

# THE FANTASY ISLAM OF INGRID MATTSON

When the commands of Allah in the Koran don't count.

September 17, 2015 Dr. Stephen M. Kirby



*Fantasy Islam: A game in which an audience of non-Muslims wish with all their hearts that Islam were a "Religion of Peace," and a Muslim strives to fulfill that wish by presenting a personal version of Islam that has little foundation in Islamic doctrine.*

As I pointed out in an earlier article (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/259380/lure-fantasy-islam-dr-stephen-m-kirby>), Fantasy Islam is a popular game among many non-Muslims and so-called "moderate" or "reformist" Muslims. Ingrid Mattson appears to be such a Muslim.

Ingrid Mattson was born in 1963 in Canada to Roman Catholic parents. In the mid-1980s she converted to Islam. In 2006 Mattson became the president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). In 2011 she resigned as president of ISNA and in 2012 was appointed as the London and Windsor Community Chair in Islamic Studies at Huron University College at the University of Western Ontario in London, Canada.

The year 2013 saw the release of the Second Edition of Mattson's acclaimed book, *The Story of the Qur'an, Its History and Place in Muslim Life*. In her book, Mattson plays Fantasy Islam.

## The Peaceful Conquest of Mecca

On p. 68 Mattson wrote:

Before the Muslims marched on Mecca, the Prophet announced a general amnesty and the city was taken peacefully...revenge killings were prohibited...

It is strange that Mattson makes this claim because the endnotes in this particular chapter of her book frequently refer to specific pages in *The Life of Muhammad (Sirat Rasul Allah)*, by Ibn Ishaq. She apparently overlooked parts of Ibn Ishaq's book because here is what we find that he wrote about the Muslim conquest of Mecca:

1. A Muslim force entered the lower part of Mecca and met resistance. The Meccans lost 12-13 men and the Muslims lost three in the ensuing battle – pp. 549-550.
2. Muhammad had instructed his commanders when they entered Mecca to only fight those who resisted them, except for a select few individuals who were to be killed regardless – p. 550.
3. Ibn Ishaq listed some of those Muhammad had ordered to be killed. There were nine total, including four women. Four or five of these nine were captured and killed. The others saved themselves by converting to Islam before they could be killed – pp. 550-551.
4. Shortly after the conquest of Mecca, Muhammad said,

If anyone should say, The apostle killed men in Mecca, say God permitted His apostle to do so but He does not permit you. (p. 555)

In the bibliography of her book, Mattson listed *The History of Prophets and Kings*, the multi-volume history written by the 10th century Muslim historian Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari. Al-Tabari mentioned the following in Vol. VIII (*The History of al-Tabari: The Victory of Islam*):

1. Khalid's battle against the Meccan force and the killing of two Muslims and 12-13 of the Meccans – pp. 177-178.
2. Muhammad ordered certain Meccans to be killed if they were captured, and some were subsequently killed – pp. 178-181.

For some reason Mattson ignored information provided by Ibn Ishaq and al-Tabari in order to create her own version of the Muslim conquest of Mecca. I'm sure that those killed during the Muslim conquest of Mecca would have preferred Mattson's version of

events.

### **Apostasy**

On pp. 233-234 Mattson discusses freedom of religion. She starts out by quoting the first sentence of 2:256 in the Koran: "There is no compulsion in religion." Then she goes on to qualify that by pointing out that most Muslims

do not believe that freedom of religion entails the freedom to apostatize from Islam or to insult or belittle Islam.

However, she states that some "contemporary scholars" ("certainly a minority at this time") believe that 2:256 is clear and includes the freedom to leave Islam. These "scholars" argue that the traditional justification for punishing apostates comes from the teachings of Muhammad (the *Sunnah*); but these "scholars" claim that these teachings have been "misinterpreted," and Muhammad never punished anyone for leaving Islam.

Mattson claimed that these scholarly arguments "are becoming more accepted by Muslim religious leaders." But it is difficult to see how these arguments could become more accepted by Muslims who know their religion, because Muhammad actually sought to punish those who left Islam.

Muhammad said that death was the penalty for a Muslim who left Islam (e.g. *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Nos. 6878 and 6923; and *Sahih Muslim*, No. 1676). And Muhammad even specified the nature of that death:

If someone changes his religion - then strike off his head!

(*Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas*, 36.18.15, in a section titled "Judgement on Abandonment of Islam.")

At the conquest of Mecca there were two individuals that Muhammad ordered to be killed because they had left Islam:

1) 'Abdallah b. Khatal, who was discovered and killed while hiding inside the Ka'bah; and

2) 'Abdallah b. Sa'd b. Abi Sarh, who came to Muhammad seeking his protection. 'Abdallah lived only because the surrounding Muslim warriors did not kill him while Muhammad was "silent for a long time" before agreeing to that protection. Muhammad was later angry with those warriors, saying, "By God, I kept silent so that one of you might go up to him and cut off his head!" (*The History of al-Tabari: The Victory of Islam*, p. 179)

And even Allah commands those leaving Islam to be killed. In 4:89 of the Koran Allah commands Muslims to take hold of those apostates who have left Islam and "kill them wherever you find them."

But in spite of the commands of Allah in the Koran and the teachings and example of Muhammad, Mattson provided the following explanation on p. 234 for why more Muslims aren't joining the "contemporary scholars" in believing that one should be free to leave Islam:

[T]he history of Christian mission in the context of European colonialism, and aggressive Christian evangelizing in the context of American military occupation, leave many reluctant to adopt this position.

So according to Mattson, it is Christianity, not the Islamic doctrine, which is preventing Muslims from enjoying the freedom of religion.

### **Wife-Beating**

On pp. 237-241 of her book, Mattson takes on the claim that 4:34 of the Koran allows Muslim men to beat their wives. Here is that verse:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other...As to those women on whose part you see ill conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful)[.]

She devotes a bit of space to summarizing different understandings of the word "beat" in Arabic (*idribuhunna*) and new interpretations by Muslims "whose primary training is not in the traditional Islamic religious sciences." But her main argument against the claim that this verse allows Muslim men to beat their wives appears to be based on Muhammad's "dislike" of such action. To show Muhammad's "dislike," Mattson refers to some teachings of Muhammad (*hadiths*) mentioned in a 2003 article written by another person (a). In reality, Mattson should have gone directly to the authoritative *hadith* collections instead (b).

1a. Mattson quoted: "(It is shameful that) one of you beats his wife like someone beats a slave and then sleeps with her at the end of the day."

1b. Sahih Al-Bukhari (One of the "near canonical texts" – Mattson, p. 106), No. 4942: "It is not wise for anyone of you to lash his wife like a slave, for he might sleep with her the same evening."

2a. Mattson quoted: "There are a number of hadith which show the

Prophet disgusted by those who hit their wives, saying... 'Do not beat the female servants of God,' and 'Some women visited my family complaining about their husbands (beating them); they are not the best of you.'

2b. *Sunan Ibn Majah, No. 1985*: "The Prophet said: 'Do not beat the female slaves of Allah.' Then 'Umar came to the Prophet and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, the woman [sic] have become bold towards their husbands. So order the beating of them,' and they were beaten. Then many women went around to the family of Muhammad. The next day he said: "Last night seventy women came to the family of Muhammad, each woman complaining about her husband. You will not find that those are the best of you.'"

In Comparison No. 1 we see that what Muhammad actually said had nothing to do with shame; it seemed to have more to do with the potential for the beating to spoil the mood later on. In Comparison No. 2 we see that although Muhammad initially said not to beat the Muslim women, when 'Umar requested it be done because of the boldness of the women, Muhammad then ordered the women to be beaten. After the women complained, Muhammad only criticized the men for the extent of the beating they gave their wives, not that they had actually beaten them. After all, these men were simply following Muhammad's orders.

In determining whether or not Muhammad disliked the beating of wives, also consider the following:

[1] Muhammad said "to beat them [wives] but not with severity." (*The Life of Muhammad*, p. 651)

[2] The authority to beat one's wives appeared to have been widely exercised in the early Muslim community, as Muhammad's young wife Aisha noted:

**'Aishah said that the lady (came), wearing a green veil (and complained to her ('Aishah) of her husband and showed her a green spot on her skin caused by beating)...so when Allah's Messenger came, 'Aishah said, "I have not seen the women suffering as the believing [Muslim] women. Look! Her skin is greener than her clothes! (Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 5825)**

[3] And Aisha herself was also a recipient. One time, when it was her turn among the wives to have Muhammad spend the night with her, she secretly followed Muhammad when he left her bed. Aisha said that when she later confessed to Muhammad that she had followed him, "He struck me on the chest which caused me pain[.]" (*Sahih Muslim*,

No. 974R1 - one of the "near canonical texts" – Mattson, p. 106).

[4] And because Muhammad was sad on one occasion, 'Umar, who became the second Caliph, used the story of slapping a woman to make Muhammad laugh. This led to the slapping of two of Muhammad's wives, Aisha and Hafsa, who happened to be present, with no reported objections from Muhammad. (*Sahih Muslim*, No. 1478)

[5] Muhammad said: "A man should not be asked why he beats his wife[.]" (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, No. 1986)

To claim that Muhammad disliked the hitting of women by Muslim men requires one to ignore the teachings and examples of Muhammad.

### **The Ubiquitous 2:62**

Chapter 2, Verse 62 of the Koran is commonly quoted by Muslim-Americans to indicate that Judaism and Christianity are respected in Islam and the adherents of those two faiths will be rewarded by Allah. We find that on p. 66 Mattson wrote:

Although the Qur'an recognizes the enmity that developed between the Muslims and many of the Jews of Medina...the Qur'an still recognizes the validity of Judaism as a path to God:

Verily those who believe, and those who follow the Jewish faith and the Christians and the Sabians – anyone who believes in God and the Last Day and does good deeds – will have their reward with their Lord and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve.

(Baqara; 2:62...)

In spite of what Mattson and other Muslim-Americans claim, this verse only means that Jews and Christians would be rewarded for the good deeds they did before the advent of Islam; after the advent of Islam, righteous good deeds would be accepted by Allah only if they are done by Muslims. And this verse was actually abrogated by 3:85 which stated that Islam is the only acceptable religion to Allah, and non-Muslims will be "losers" in the Hereafter (e.g. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, *Tafsir Al-Qurtubi Vol. 1*, and *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan*).

It's interesting to note that on pp. 196 and 197 Mattson refers to the *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn* as, "One of the most influential classical *tafsirs*..." and "the 'unofficial Sunni Canon' of *tafsir*." Even with her high regards for this *tafsir*, she apparently did not bother to consult it before she explained the meaning of 2:62. This *tafsir* pointed out that to be rewarded, the good deeds had to accord with *Sharia Law* (p. 23), which undermines Mattson's claim that this verse "recognizes the validity of Judaism as the path to God."

## **The Koran is Inclusive toward Christians**

On p. 153 Mattson states:

It can be argued further that the Qur'an does more than offer guidelines for a legal policy of tolerance and that its attitude toward other faith communities in general and Christianity in particular is, in many ways, inclusive.

Mattson's statement is, in many ways, wrong. In the Koran we find that Allah states that the Christians are misguided in their beliefs (1:7). Allah states that Christians are among the worst of creatures who "will abide in the fire of Hell" (98:6). He forbids Muslims from being friends with Christians (5:51). Instead, Allah commands Muslims to fight Christians until those Christians pay the *jizyah* (protection tax), with willing submission and feeling themselves subdued (9:29). Allah states that Christianity is a false religion because Jesus was not crucified, but it only appeared so (4:157-158). Allah also states that those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God commit the one unforgivable sin in Islam, *Shirk* (e.g., 4:48 and 4:116). In fact, Allah curses Christians specifically for this belief (9:30) and says that those who so believe will go to Hell (e.g., 3:151 and 5:72-73).

In spite of Mattson's claim, one does not find tolerance and inclusiveness toward Christians in the Koran.

## **Conclusion**

In the *Preface* to the first edition of her book, Mattson noted that the book "reflects my personal perspective on the Qur'an." She wrote that she approached

the Qur'an from the perspective of a Western academic who is also trying to live as a faithful Muslim. This is not the only perspective on the Qur'an, but it is one that, perhaps, has been underrepresented in the literature.

When it came to the Koran verses mentioned in the book, she wrote that

the context provided for each citation is of my own choosing. But each of these verses can be found in other, often drastically different contexts throughout Muslim societies...I hope to replicate an aspect of the way in which Muslims can decontextualize and recontextualize verses they encounter throughout their lives.

So who needs the commands of Allah in the Koran, the teachings and examples of Muhammad, and over a thousand years of Islamic scholarship? Ingrid Mattson is a champion Fantasy Islam player.

📌 **Tags:** Denial, Islam, Left

## **ABOUT DR. STEPHEN M. KIRBY**

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