

Dear friends, I hope you are well. In this newsletter I will report on my ministry, family, and some reflections on the last of the early church fathers, John of Damascus. I hope you find it encouraging and will pray for these things.

Ministry

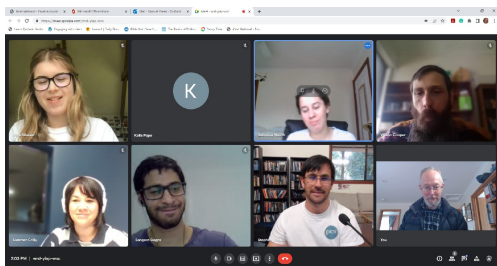
What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)



Gezahegn training students across Ethiopia

In my last newsletter I wrote about Gezahegn and Bsrat and how I had trained them and they trained others at the Ethiopian IFES conference. Well, we can give thanks to God because they have continued to train more students in Ethiopia. These two young men now have an itinerant ministry across Ethiopia training students about Islam and how to read and teach the Bible.

Through video conferencing I have been busy training people across the universities of Australia and around the world. It is encouraging to see how this training has evolved over the last two years of lockdown. At first the training sessions were clunky, but now after two years the software is better and we know how to use the medium properly. These sessions are highly effective. As we come out of Covid restrictions I believe we have new useful skills that we did not have before.



That being said, there is still something unique about training face-to-face, and in April I had the great privilege of speaking at the WEC annual conference to a large group of missionaries on the subject of Islam. It was an honour to speak to such an audience.



Samuel speaking at the WEC conference

I have written several new articles for the Answering Islam website, and my next article is entitled, *Sermon illustrations and Islam*. This article is aimed at Christian preachers and will give them ideas and references for how to accurately include facts about Islam into their sermons.

<https://answering-islam.org/authors/green.html>

There are a whole series of debates coming up and God willing I will be able to visit Ethiopia and the US again later this year. I have been talking with IFES staff in Ethiopia and it seems they need a short book that has a one page introduction to each book of the Bible. This book would help students who are starting to regularly read the Bible to quickly understand the context of each book.

Finally, the Indonesian translation of my book is making steady progress.

Family

My father passed away on Good Friday, so it has been a sad time recently. I conducted his funeral and it was a good time for his family and friends to remember his life and be thankful.

Anne-Petra and I were the cooks on our church's weekend conference. We enjoy doing this type of



ministry together.
Finally, I have been learning how to underpin and lay concrete around the house.

John of Damascus (AD c.675-749)

The early church fathers are the men after the apostles who served the church by defending and proclaiming the gospel, teaching the Bible, and clarifying Christian doctrine. Their writings have been preserved in very large collections. They begin with Clement of Rome, then Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and include men like Athanasius and Augustine. But the last of them is John of Damascus.

John was from a prominent Christian Arab family and his grandfather seems to have negotiated the surrender of Damascus to the Jihadist forces of Khalid ibn al-Walid in AD 635. Whereas, for the earlier church fathers they had to write in a world dominated by Greek philosophy and pagan religion, John now had to write in a world dominated by Islamic thought. As such, he had to navigate a transition for the church in the East, and demonstrates to us how to make the transition when the world around you suddenly changes - something Western Christians may feel today with the rise of secularism and Islam.

His works are: *The Fount of Knowledge*, *On Heresies*, *The Orthodox Faith*, and *Disputation between a Christian and a Saracen*.

So how did John navigate this change for the church? Firstly, he restated the basics of the Christian faith. Things that once had been assumed now were not, and so John called Christians back to their scriptures to make sure they understood their own scriptures and doctrine. He did this in his books, *The Fount of Knowledge* and *The Orthodox Faith*. This is what we need to do today. As secularism and Islam grow in the West, Christians need to make sure they understand their own religion because now the world is not backing up and supporting Christian belief.

The second thing John did was to explain false teaching. He did this in his books, *On Heresies*, and *Disputation between a Christian and a Saracen*. In these he gives a history of all the false teaching from the time of the apostles to his present and includes a large section on Islam (Ishmaelites). We need to know this history too because many of the false ideas we encounter today have appeared in the past and we can learn from the past how to answer them. In the case of Islam, John interacts with many aspects of the religion and responds to the accusations they bring against Christians. He shows that since the Qur'an describes Jesus as the Word and Spirit of God, and God is never without

his Word and Spirit, then it is illogical for Muslims to reject the idea of the Trinity. He speaks about the Islamic veneration of the Black Stone in Mecca, and many other aspects of Islam. It is worth reading, and as part of my training I get students to read this.

The writings of John are also of historical interest because he describes early Islam, earlier than even the earliest Islamic sources that we have. He shows us what Islam was like before it took its modern form. He describes a chapter in the Qur'an which is no longer there, and Muslim practices at his time:

[Muhammad] made it a law that they be circumcised and the women, too, and he ordered them not to keep the Sabbath and not to be baptized. And, while he ordered them to eat some of the things forbidden by the Law, he ordered them to abstain from others. He furthermore absolutely forbade the drinking of wine.

Daniel Janosik has recently made the first critical text of John's writings and given a new translation. I interviewed him to talk about his new book, *John of Damascus - First apologist to the Muslims*. You can watch the interview here.

<https://youtu.be/RbApd1VCaZ4>

Partnership in this work

Thank you very much for your support of this ministry. We are partners in this work. There is still much work to be done and I need your partnership. Please consider supporting me in this work. I need support to continue this work.

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AFES office 02 9697 0313

Your brother in Christ
Samuel Green
samuelgreen@iinet.net.au
+61424 084 514