

Praying with opened Eyes for Muslims on Hajj

Young Muslim children passionately grow up hearing about the men and women who have gone on “Hajj” or “pilgrimage” to Mecca. Today on the web, young women are asking if the Hajj will cleanse them of sins, not only their small common sins, but also their big serious sins. These women want to be clean and they are told, “YES, the Hajj cleanses you from all sins.”

We are not condemning Muslims for going on the Hajj; we all desire to be clean of sin. We want to CALL on God to be merciful and intervene in their lives as only He can really do – just like Paul’s experience on the Damascus road.

What happens on the Hajj?

The Hajj, one of the five pillars of the Islamic religion, begins on the 8th day of the 12th month of Dhul Hijjah of the Islamic calendar. Because the calendar is based on the moon’s cycle, the Hajj begins nine days earlier each consecutive year. This year, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hajj will only be allowed for residents in Saudi Arabia. Muslims will flock to Mecca to perform the rituals and follow the steps of Muhammad, their prophet. Each day they will perform a different ritual:

- Day 1: The ritual of *IHRAM* (cleaning)
- Day 2: The ritual of *WUQOOF* (standing)
- Day 3: The ritual of **Stoning and Sacrificing**
- Day 4: The ritual of *Sa’y* (running between)

The following thoughts are designed to fuel Christ-centered prayers during this Hajj.

Hajj Day 1: Ihram

There are six different places to enter Mecca for Ihram (ritual cleansing), so it is at the *Miqat*, “a stated place,” where Muslims actually enter into the Hajj. After performing this ritual, the pilgrims will wear white cloths, wrapped around them, a sign showing that all pilgrims are equal in Islam, kings and servants are all dressed alike.

More crucial than wearing the white clothing, Ihram is the state of sacred purity the Muslim faithful must enter before conducting the Hajj. From the *Miqat* entry point, most pilgrims head to the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque. As they enter Mecca, they will shout the *Talbiyah*, a Muslim prayer. “*Here I am at your service O Lord, here I am. Here I am at your service and you have no partners. Yours alone is All Praise and All Bounty, and yours alone is the Sovereignty. You have no partners.*”

After the Kaaba visit, the pilgrims will walk to a tent city called Mina, continuing to quote the *Talbiyah* prayer. They must spend the night in prayer and meditation.

Key Scriptures

They will call on me, and I will answer them. I will say, you are my people and they will say, The Lord is our God. Zechariah 13:9b

Going before the Father

- *Purification rituals may cleanse the body, but they don’t cleanse the heart. Only Jesus can cleanse our hearts and we can only do that through repentance. **Pray** that the Holy Spirit would issue a call to genuine repentance that seeking hearts hear and respond to.*
- **Thank** Jesus that it is through His blood sins can be forgiven and **pray** that Muslims would understand that He is the only way to the Father. John 1:29, Hebrews 1:3, Acts 10:43
- **Ask** the Lord to bring to memory Scripture verses they may have heard over the TV or radio or internet about the white robes God provides for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 7:9). **Pray** they may understand and desire to be clothed with Christ’s righteousness.

Hajj Day 2: Wuqoof – Standing at Arafat

In the morning, after prayers, the pilgrims proceed to the Plain of Arafat where they perform the central ritual of the Hajj, the standing (*wuqoof*). In a shame and honor society (most Muslims come from this type of society), the seeking of the forgiveness of sins (shame) brings freedom. Abu Qataadah reported that Muhammed said, “fasting on the Day of Arafat expiates (atones for guilt) the sins of the preceding year and the coming year.”

The pilgrims face Mecca and pray from noon to sundown. These prayers are done in a prescribed way: *they should remember God, *ask for forgiveness and *pray other Islamic prayers. It is believed that Muhammad delivered his final sermon from a hill above this plain, called Mount Arafat, during his last pilgrimage. Muslims believe that they leave this day cleansed of sin.

As the sun sets, the people are not required to quote any prescribed prayers. During these sacred moments, pilgrims are to be alone with God. They should ask that their sins and lifelong shortcomings be forgiven.

At sunset, a cannon sounds. Pilgrims leave Arafat going to Muzdalifah, where they sleep or stay up all night under the stars. On the way, many will pick up stones and pebbles. For Muslims not on the Hajj, many will fast on this day of *wuqoof*.

Key Scripture

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and all the people in your house. Acts 16:31

Going before the Father

- *As the pilgrims head to Muzdalifah, may what happened to Paul in Romans 7:7-13 well up in them, that their sins would continue to overwhelm them. **Pray** for conviction of sin deep in their hearts and minds.*
- ***Pray** that God would reveal His heart - that He is grieved by our sin, but that He offers a way to receive His forgiveness. Jesus takes guilt and shame away which brings real freedom.*
- ***Pray** that God would reveal His heart of love for the people. He loves them so much. Pray that people will have encounters of God’s love for them.*
- ***Pray** that God will speak to them in dreams and visions, as they spend the second night of the Hajj praying for their shortcomings and needs. Ask God for an open heaven for many who are genuinely seeking an encounter with God.*
- *Muslims pray five times a day “Show us the straight way, the way of those on whom you have bestowed your Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray.” **Pray** that God will answer their prayer in such a way that they can grasp God’s grace through Jesus Christ.*

Hajj Day 3: Stoning and Sacrifice

As the pilgrims leave Muzdalifah, they pass through Mina again. They head to the three pillars, which represent Satan coming to Abraham three times, to tempt him to ignore the instructions of God concerning the sacrifice of Ishmael. Muslims believe that Abraham threw stones at Satan. Using the stones or pebbles that they have collected, they throw them at the pillars, which represent Satan. In the stoning, pilgrims renounce evil and declare their willingness to sacrifice all they have to God.

After this “victory over Satan”, pilgrims will kill a sheep, a goat or maybe a camel in remembrance of God’s provision of a sheep sacrificed instead of Abraham’s son. This sacrifice ends the formal time of Hajj. It is on this day, as well, that Muslims all over the

world will sacrifice a sheep or some other animal. This is the biggest Islamic feast of the year, called Eid-el-Kabir (literally the Big Feast) or Eid-ul-Adha (the Feast of Sacrifice).

Key Scripture

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him. John said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." John 1:29

Going before the Father

- *Ephesians 6 states "Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Muslims understand there is a spiritual battle caused by Satan. Throwing rocks at Satan during the day of stoning is meaningless apart from the Cross and Resurrection which defeated Satan. **Pray** that they would see that only Jesus defeated sin, Satan, and death. May they know that in Christ, we have mighty weapons "for the tearing down of strongholds." (2 Corinthians 10:4)*
- **Thank** the Lord that Muslims see the importance of sacrificing an animal. In the Old Testament, it meant forgiveness of sins. After Jesus died on the cross, animals no longer were sacrificed, for His death covered all of our sins. **Pray** that they will understand the meaning behind it.
- **Ask** that God would overwhelm people with the truth and reality of Jesus' death on the cross. **Ask** that the Holy Spirit move in people's hearts so that they can receive this as truth.
- **Ask** God to give Muslims understanding that Christ has overcome all the powers of Satan on the cross and **pray** that they will experience the reality of that victory in their lives through spontaneous healings and deliverances by calling on Jesus' name.

Hajj Day 4: Sa'y - Running between

Lastly, the pilgrims go to the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Inside, the pilgrims walk around the Kaaba seven times and point to the stone or kiss it. Then they pray in the "Place of Abraham," the spot within the Grand Mosque where Muslims believe the patriarch prayed. After this prayer time, pilgrims reenact the running between the hills of Safa and Marwa, and drink from the well of Zamzam. This reenactment is the Islamic version of Hagar's desperate search for water for her son, Ishmael. They say she repeatedly ran between the hills of Safa and Marwah, climbing them to get a better view of the landscape, attempting to find someone who had water. Upon her return to her son after one of her runs, she discovered that a spring had miraculously sprouted near the infant. Muslims believe the Zamzam Well is this source of water and millions of Muslims still drink from it.

Key Scripture

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. Isaiah 55:2-3

Going before the Father

- *As Muslims circle the Kaaba and run through the hills, ask that they will see the futility of these acts. They can have peace with God and a commitment to Him, but it is through what Christ did for them. **Pray** that they will hear this good news and believe.*
- *In John 4, Jesus is interacting with the woman at the well. He says to her that He will give her this living water if she asks. **Pray** that Muslims across the world desire the living water that only Jesus can give.*

- *Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). As the pilgrims leave after all these spiritual experiences and the exercises they have done, may they still feel extreme emptiness and a lack of peace until they know the Redeemer of their souls, Jesus.*
- **Pray** *that they may learn the meaning of 'drinking for free' and that they can meet God wherever they live, without having to save up money in order to make the pilgrimage.*
- *"God is opposed to the proud and gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). As Muslims head home, some take great pride in being referred to by the title "Haj/Haji." **Pray** that they will learn that God opposes the proud. **Pray** that they will see that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. © Adapted from 2010 Prayer Guide, LCA 2020*