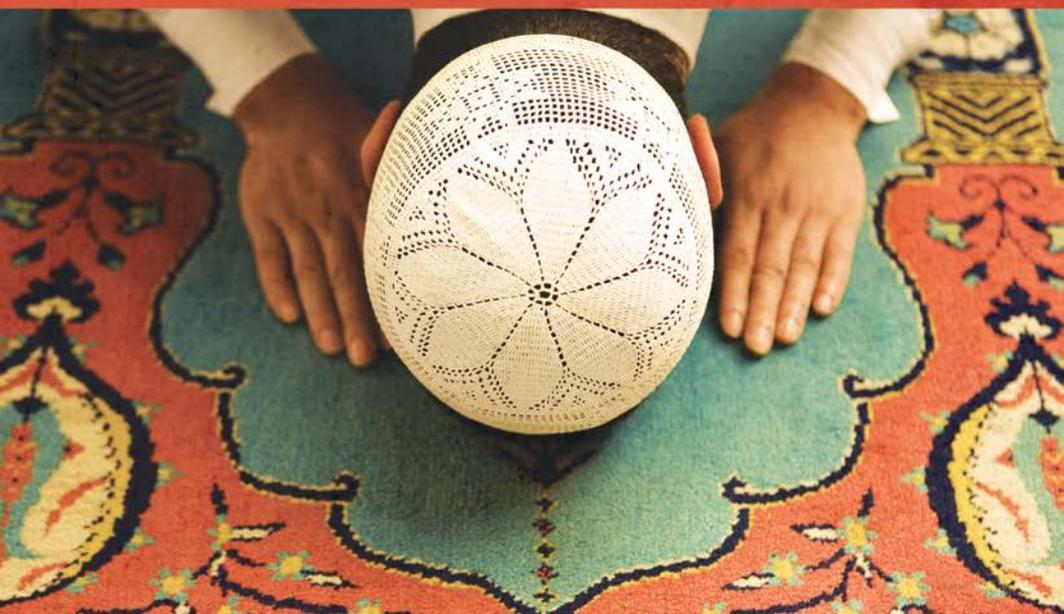


WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN
SHOULD KNOW ABOUT
ISLAM

A PRIMER ON THE MUSLIM FAITH
FROM A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

ROB PHILLIPS



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FOREWORD

One question I am frequently asked when leading apologetics conferences is, “Shouldn’t we see Islam as a religion of peace?” Answering that question in the negative invites charges of bigotry, or at least insensitivity. But responding with a “yes” is a lie. The religion Muhammad founded 1,400 years ago is one of global conquest by whatever means deemed necessary.

The truth is that the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims are precious people for whom Christ died. As Christians, we should love our Muslim friends and seek their salvation. At the same time, we should understand that Islam is a dangerous false religion that enslaves people and strives for world domination.

We should seek to understand the basics of Islam if we are to gently and respectfully share our faith with Muslims. Their belief in one God; their respect for many Old Testament prophets; their acceptance of some portions of the Bible; and their high regard for Jesus are good starting points. However, we need to understand that Muslims deny the Trinity; believe the Bible has been corrupted; and consider our claim that Jesus is the Son of God to be *shirk*, or the unpardonable sin.

That’s the reason for this short book – so Christian readers may learn the essentials of the Muslim faith from a biblical perspective, and having learned them, may engage their Muslim friends in spiritual conversations focused on the One who desires that all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Rob Phillips

ISLAM: AN OVERVIEW

Islam is the youngest major world religion, and one of the fastest-growing. It was founded by Arabian visionary Muhammad (570-632 A.D.), who was born in the city of Mecca in Arabia. Muhammad claimed he received supernatural revelations from God through the angel Gabriel. These revelations were written down by others and compiled into a book called the Qur'an. Islam today is comprised of two main schools: the majority Sunni school and the minority Shi'ite school. In addition, there are millions of Muslim mystics called Sufis. Islam is the second-largest religion in the world (behind Christianity) with about 1.6 billion followers. Interestingly, the four nations with the largest numbers of Muslims today are all outside the Middle East – Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India.

PURPOSE

The ultimate goal of Islam is to subjugate the world and then rule it according to Islamic law. Islam claims to be the restoration of true monotheism and thus supersedes

both Judaism and Christianity. Islamic law teaches that conversion may be achieved through persuasion or subjugation, but some hold that if these fail, unbelievers (or “infidels”) may be eliminated if necessary. As such, hostility toward non-Muslims is accepted and even encouraged in some Islamic cultures, based on passages from the Qur’an such as, “O you who believe, take not the Jews and Christians as friends...” (5:51).

ISLAM’S BEGINNINGS

Islam began with the supernatural visions and revelations that Muhammad claimed he received from Allah through the angel Gabriel. Because it is said Muhammad could neither read nor write, he memorized these revelations and ordered his followers to write them down. These writings became Islam’s holy book, the Qur’an. Muhammad at first feared his revelations came from a *jinn*, or evil spirit, but later he accepted their source as divine and taught that he alone was the true recipient of Allah’s truth.

Muhammad was born in the Arabian city of Mecca in 570 A.D. Mecca was an important economic center, serving as a resting place for trading caravans. But it also was an important religious city because the *Ka’bah* was located there. The *Ka’bah* is a cubic structure that in the days of Muhammad housed 360 deities. Each Arabian tribe selected its own deity and came to Mecca each year to pay homage to its god. Muhammad’s monotheistic preaching

threatened the economic and religious livelihood of Mecca and set him against his own tribe. He and about 100 Muslim families were forced to flee to Medina, a city 200 miles north of Mecca. Muslims look to the year of Muhammad's flight, 622 A.D., as the beginning of the Muslim calendar. In 630, Muhammad and his army returned and took control of Mecca. He personally destroyed the idols in the *Ka'bah* and within a year succeeded in unifying the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula under Islam. Muhammad died in 632 A.D. without appointing a successor.

THE SECTS OF ISLAM

The two major sects of Islam, Sunni and Shi'ite, originally were established after Muhammad's death in a dispute over who should serve as his successor, or *caliph*. The Sunni Muslims insisted that Muhammad's successor be elected, while the Shi'ite Muslims felt he should be of Muhammad's bloodline, which would have meant that Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, would have become *caliph*. The Sunnis prevailed and today account for about 80 percent of the Muslim population. Sunnis and Shi'ites differ in other ways as well:

Authority. Sunnis emphasize the authority of the written traditions, which include the Qur'an and the *Sunna* ("custom"), from which they derive their name. They also receive guidance from a consensus of elders (*ulama*), who base their decisions on Islam's writings. Shi'ites look more

toward human authority. Initially, they believed Allah spoke through the *Imam*, roughly the equivalent of the Catholic pope. In the ninth century, however, the twelfth *Imam*, known as the *Mahdi*, became hidden; Shi'ites today await his return, much as Christians await the return of Christ.

Civil and religious power. Sunnis believe there should be a separation between civil and religious authorities, while Shi'ites believe the religious authorities should exercise both political and religious power. Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, for example, was a Shi'ite leader.

There is another significant sect of Islam known as Sufism, which is mystical in nature. Minor sects include the Wahhabis (primarily in Saudi Arabia), the Druze (mostly in Lebanon, Syria and northern Israel), the Alawites (mainly in Syria), and the Ahmadiyahs (primarily in Pakistan). Beyond this, Islam has been influential in the founding of two other religions: Sikhism and Baha'i.

SOURCE OF AUTHORITY

Muslims believe Allah has revealed many written works, including the Old and New Testaments. But these revelations ended with the Qur'an ("recitations"), which supersedes all others. For all practical purposes, Muslims accept only the Qur'an as the Word of God. They believe Allah's earlier revelations in the Bible have been corrupted

by Jews and Christians and therefore are not trustworthy, except as interpreted by the Qur'an. Sunni Muslims, as mentioned above, also place strong emphasis on the *Sunna*, which includes the *Hadith*, in which the sayings and conduct of Muhammad and his companions are recorded.

BASIC BELIEFS

Every Muslim must hold to six articles of faith:

Faith in Allah. The central doctrine of Islam is that God is one and that no one may be associated with his deity. To associate someone, like Jesus, with Allah by calling Him God's Son is to commit the unpardonable sin of *shirk* (4:48).

Belief in angels like Gabriel, whom they claim transmitted the Qur'an to Muhammad. Each person has two angels assigned to him or her – one to record the person's good deeds and the other to record the person's evil deeds. Muslims also believe in evil spirits called *jinn*, from which we get the word "genie."

Acceptance of the Qur'an. Four high-ranking prophets were given books by divine revelation. Moses was given the *Tawrat* (Torah); David, the *Zabur* (his Psalms); Jesus, the *Injil* (Gospel); and Muhammad, the Qur'an. Muslims teach that only the Qur'an has been preserved in perfection; Jews and Christians have corrupted the rest.

Acceptance of Islam's prophets, with Muhammad as the greatest. The Qur'an says Allah has sent prophets to every nation, proclaiming the truth of the one true God. In all, 124,000 prophets have been sent. Most are unknown, but many include biblical characters such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Muhammad is the only prophet who is for all time; he is called the "Seal of the Prophets."

Belief in predestination – that is, everything that happens, good and evil, is predestined by Allah's will.

Preparation for the Day of Judgment, in which each person's good and evil works are measured, resulting in heaven or hell. The Muslim ideas of the afterlife are metaphorical. The real nature of paradise and hell are known only to Allah.

RELIGIOUS DUTIES

Every Muslim must practice at least five fundamental religious duties. These are known as the Pillars of Religion, and they are:

The confession of faith or *Shahada*: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet." Sincerity in voicing the confession is essential. If a Muslim repudiates the *Shahada* it nullifies his or her hope of salvation.

Prayer (*Salat*). Muslims must recite 17 cycles of prayer each day. These cycles usually are spread over five times while the supplicant faces Mecca – dawn, noon, midafternoon, dusk, and two hours after sunset. The noon service on Friday is the only time Muslims are expected to gather together at the mosque. Muslims wash themselves ceremonially before praying; this is called ablution or *wudu*.

Observing Ramadan, a month of fasting throughout the daylight hours to commemorate the first revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad. During the day, Muslims must refrain from food, drink, smoke, and sexual relations. After sundown, all of these pleasures may be enjoyed until sunrise the next day.

Almsgiving or *Zakat*. Muslims are required to give 2.5 percent of their currency, plus other forms of wealth, as determined by a complicated system that purifies their remaining wealth.

Pilgrimage, or *Hajj*, to Mecca, Muhammad's place of birth. Every Muslim who is physically and financially able must make this trek at least once in his or her lifetime. Pilgrims must wear white garments to eliminate all class distinctions. The process of visiting several sacred sites usually takes more than a week.

A sixth religious duty is sometimes associated with these: *Jihad*, or Muslim holy war. When the situation warrants it, this duty requires Muslims to go to war to defend

Islam against “infidels.” Anyone who dies in a holy war is guaranteed everlasting life in heaven and is considered a martyr for Islam.

ARE YAHWEH AND ALLAH THE SAME?

While many people assume that Muslims and Christians worship the same God, differing only in the name upon which they call, this simply is not true. The god of the Qur’an and the God of the Bible do share some similarities, but the differences are profound. Following are some similarities and differences highlighted by *The Illustrated Guide to World Religions*:

SIMILARITIES

- Both are One.
- Both are transcendent Creators of the universe.
- Both are sovereign.
- Both are omnipotent.
- Both have spoken to humanity through messengers or prophets, through angels, and through the written word.
- Both know in intimate detail the thoughts and deeds of men.
- Both will judge the wicked.

DIFFERENCES

- Allah is a singular unity, while God is a compound unity who is one in essence and three in persons (Matt. 28:19; John 10:30; Acts 5:3-4).
- Allah is not a father and has begotten no sons (19:88-92; 112:3), but God exists in an eternal relationship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Through the Qur'an, Allah broke into history through a word that is written, but the God of the Bible broke into history through the Word who is a person (John 1:1, 14; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:2-3; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:9-10).
- "Allah loves not the wrongdoers" (3:140), and neither does he love "him who is treacherous, sinful" (4:107), but the God of the Bible "proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).
- The standard of judgment for Allah is the Qur'anic teaching that our good deeds must outweigh our bad deeds (7:8-9; 21:47), but the standard of the God of the Bible is complete perfection as measured by the holy character of God Himself (Matt. 5:48; Rom. 3:23).
- Allah provided a messenger, Muhammad, who warned of Allah's impending judgment (2:119; 5:19; 7:184, 188; 15:89-90) and who declared that "no bearer of a burden can bear the burden

of another” (17:15; see also 35:18). But God provided a sinless Savior who took our sins upon Himself and bore God’s wrath in our place (Matt. 20:28; 26:28; Luke 22:37; John 3:16; 10:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:9-10).

COMPARING CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT GOD:

There is one true and living God, who exists as three distinct, co-equal, co-eternal persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While the Bible is clear that there is one God (Deut. 6:4), the Scriptures also call the Father, Son and Holy Spirit God (e.g., John 5:18; 20:28; Acts 5:3-4), and in some places the three persons of the Godhead are depicted together (Matt. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Peter 1:2). God is personal, knowable, approachable, and loves all people.

WHAT ISLAM SAYS ABOUT GOD:

The one true God is Allah. He is a distant God, unknowable and unapproachable. He does not love all people, only those who do well. He is the author of evil as well as good since he predestines all things. He is not triune but singular,

and no partner is to be associated with him. To associate a person to Allah – such as by calling Jesus the Son of God – is to commit the unpardonable sin of *shirk*.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT JESUS:

He is the virgin-born Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:35). He is the eternal God, the Creator, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Holy Spirit (John 1:1-14; Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-13). Jesus died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3), rose physically from the dead (Matt. 12:38-40; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:4-8; 1 Peter 1:18-21) and is coming back physically and visibly one day (Matt. 24:29-31; John 14:3; Titus 2:13; Rev. 19:11-16).

WHAT ISLAM SAYS ABOUT JESUS:

He was one of God's prophets or messengers, but inferior to Muhammad, who brought Allah's final revelation to man. The Qur'an denies that Jesus is the Son of God, and any Muslim who believes in the deity of Jesus has committed the unforgivable sin of *shirk* – a sin that will send that person to hell. Muslims do believe Jesus is the Messiah, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life and is coming back one day – to establish Islam throughout the earth. They do not believe He died on the cross, but was called to heaven by Allah.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE BIBLE:

The Bible is the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God, and is His sole written authority for all people (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

WHAT ISLAM SAYS ABOUT THE BIBLE:

The Bible is corrupted and untrustworthy. Islam claims the Qur'an is the literal Word of God, received supernaturally by Muhammad from the angel Gabriel. It supersedes the Bible, which also was given by Allah. The Qur'an does assert, however, that the teachings of the Qur'an are in harmony with those of the Bible: "We have revealed to thee the Book [the Qur'an] with the truth, verifying that which is before it [the Bible]" (5:48). Yet the Qur'an and the Bible clearly contradict in countless ways. For example, the Qur'an teaches a unitarian God; the Bible, a Trinitarian God. The Qur'an says Jesus was just a man; the Bible, that He was and is God incarnate. The Qur'an stresses salvation by works; the Bible, salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SALVATION:

Christ's death at Calvary completely paid our sin debt so that salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus (John 3:16, 5:24; Rom. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

WHAT ISLAM SAYS ABOUT SALVATION:

The Qur'an teaches, "Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam" (3:19). This means salvation is achieved only through submission to the teachings of Islam. Forgiveness is based on good works and Allah's choice of mercy. The Muslim's chances for heaven are good if he or she: 1) accepts the Muslim god Allah and his apostle Muhammad; 2) does good works and all that is required of him by Allah; and 3) is predestined to Allah's favor. Islam teaches that Christ was neither crucified for our sins nor resurrected; therefore salvation cannot possibly be attained through faith in Christ.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SIN:

Sin is the violation of God's perfect and holy standards. All people are sinners (Rom. 3:10, 23) and are under the curse of sin – spiritual and physical death (Gen. 2:17, 3:17-19; Rom. 6:23). Only faith in Christ and His work on our behalf frees us from sin and its consequences (John 3:16, 5:24; Eph. 2:8-9).

WHAT ISLAM SAYS ABOUT SIN:

Sin is lack of obedience to Allah. Man is sinful by act only, not by nature. Original sin is viewed as a "lapse" by Adam. Man is not really "fallen" in his sin nature; he is

merely weak and forgetful. The most serious sin is *shirk*; for example, considering God as triune. Sin is thought of in terms of rejecting right guidance. It can be forgiven through repentance. No atonement is necessary.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT HEAVEN AND HELL:

Hell is a place of everlasting conscious existence, where the unbeliever is separated from God (Matt. 25:46; Luke 16:19-31; Rev. 14:9-11, 20:10-15). As for heaven, all believers have God's promise of a home in heaven, will go there instantly upon physical death, and will return with Christ from heaven to earth one day (John 14:1-3; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 19:11-16).

WHAT ISLAM SAYS ABOUT HEAVEN AND HELL:

Muslims believe in heaven and hell. Allah predetermines the eternal destiny of each person, and the hope of salvation for the Muslim is based on works, although no Muslim has the assurance of heaven (unless he or she dies as a martyr). Islam teaches its followers to prepare for the Day of Judgment, in which each person's good and evil works are measured, resulting in heaven or hell.

DO CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS WORSHIP THE SAME GOD?

Several years ago, El Arabiya TV asked President George W. Bush whether he was anti-Islam. He responded: “Well, I believe in an almighty God, and I believe that all the world, whether they be Muslim, Christian, or any other religion, prays to the same God.”

While the president’s comments no doubt were intended to soothe the minds of Muslim viewers, they had just the opposite effect on me. The god of Islam (Allah) and the God of the Bible (Yahweh) clearly are different. We can see this by asking three personal questions:

1. DOES GOD KNOW ME?

Allah. The Qur’an teaches that Allah is the transcendent creator. He knows who you are; in fact, he has fatalistically determined your thoughts, words and deeds – and even your eternal destiny, which is why Muslims so often say, “If Allah wills it.” So, Allah does indeed know you.

But Allah is neither knowable nor approachable. The Qur'an depicts him as a singular being with no "partners." To call Jesus the Son of God is to commit *shirk*, the unpardonable sin. Of the 99 names for God in the Qur'an, none is intimate. Allah reveals his will, not himself.

Yahweh also is depicted as the transcendent Creator. He knows us; but more than that, He is knowable and approachable. He created us in His image – with personality, thought, and will – for the purpose of enjoying an everlasting, intimate relationship with Him. He exists as a Trinity in eternal relationship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In fact, God is so knowable, He came in the flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. As the apostle John writes, "The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Does God know me? Allah and Yahweh are depicted as supreme beings that know everything and everyone. But ... only the God of the Bible is truly personal and knowable.

2. DOES GOD LOVE ME?

Allah. The Qur'an teaches that Allah loves those he chooses to love and hates those he chooses to hate. "Allah loves not the wrongdoers," says the Qur'an (3:140), neither does he love "him who is treacherous, sinful" (4:107). "Those who

disbelieve and act unjustly, Allah will never forgive them, nor guide them to a path, Except the path to hell, to abide in it for a long time. And that is easy to Allah” (4:168-169). Other types of people Allah hates include the proud and boastful (4:36; 16:23; 31:18; 57:23); those given to excess (5:87); and the ungrateful (22:38).

Yahweh, on the other hand, loves all people (John 3:16). He demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). John writes, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10 KJV). Even though God hates sin, He loves sinners and takes no pleasure in punishing them (Eze. 18:23).

Does God love me? Only the God of the Bible loves all people.

3. DID GOD DIE FOR ME?

Allah. The Qur’an teaches that Allah did not and would not die for you, nor would he send anyone to die for you. In fact, Islam claims that Jesus did not die on the cross but was taken up into heaven, and Judas, or someone who looked like Judas, was crucified in His place.

Further, the Qur’an states that there is no need for Allah to provide a sacrifice for sin because ignorance of Islam, not sin, is man’s problem. The possible exceptions are apostasy from Islam and refusal to convert to Islam. Staying away

from major sins (whatever those are) will automatically result in one's "small" sins being overlooked by Allah (4:31).

Yahweh, on the other hand, loves us so much He sent His Son to die for us. This was determined in eternity past; Jesus is declared to be the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ not only died for us; He rose from the dead, conquering sin and death. And He offers us forgiveness of sins and eternal life by grace through faith in Him.

Did God die for us? Only the God of the Bible sent His Son to die for us, securing eternal life for those who trust in Him.

So, are Allah and Yahweh just two different names for the same God? You decide:

- Allah is distant and unknowable. The God of the Bible is close and personal.
- Allah does not love every person. Yahweh does.
- Allah did not and would not die for you, nor would he send anyone to do so. But the God of the Bible loves you so much He sent His one and only Son to die for you. And He stands ready to grant you everlasting life if you will receive Him by faith.

WHO ARE SUNNI AND SHI'ITE MUSLIMS?

When the militant forces of ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) recently occupied a large portion of the Middle East and declared the establishment of a new country under an Islamic *caliph* (leader), it became apparent to the outside world that much of the conflict involved Muslims fighting one another.

Specifically, the continuing conflict involves two major sects of Islam: Sunni (the sect of ISIS) and Shi'ite. This may prompt us to ask, "What's the difference? Muslims are Muslims, aren't they?"

Well, yes and no. Understanding the difference between Sunnis and Shi'ites may help us grasp the centuries-old animosity between these two major Islamic groups. But make no mistake: Sunnis and Shi'ites gladly set aside their differences when they can join together to destroy their common enemies – primarily Jews and Christians.

MUHAMMAD'S SUCCESSORS

Muhammad founded Islam in the seventh century but named no successor. After his death in 632 A.D., Muslims became deeply divided on the issue of who should take up the mantle of leadership of this new religion.

By consensus, Muhammad's followers selected his cousin Abu Bakr as the first *caliph*. After his death about a year later came the second *caliph*, Umar, who spread Islam into Syria and North Africa, and who drove Christians and Jews out of Arabia.

His assassination led to the rise of the third *caliph*, Uthman, a son-in-law of Muhammad, and then a fourth leader, Ali ibn Abi Talib, the husband of Muhammad's daughter Fatima by his first wife Khadija. When his own soldiers murdered Ali, a fifth *caliph*, Mu'awiya, succeeded him.

But the caliphate began to unravel amidst disagreements that led to the Sunni / Shi'ite split.

Muslims who continued to believe that the leadership of Islam should be based on a consensus of the faithful came to be known as Sunnis, or traditionalists. Others, devoted to Ali, the murdered fourth *caliph*, insisted that all divinely inspired leaders of Islam, known as *Imams*, must be direct descendants through the line of Fatima. So, they declared Ali the first *Imam* and became known as the "Shia" or party of Ali.

In all, Shi'ites believe there have been twelve *Imams*, with the twelfth, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, going into hiding in 874 A.D. So-called “Twelver” Shi'ites believe he is still alive and will return in the last days as the *Mahdi* or “The Guided One” to lead the armies of Islam to final victory over the forces of Satan (especially Christians and Jews).

In some respects, Shi'ites regard the *Mahdi* in the same way Christians anticipate the return of Christ – with vastly different results, of course.

In short, Sunnis insist that the leadership of Islam should represent the consensus of Muslims around the world, while Shi'ites recognize as inspired leaders only the *Imams* whose bloodlines may be traced back to Muhammad through the line of Fatima.

Sunnis today account for more than 80 percent of Muslims worldwide.

OTHER DIFFERENCES

Besides leadership issues, Sunnis and Shi'ites differ in other ways.

Authority. Sunnis emphasize the authority of the written traditions, which include the Qur'an and the *Sunna* (“custom”), from which they derive their name. They also receive guidance from a consensus of elders (*ulama*), who base their decisions on Islam's writings. Shi'ites look

more toward human authority and, as mentioned above, “Twelvers” eagerly await the imminent return of the *Mahdi*.

Civil and religious power. Sunnis believe there should be a separation between civil and religious authorities, while Shi’ites believe the religious authorities should exercise both political and religious power. Ayatollah Khomeini, who led the Islamic revolution against the shah of Iran in 1979, was a Shi’ite leader.

There is another significant sect of Islam known as Sufism, which is mystical in nature. Minor sects include the Wahhabis (primarily in Saudi Arabia), the Druze (mostly in Lebanon, Syria and northern Israel), the Alawites (mainly in Syria), and the Ahmadiyahs (primarily in Pakistan).

Beyond this, Islam has been influential in the founding of two other religions: Sikhism and Baha’i.

In the end, Sunnis and Shi’ites may be loosely compared to Roman Catholics and Protestants in Christianity. They agree on many theological issues but become divided in matters of religious leadership, authority, and practice – in some cases going to war over these issues.

All Muslims are unified, however, in their belief that Jews and Christians are *kafirs*, or infidels, who must be conquered, converted by persuasion or compulsion, subjugated, or eliminated. On this the Sunnis of ISIS and the Shi’ites of Iran are in full agreement.

THE ULTIMATE ROLE MODEL: JESUS OR MUHAMMAD?

Muslims have a high regard for Jesus. They believe He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, performed miracles, and spoke prophetic truth. He is in heaven today and is poised to return triumphantly to earth.

Yet it is Muhammad to whom Muslims pin their hopes. While they confess Jesus as a prophet, they say Muhammad is the greatest of Allah's messengers and the one through whom Allah chose to reveal supreme truth in the Qur'an. Therefore, Muhammad, not Jesus, is the ultimate role model.

Okay. So let's look at the record. We'll focus on three areas.

1. LIFESTYLE

Jesus lived the most exemplary life in human history. He was tempted in every way we are tempted, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He successfully rebuffed intense temptation in the desert as Satan sought to entice the physically weakened

Messiah to swap His earthly mission for personal comfort and human adoration.

Denying Himself, He never turned away the poor, sick, outcast, or spiritually barren, noting, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life – a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Muhammad, in sharp contrast, did not profess to be sinless. Even so, the Qur’an establishes him as the highest model of virtue for the faithful in all circumstances (33:21). Indeed, he often was kind, generous and brave, yet his life was deeply flawed.

Despite the Qur’an’s prohibition against marrying more than four wives, Muhammad had at least nine wives at one time – justified by a special revelation giving him, and him alone, the right to exceed the legal limit (33:50).

One of his wives was only nine years old when the marriage was consummated. Another was taken from an adopted son, who divorced his wife so Muhammad could have her. Further, the prophet allowed his followers to possess an unlimited number of concubines, and to practice a form of prostitution called *muta*.

More could be written about the prophet’s brutal treatment of critics and apostates, but this should suffice to help you decide whether Jesus or Muhammad lived a more consummate lifestyle.

2. SOURCE OF AUTHORITY

Jesus is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit; thus He is the divine second person of the triune Godhead. The Father sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14) and entrusted all judgment to Him (John 5:22). Before ascending into heaven, Jesus told His disciples that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him (Matt. 28:18).

Jesus demonstrated His authority through teaching, miracles, forgiveness of sins, and resurrection from the dead. He claimed equality with the Father and never refused to be worshiped.

According to the Qur'an, Muhammad's only miracle was the Qur'an itself (29:48-51). Yet when he first began receiving revelations in a cave on Mount Hira, Muhammad thought he had been possessed by a poetry demon. He later became suicidal and tried to throw himself off a cliff.

His wife Khadijah and her cousin convinced him he was not possessed; rather, he was a prophet of God. At one point late in life, Muhammad claimed he was the victim of a magic spell, which witnesses said made him delusional.

When Muhammad recited the 53rd chapter of the Qur'an to his followers, it featured verses allowing Muslims to pray to three pagan goddesses. He later ordered the scribes to strike these so-called "Satanic Verses," which he said came from Satan and not from God.

These examples should cast considerable doubt on Muhammad's claim to speak authoritatively for God.

3. HISTORICAL RECORD

Christian beliefs about Jesus are based entirely on sources written within the lifetimes of eyewitnesses. As David Wood, host of the talk show "Jesus or Muhammad," notes, "Having multiple, independent, early sources allows us to form a reliable picture of the historical Jesus."

Further, we have thousands of manuscript copies of the Gospels and other New Testament books – some of them dating back to the early second century. These documents, plus tens of thousands of New Testament quotes from the early church fathers, confirm the veracity of the texts. In addition, several ancient non-Christian writings refer to Jesus.

In contrast, the Qur'an tells us very little about Muhammad. Our earliest detailed biographical source, Ibn Ishaq's *Life of Muhammad*, was written more than a century after Muhammad's death. Modern Muslims cast doubt on this book, however, and turn to works written more than two centuries after Muhammad's life – plenty of time to embellish or fabricate stories.

But perhaps the most telling historical contrast comes in the record of each leader's dying words. On the cross, bloodied and beaten beyond recognition, Jesus asks the

Father to forgive His tormentors. Six centuries later, as Muhammad lay dying from the effects of poison given to him by a Jewish woman whose family his followers had slaughtered, the prophet of Islam gasps, “May Allah curse the Jews and Christians, for they built the places of worship at the graves of their Prophets.”

Which is the ultimate role model: Jesus or Muhammad?
You make the call.

WHY ARE THERE TWO QUR'ANS?

The Qur'an is Islam's most holy book. While Muslims believe Allah has revealed many written works, including the Old and New Testaments, these revelations ended with the Qur'an, which supersedes all others.

For all practical purposes, Muslims accept only the Qur'an as the Word of God. They believe Jews and Christians have corrupted Allah's earlier revelations in the Bible, although they honor the writings of Moses, who was given the *Tawrat* (Torah); David, the *Zabur* (his Psalms); and Jesus, the *Injil* (Gospel).

Where the Qur'an and the Bible disagree with one another, Muslims embrace the Qur'an as true and reject the Bible as tainted.

But what happens when the Qur'an contradicts the Qur'an, as it sometimes does?

A brief look at history and the doctrine of "abrogation" sheds light on the Muslim view of divine revelation.

MECCA AND MEDINA

According to Islamic sources, Muhammad received his first revelation in Mecca in 610 A.D. As the angel Gabriel delivered the messages, Muhammad committed them to memory and began preaching a new brand of monotheism to his polytheistic countrymen.

These early “Meccan” passages mostly were peaceful and religious in tone. “There is no compulsion in religion,” urges Surah 2:256. Further, Jews and Christians are called “people of the book,” meaning they are recipients of Allah’s earlier revelations.

But something changed when Muhammad fled for Medina a decade later. Bill Warner, in *The Life of Muhammad*, explains: “He preached the religion of Islam for 13 years in Mecca and garnered 150 followers. He was forced to move to Medina and became a politician and warrior. During the last 9 years of his life, he was involved in an event of violence on the average of every 6 weeks. When he died, every Arab was a Muslim. [Muhammad] succeeded through politics, not religion.”

The later “Medinan” passages, sometimes called the “second Qur’an,” bear evidence of this change. Jews are compared to apes and pigs (2:65; 5:60; 7:166), while those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God are cursed (9:30).

After Muhammad's death, his followers compiled the Meccan and Medinan recitations into a single, unified volume. The Qur'an is organized into 114 surahs, or chapters, from the longest to the shortest.

The absence of context and chronology makes understanding the Qur'an difficult unless read with the *Sunna*, consisting of the *Sira* (Muhammad's life) and the *Hadith* (a collection of Muhammad's words and deeds).

Even so, when Muslims read the Qur'an and come to conflicting passages, how are they resolved?

ABROGATION TO THE RESCUE

The answer is the Muslim doctrine of abrogation. This simply means that when two passages contradict, the more recent passage "abrogates," or overrides, the earlier one.

But this doctrine creates more problems than it solves. For example, one verse in the Qur'an affirms the doctrine of abrogation (2:106), but an earlier verse says, "There is no changing the words of Allah" (10:64).

A second, and larger, problem is that the Medinan passages promote hatred of and violence toward non-Muslims, particularly Jews and Christians. One could argue that those persecuting *kafirs*, or infidels, in Islamic states are true believers, while those living in peaceful coexistence are less faithful to the cause.

Some Muslims may respond by saying the Bible also promotes abrogation. For example, the Law of Moses commands an adulterer to be stoned (Lev. 20:10). Yet Jesus sets free a woman caught in the very act (John 8:2-11).

The answer lies in the nature of Scripture. Unlike the Qur'an, the Bible is God's progressive revelation. Each verse, chapter, and book builds upon the others until we have the complete written revelation of God in the 66 books of the canon.

Difficult passages, which some mistakenly call contradictions, are resolved when we consider context, genre, purpose, perspective, and sense (literal vs. figurative language).

As for the adultery issue cited above, Paul Copan provides insight in his excellent book, *Is God a Moral Monster?* "The law of Moses is not eternal and unchanging.... Old Testament sages and seers themselves announced that the law of Moses was intentionally temporary.... So let's not think that we're talking about the universal application of all Old Testament laws for post-Old Testament times."

Jesus could uphold the Law and forgive the woman caught in adultery because He understood the Law's true intent – to be our guardian until Christ so that we may be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).

As the Creator, Sustainer, and Savior of the world, Jesus has the sovereign authority to forgive sins because He is sin's remedy – which the two Qur'ans tragically deny.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHRISLAM

Christians sharing the gospel in Muslim-dominated countries take incredible risks. And converts from Islam to Christianity are routinely banished, imprisoned, or murdered.

So, how do Christian missionaries teach Muslims about Jesus when Islam denies His deity and death on the cross? And how do new converts from Islam to Christianity worship Jesus without inviting severe persecution?

One answer is Chrislam, the bringing together of Christianity and Islam. Proponents of Chrislam say that because the Qur'an mentions Jesus and affirms certain biblical teachings about Him, Christianity and Islam share at least some common ground.

They further argue that if Christians avoid the offensive term "Son of God" when referring to Jesus, and emphasize His role as prophet rather than divine Savior, Muslims are more open to the gospel. Once they come to faith in

Christ, Muslims may continue to worship at a mosque, pray Muslim prayers, and even partake in a pilgrimage to Mecca.

SINCERE MOTIVES

No doubt, the motives behind Chrislam are sincere. Believers want to be, like the apostle Paul, “all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). But the problem with Chrislam is that it strips away, or at least masks, the essentials of the gospel, according to Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton, and Bill Nikides, editors of *Chrislam: How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel*.

Their book is a well-researched challenge to so-called Insider Movements, Christian missionary efforts that to some extent embrace Chrislam. The premise of their book is that Insider Movements “must not be seen as a viable strategy for Evangelical missions to Muslims.”

The authors provide both clarity to the issue of Chrislam and correction to a well-intentioned movement. Christians genuinely want to see Muslims come to faith in Christ. However, the gospel has always been an offense, and it can be no less of an offense to Muslims than to the Jews and pagans of the apostles’ day.

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY INCOMPATIBLE

Consider the following:

First, Islam and Christianity are not compatible. Islam is a false religion with a false god (Allah), a false prophet (Muhammad), and false written authority (the Qur'an).

Second, Allah and Yahweh are different deities. Allah is unknowable and unapproachable; Yahweh is personal, knowable, and invites us to approach His throne of grace. Allah has never spoken directly to a human being; Yahweh has spoken to people throughout history and continues to do so today. Allah reveals his will but not himself; Yahweh reveals Himself in creation, conscience, the canon of scripture, and Christ – the Word who became flesh (John 1:14).

Third, Muhammad is a false prophet. He denied the Trinity, the Fatherhood of God, the Sonship of Jesus, the deity of the Holy Spirit, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and many other Christian doctrines.

Fourth, Christians must not call themselves Muslims for the sake of evangelism. Islam defines a Muslim as one who submits to Allah and Muhammad – a false god and a false prophet.

Fifth, Christians must not encourage new converts to Christianity to call themselves Muslims, stay in a mosque,

pray toward Mecca, or travel there on a pilgrimage. These are religious practices that demonstrate submission to Allah. Rather, new converts should be urged to follow Christ and become part of a fellowship of Christians.

Sixth, Bible translations that deliberately mistranslate the Greek and Hebrew terms for Son, Son of God, Son of Man, or Father, should not be used to evangelize Muslims.

Seventh, Christians should not use the Qur'an as scripture. While the Qur'an speaks of Jesus in many places, it teaches another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

Finally, it is impossible for a person to be both a Christian and a Muslim. Despite an ever-growing trend toward syncretism – the belief that all is one – the gospel stands apart as the only good news for sinful people, and Christ alone is sufficient for forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Islam and Christianity cannot be reconciled, for the differences between the two religions are vast and the similarities are few.

Allowing Muslims to claim Jesus as Savior while remaining in a religion that denies His deity and his death on the cross is a poor excuse for evangelism.

ISLAM'S DOCTRINE OF DECEPTION

Like Christianity, Islam is monotheistic, yet it denies basic Christian doctrines like the Trinity, the deity of Christ, Jesus' death and resurrection, and salvation by grace through faith.

Muhammad's encounters with heretical Christian sects, and the lack of a Bible in Arabic in his lifetime, no doubt contributed to his faulty understanding of the Christian faith.

But two lesser-known teachings based on the Qur'an are equally disturbing. Christians should understand them in order to more effectively evangelize our Muslim friends.

TAQIYYA

Taqiyya is a doctrine of deception. It empowers Muslims to deny their faith or commit otherwise illegal or blasphemous acts while they are at risk of persecution. It was developed to protect Shi'ite Muslims, who usually were in the minority and under pressure from rival Sunnis.

For all practical purposes, however, the doctrine has been expanded to encourage any deceit that advances Islam. Qur'anic scholar Al-Tabari explains, "If you [Muslims] are under their [infidels'] authority, fearing for yourselves, behave loyally to them, with your tongue, while harboring inner animosity for them.... Allah has forbidden believers from being friendly or on intimate terms with the infidels in place of believers – except when infidels are above them [in authority]."

This helps explain the existence of "sleeper cells" in non-Muslim countries. Bent on the overthrow of the U.S., for example, some Muslims fully integrate into American culture, becoming our neighbors and friends – all the while plotting to kill us.

This is not to accuse all Muslims – or even most Muslims – of deceitfulness, but it warns us to be on guard against Muslims who, like false teachers in Christianity, are all too eager to tickle our ears as long as it advances their agenda.

In contrast, the Bible instructs Christians to be truthful at all times, even in the face of persecution, so that the name of Jesus – the Way, the Truth, and the Life – is honored. Paul exhorts Christians to "speak the truth, each one to his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25). Peter urges us to rid ourselves of "all wickedness, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander" (1 Peter 2:1).

Martyred saints in heaven are commended, not because they deceived others to save their own skin, but because “they did not love their lives in the face of death” (Rev. 12:11).

ABROGATION

Abrogation involves the annulling of a former law by a new law (16:101). Therefore, the Qur’an, because it was written after the Bible, abrogates, or overrides, scripture – particularly where the Bible and the Qur’an contradict one another.

Interestingly, the doctrine of abrogation applies to the Qur’an itself, thus protecting the Qur’an from numerous contradictions. Since the Qur’an was recorded over many years, Muslims claim that passages written more recently abrogate previous passages.

Christian apologist Ron Rhodes writes, “What this means is that Allah is not bound to his revelations. If he wants, he is free to bring new revelation that contradicts former revelation. If need be, Allah is free to rescind earlier revelations and bring about entirely new and different ones.”

For example, early passages in the Qur’an ordered Muslims to pray toward Jerusalem. But after the Jews rejected Muhammad and his teachings, he received new revelation directing prayers toward Mecca. And while some Muslims

today quote earlier passages in the Qur'an instructing them to treat Jews and Christians with respect, later passages promote violence against "infidels." The law of abrogation requires that the later verses be obeyed.

In contrast, the Bible is unchanging because God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is holy, not capricious. Further, the manuscript evidence clearly shows that the Bible we hold in our hands today is the same one the Holy Spirit breathed out in ancient times. It has not been corrupted, as Muslims claim.

Islam is a religion of conquest. Muslims are commanded to bring the whole world into submission to Allah by any means necessary – persuasion, compulsion, deceit, or violence. In contrast, Christianity is the true religion of peace, offering sinful people a restored relationship with their offended God through the sacrifice of His Son. God establishes His kingdom in the hearts of willing followers and forces no one to worship Him against their will.

Therefore, in sharing the gospel, Christians are never justified in acting deceitfully or violently.

HOW ISLAM MAKES PEACE

In the wake of 9/11 and subsequent acts of terror in the name of Allah, many Muslim leaders labor to buff the tarnished image of the religion Mohammad founded nearly 1,400 years ago.

Their key message: Islam is a religion of peace.

No doubt many of the world's Muslims prefer peace to the sword, decrying the acts of Islamist terrorists as perversions of true Islam.

And to be fair, Islam is a religion of peace, as long as peace is defined in Muslim terms.

A case in point: *dhimmitude*.

THREE OPTIONS

Dhimmitude is the path to peace non-Muslims may choose when their land and people are claimed for Islam. If you think this is an ancient practice that died with Muhammad, look no further than modern-day Syria.

The *Times of Israel* recently reported that Christian leaders in the northern Syrian city of Raqqa, captured by an organization formerly affiliated with al-Qaeda, have signed a submission document banning them from practicing Christianity in public in return for protection from their Islamist rulers.

The Christian community was given three options: (1) convert to Islam; (2) remain Christian but pledge submission to Islam; or (3) “face the sword.”

They opted for the second of these choices, known as *dhimmitude*.

The Christians of Raqqa chose to sign the *dhimma* treaty, receiving in return a commitment by the local Muslim commander not to be subjected to physical harm or religious targeting.

But there’s a catch: Under the treaty, Christians may not renovate churches or monasteries; display crosses in public; read scriptures indoors loudly enough for Muslims standing outside to hear; or conduct religious ceremonies outside the church. In addition, they must pay the *jizya* tax twice annually for each adult Christian.

This is not an isolated incident. Rather, *dhimmitude* is the normal imposition by Muslims who wish to bring the whole world into submission to Allah.

A BITTER COMPROMISE

Dhimmitude is a bitter compromise that protects non-Muslims from death but grants them only the illusion of religious freedom, which in fact requires an admission that Islam is the greatest religion and Allah is the only true god.

The vast majority of U.S. Christians would eagerly grant Muslims – or persons of other religious persuasions – the right to worship freely according to the dictates of their conscience.

But the simple truth is that Muslims, if true to their faith, would not grant the same freedoms to non-Muslims. Convert, die, or become a *dhimmi* are the only choices you have when Islam rules.

So what are Christians to do?

First, stay true to our faith. Efforts to merge different belief systems – for example, Chrislam, the marriage of Christianity and Islam – or to blur the doctrinal differences between religions, essentially denies the uniqueness of Christ and the eternal value of His finished work on the cross.

Second, support religious freedom in the U.S. and around the world. Open Doors International's World Watch List for 2014 shows that nine of the top 10 nations that persecute Christians are dominated by radical Islam. We should urge our nation's leaders to take a bold diplomatic

stand in support of religious freedom, while modeling that freedom, based on Judeo-Christian principles, at home.

Third, hold our Muslim friends accountable. When they say they support religious freedom, ask if such a thing is truly possible in a Muslim society. Even in “secular” Muslim states like Turkey and Malaysia there may be severe penalties for worshiping in public or sharing your Christian faith with a Muslim. Is that truly religious freedom?

Also, ask whether they support the 1,400-year-old practice of *dhimmitude* and whether they would support it if Muslims outnumbered Christians in the U.S.

Fourth, demonstrate through your life and words that true peace comes only through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He not only brings us peace (John 14:17); He is our peace (Eph. 2:14).

Finally, ask yourself, if forced to choose between conversion to Islam, *dhimmitude*, or death for faithfulness to Jesus, which would you choose? That day is already here for many Christians around the world.

THE REAL TRAGEDY OF JIHAD

The 2012 terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy in Libya, resulting in the deaths of four Americans, brought the Muslim doctrine of *jihad* back into our living rooms as we watched in horror the murderous rage of people acting in the name of Allah.

But what, exactly, is *jihad*?

The Arabic term means to endeavor, strive, struggle, or fight. It is sometimes translated “holy war.”

There are two ways in which Muslims embrace *jihad*.

First, the “greater jihad” is the internal struggle against evil inclinations. It might be compared to the Christian’s battle against the flesh. Surah 9:20 reads, “Those who believed and fled (their homes), and strove hard in Allah’s way... are much higher in rank with Allah.”

Second, the “lesser jihad” is warfare in the cause of Allah. Surah 9:29 says, “Fight those who believe not in Allah,

nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor follow the Religion of Truth, out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax [*jizyah*- a non-believer's tax] in acknowledgement of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.”

THE PURPOSE OF JIHAD

Muslims contend that the main purpose of *jihad* is to protect and preserve the “haqq” (truth), according to scholar N.S.R.K. Ravi. Some believe the way to deal with those who pose obstacles to the spread of Islam is to declare *jihad* against them. This can take on peaceful forms: *jihad* with the tongue (speaking the truth), *jihad* with the heart (feelings and intentions), and *jihad* with the hand (good works).

However, the Qur'an also encourages *jihad* with the sword to defend Islam from attack, or to forcefully establish Islam in foreign lands where Islam is not granted free expression. In this sense, *jihad* may be waged against oppressors, disbelievers, idolaters, and even Christians and Jews.

“Those who participate in *jihad* are told they will receive rewards from Allah, ranging from the spoils of war if they survive, to entrance into paradise if they're killed in battle,” says Ravi.

There is little doubt that the 9/11 terrorists, the Islamist Army major who gunned down U.S. soldiers at Ft. Hood in

2009, and the men who stormed our embassy in Benghazi in 2012 believed they were serving Allah, advancing Islam, and securing their place in paradise.

But a finer point needs to be made here. Whether a Muslim engages in “greater jihad” or “lesser jihad,” ultimately he is striving for God’s acceptance, for salvation in Islam is achieved through external acts, specifically the five pillars of Islam (with *jihad* a possible sixth pillar).

MISSING THE POINT

At its core, Islam misses the point because Muhammad’s followers teach a flawed view of man’s problem, which is sin. They insist that ignorance of Islam, not sin, is man’s problem. We do not need a Messiah to die for us, they argue. In fact, Allah would never permit a great prophet like Jesus to die a shameful death on a Roman cross; therefore, they teach, Allah swept Jesus alive off the cross and into heaven.

Embrace the five pillars, Islam teaches, and hope that Allah, who predestines good and evil, is kindly predisposed toward you. The Bible, however, takes a much different view. Sin *is* our problem. We are by nature creatures who desire to live independently of God. Our sin creates a chasm between us and our Creator that no amount of “struggling” could ever bridge.

That’s why Jesus came. He left the glory of heaven, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life and offered it up on

the cross, where the Father “made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Through His finished work, Jesus conquered sin and death for us. He has taken up our struggle and paid our sin debt in full. The fight is over. By faith we are accepted by God, brought into His kingdom, and made His adopted children.

Unlike our Muslim friends, we do not strive to be accepted by a distant deity. Rather, we enjoy intimate fellowship with a personal God who loves us, makes peace with us, and assures us of a place in His kingdom.

Scholars will continue to debate the legitimacy and extent of *jihad*. Meanwhile, we can help our Muslim friends understand that the most violent act in history, the crucifixion of Jesus, accomplished what *jihad* will never attain – peace with God, eternal life, and an intimate, everlasting relationship with the sovereign Creator of the universe.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Note: Names of people and tribes in this column are changed or abbreviated for security reasons.

He was born into the “T” tribe, known and feared as the Defenders of Islam on the Philippine island of Mindanao.

His father was an *Imam*, a Muslim spiritual leader.

And it was expected that he would follow in his father’s footsteps, joining his tribesmen in defending the religion Muhammad established 1,400 years ago.

But then Mark went to trade school on the Island of Cebu to train in auto mechanics.

The school, as it turned out, was run by the International Mission Board (IMB) and supported through Cooperative Program gifts and Lottie Moon offerings. In addition to gaining a craft, Mark attended a Values Class built around 21 Bible stories.

His teacher was A.S., who now serves as an indigenous missionary to the Philippines for the IMB.

As A.S. taught the Bible stories and shared the gospel, he built a rapport with Mark and the other students. Ultimately, he encouraged them to entrust their lives to Christ.

A.S. recalls: “While I was inviting the class to pray to receive Christ, I noticed that Mark was sweating very much. He told me later it was like he was on fire.”

Mark prayed to receive Christ as Savior, knowing that his decision would generate some heat of its own.

DECLARING HIS FAITH

Returning home to Mindanao, where Islam plays a strong influence, Mark told his family about his newfound faith in Jesus. In Muslim families, such a declaration often results in banishment – and sometimes in an “honor killing.”

His father was stunned and disappointed but did not shun him. Even so, the bolder Mark became in sharing his faith with Muslim family members and friends, the more he became a target of the “T.”

For his protection, he continued to stay on Cebu Island with his wife and children instead of going home to Mindanao. He now serves in the Central Philippines as an indigenous Southern Baptist missionary.

I had the opportunity to spend time with Mark while on a mission trip to the Philippines. Quiet and unassuming, he spoke little of himself but gladly shared his testimony when prompted.

I asked what made the difference – what led the son of an *Imam* to embrace the Son of God?

He answered in one word: “Freedom.”

THE FIVE PILLARS

Mark then began to explain that his life as a Muslim was consumed with trying to satisfy a distant and unknowable god by practicing the Five Pillars of Islam:

The confession of faith or *Shahada*: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.”

Prayer (*Salat*). Muslims must recite 17 cycles of prayer each day. These cycles usually are spread over five times while the supplicant faces Mecca.

Observing *Ramadan*, a month of fasting throughout the daylight hours to commemorate the first revelation of the Qur’an to Muhammad.

Almsgiving or *Zakat*. Muslims are required to give 2.5 percent of their currency, plus other forms of wealth, as determined by a complicated system that purifies their remaining wealth.

Pilgrimage, or *Hajj*, to Mecca, Muhammad's place of birth. Muslims who are physically and financially able must make this trek at least once in their lifetimes.

The ceaseless cycle of works failed to satisfy Mark or to provide assurance that Allah loved him and predestined him for heaven.

In contrast, the message of Christ was liberating. God loved Mark unconditionally. And although Mark was separated from God by sin – as all people are – God loved him so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross, satisfying God's wrath for sin and extending to Mark His mercy and grace.

As Mark stood in the Values Class that day and prayed to receive Christ, the heat he felt was the purifying presence of God.

Today, Mark's changed life is an example to those he once drank and gambled with. They see the difference Jesus has made, and they ask him about it.

While the "T" – Mark's former tribe on Mindanao – continues to fiercely defend Islam, Christ has transformed Mark into a gracious and gentle defender of the Christian faith.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ISLAM?

Islam is one of the fastest-growing major religions in the world. But how much do you know about the beliefs and practices that Muhammad and his followers began exporting from the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century?

Here's a chance to test your knowledge. The correct answers begin on page 66.

QUIZ

1. The Arabic word "Islam" means:

- a. Holy war
- b. Allah saves
- c. Submission
- d. True religion

2. Muslims believe the final written authority from Allah is:

- a. The Bible
- b. The Hadith
- c. The Qur'an
- d. The Pearl of Great Price

3. The foundational path to salvation in Islam is:

- a. The Eight-fold Path
- b. The Five Pillars
- c. The Four Horsemen
- d. The Roman Road

4. The word "jihad" means:

- a. Holy war
- b. To struggle / strive
- c. To battle evil desires or enemies of Islam
- d. All of the above

5. Calling Jesus the "Son of God" in Islam is considered "shirk," which means:

- a. Respectful and appropriate
- b. Every Muslim's duty
- c. The unpardonable sin
- d. Taught by Sunni Muslims but not Shi'ites

6. Muslims teach that Jesus' death on the cross:

- a. Paid the sin debt for all mankind
- b. Exonerated the name of Allah
- c. Paved the way for the greatest prophet – Muhammad
- d. Never happened

7. A primary difference between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims is:

- a. Shi'ites look to Muhammad's bloodline for successors; Sunnis do not
- b. Sunnis are Arabs and Shi'ites are not
- c. Sunnis embrace the Qur'an but reject the Hadith
- d. Shi'ites add a sixth pillar to Muslim faith: *jihad*

8. Which of the following is not considered a Muslim prophet:

- a. Muhammad
- b. Saladin
- c. Jonah
- d. John the Baptist

9. Who do Muslims say dictated the Qur'an to Muhammad?

- a. Allah
- b. Ishmael
- c. The Holy Spirit
- d. Gabriel

10. How can Muslims be assured of entrance into Paradise?

- a. By faith
- b. By fighting in a holy war
- c. By obeying the teachings of Islam
- d. They can't

THE ANSWERS

1. **c Submission.** “Islam” describes the religion of submission to the will of Allah, obeying His commands and surrendering to his will.

2. **c The Qur’an.** Muslims believe Allah has revealed many books, including the Bible. But these revelations ended with the Qur’an, which supersedes all others. For all practical purposes, Muslims trust only the Qur’an. They believe Christians and Jews corrupted Allah’s earlier revelations in the Bible.

3. **b The Five Pillars.** These are *Shahada* (testimony or confession of faith); *Salat* (compulsory prayer five times a day); *Zakat* (compulsory payment from a Muslim’s annual savings); *Sawm* (obligatory fasting during each day of the month of Ramadan); and *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca, Muhammad’s place of birth). Acting correctly and sincerely on the five pillars is meant to conform a Muslim’s life to the will of Allah.

4. **d All of the above.** The Arabic term means to endeavor, strive, struggle, or fight. It is sometimes translated “holy war.” Muslims embrace *jihad* in two ways. The “greater jihad” is the internal struggle against evil inclinations. The “lesser jihad” is warfare in the cause of Allah.

5. **c The unpardonable sin.** Muslims reject both the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Declaring Jesus as the

divine Son of God will damn a person to hell. Muslims do believe Jesus is the Messiah, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life and is coming back one day – although for the purpose of establishing Islam on earth.

6. d Never happened. The Qur'an states that the Jews "killed him not, nor did they cause his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them as such" (6:157). Jesus later died of natural causes (5:117). It should be noted that some Muslim scholars say Jesus did not die on the cross but was carried away into heaven and replaced either by Judas Iscariot or someone made to look like Judas.

7. a Shi'ites look to Muhammad's bloodline for successors; Sunnis do not. In addition, Sunnis believe in a separation between civil and religious authorities, while Shi'ites believe religious authorities should exercise both political and religious power.

8. b Saladin. Muslims teach that Allah has sent 124,000 prophets. Most are unknown, but many include biblical characters such as Adam, David, John the Baptist and Jesus. Saladin, by the way, was a Kurdish Muslim who defeated the Crusaders and recaptured Palestine for Islam in the 12th century.

9. d Gabriel. Islam began with supernatural visions and revelations that Muhammad claimed he received from Allah through the angel Gabriel. At first he feared these revelations came from a *jinn*, or evil spirit.

10. d They can't. Muslims believe in a Day of Judgment when the faithful Muslim is rewarded with paradise and others are sent to hell. The uncertainty comes in not knowing *how* faithful one must be. Some Muslims believe that death in holy war assures the martyr of eternal life, but this is a slippery slope that often results in the killing of innocent people, which Islam forbids. Some Muslims teach a hard determinism – or even fatalism – with respect to the afterlife. This creates an excellent witnessing opportunity for Christians, who may speak of assurance of salvation by God's grace through faith in Christ – not by human effort.

SHARING YOUR FAITH WITH MUSLIMS

We want our Muslim friends to trust in Jesus. Yet evangelizing them poses a unique set of challenges. They believe in Jesus as a prophet but consider it the unpardonable sin of *shirk* to acknowledge Him as the Son of God. They accept the words of Moses, David, and the Gospel writers but only where they agree with the Qur'an. And they face the daunting prospect of being shunned or even becoming the victims of an "honor killing" for leaving the religion of Muhammad. Even so, the gospel stands as good news for all people, and the Holy Spirit is active throughout the world today, drawing unbelievers of all kinds to faith in Jesus, whose blood cleanses from all sin.

As we seek opportunities to share our faith with Muslims, we should consider three simple rules.

1. BE READY

Pray. God changes hearts. He reveals Himself to people. He gives Christians courage, wisdom, and insight. Apart from fervent prayer, our witnessing efforts are little more than debate.

Know what we believe. We should have a firm grasp of the Christian faith and be able to articulate such doctrines as the authority of scripture; the person and work of Jesus; and salvation by grace through faith.

Rehearse our testimony. In a few minutes, we should be able to share a simple narrative highlighting our life before Christ, how we came to know Christ, and our life since receiving Christ.

Learn about Islam. We should know the basics of Islam's history; be familiar with key passages in the Qur'an; be able to recite the five pillars of Islam; and understand the differences between Sunnis and Shi'ites.

2. BE GRACIOUS

Consider the example of Jesus: "They were all speaking well of Him (Jesus) and were amazed by the gracious words that came from His mouth ..." (Luke 4:22).

Consider Paul's exhortation: "Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person" (Col. 4:6).

Be humble. Christians have the truth, but we may not have all the answers. A willingness to say, “I don’t know,” or, “I haven’t thought of that before” may go a long way in demonstrating respect for our Muslim friends.

Be a friend. A sincere interest in others – their work, family, hobbies, and so on – help earn us the right to be heard. As Ron Rhodes writes, “Muslims do not care about how much you know until they know how much you care.”

3. BE CLEAR

Have a clear head (2 Tim. 4:5); a clear conscience (Heb. 13:18); and a clear resolve (Gal. 3:11).

Define terms. Muslims believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, and the scriptures, but they define them differently. We should clarify our differences as well as embrace out common beliefs.

Ask questions. For example, we might ask, “What do you believe about Jesus?” “What do you think is mankind’s biggest problem?” Or, “What are your views on the afterlife?” These are non-threatening inquiries that may help provide an opportunity to learn more about Islam, and to share our biblical worldview.

Focus on Jesus. Muslims have a high view of Jesus, believing Him to be virgin-born, sinless, and a miracle worker. But they reject His deity and His sacrificial death

on the cross. We may share our beliefs about Jesus, based on scripture, and further emphasize the unbreakable relationship we with have with Him because of His death, burial and resurrection.

Muslims are working for their salvation and have no assurance of eternal life. A kind word, a basic understanding of Islam, a firm grasp of Christian doctrine, and a ready testimony about our personal relationship with Christ may just surprise them and plant a seed of God's love in their minds.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

OTHER BOOKS BY ROB PHILLIPS:

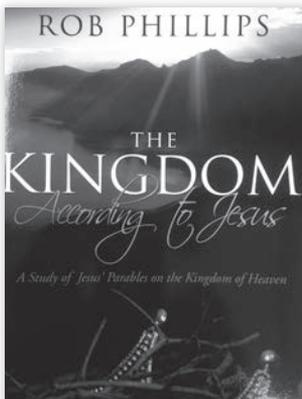


The Apologist's Tool Kit

The Apologist's Tool Kit equips you to defend the Christian faith “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:16). The articles in this 81-page booklet address some of the most commonly challenged Christian doctrines today, from the existence of God to the authority of scripture. In addition, they offer a biblical basis for identifying and dealing with false prophets, and they provide an overview of several religions, cults, or sects that lay claim to scripture but deny its core teachings.

Order online at mobaptist.org/apologetics.

The Kingdom According to Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Parables on the Kingdom of Heaven



Jesus used more than a dozen parables to reveal previously hidden truths about the kingdom of heaven, but for many the kingdom remains a mystery. What is the kingdom of heaven? Is the kingdom here, or are we to wait for it? Who's in the kingdom and who's not? And what

can we learn from Jesus' stories of mustard seeds, pearls and bridesmaids? *The Kingdom According to Jesus* explores these questions in a simple and compelling way that encourages readers to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33).

Available from Amazon and other booksellers.

WEB RESOURCES:

Visit the Missouri Baptist Convention's apologetics webpages at **mobaptist.org/apologetics**.

View, download, and share apologetics resources at **oncedelivered.net**.

