

Understanding Islam & Christianity

QUICK HISTORY OF ISLAM & MUHAMMAD (AD 570-632)

Muhammad, founder of Islam, endured a troubled childhood - parents & grandparents all died before he was 9. Then he lived with his uncle. He became a religious seeker, often retreating to the mountain caves above Mecca to meditate. At 24, he married a wealthy widow and became a prosperous merchant. When he was 40, Muhammad said the angel Gabriel began delivering messages to him from Allah. The earliest messages emphasized that, *"There is only one God, and his name is Allah. Worship Him."*

These messages and later revelations, all of which the illiterate Muhammad dictated to his disciples, make up the Qur'an. This book is not a book of history, not about Muhammad, and not a theological argument. This book is a book of proclamation - that God is one and sovereign, judgement is coming and we all need to submit to Allah.

Muhammad, and his growing numbers of disciples became a threat to the social order in Mecca. He soon found himself the target of an assassination plot and fled. In 622, he organized an exodus of his followers at Mecca to go to Medina. Those who would be chiefs in Yathrib agreed to appoint Muhammad as their leader. 622 is celebrated as the first year of the Muslim era. That year, Muhammad transitioned from being the leader of a persecuted and powerless minority, to being the leader of a community governed by Islamic law. In 630, he roused his forces and captured Mecca, proclaiming the end of idolatry. In this, he also extended a blanket of amnesty to his enemies. Muhammad died in 632.

THE BASICS

7 FUNDAMENTAL TENANTS OF ISLAM

- 1) God (named Allah)
- 2) God's angelic servants and enemies (angels & demons)
- 3) God's word (called the Qur'an, often referred to as the Koran)
Also believe in the first 5 books of the Bible & Psalms
- 4) God's prophets (Muhammad being the greatest one)
- 5) God's judgement (a "Last Day" for all mankind)
- 6) God's justice (Allah will judge each person's life on the last day)
This will be based on good deeds vs. bad deeds
- 7) God's resurrection (Allah will raise the dead)

SALVATION IS EARNED BY THESE 5 PILLARS

- 1) Confess his faith by saying (outloud) that Allah is the only God and Muhammad is his prophet
- 2) Pray five times a day; before sunrise, at mid-morning, noon, mid-afternoon and after sunset
- 3) Give voluntary contributions of money (2 to 3% of wealth)
- 4) Fast during the Islamic holy season of Ramadan
(one month when no food is consumed from sunrise to sunset)
- 5) Make a pilgrimage to Mecca

ISLAM & WAR

BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW...

The teachings of Islam hold that war is only defensible in situations when

- 1) an Islamic state is under attack;
- 2) when Islam itself must be defended (not spread);
- 3) to protect innocent people who are suffering;
- 4) to defend Muslims who have been evicted, without rightful cause, from their homes.

BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW...

The 1st successor to the Prophet Mohammed (Abu Bakr) gave these instructions about battle:

"Do not commit treachery or veer from the right path. Never kill a child, or a woman, or an elderly person. Do not harm trees or burn them, especially trees that bear fruit."

ABRAHAM!?

BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW...

The tradition of God testing Abraham's devotion to him by asking him to sacrifice Ishmael is the heart of the Abrahamic tradition and the Abrahamic stories. Abraham was the first Prophet who was asked for the ultimate sacrifice: "I want you to sacrifice your own flesh and blood for me". And he passed the test because he was prepared to do it, in his submission and devotion to God. As a symbolic gesture, Muslims reenact what Abraham was going to do with Ishmael by sacrificing a lamb or sheep.

Many of the stories in the Qur'an that relate to Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael are about their flights from Sarah and also about Abraham trying to set up another dwelling, another place with Hagar and his son Ishmael.

Much of what Islamic tradition is about - and even some of the rituals such as the Hajj - stem from the pre-Islamic era and are translated into Islamic rituals through Abraham.

Compare to the Jewish story of Abraham found in *Genesis 16, 21 & 22*.

3 FASCINATING FACTS

- 1) Islam means "Submission to God."
Therefore a Muslim is one who strives to submit to Allah.
- 2) Islam is the world's 2nd largest religion.
- 3) Muslims neither worship Muhammad nor pray to him.
Muslims only worship Allah.

MUSLIMS & CHRISTIANS AGREE

- There is only one God.
- Jesus existed and should be respected.
- There will be a final judgement day.

DISAGREEMENTS...

1) Jesus was not crucified or even killed

Luke 9:22 (NIV) - JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH

"And [Jesus] said, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.'"

John 19:16-18 (NIV) - JESUS & PILATE

"Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull. Here they crucified him, and with him two others - one on each side and Jesus in the middle."

Tacitus (considered greatest Roman historian) - written 116 AD
[About the fire in Rome] *"Nero substituted as culprits and punished in the most unusual ways those hated for their shameful acts, whom the crowd called 'Christians.' The founder of this name, Christ, has been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate."*

2) Salvation (get to heaven) is only by good works

John 3:16, 18 (NIV) - JESUS ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believe in the name of God's one and only Son."

John 1:17 (NIV) - JOHN ABOUT JESUS

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 2:8-9 - PAUL ABOUT SALVATION

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."

3) Islam is the one true religion

John 14:6 (NIV) - JESUS ABOUT GETTING TO GOD

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the father except through me."

Matthew 16:18-19 (NIV) - JESUS ABOUT "RELIGION"

"I tell you that you are Peter [previously known as Simon], and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

4) Jesus was God incarnate (in the flesh)

Qur'an - ABOUT JESUS

"In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary."

John 14:11 (NIV) - JESUS ABOUT BEING GOD

"Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."

SOURCES:

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ISLAM & JESUS

BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW...

Muslims have an extraordinary respect for Jesus. They say that he was the greatest of all the prophets, until Muhammad.

The Qur'an calls Jesus...

- 1) Messiah
- 2) Word from God
- 3) A Spirit from God
- 4) Son of Mary (through virgin birth)
- 5) Strengthened with the Holy Spirit

The Qur'an even accepts the historicity of all the Gospel miracles EXCEPT for the death & resurrection of Jesus.

According to Islamic tradition, Jesus did not die. The Qur'an states that, "God raised Jesus to himself." He ascended into heaven (like the Hebrew prophet Elijah) before a disciple was crucified on a Roman cross.

CONVERSATIONS

START THE DIALOGUE...

- 1) What led you to follow the Islamic faith?
- 2) If I could tell you how to know for sure you will go to heaven, would you be willing to listen?
- 3) Jesus and Islam both claim to be the only path to God, so how should a person decide which one is right?

OTHER TIPS...

- 1) Compliment and learn from a Muslim's commitment to prayer
- 2) Ask what they have been taught about Christianity and about Jesus
- 3) Listen to their beliefs
- 4) Emphasize the claims that Jesus made about being God and the only way to heaven
- 5) Highlight the assurance of salvation that Christians have because of Grace as opposed to works.