

The common problems with 5 salat daily timings as per The Quran

It is a common occurrence to find people advocating 5 salat daily from The Quran, however in my view every single person that has done so repeats the same erroneous arguments or at the very least misrepresents the information, i.e. so it looks like there may be 5. Of course, it is possible such advocates are not aware of past discussions on 5 salat timings and/or are unaware of the problems with their own view. With this in mind, this article is an attempt to summarise the common problems so students of The Quran can weigh and consider the information for themselves and make up their own minds.

Important note: whilst my view is that The Quran does not state 5 salat daily ([read my view on salat here](#)), that does not mean I consider it wrong for a *mumin*/believer to uphold 5. It does not matter to me what a fellow brother/sister does when it comes to their personal relationship with God. My only issue arises when claims are made, such as "Quran states 5".

Background information:

Traditional Islamic history openly admits that before the alleged "isra & miraj" (night journey & ascension) story involving prophet Muhammad in 17:1, there were only two salat daily, or perhaps 2 + 1 extra during the night, see sources: [famous Traditional scholar Ibn Kathir](#) and [academic article dedicated to this topic](#). For those unfamiliar with the alleged *isra & miraj* story, please use a search engine. For a possible explanation of 17:1 as per Quran, please see [here](#). Thus, according to tradition, after this event there became 5 daily salat.

The following are some typical examples of articles arguing for 5 daily salat from The Quran:

- A) Joseph Islam: <http://quransmessage.com/articles/the%20five%20prayers%20from%20the%20quran%20FM3.htm> (accessed Feb 9th 2014)
- B) Muhammad Shaikh: http://muhammadshaikh.com/english_pdf/salah_prayer.pdf
- C) Rashad Khalifa et al: http://submission.org/Where_can_we_find_Salah.html (very brief content regarding the timings)
- D) Dr Ahmad Subhy Mansour http://www.ahl-alquran.com/English/show_article.php?main_id=8297
etc.

There are other articles, however their arguments are very similar and discuss the same verses. I will use the contents of article **(A)** as the primary reference, listing examples of problems, and alongside each numbered point I shall reference which other articles from the above also have same/similar issues. It should be noted that the other articles above do not discuss certain aspects of their proposed view, thus are not detailed enough to determine if they contain some of the problems below or not.

#####

1) B, C, D.

Quote from article: "This article will attempt to show that not only are the 5 prayers strongly alluded to (and sometimes mentioned by name)..."

and

Quote: "The Fajr prayer is actually mentioned by name in the Quran as is the Isha prayer..."

The first point to note is that the author openly admits names of some salat are given (i.e. *fajr* and *isha*), yet nowhere in the article is it considered why only these two are named.

2) D.

After the small error of incorrectly using the plural "prayers" when 11:114 uses the singular "salat" (this is done several times throughout the article), the author states:

"In the above verse, Fajr prayer is mentioned along with Isha prayers and are described as prayers at the two ends of the day (Salata Tarafayi = two ends).

The end of the night can be perfectly reconciled with the actual moment at which the sun starts to lighten the sky whilst remaining well below the horizon. This is known as dawn and is a period before actual sunrise (Fajr as it is read today). The end of the day would be the point at which the sun's rays no longer illuminate the sky. This period would not be sunset (as the sun's light still illuminates the sky even though the sun is below the horizon at sunset), but rather would correspond to 'layl' (night). It is at this point Isha prayer is due."

Thus, according to the author:

two ends of the day = fajr and isha

end of night = dawn / morning twilight (fajr is due)

end of day = no light / night / layl (isha is due)

Thus, clearly, the author considers morning and evening twilight part of the day and not part of the night. This will be returned to later.

Further, quote:

"In this verse, we also find mention of the approach of the night (wa zulfan mina al-layli) which is discussed in the section dealing with Maghrib prayers."

A minor inconsistency in the article, i.e. "zulfan" is Arabic plural (i.e. 3 or more) meaning it should be "approaches of/from the night".

3) B, C, D.

It should be noted that 11:114 may not necessarily refer to 3 salat, as it can be taken to refer to 2 salat, i.e. two ends of the day and the adjacent/near parts from the night. This can refer to two time-ranges, giving a self-contained explanation for salat (of) fajr (begins at morning twilight and ends when the sun rises above the horizon) and salat (of) isha (begins at sunset/evening twilight and ends when this light disappears i.e. dark night). In this interpretation night includes the twilights, and satisfies the plural "zulfan" (see [note](#)). If it was referring to another salat we may expect to see the singular *zulfa*. Thus, it is an assumption to consider 11:114 refers to 3 salat, when this is not the only option.

4) B, C, D.

The author then references 30:17 (and later 30:18) to support the morning and evening timings mentioned previously (i.e. fajr & isha). The word *salat* does not occur in 30:17, thus there is an assumption here, that the word assumed to allude to *salat* is *sbh*/glorify.

Further, and perhaps more critically, *sbh* is used many times in The Quran, sometimes with references to timings but the author does not discuss all of these timed-*sbh* verses and equate them with *salat*. If one is going to equate a timed-*sbh* verse with *salat* then one must equate them in all timed-*sbh* verses and determine the result. Note the author's later use of 30:18 which uses *hmd*/praise and not *salat*.

No methodology is explained as to why certain timed-*sbh*/hmd verses are cited and some not. Without explanation this leaves the presentation of information open to bias, i.e. the author only gives us the timing examples which seemingly support the position of 5 salat daily. It is possible this is selective presentation of information based on the author's pre-conceived notion / confirmation bias.

Wikipedia:

Confirmation bias (also called *confirmatory bias* or *myside bias*) is the tendency of people to favor information that confirms their beliefs or hypotheses (e.g. the 5 salat daily theory). People display this bias when they gather or remember information selectively, or when they interpret it in a biased way. The effect is stronger for emotionally charged issues and for deeply entrenched beliefs. People also tend to interpret ambiguous evidence as supporting their existing position.

5) C.

The translation given for 30:18 may not be correct, quote:

"Unto Him be praise in the heavens and the earth! - and at night (Arabic: Ashiyyan) and in the noonday (Arabic: Tuz'hurun - at noon)"

The word "tuz'hurun" is actually a verb (not a noun as the article seems to imply) and occurs 7 times in The Quran and in no other occurrence does it mean "you are at noon". It more commonly means "you are revealed/exposed". When we insert this understanding into 30:18 it seems more fitting, i.e. covers both situations, at night and when one is exposed/revealed (in the day).

6) B, D.

The translation given of 17:78 contains a clear insertion on the author's part, quote:

"...and the morning prayer and reading: for the prayer and reading..."

The Arabic only says "quran al fajr" / "reading (at/of) dawn". It is not explained why the author has used such a translation.

7) B, C, D.

Whilst the author is to be commended for stating there are two options for the phrase "*duluk as-shams*" in 17:78, one of the resultant interpretations cited is not possible according to the Arabic, quote:

"Therefore depending on the lean as to which interpretation one favours of the term 'sun's decline' (i.e. whether from zenith or towards sunset) will determine whether one accepts this as a reference to all prayers from noon to sunset (Dhuhr, Asr and Maghrib) or exclusively to 'Maghrib'."

It cannot be a reference to "all prayers from noon to sunset (Dhuhr, Asr and Maghrib)" as the singular *salat* is used and only one time-period is given i.e. "establish *salat* at A to B". It is a common error for other articles promoting 5 to contain this obvious problem. In this case the author opts for it referring to one *salat*, e.g. "Maghrib".

8)

It should be noted that since *layl*/night is dark according to the author, to say "darkness of the night" is redundant/superfluous. According to The Quran, *layl*/night contains light (e.g. twilight), see 36:37, or further reading see this [article](#).

9)

50:39 is cited with "*sbh bi hmd*" assumed to refer to *salat*. An issue with this assumption arises when we read the following verse:

So be patient to what they are saying, and glorify with praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the setting, and from the night sbh/glorify Him and ends (of) the *sujud*/prostration/submission. [50:39-40]

According to the author's position, this would mean these verses tell us to perform a *salat*:

- 1) before the rising of the sun
- 2) before its setting
- 3) from the night
- 4) at ends of the *sujud*

An attempt to explain (4) is made later by the author, see point (17) below. For a discussion on the meaning of "*sujud*" see [here](#), e.g. completing a command can be a "*sujud*".

10) B.

The author incorrectly translates 20:130, exposing a potential problem in his theory, quote:

"Also, we note in 20:130 that the two ends of the day (watarafa l-nahari) are used as separate periods along with the period just before the setting of the sun (Shamsi waqabla ghurubiha) which clearly indicates the period of Asr prayers.

020.130

"Therefore be patient with what they say, and celebrate (constantly) the praises of thy Lord, before the rising of the sun (Arabic: Qabla taluhe- Shams - i.e. Fajr), and before its setting (Arabic: Qabla gharubiha - i.e. Asr); yea, celebrate them for part of the hours of the night, and at the sides of the day (Arabic: Watarafa l-nahari - i.e. Fajr and Isha): that you may have (spiritual) joy"

The word "*atrafā*" (ends/sides) is actually an Arabic plural meaning 3 or more. Note how it is different to the dual form "*tarafay*" used in 11:114. Thus, "*atrafā*" cannot mean "two ends of the day". It more correctly means "3 or more ends/sides of the day". Of course, once this correction is inserted into the author's interpretation it causes a problem.

Note how also the author assigns a *salat* for each time-point given EXCEPT "hours of the night". See point (15) later.

Thus, using the author's reasoning, we have:

- 1) before the rising of the sun = Fajr
- 2) before its setting = Asr
- 3) from hours of the night = ?
- 4) 3 or more sides/ends of the day = Fajr + Isha + ? (+? etc)

Why The Quran has redundant and potentially misleading repetition is not discussed by the author, e.g. why mention Fajr twice. From my experience, 20:130 is a frequent cause of issues for those advocating 5 *salat* daily from Quran.

11) B, C, D.

After a questionable translation of "*wa*" in 2:238 as "especially", the author states, quote (bold and underline emphasis mine):

*"The prayers are referred to as 'salawaat' which is plural (singular: salat). Therefore by simple deduction there has to be clearly more than 1 prayer in the day **if** this is a reference to the daily prayers."*

In 2:238 The Quran makes no reference to the "*salawaat*" being "in a day", thus the use of "**if**" above is important to note. In a day is an assumption. Next, it is said, quote:

"If the literal meaning of 'wusta' is taken as 'middle' and which seems correct in context..."

The author provides no reasoning/evidence why it "seems correct in context". The author then references one usage (100:5) of the verb "WaSaTa" (same root as the adjective/noun "WuSTa" in 2:238) to show that it can mean a literal "middle". However, what the author fails to mention is that every other occurrence of this root in The Quran shows it means "middle" in the figurative sense, i.e. balanced, conforming/equitable/just/excellent, average/moderate, most remote from the extremes. See its other adjective/noun usage below:

And as such, We have made you a **WaSaTan** nation... [2:143]

God will not hold you for your unintentional oaths, but He will hold you for what oaths you have made binding; its cancellation shall be the feeding of ten poor from the **aWSaTi** of what you feed your family... [5:89]

The **aWSaTu** of them said: "Did I not say to you: why do you not glorify God?" [68:28]

Therefore, in terms of simple probability, the adjective/noun "*wasat*" in 2:238 more likely refers to the figurative meaning of "middle".

Quote:

"As can be seen, the middle (wusta) prayer is the central prayer and is the one that approaches sunset or corresponds to the period of late afternoon."

It should be noted that the author infers this "middle prayer" to refer to "Asr" in late afternoon, but this is not the literal middle of the day, as that would be noon (i.e. Dhuhr). Interestingly even in the article's quoted part of Lane's lexicon it gives a use of "wusta" referring to "the middle/midst of the sky" which also indicates noon. Thus, strictly the article means "middle" as in middle of the theorised 5 *salat* daily sequence, i.e. the 3rd one of the day, i.e. "Asr". Thus, the so-called "middle prayer" is not in the middle of the day.

Also, technically if it is the "middle" *salat*, then we are not told in The Quran which is the first *salat* of the alleged five, thus cannot identify which one is the "middle". It could be inferred however that the first *salat* of the alleged five would be the first one of the day, i.e. *salat al fajr*, thus making "Asr" the "middle" *salat*. Ideally in this argument, accompanying information showing when day begins as per Quran would be helpful.

Quote:

"This prayer has been given special attention and has been singled out for mention in the 'group' of prayers (salawaat - plural)."

The author does not provide any reasoning/evidence for why it has allegedly been singled out. This is likely because there is no explanation from The Quran. This is perhaps why the author (and others) conveniently translate "*wa*" as "especially", as simply translating "*wa*" as "and" would make readers ask: why has the middle "*salat*" been redundantly singled out when it is already included in "*salawat*" mentioned previously? Hence, I suspect that by assigning a questionable "especially" status, may help give some credence to this view.

After saying "guard the *salawat*" it is redundant to say "and the middle *salat*", as the latter is already included in the former.

Another problem for the author's view arises with the following verse:

Guard over the *salawat*; and the middle *salat*; and stand/observe dutifully for God. [2:238]

So if you fear then on foot or riding, then when you are secure then remember God as He has taught you what you did not know. [2:239]

Does 2:239 refer to "the middle *salat*" or "*salawat*"? It will be an assumption to choose one over the other, although the flow and structure seems to favour "*al salat al wusta*" over "*salawat*" in my view. For an explanation of my view, please see this [post](#).

Further, the Arabic form of the term "*al salat al wusta*" in 2:238 is different to the form "*salat al fajr*" and "*salat al isha*" in 24:58, and clearly indicates it is a description whilst the latter two are a specific reference, i.e.

salat al fajr ~ salat (of) fajr/dawn

salat al 3sha ~ salat (of) 3sha/evening

al salat al wusta ~ the wusta/balanced salat

Many of those who advocate a middle *salat* incorrectly refer to it as "*salat al wusta*" as if to imply it occurs in the same form as "*salat al fajr*"/"*salat al isha*" in Quran.

As a side note, "*wusta*" has never been a reference/name for a *salat* in Traditional Islamic history as far as I'm aware. And for those that argue it refers to a clear/known period of the day, they should note that there is variance in Traditional sources about which *salat* it may refer to.

12)

Commenting on 11:114, quote:

"...we were also informed about the prayer at the approach of the night (*wa-zulafan mina al-layl*)..." i.e. evening twilight.

The author follows up by clarifying what this period refers to, quote (underline mine):

"...therefore the period of maghrib can be correctly deduced as it is a period which precedes the onset of night (*Arabic: layl*) and after sunset." i.e. evening twilight.

In other words: "*zulafan* mina al layl*" = approach* of the night = maghrib = evening twilight, and this period precedes night, i.e. is NOT part of the night. Also see point (2) above to confirm this.

*Arabic plural, i.e. 3 or more, thus author should actually render it as "approaches"

Unfortunately for the author the Arabic "*min/mina*" in "*zulafan mina al layl*" is a partitive preposition in this construction, thus the "approaches" must be from (i.e. a part of) the night/*layl*. To evidence this point, please see the below references:

'An Introduction to Classical and Koranic Arabic' by W.M. Thackston

http://islamicbulletin.org/free_downloads/quran/thackston_arabic.pdf

p7

Quote: "**min(a)** (+genitive) from/among/amongst/in (in a partitive sense)"

'A Grammar of Classical Arabic' by Wolf Dietrich Fischer

<https://ia600806.us.archive.org/22/items/AGrammarOfClassicalArabic/AGrammarOfClassicalArabic.pdf>

p90

Quote: "If the sense is partitive, it is combined with the dependent genitive by **min**"

p160

Quote: "In combination with terms that denote place and time, **min** refers to a certain segment of the place or time, e.g. **min** al-layli 'in a part of the night'"

Note that in 11:114 "*al layli*" in "*zulafan mina al layli*" is in the genitive case, thus is meant in the partitive sense.

Thus, this finding contradicts the article.

13) B, C, D.

Quote (underline mine):

"The Arabic root word *Zay-Lam-Fa* (from the word *wazulafan*) means to be close to in position or approaching, in this case, the end of the day..."

Note that the underlined part is an interpretative assumption, as "near parts" (*zulafan*) needs a reference point, i.e. near to what? And in 11:114 the **ONLY** reference point given prior is "two ends of the day", thus that is the more correct reference point according to the Arabic. The author has interpreted his own reference point of one end of the day, i.e. the latter end of the day. You may see [here](#) for further elaboration.

14) B, C.

Whilst making a case for "*Isha*" salat, the author cites examples from The Quran that allegedly reference this *salat*, e.g. 3:17, 39:9, 25:64. It should be noted however the word "*salat*" (or its root [SLW](#)) do not appear in these verses. The reference to "*salat*" is therefore an unstated assumption.

15) B, C, D.

In "the *tahajjud* prayer" section a significant inconsistency in the author's argument is exposed, quote:

"This particular prayer has only been mentioned once in the Quran and has been enjoined on the Prophet. It has been enjoined to a singular person and from the context, it is clear that this command is directed at the Prophet. This is not for the believers as a specific prayer to undertake albeit believers can pray as much as they desire without any restrictions given by scripture except that one does not overburden oneself and keeps a balance (73:20)."

The article then highlights the singular address in 17:79 and tries to make the case that this "*tahajjud* prayer" is only for the prophet whilst seemingly forgetting that the prior verse 17:78 is also in the singular address but was used by the author to clearly imply it is an instruction for all believers!

To make matters worse, the author again cites 50:39-40 and 20:130 but this time uses them to imply parts of them are only applicable to the prophet whilst previously the author used the same verses to extract timings that were applicable to all believers.

Since the author does not explain his methodology for determining what verse is applicable to whom (i.e. prophet and/or all believers), it could be that what underpins this selective approach is simply confirmation bias.

It should be noted that to my knowledge, the only plural address to believers for a timed *salat* verse is 24:58, wherein only "*salat al fajr*" and "*salat al isha*" are mentioned. This is commonly not mentioned in articles.

16) B, D.

A more accurate translation of 17:79 is shown below:

Establish the *salat* at the setting of the sun to the darkness of the night; and the reading (of) dawn; indeed, the reading (of) dawn is witnessed. [17:78]

And from the night so remain awake with it additionally for yourself, perhaps your Lord will raise you (to) a status praiseworthy. [17:79]

The "with it" (Arabic: bi hi) refers to a preceding masculine noun, and thus can ONLY refer to "reading" (Arabic: *quran*). Note that "*salat*" is a feminine noun. Thus, the idea of "the *tahajjud* prayer" is not possible unless one considers it as a reading (also see 73:20).

17)

Quote:

"50:39 ...in the night-time hymn His praise, and after the (prescribed) prostrations (*Arabic: wa adbara-sajud*)"

From this the author deduces: "After the prostrations here can only refer to *Isha* prayers."

The above deduction is an assumption and is not the only option. See point (9) above. The Arabic more literally says "and (at) ends/back (of) the *sujud*/prostration/submission", as "*sujud*" is singular here.

18) B, C, D.

Readers should note that by the end of the article, no definitive timings are concluded, i.e. start point AND end point for each alleged *salat*. This issue is prevalent in all articles advocating 5 daily *salat*. It is thus sometimes argued that The Quran only makes reference to time periods, and therefore leaves it to us to determine the specific times. It should be noted that this is an assumption, a forced one, resulting from holding the 5 *salat* daily view. This view must be balanced with The Quran's claim of

being clear, detailed etc see [here](#).

Interestingly, in such an explanation this may make it difficult to perform a coherent *salat* in a group, i.e. the start/end point is not defined thus would have to be agreed beforehand. Also, since the times are not defined in such a view, an individual could spend most of the day performing *salat*, with little or no break inbetween periods. Further, in such a view, it could be the case that a person is performing their "Asr *salat*" and another could be performing their "Dhuhr *salat*", both at the same time of the day.

Some advocates attempt to remove this problem by citing precedent, i.e. the timings allegedly instituted by the earliest Muslim community that have been passed down through the generations can be used by believers today as an example to follow. Some may find this explanation acceptable.

19) B, C, D.

Even if we accept it is left to us to determine the specific times, one should note the inconsistent/asymmetrical timings, i.e. some *salat* have specific start points some do not, some have specific end points some do not, some could have specific start and end points some may not, there could be differences in length of the time periods of each one etc.

Of course there is no statement in Quran that the time periods must be equal in length, or must have an identifiable start and/or end point but one would have thought this information would make them much more practicable, especially for groups.

A relatively common problem in such articles is that whilst verses are cited to indicate times, the specific times are not clearly explained and defined. This is likely because specifics do not exist. For clarity, it is preferable to have the following basic information made clear IF it is available, for each *salat*:

name/reference for *salat* as per Quran, if any (verse references for this)

salat time range: start point and end point (verse references for this)

20) B, C, D.

It should be noted that according to the 5 *salat* daily view, a *salat* called "Dhuhr" and a *salat* called "Asr" are claimed to be due from noon onwards, however according to 24:58 it was common practice for believers within their households to discard their clothes at/from noon (likely due to the heat*), and this period of undress is described as "private parts/times" (*Zawrat*) for us. During these private times others are asked to seek our permission in order to mingle with us. Thus, questions arise: when is *salat* meant to be offered in this private time of undress? Do believers uphold the alleged Dhuhr/Asr *salat* privately? Can they uphold them naked? Do they uphold Dhuhr, then undress, then re-dress and uphold Asr, then undress etc - is this what is being suggested?

It could be argued that we are meant to apply some sort of common sense, for example, when noon arrives, one would uphold both these *salat* immediately or soon after, then go to their homes (or if already in the home) and discard their garments, but unfortunately for such an explanation 24:58 states at/from noon. Perhaps some might accept this explanation. Of course, some advocates of 5 *salat* daily argue for the alleged "Dhuhr" and "Asr" time periods to extend well into the afternoon and even until start of sunset.

*It should be noted that the hottest part of the daytime tends to be post-noon, i.e. in the afternoon. At noon, direct sunlight is at its maximum, however it takes some time for the sun to heat up the atmosphere (see [here](#)).

21) B, C, D.

All such 5 *salat* daily articles do not discuss how their alleged timings can be calculated by an ordinary person in a practical manner (using natural phenomenon). That is why it is commonly said in Traditional Muslim sources that one can use the shadow of a stick as a guide, even though this timing guide is inconsistent as it depends on where one is located. For example, at the equator it is commonly said the time of "Dhuhr" (noon) begins when there is no (or very little) shadow but this is not applicable if living away from the equator (i.e. the majority of the world's population). Thus, there is variance amongst 'schools of thought' on how Dhuhr/Asr times are determined. In addition, in certain parts of the world, the sky is frequently overcast which makes the use of shadow difficult to impossible. You will find there is less variance amongst Traditional Muslims when it comes to the timing of sunrise and sunset *salat*.

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Please note that the above highlighted problems may not be the only ones. It is hoped that this article will allow readers to weigh and consider information more accurately. The reader is recommended to re-read and reflect upon the findings of this work. All feedback is welcome, especially corrections. Thanks.

This new article reinforces the above findings also: [the meaning of SaBiH from The Quran](#)

Tools/Resources/Books used:

www.StudyQuran.org

[Project Root List](#) - Quran concordance, grammar and dictionary

[Quranic Arabic Corpus](#)

'[Dictionary of The Holy Quran](#)' by Abdul Mannan Omar

[Study Method](#)

This work would not have been possible without the many people who have contributed to this topic, and without the resources now available to anyone wishing to study The Quran in detail. For these stepping stones, I am indebted and truly thankful.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER:

This work reflects my findings and personal understanding, as of February 9th 2014. Seeking knowledge is a continual process and I will try to improve my understanding of the signs within 'the reading' (*al quran*) and out with it, unless The God wills otherwise. All information is correct to the best of my knowledge only and thus should not be taken as a fact. One should always seek knowledge and verify for themselves when possible: 17:36, 20:114, 35:28, 49:6, 58:11.

And do not follow what you have no knowledge of; surely the hearing, the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that. [17:36]