



Islam

Introduction

Point of Origin

Key Points of Belief

Basic Practices: The Five Pillars of Islam

Islam Versus Scripture

Weak Points of Islam

Review Questions

References

Introduction: "Islam is one of the major religions of the world, embracing an estimated one-fifth of the total world population." (Sabini, p. 1). There were an estimated six million Muslims in the United States in 1990, and there are certainly hundreds of thousands more today (Tant, p. 294). Since the events of September 11, 2001, much attention has been focused on this religion. But even before September 11th, daily realities such as the price of gasoline and reports of political crises on the evening news bore witness to the influence Islam on American life. While the inherent power of Islam to affect the world we live in is a sufficient reason for any individual to desire to study its origins and beliefs, the Christian should have a higher motive. To "test all things," to "test the spirits, whether they are of God," and to be able to "become all things to all men" in order to "save some" are the mandates for this study (cf. I Thessalonians 5:21; I John 4:1; I Corinthians 9:22).

The word Islam is derived from an Arabic root which denotes both "peace" and "submission". It is defined literally as "peaceful submission to the will of God -- without resistance" (Draz, p. 3) or "the perfect peace that comes when one's life is surrendered to God." (Huston, p. 201). The term Muslim is a related word used to name people who practice Islam or to describe things related to the practice of Islam. Muslims do not accept the label "Muhammadanism" as being fairly descriptive of their religion; "To name Christianity after Christ, they say, is fitting, for Christians believe that Christ was God. But to call Islam Muhammadanism is like calling Christianity St. Paulism." (Huston, p. 201). "Muhammad was only a mortal being..." (Abdalati, p. 8).

< Point of Origin >

Muhammad, Islam's founding prophet, was born into one of the leading tribes in the central Arabian city of Mecca in 570 A.D. His father died before Muhammad's birth, his mother when he was six, and the grandfather who cared for him after his mother's death, when he was nine (Huston, p. 203). He was raised by his uncle Abu Talib (Rahman, p.11). As a young man, Muhammad entered the service of a wealthy widow, fifteen years older than he named Khadija who put him in charge of her caravan trade. When he was twenty-five, Muhammad married Khadija. Later in life, he would take several other wives.

Muslims admit (Rahman, p. 12) that during these early years, Muhammad probably came in contact with Arabian paganism, Judaism, and apostate Christianity, and that one of the chief gods of Mecca was an Arabian god known as Allah. It is also an accepted fact that in the midst of the crude pagan religions of the Arabs, there were some who already believed that there was only one true God.

When he was about forty years of age, Muhammad began to frequent a cave at Mount Hira in the vicinity of Mecca. It was there, in something of a trance or semi-conscious state, that he claims to have begun receiving revelations from Allah through the angel Gabriel. These "revelations" were first shared with his wife, then with close friends and Meccans at large. Those who believed began to memorize and record Muhammad's words; later (after Muhammad's death) they collected their records and remembrances into the book known as the Koran (or Qu'ran).

Muhammad and his followers apparently suffered much persecution in Mecca itself from the established religious leaders, but Muhammad's following nonetheless grew and spread in other cities of Arabia. One such city, located 280 miles north of Mecca, was Medina. The leaders of this city invited Muhammad to come and mediate between warring factions in the city. Having sent a number of his followers ahead, Muhammad escaped to Medina in 622 A.D. This trip, called the Hijra or "Flight" by Muslims, marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Claiming continued revelations, many of them now coincidentally relating to social or governmental affairs, Muhammad soon gained total control of Medina. By 630 A.D., Muhammad ruled over armies in a vast area of Arabia and was able to re-enter Mecca as a conquering hero.

< Points of Belief >

1. There is One God and his name is Allah. The name Allah literally means "The God." Islam is highly monotheistic. A Muslim writes, "We must believe in the

existence and oneness of Allah...that He has no partner, that there is no comparable being..." (Shaltout, p. 91). Therefore, as we shall see in detail later, Muslims do not believe in the deity of Christ, and label Christians as "polytheists" (El Dareer, p. 10).

2. Allah has revealed himself through his prophet Muhammad, who is regarded as the "seal of the prophets", the last and greatest of them all. Islam claims to accept Moses, Christ, and many other Biblical prophets as true spokesmen for God. However, Muhammad has had the last word.

3. "The holy book of the Qu'ran (or Koran) is the completion of this revelation." (Sabini, p. 8). The Koran is of slightly less length than the New Testament. It is divided into one hundred fourteen chapters called "Surahs". Individual verses are called "Ayahs". Muslims believe that the Koran is Allah's perfect and complete revelation as it exists in the Arabic language. They claim that it "cannot be fully translated into any other language" and that "It is impossible, therefore, to reproduce the meaning, beauty, and fascination of the Qu'ran in any other form" (Abdalati, p. 3). An English translation of the Koran is therefore considered "a human interpretation in a different language that falls far short of the forcefulness of the original book." (Abdalati, p. 4).

4. "The Sunnah ...is justifiably binding on all Muslims." (Draz, p. 39). An oral Tradition of the things Muhammad taught, exemplified, and approved of is called the "Sunnah," and is held in high esteem by Muslims. "Hadith" is a statement, narrative or record of Sunnah tradition. "The role of the Sunnah is not limited to clarifying the duties implied in general commandments revealed in the Qu'ran. Often the Sunnah establishes new obligations and prohibitions for which no clear reference can be found in the Qu'ran." (Draz,p. 39). However, "If there be any contradiction or inconsistency between any of the Traditions and the Qu'ran, the Muslim adheres to the Qu'ran alone...because no genuine Tradition of Muhammad can ever disagree with the Qu'ran or be opposed to it." (Abdalati, p. 21). It should be noted here that the two major factions within Islam (Sunnites and Shi'ites) disagree sharply over which traditions or Sunnahs are genuine and authoritative (Sabini, p. 15).

5. Based on the Koran, Islam holds that there are at least three classes of spirit beings other than man; these are angels, jinns, and devils. The angels are ruled by four Archangels, the most visible of whom is Gabriel. Jinns are the desert spirits created of fire, which Arabs believed in long before Muhammad. The Koran's view of Satan and devils is similar to that presented in the Bible. (Sabini, p. 10).

6. After life, the soul remains in the grave where it receives a foretaste of its fate until the Judgment or Last Day, at which time Allah will send whom he wills to Heaven or Hell according to their conduct on earth (Sabini, p. 8).

Basic Religious Practices: "The Five Pillars" of Islam

1. Testimony or Confession (shahada) is the profession of faith. "It consists of a single sentence: 'There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet'". (Smith, p. 218). Each Muslim must say this with conviction at least once in his lifetime; most say it many times each day.

2. Prayer (salah) is to be made in Arabic at least five times daily facing Mecca. The prayer begins with a devotional phrase (e.g. "God is most great") and then with the opening verse of the Koran, which, in English would run something like this:

Praise be to God
 The Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds
 Most Gracious, Most Merciful;
 Master of the Day of Judgment
 Thee due we worship
 And Thine aid we seek. (Sabini, p. 18).

Tradition has established a formal sequence for prayer of standing and reciting, bowing from the hips, straightening up, gliding to the knees, prostrating face down, sitting back on the haunches and prostrating again.

3. Charity (zakah) is the payment of a fixed alms tax amounting yearly to two and a half percent of a Muslim's income and holdings. This money is to be distributed among the poor. (Smith, p. 221; Sabini, p. 19).

4. Fasting (sawm) is required during the month of Ramadan in the Arabian calendar. Muhammad is supposed to have received his commission as a prophet and made his flight from Mecca to Medina during this month (Smith, p. 221). During Ramadan "Muslims are required to abstain from food, drink, smoking, and sexual relations during the hours of daylight." (Sabini, pp. 19–20).

5. Pilgrimage (hajj) is a requirement of the Koran that every adult Muslim make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if physically possible.

Cross-points

Listed below are various points of difference between the Qu'ran and the Bible. Many other contradictions could be documented, both in the area of the history of biblical characters (e.g. Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Lot's Wife, Joseph) and in the area of doctrine --especially on points of basic morality (e.g. use of violence, swearing, etc.).

The Qu'ran (Koran)

The Bible

On Various Points of History

On Various Points of History

1. THE BIRTH OF JOHN: At the announcement to Zacharias of the birth of John the Lord says, "Thy sign shall be that for three nights, though sound in health, thou speakest not to man." (Surah 19:21).

1. THE BIRTH OF JOHN: Gabriel said to Zacharias, "You will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." (Luke 1:20).

2. THE BIRTH OF JESUS: Mary was in labor "under the trunk of a palm. She said: 'Oh would that I had died ere this, and been a thing forgotten, forgotten quite!' She was then told to "shake the trunk of the palm tree toward thee: it will drop fresh ripe dates upon thee. Eat then and drink and be of cheerful eye" (Surah 19:24, 26, 27). She brought newborn Jesus to the people who implicated her as being immoral for having a child out of wedlock --newborn Jesus answers on Mary's behalf "Verily, I am the servant of God; He hath given me the Book, and He hath made me a prophet" (Surah 19:31).

2. THE BIRTH OF JESUS: "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:7). Mary's morality was defended by God Himself when He appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Do not be afraid to take you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20).

3. THE CRUCIFIXION: "And for their saying, 'Verily we have slain the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, and Apostle of God.' Yet they slew him not, and they

3. THE CRUCIFIXION: "And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him..." (Luke 23:33). "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to

crucified him not, but they had one who was made to appear to them like Jesus. And they who differed about him were in doubt concerning him: No sure knowledge had they about him, but followed only an opinion, and they did not really slay him, but God took him up to Himself. And God is Mighty, Wise!" (Surah 4:156). The Muslim "cannot possibly accept the doctrine that Adam with the whole human race had been condemned and unforgiven until Jesus came to expiate their sins. Consequently, the Muslim cannot entertain the dramatic story of Jesus' death on the cross just to do away with all human sins once and for all." (Abdalati, p.17)

On Various Points of Doctrine

1. JESUS THE SON OF GOD: "It beseemeth not God to beget a son..." (Surah 19:37). "They say: 'The God of Mercy hath gotten offspring.' Now have ye done a monstrous thing! Almost might the very Heavens be rent there at, and the Earth cleave asunder and the mountains fall down in fragments, That they ascribe a son to the God of Mercy, when it beseemeth not the God of Mercy to beget a son!" (Surah 19:91-93). See also Surah 4:171. "How can He have a son when He has no consort?" (Surah 6:100, El Dareer).

2. POLYGAMY: "...of other women who seem good in your eyes marry but two, or three or four; and if ye still fear that ye shall not act equitably, then one only..."

the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:8). "...Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3).

On Various Points of Doctrine

1. JESUS THE SON OF GOD: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." (John 3:16a). At the transfiguration, "...a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud saying "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5b). "Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:3-4).

2. POLYGAMY: "For this reason shall a man leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5). "...let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." (I Corinthians 7:3b).

(Surah 4:3)

3. DIVORCE: "Ye may divorce your wives twice: Keep them honorably or put them away with kindness...These are the bounds of God" (Surah 2:229).

4. AUTHENTIC SCRIPTURE: "...today they (Jews and Christians) still have much of that truth encrusted with pagan ideas in what they have in their hands.

Unfortunately these encrustations is the reason why we say they do not have pure scriptures which makes them unreliable and sprinkled with contradictions. It is these contradictions in the Bible that point to the corrupting impurities of pagan thoughts, and it is the impurities that render the Bible unreliable and out of tune with the Koran." (El Dareer, p. 54).

"Moreover this Koran could not have been devised by any but God: but it confirmeth what was revealed before it, and is a clearing up of the Scriptures..." (Surah 10:38).

3. DIVORCE: "For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce..." (Malachi 2:16). "Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:6b).

4. AUTHENTIC SCRIPTURE: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Lord Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35), and Paul said "...that the things that I write to you are the commandments of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 14:37). "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8).

< Weak Points of Islam >

1. Message Unconfirmed By God. Islam's prophet, Muhammad, showed no miraculous sign to demonstrate that his message was from God. He claimed the message itself was a miracle. That is a little like saying, "This message is from God because I said so."

2. Qu'ran Not Recorded By Inspiration, But By Divisive Disciples. Muhammad was illiterate; he could neither read nor write (El Dareer). Among his disciples, those who could were not inspired and never claimed to be. Yet, they are the ones responsible

for writing down Muhammad's words and collecting them into the Qu'ran. Upon Muhammad's death, these same disciples could not agree upon who should be his successor (or Caliph). There was much intrigue and treachery among them, resulting in, among other things, the major division in Islam between the Sunnites and Shi'ites. Each of these groups claims a different disciple of Muhammad's as his true successor.

3. Reliance On Unreliable Traditions. Islam could not be practiced in most of its modern forms without guidance from the Traditions of the Prophet or Sunnahs. Yet, through the centuries since Muhammad, literally thousands of these traditions have been fabricated and forged, so that it is with great difficulty that even Muslims can determine which are genuine.

4. Spread Through Violence. The Qu'ran commands the spread of Islam through Jihad or Holy War (Surah 9:5, 29), and history records that this has indeed been a major factor in Islamic "evangelism" since its beginning. One must ask, if Islam is a religion which has true merit, why must it be forced on people?

Review Questions on Islam

1. Give two reasons for studying Islam.
2. What does the name "Islam" mean?
3. What is the name of the Islamic bible?
4. In your opinion, would it be correct to call Islam by the name Muhammedanism? (State your reasoning.)
5. Name six fundamental beliefs of Islam.
6. What are the Five Pillars of the practice of Islamic faith?
7. Which of the contradictions between the Qu'ran and the Bible presented in the Cross-Points section of the lesson seems most significant to you? Why?
8. What are the biggest weaknesses of Islam?

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