

The black death: how different were the christian and muslim responses?

[History](#), [Middle Ages](#)



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In the year of 1348, The Black Death broke out as a great pandemic that affected much of Eurasia. A large part of the influence on the reactions of the people living in this era came from religion. The dominant religions in this time were Christianity, mostly stemming from Europe, and Islam, which was stemming from Asia and the Middle East. The two monolithic deities, Allah and God, both were very influential beings at this time. The documents analyzed prove a massive difference between the Christians' and Muslims' reactions based on the overall context, the causes behind the disease, and the behavior of the people during the time. The first three documents describe the general context in which the plague is found. Document one is a map showing the spread of the disease in the Middle East. The line show the patterns in which the people migrated across the land to different cities. The Christians did not have a specific " holy city" in Europe, so they had no refuge from the Lord to flee to. However, the lines drawn show that the Muslims came from specifically Cairo to Mecca. Mecca is a holy city that Muslims take a pilgrimage to as part of their submissions. The Muslims probably found comfort in their holy city, and those that were able to went from Cairo to be in the company of Allah. The Christians did not travel to anywhere in particular because the bible does not tell of a specific city that is deemed holy except Jerusalem, and the only religious people taking a pilgrimage to Jerusalem during this time would be Jews and not many Christians. Therefore, the Muslims decided to migrate more in groups, as opposed to the Christians who panicked and ran away from the disease. However, one must take into account the point of reference of the map as it

only shows the Middle East. The Christians could have spread farther to other places that at the time we could assume they considered " holy", but we do not know because of the lack of areal view. We could see the other places where people fled with a map with a more expansive world view. Document two shows mortality estimates in different regions. The first death toll is in Christian Europe with a population loss of approximately one third. The second death toll is for England which includes half the population being lost, (2, 000, 000 of 4, 000, 000). This death toll shows the rates of different classes of people as well which includes the general population, as opposed to the priests and monks. The priests and monks had greater exposure to the sick and to germs by praying with the sick and their families causing them to be more susceptible since they were in close quarters with the germ throughout a majority of their day. Then they would go back to the monasteries to sleep with all the other monks and priests that had been around the germ as well. The priests' and monks death rate was about 45% while the general population of England's peoples' death rate was about 33%. The third death toll is the Middle East's population. The mortality rate is about one third for that area as well. However, the Middle Easterners do not include a death toll for the Muslims, indicating that religion did not separate all their peoples during that time. Although religion was a nice thing to rely on, the Middle Easterners definitely showed more of a sense of community as a region as a whole, rather than the Christians who only accepted the people of their religion. This document is rather unbiased, although the population figures are only estimates. This applies specifically to the case of the death toll for the Middle East. With a pre-plague population that ranged

from 4 to 8 million people 4 million people in between makes a large difference on the death percentage. The third document is a couple of diary entries by two men about the plague, one living in the Middle East and one living in Italy. The first entry is by a man, who had to bury his children, describing the conditions of the plague. He mentions that people truly did seem to die almost instantly, however they did not actually die almost instantly, and many believed that the plague was the end of the world. The fact that the people of the Christian world did not die instantly and that it took a few days to kill meant that they had the bubonic plague which meant possible survival. The second diary account describes the kind of plague that was pneumonic, meaning certain death for anyone that caught that particular germ. This shows that the Christian world might not have ever gotten the pneumonic plague and only had the bubonic, meaning that they truly did not have the worst of the disease. However, the Muslim author wrote his account after the plague had passed and he did not experience the disease first-hand, meaning he could be misinterpreting the damage of the disease by either over exaggerating or under exaggerating it. An additional document that one can consult could be a map that shows a greater difference between the Muslim and Christian worlds, such as color coded arrows that showed the migrations of Christians and Muslims. In documents four and five the authors show the causes of the disease and its spread. Document four exhibits two more diary entries. The first is of an Italian diary writer who is saying that the plague is a punishment from God. He is a chronicler, so he is supposed to be unbiased, however, he is a Christian from Italy, so he is going to let his Christian beliefs influence his record-keeping.

The second document is from a Muslim scholar who says that the plague was a gift from God, rather than a punishment. This shows a great difference between the beliefs of the Christians and the beliefs of the Muslims. Gifts and punishments are vastly different things, proving that the Muslims were more positive about the disease and the Christians were enraged and pessimistic. One should also keep in mind the fact that the Muslim author wrote his documentation after the passing of the disease because perhaps the Muslims living during the plague did not agree with this state of mind. Document five shows the causes and prevention tactics of the Black Plague in Europe and the Middle East that most believed to be true during that time. The causes and tactics mentioned in this document include both excessive and uneducated behavior. Both the Christians and the Muslims were trying any kind of method to get rid of the disease. The activities documented were non-religious, meaning that the religious activities could have been as ridiculous as the ones documented here, or maybe they were perfectly rational in comparison. In documents soon to be mentioned, more will be learned about the religious practices of the Muslims and the Christians. In order to properly analyze the causes of the disease, accounts of educated people and doctors would be beneficial because the doctors witnessed everything first-hand and were essentially experts of the disease during the time, and the educated people might have had many more rational practices and would have been aware of a lack of reason behind the insane practices mentioned in document five. The reactions and behaviors of the people of Eurasia during the time of the plague will prove the difference between the Christians and Muslims the most. Document six is explaining how the

Christians were acting during the winding down of the plague, which one needs to take into account because of the length of time in which they had been enduring the disease at this point. They were breaking laws with no regard to anything or anyone, acting in selfish manners and chaos was everywhere. The severity of the disease was causing them to go crazy and therefore they could not control themselves any longer. There is further evidence of this in document seven. The author of this poem wrote this work at the heart of the plague. The Christians blamed the Jews for this awful disease and they were accusing the Jewish people of poisoning the wells, therefore making everyone sick. The Christians tortured the Jews by holding them over fires in order to get the Jews to confess to crimes they had not committed. The use of Anti-Semitism was in great abundance as Christians used Jews as scapegoats. The poem also tells of Christians who tried to help the Jews but other Christians attacked those who came to their aid. The author of this poem does not approve of these persecutions because he speaks of the lack of mercy and also describes the actions as a "dread form."

This shows that he is describing the events as they happened from a perfectly human standpoint, realizing that this is not the acceptable way to handle these situations. The Pope does not even agree with the burning of the Jews. The Pope wrote document eight and he states that the theory of the Jews poisoning the wells does not make much sense and is inevitably inaccurate because the Jews would have had to have been drinking the same water that the Christians were. The Christians and the Jews all lived in the same villages and the fact that the Christian leader, the Pope, did not even believe that this was a plausible theory proves that some Christians truly

were acting in a lunatic manner. Documents nine and ten tell of how the Muslims reacted to this plague. Document nine describes how the Muslims congregated and embraced each other by fasting and praying together in the Great mosque for three days. They also accepted the Christians' book of law, the gospel, as well as their own, being truly tolerant of everyone. Since a Muslim wrote this document he might have implemented a measure of self-pride in the descriptions, but at the same time, he was a traveler who had seen many different cultures which gives him perspective of how pleasantly the Muslims reacted to such a tragic disaster. A well-known researcher wrote Document ten who one may assume is completely unbiased in terms of retelling the truth of the reactions of the time from what others recorded. The author does not offer proof of violent acts meant to challenge either the authority of the church or any indication of violent acts at all. The Muslims believed that the plague was a part of an apocalyptic event that was out of their control, so their view was to embrace the time that they had and try to be the best followers of their faith that they could possibly be. The only document missing from this category of reactions is a reaction from the Jews. No documentation is available that describes the Jews' first-hand feelings about their treatment. Such a document would be very helpful in order to analyze the reactions of everyone affected by the Black Death. It is clear that the Black Death was a major event in history that caused a vast array of reactions for anyone who had to survive it or die from it. As it killed a third of the population of Europe, this plague could not help but leave damage and broken minds, as well as bringing people together solely for the purpose of attempting not to live the rest of their time on the

Earth in fear. Many lives were lost because of the disease itself and the bizarre behaviors performed because of the pure distress caused by the horrid pandemic. Through the documents mentioned, the context and causes of the disease as well as the behaviors of the Muslims and Christians prove that the Muslims and Christians did react differently.