



Islam

- What is Islam?
- How is it different than the gospel of Christ?
- Should I believe in it?
- How should I react to Muslims?

Perhaps you've met one of the 1.61 billion Muslims in this world. Millions of them make their home in the United States. Islam is the second-largest religion in the world, and many say that it is also the fastest-growing.

But most of us have only a vague idea of what Islam is, perhaps influenced mainly by images of violence in the media. In recent years, the issue of radical Islamic terrorists has occupied the American mind. This, as your Muslim friend will surely be quick to point out, is a version of Islam practiced only by a small minority.

What is Islam, then? All Muslims will agree on the basic facts. Muhammad, a man born around 570 AD (or over 500 years after Jesus), founded the religion. Muslims consider him to be the greatest and final prophet of God.

Islam took shape around Muhammad. Since he was at the same time a religious, political, and military figure, Islam also became an all-encompassing way of life. It merges both religious beliefs and civil law. Muhammad's followers formed a political entity that expanded greatly during his lifetime. After Muhammad's death in 632, his successors led this new Muslim Empire on a conquest of much of the known world. Even today, some predominately Muslim countries have theocratic governments that rule based on Islam's holy law.

Muhammad's religious message emphasized two basic principles: there is only one God (called Allah), and on the Day of Judgment he will punish the wicked and reward the righteous. These main theological concepts are repeated over and over again in the Qur'an, Islam's holy book. After Muhammad's death, his followers wrote down his teachings in this book.

Most of the practical side of Islam --beliefs, practices, and everyday life-- comes from two other collections of writings, the *Hadith* and the *Sunna*. These are stories relating things that Muhammad did or said. These traditions were passed down orally for hundreds of years

before they were finally placed in authoritative collections. Islam's "five pillars" (profession of faith, ritual prayer, alms-giving, fasting during the holy month, and a pilgrimage to Mecca) find their practical forms in these texts.

Muslims believe that Muhammad is the last and greatest prophet in a line that traces its origin to Adam himself. To them, Islam is the religion of Abraham, which was taught by the Hebrew prophets and Jesus himself. Muslims hold a certain respect, then, for both Jews and Christians. However, they believe that faulty transmission of the Torah and the Gospels corrupted those books, so Muslims put virtually no stock in them. In practice, Muhammad becomes the sole messenger of Allah.

Comparing Islam to the Gospel

Are Allah and Jehovah the same God?

One of the more common sentiments heard in our society is summed up in one phrase: "All religions are basically the same." People bent on a false concept of tolerance and disillusioned by the divisions produced by religious difference want to blur the lines between the various faiths. This seems especially easy to do with Islam and the Gospel, since they appear to share many views. But it is not true.

A religion and its followers are defined by the god they worship. Allah and Jehovah are not the same God. Consider how they are different on these points:

- **GRACE.** Allah rewards good deeds with paradise[1]; in other words, Muslims must earn their salvation by good works. The God of the Bible grants eternal life apart from works (Eph. 2:8-9).
- **JUSTICE.** The Qur'an states that Allah forgives sin[2]. But it offers no explanation about how he does this without being unjust; how could any judge simply let an offender "off the hook" with no punishment? The cross of Jesus Christ solves this problem for the true God. Jesus' atoning death paid the ransom to rescue us from sin (Isaiah 53:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).
- **LOVE.** At the same time as God provided for the seriousness of sin as Christ hung on the cross, He was demonstrating His matchless love. Why else would God take on human form and suffer, except that He loves the world? (John 3:16; Philippians 2:5-8) But this manner of love is absent in Allah; he is a distant god who "created man to try him with afflictions." [3]
- **OMNIPOTENCE.** According to the Muslim concept of Allah's power as Creator, everything that happens is caused by him. Everything, down to our very thoughts and our eternal destinies[4]. Of course, this idea of omnipotence takes away our ability to choose. In the end, therefore, it is Allah who chooses who will be a Muslim and be saved. The Lord, on the other hand, has all power, but refrains from using it to force us in one direction or the other (Revelation 19:6; 22:17).
- **HOLINESS.** Since Allah is responsible for all that happens, he must also be responsible for all the evil that is in the world. If a person sins, they do so because Allah willed[5]. Contrast that with Jesus, who is perfectly holy (Hebrews 7:26).
- **CHANGEABILITY.** The Qur'an is supposedly the representation of Allah to mankind. However, many verses in the Qur'an have been abrogated (or eliminated) --even during Muhammad's lifetime! [6] Furthermore, recall that Muslims believe that Allah allowed his word to be corrupted by the Jews and Christians. Jesus taught that God's

word, like God Himself, cannot be corrupted or changed (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:24-25).

- **ONENESS.** God's oneness is not only a main theme of Muhammad, but also of Jesus (Mark 12:29). Unfortunately, the Islamic concept of monotheism is a reaction to a misunderstanding of the oneness of God. Muslims reject the notion that God had a Son named Jesus, and that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh. But the fact that there are three personalities in the one Godhead --the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19)-- only contradicts our limited human understanding of unity. Divine oneness is beyond our comprehension, because God is far above us!
- **NATURE.** The true God is spirit (John 4:24), His kingdom is spiritual (John 18:36), and the hope He offers is spiritual (1 John 3:2-3). But the God of Islam promises virgins, wine, and luxury to the righteous dead -- worldly enticements [\[7\]](#). He also encourages physical warfare to expand the influence of Islamic law [\[8\]](#).

Do not be deceived! Allah and God are not the same. Islam and the Way of Christ are not the same. But which should you choose?

Finding the Truth About Islam

How do we know Muhammad is a prophet?

Many people asked Muhammad himself that very same question during his lifetime. The Qur'an records some of his answers. While he responded in various ways, his main answer was:

"This Qur'an could not have been composed by any but Allah. It confirms what was revealed before it and fully explains the Scriptures. It is beyond doubt from the Lord of the Creation. If they say: 'It is your own invention,' say: 'Compose one chapter like it. Call on your false gods to help you, if what you say be true!' "[\[9\]](#)

In other words, the Qur'an is presented as proof that Muhammad is the apostle of Allah. It is seen as so beautiful, insightful, and perfect that it must be divinely inspired. The book itself is a miracle.

If you want to investigate this claim, read the Qur'an. You may think it is beautiful, or you might not, since beauty is a subjective thing. But even if you do think it is beautiful, do not accept it for that reason. This author thinks Shakespeare's writing is beautiful, but would never believe that Shakespeare is a messenger from God.

Muhammad had every opportunity to answer the challenges in the one way that would actually prove him to be a prophet: perform a miraculous sign. He never did. Nor did he ever claim to.

It is true that his adoring followers, hundreds of years later in the Hadith and Sunna, claimed that he did all sorts of miracles. But from what one reads in the Qur'an, Muhammad himself did not believe he could perform supernatural signs.

Compare this to Jesus, whose resurrection from the dead is supreme proof of His claims (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Other miracles that He and His disciples did could not be denied, even by their enemies! (John 11:47-48; Acts 4:15-17). The eyewitness accounts of these

events contained in the New Testament provide ground for our faith in the gospel of Jesus (John 20:30-31; 2 Peter 1:16-18).

In the end, Muhammad provides no good reason to believe in him.

Being a Neighbor to Muslims

How can I help to save my friend?

Common stereotypes, unfortunately, picture all Muslims as bloodthirsty terrorists. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Some of the best, most kind and moral people you will meet adhere to Islam. Muslims should be able to expect the same courteous, compassionate treatment from Christians as anyone else. You might even befriend a Muslim and feel comfortable learning about and enjoying their culture.

But our compassion and friendship should, as always, include speaking to them about Christ. As Jesus so boldly stated --but backed up with His works-- He alone is the way to salvation (John 14:6). We should have pity on our Muslim neighbors and invite them to come to know the only true Savior and God. Open up the Scriptures with them, be open-minded, be willing to learn, and reason with them.

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Footnotes

[1] Qur'an 2:27; 11:114; 39:61

[2] Qur'an 39:53

[3] Quotation from Surah 90, trans. by N.J. Dawood

[4] Qur'an 81:27-29

[5] Qur'an 6:107-108

[6] See "The Incident of the Satanic Verses" in chapter 3 of Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman, by William Montgomery Watt.

[7] Qur'an 4:57; 52:19-20; 56:22-24,35-38; 78:31-34

[8] Qur'an 2:190-193; 9:5,14,29; 47:4; 66:9

[9] Quotation from Surah 10, trans. by N.J. Dawood. See also 2:23; 4:82; 11:13; 52:33,34