

Islam

By Ellen DeWitt

- *How did Islam originate?*
- *What is the message of Islam?*
- *How does this compare to the Bible?*

The History of Islam

Islam is the youngest world religion and yet the world's second largest, next to Christianity. It claims over 700 million members and dominates 42 countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa. "Islam" means "to submit" (to Allah's will). A follower of Islam is called a "Muslim" (a verb form of "to submit"). The founder of Islam was Mohammed, an Arab born about A.D. 570 in Mecca (a city in today's Saudi Arabia). He often retreated to a cave outside of Mecca where he would spend periods of time in deep meditation about the degenerate state of religion and morals among his own countrymen. During one of these retreats, in A.D. 610, he reported that he was visited by the angel Gabriel, who commanded him "to recite in the name of the Lord..." The message he received later became the essence of the Koran (recitations), the book Muslims believe is the word of God. Mohammed claimed he had been ordained a prophet, called to bring his people out of moral decadence, superstition, and polytheism.

Mohammed began preaching that there was but one God, named Allah (which means "the God"), to the exclusion of all other deities. This brought him much opposition, forcing him to leave Mecca in the south and move to Medina in the north. Mohammed instructed his followers to face Mecca, his birthplace, when praying rather than Jerusalem as the Jews did (1 Kings 8). To this day, Muslims face Mecca in prayer, the act itself a symbol of hostility between the Jews and the Muslims.

For the next ten years, he and his followers attacked and conquered villages in the regions around Medina. In 630, accompanied by 10,000 men, Mohammed marched back into Mecca. He purged Mecca of hundreds of its pagan gods and deities, establishing a monotheistic religion. He was successful in uniting a federation of Arab tribes that would eventually conquer the Byzantine and Persian empires.

Mohammed died in 632. In 636, the Muslims conquered Jerusalem. They cleared the rubble from the temple site and built a mosque and the Dome of the Rock, identifying it as the place where Mohammed went to heaven on his winged steed. This is Islam's third most sacred site (after Mohammed's birthplace in Mecca and his tomb in Medina).

Mohammed's failure to name a successor resulted in a split into two major sects of Islam. The Shi'ites are the most visible and vocal. They seek to uphold a strictly fundamentalist and fiercely authoritarian interpretation of the Koran and believe that religious leaders should also be political rulers. An example of this was Ayatollah Khomeini (1900?-1989), who became the sovereign spiritual and political leader of Iran. The majority of Muslims are the Sunnites, who believe that the Muslim faith can be lived out within the context of existing earthly governments.

Islam's Teachings, Beliefs, and Practices

All of Muslim thought is summarized in the shahadah (creed): "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet."

The five basic pillars of Islamic practice are:

- (1) The daily recitation of the shahadah.
- (2) The prescribed prayer said five times daily while kneeling, bowing, and facing Mecca. This reminds one that the shahadah is true.

- (3) The giving of alms. One-fortieth (2.5%) of one's annual income is given spontaneously to the poor, the homeless, or wherever need is deemed greatest.
- (4) Fasting during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan, believed to be the time when Mohammed received the revelation of the Koran.
- (5) The Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, is required of every able Muslim (or their representative) at least once in a lifetime. The hajj greatly enhances the chances for salvation and reminds one of the great devotion one owes Allah.

In addition to the five pillars, Muslim practice includes total abstinence from alcoholic beverages and all forms of gambling. Males are considered superior to females. Traditionally, Muslim women are required to cover their faces with a veil. The Koran permits polygamy, allowing men to have up to four wives (although Mohammed had ten wives). Anyone who dies in a holy war (jihad) is allegedly guaranteed eternal life in heaven. Some radical groups have exalted jihad to the level of a pillar, killing infidels for their faith.

The Koran vs. the Bible

God--Islam teaches "believe in Allah... and do not say, Three... Allah is but one God" (Koran, Sura 4:171). The Bible tells us that God has revealed Himself as One God eternally existing in three persons--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20). The Koran says that Allah only "loves" those who do good, he does not love the sinner. The Bible says, *God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...* (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-10). Allah is ultimately unknowable and incomprehensible, he is uninvolved in human affairs, and he is nonrelational. The Bible teaches, *This is eternal life to know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent* (John 17:3 [emphasis mine]; Ephesians 1:17; 1 John 2:3-4; 4:7-8).

Jesus Christ--Islam mentions six principal prophets (of a total of 18) as sent from Allah: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed (Mohammed being a superior prophet to Jesus because he brought God's final and best revelations to man). The Koran repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus Christ is not the literal Son of God. The Bible repeatedly claims that Jesus is God who became incarnate (John 1:1-14; 3:16, 18; 10:36-38). Islam also rejects Christ's crucifixion. "... they did not really slay him, neither crucified him; only a likeness of that was shown unto them" (Koran, Sura 4:157). They teach instead that God substituted someone else in His place. Yet innumerable eyewitnesses, both Jesus' friends and enemies, saw Jesus die on the cross (Matthew 27, Luke 23; John 19).

Salvation--Because the Koran teaches that, "The true religion with God is Islam," this means for the Muslim that salvation is achieved only through submission to the teachings of Allah in the Koran. "Whoso desires another religion than Islam...in the next world he shall be among the losers." Islam teaches that on the Day of Judgment, "they whose balances shall be heavy with good works, shall be happy; but they, whose balances shall be light, are those who shall lose their souls, and shall remain in hell forever" (Koran, Sura 23:1-4-5). Therefore, for the Muslim, salvation is by works. However, Jesus said, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me* (John 14:6). The Bible also says, *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace... For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works* (Ephesians 1:7, 2:8-9). Therefore, for the Christian, salvation is by grace. By personally receiving the work of Christ on the cross, the Christian can have an assurance of salvation that a Muslim can never have. The Christian can be assured by such comforting words as *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1).

Today there has been a sharp change in attitude with respect to Islam. For example, in Article 16 of Vatican II, the Roman Catholic church states: "But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God..."

Islam in America

Islam is throughout America, with major cities having Islamic centers. It is popular with people such as Mohammed Ali, but it spreads mostly through the immigration of Arabs.

Like most major world religions, Islam has splinter groups. One is Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Chicago-based Nation of Islam, known for his Million-Man March in Washington, D.C. Farrakhan embraces some Islamic teachings (abstention from alcohol and pork) but does not observe the five daily prayers and pilgrimage to Mecca. His message is accepted by many people but is not considered orthodox by most Muslims.

Conclusion

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh...Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; ...If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting ... (2 John 7-11).

Questions and Answers

Q: *How did Islam originate?*

A: In the 600s an Arab named Mohammed claimed to receive divine revelations which became the Koran, the teachings of the religion Islam.

Q: *What is the message of Islam?*

A: “There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet.” Jesus was only a prophet not God. The Koran is the last and greatest revelation from Allah. Salvation is only through being a Muslim and obedience to the Koran.

Q: *How does this compare to the Bible?*

A: There is **only** one God, who exists as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Bible is His **only** written revelation. **Jesus Christ is God** incarnate who died for our sins. *let it be known to all of you,...that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene... there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved (Acts 4:10-12).*