 July was initially over hazy air, but Mount Etna, also in eruption, rose above it.



A plume of white volcanic ash blows from the summit of Mount Etna.

This is the narrow Strait of Messina between Sicily and the rest of Italy.

Mount Olympus still had a snow cover near the end of July.

Being in Muslim territories for a month gave cause for historical reflection. I have also been retaking the important 12-week course “Encountering the World of Islam” (EWI, <https://www.encounteringislam.org/>). I first took the course in Winter 2007 shortly after it was created as an important supplement to the Perspectives course (<https://perspectives.org/>). The EWI course was designed in and is based in Littleton, Colorado.

The contents of the Bible were finalized at a Council of Carthage in 397 AD. The Apostle’s Creed was written before about 250 AD. The Nicene Creed was written in 381 AD. The Athanasian Creed was written during the 400s AD. Though Arabia had short trade routes to the eastern Mediterranean region, none of these documents that define the Christian faith were translated into Arabic until centuries after Mohammad started the Islam religion in 622 AD. That is a great failure of the Church.

Arabian religious traditions were transmitted orally until 657 AD when the Quran was finalized and all other variations of it were burned. During oral transmission teachings can have distortions and be incomplete. In the

centuries before Mohammad the teachings of the heresies and cults infiltrated Arabia. The Gnostics were famous for writing their own semi-fictional stories about Jesus centuries after his life. There were the Arians, Nestorians, Monophysites, Chalcedonians, and others. Even the Roman Church was excessively glorifying Mary. Mohammad was never exposed to the true Bible and Creeds. The Quran and teachings of Islam claim that the Bible was corrupted, though no proof is offered. The corruption is in the teachings of the heresies and cults, not the original Bible and Creeds. Mohammad rejected some distortions and accepted others as being true.

A thousand years ago the Vikings invaded much of western Europe. They had their Norse religion and destroyed Christian things. However, the people that they captured and brought to Scandinavia as slaves introduced the Vikings there to Christianity. Eventually the Vikings were no longer a threat and blended into European society, being nominally Christianized. But the Bible was only in Latin in that part of the world, not in the northern and western European languages. So the general population learned only small portions of the Bible.

The Crusades are now a major blemish in relations between Muslims and Christians. Though promoted by the Roman Church, the European participants were likely ignorant of most of the Scriptures because of the language barrier; most did not know Latin. So the descendants of the Viking warriors were doing the Crusades for political, not religious, purposes. In addition, they attacked Constantinople and its Byzantine Empire, though they were also of Christian heritage. That weakened the Byzantines so that the Muslim Ottoman Empire eventually occupied its territory. Jesus never taught that the faith should be spread by warfare.

In the early 1500s Martin Luther translated the Bible into German, and the printing press helped it to be produced in great quantities so the general public could read the Scriptures themselves. However, for the next two hundred years the German Lutherans did not send any missionaries to foreign lands. Finally, in connection with a 24/7 prayer meeting that lasted a hundred years the Moravians eagerly acted on the Biblical mandate.

Like the Christian scene with its many denominations, the Muslim world also has many divisions. We hear of the Sunni and Shia groups, sometimes of the Sufi. There are smaller variations. Even within the majority Sunni there are differences. Wahhabism, based in Saudi Arabia, seeks to purge Islam of its modern variations and restore it to seventh century purity. That branch generates much of the militancy and terrorism that is in today's news. Though translations are available, the Quran and Hadiths are kept in the Arabic language throughout the Muslim world. For people groups with different languages and cultures their formal prayers are in Arabic which they do not understand. Few people learn Arabic in order to read the Muslim scriptures. Women are very unlikely to be properly educated in the Muslim teachings. So they raise their children according to what has been passed down from their mothers and grandmothers. In most of the Muslim world the local version of Islam gets blended with the folk religions of the general population prior to conversion. So Islam is globally unified in the ability to recite the short Muslim creed (in Arabic) but is greatly diversified according to regional customs. As in the Christian scene, perhaps the great majority of Muslims are nominal, just going about their daily activities common to all people around the world. That seemed to be what I saw in Tunisia. Loudspeakers at the mosque announced the five prayer times daily, but no one visibly stopped their activities to pray. Perhaps I will be more observant if I return to Muslim territories in the future.

Dr. Ed Holroyd
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Laughing Dove at Blue Mosque



White Stork west of Istanbul