

The Religion of Islam

I. Introduction

A. "Islam" means "submission." A follower of the religion of Islam is called a "Muslim" which means "one who is in submission to the divine will".

B. Islam is the youngest of the 5 major religions of the world. According to the best estimates, there are 800,000,000 to 1 billion Muslims world-wide. At present, over 20 million Muslims reside in Europe. There are now over 2000 mosques in England! The U.S.S.R., the 4th largest Muslim nation in the world, has 53 million adherents representing 1/5 of the total population. After ethnic Russians, Muslims are the largest population group but are growing 4 times as fast, and may out-number them in less than 20 years. Currently, there are 48 nations where adherents of Islam are in the majority.

C. The current resurgence of Islam began with the oil cartel following the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Millions of dollars from enormous foundations are being spent to fuel the worldwide expansion of Islam. There are now more adherents of Islam in the U.S. than Episcopalians!

D. *Nota bene*: The greatest threat to world peace and stability in the next decade or two may be the result of the religion of Islam. Almost every controversy in the Middle East can be traced to this religion, either through intra-party squabbles, or Islam versus non-Islam.

II. Historical Background

A. The religion was founded by Muhammad who was born in 570 A.D. in a small village (Mecca) along a caravan route in what is today known as Saudi Arabia.

B. The young Muhammad, an orphan at an early age, had an inquiring mind and an intense interest in religion. The prevailing religion at this time in Arabia was one of polytheism and animism. He inquired of both Judaism and Christianity. The Christianity that he came into contact was of a very heretical sort. Christianity at this time was losing its vitality and was about to enter the Dark Ages.

C. At about 25 years of age Muhammad married a wealthy widow 15 years his senior. Due to the ensuing economic security, Muhammad turned the more to religious contemplation often retiring to caves in the wilderness for long periods of time. He practiced fasting and was prone to dreams. He had a profound dissatisfaction with the polytheism and superstition of his day. He received his first of many "revelations" at 40 years of age, and thought at first he was possessed of a demon. Later he claims he was visited by the angel Gabriel who informed him to warn the people. This marked the beginning of his prophetic office.

D. The response in Mecca to his claims was small and limited mainly to family members. Soon he and his followers (around 200) were forced to flee. This flight to Medina occurred in 622 A.D. and is known as "The Hegira". In Medina, Muhammad became a leader and theocratic head of the town. Muslims reckon time from the Hegira. 622 A.D. = the year 1 A.H.

E. In less than a 100 years Islam spread from the Atlantic Ocean across central Asia deep into India. This empire lasted over 1000 years. Only a handful of countries have ever reversed themselves after becoming an Islamic nation in 14 centuries of history!

III. The Belief System of Islam

A. Islam is a religion of rigid monotheism and an all- encompassing law. It is a belief system, i.e. a world and life view. Everything is seen from an Islamic perspective.

B. Islam's five fundamental articles of faith:

1. There is no God but God. "Allah" is the Arabic word for "God". This god is the sovereign Lord of the universe. Everything that occurs is according to his will. He is also the source of both good and evil. The Koran assigns 99 names to Allah. The 100th name is secret and is known only to the camel!

2. God gave prophets (the Koran mentions 28) to every age from Adam to Muhammad. Muhammad, the last and greatest prophet, was sinless as were all the other prophets. Jesus was the prophet of the previous age. They affirm that Jesus was born of a virgin and performed many miracles, but they vehemently deny that he was God, was crucified, or rose from the dead.

3. Islam believes that each age was given a book through its prophet, but all have been lost except portions of the Old Testament and the Gospel of Jesus which was corrupted by Christians. The Koran ("Quran") was given to Muhammad and supersedes all other revelations. The Koran is divided into 114 Suras (chapters) and was given directly to Muhammad. To the Muslim, every word of the Koran is the Word of God and is of an eternal nature. In other words, it existed in heaven prior to being dictated by the angel Gabriel. The Koran governs every area of the life of a Muslim, from how to prevent crime to the proper use of a toothpick! It is often the only constitution of some Muslim countries.

4. There are good and bad angels. The chief good angel is Gabriel. The chief fallen angel is Shaitan (Satan).

5. There will be a day of judgement in which all the dead will be resurrected. Allah will be the judge and each person will be sent either to heaven, a place of sensual pleasure, or hell, a place of torment. Hell is for those who opposed Allah and his prophet, Muhammad. Salvation is attained by the quality of a person's obedience to the law as determined by Allah. Muhammad is seen as a mediator who helps a person attain salvation. The bridge to paradise is likened to a razor-sharp sword; Muhammad awaits to assist in crossing.

C. Each Muslim has six obligatory duties:

1. Reciting the creed. "There is no God but Allah". The word "quran" in Arabic means "to recite".

2. Pray five times a day facing Mecca.

3. Tithe to the poor and for the furtherance of Islam. It varies from 2 to 10 per cent.
4. Fast for one month each year during the 9th month, the lunar month of Ramadan. This month of fasting is during the day only. Feasting takes place after sundown.
5. Make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a lifetime. A male who makes a pilgrimage to Mecca is called a "Haji" a title of honor similar to the English "Sir".

D. The concept of "Jihad" ("holy war") is sometimes referred to as a *6th pillar*. Jihad is also a religious duty of all adult males who must commit to any summons of war against infidels. Any who die in such a war are assured paradise. Today there is controversy as to who in the Arab world can legally declare a Jihad. In the past, this has been a most successful form of "evangelism". Polytheistic cultures have been given the option of submission or death. Historically, Jews and Christians, since they were considered "people of the Book" were given a choice of submission or paying tribute (taxes).

IV. Other Muslim beliefs

A. The unforgivable sin to a Muslim is to attribute deity to anything other than God himself. To claim that Jesus is God or the Son of God is blasphemy to a Muslim. They believe that God is unbegotten and begets not.

B. Most Muslims believe Jesus predicted the coming of Muhammad when He said that He would send "another Comforter" in John 14:16. Muslims even refer to Muhammad as the "Holy Spirit".

C. Muslims are very anti-Trinitarian. The Koran teaches that Christians believe in a Trinity of God, the Father, Jesus, the Son, and Mary the Mother!

D. Most Muslims believe Judas died on the cross, not Jesus. God caused Jesus to be ascended into heaven.

E. Most Muslims do not separate church and state, i.e. politics and religion. There is no such thing as secular and sacred. This is a cause of some of their intra-mural conflicts. Occasionally a ruler attempts to secularize the state. For this Sadat was assassinated. Turkey gets away with it, but it is resented in much of the Muslim world.

F. The Koran allows a man to have up to four wives if he believes he can treat them equally!

G. The Koran teaches that if a Muslim soldier kills another Muslim soldier in an unjust war he will go to hell! In the recent war, many Iraqi soldiers did not believe it was just war, hence they deserted in large numbers (and probably for other reasons as well!).

H. Muslim soldiers can declare a victory in battle even though they were stomped by the enemy, because to a Muslim, win or lose, it is the will of Allah. So if you lose, you win, because it is the will of Allah. I. The Koran teaches that Muslims should take up arms against infidels. The following quote from the Koran should give insight into Saddam's behavior:

"When ye encounter unbelievers, strike off their heads until ye have made a great slaughter among them, and bind them in bonds; and either give them free demission afterwards or exact a ransom... Verily if God please he could take vengeance on them, without your assistance, but he commandeth you to fight his battles... And to those who fight in defense of God's true religion, God... will lead them into paradise..."

V. Reaching Muslims for Christ

There is no needier field today than Muslim countries. We need to pray fervently that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers. Most specialists in Muslim evangelism say to be successful in this field, one must be patient, be loving, establish relationships, understand Islam, and be given to much prayer.

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March 2004