

# World Religions, Cults, and Aberrant Beliefs

## Lesson 3 – Islam

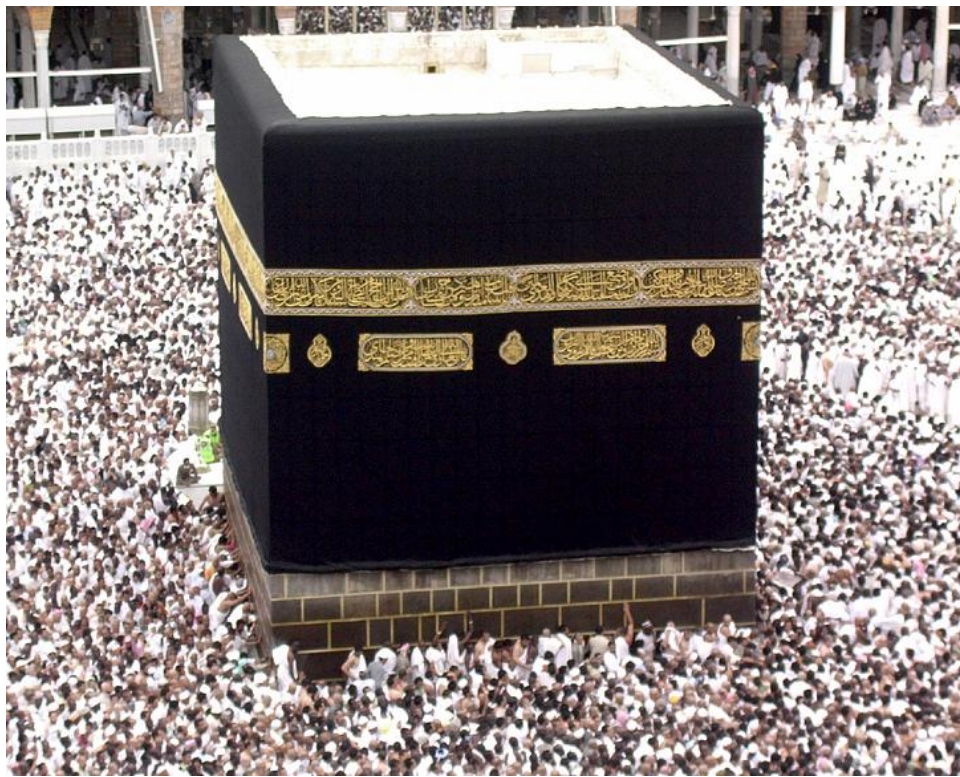
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### History of Islam

Islam means “submission” and a follower of Islam is called a Muslim or “a submitted one”. Muslims believe in submitting to their one and only god, named Allah. Islam was founded by Muhammad. Muslims believe Muhammad was the last prophet of God, superseding Jesus, the prophet who was before him. Muhammad was born around 570 AD and died in 632. He was a trader from the city of Mecca.

Mecca was the cultural and religious center of Arabia. The area was ruled by tribes with numerous, competing, polytheistic religions. At the heart of Mecca was a shrine about 60 feet cube containing hundreds of idols, and known as the House of Allah. Allah was recognized as the supreme deity, but was worshipped along with other deities. The cube was believed to have been built by Abraham and his son Ishmael on the same spot as the first shrine to God built by Adam.



At forty, Muhammad entered a cave for meditation. It is here that, according to the Qur'an, Muhammad received “revelations” from the angel Gabriel. Muhammad could not read nor write so he was instructed to memorize the words given to him by Gabriel. This complete recitation which Muhammad received over a 23 year period, ending in 632, the year of his death, is known as the Qur'an (meaning recitations).

It became Muhammad’s mission to proclaim Islam, allegedly given to him by Allah through Gabriel. Muhammad called people to repent from their idol worship, to do good, and to serve the one true God, Allah. He taught that man is God's slave and it is his duty to submit to God and obey him. He said that the day of judgment was coming and that a man's works will be weighed on that day. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad may, by Allah's grace, be saved and enter Paradise which is full of sensual pleasures. The unsaved go to hell. In his first three years of proclaiming Islam, he had 40 converts.

Muhammad's preaching brought much opposition in Mecca. In 622, the Mecca leaders denounced him and he fled Mecca and moved to Medina where he established the first Islamic community. This event is known as the Hijra (literally meaning "flight"). The Muslim calendar begins on July 16, 622; the first day of the lunar year in which Muhammad's migration took place. In Medina, Muhammad preached about Allah and monotheism and urged all people to return to the true faith of Abraham. Muslims view Muhammad as the restorer of the original, uncorrupted monotheistic faith of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets.

After two years in Medina, the Muslims were very poor and persecuted which prompted a revelation to come to Muhammad permitting him to raid passing caravans. Soon afterward, there was a significant battle at which Muhammad, with 350 men, defeated an army of 1,000. This victory gave confidence to the Muslims and encouraged more converts.

In 627, the ruling tribe of Mecca tried to destroy the Muslims but failed. Muhammad then sought to conquer Mecca. In 630 Muhammad conquered Mecca and destroyed all of the idols. In 632, Muhammad delivers his last sermon, later falls ill, and dies. His father-in-law becomes Caliph, the religious leader of Islam. Islam spread rapidly during the first century after Muhammad's death. It spread, often through military force, across the Middle East, through most of North Africa to Spain, and as far east as India. The Muslim advance into Europe was stopped by Charles "The Hammer" Martel at the Battle of Tours in France in October 732. Charles Martel was the grandfather of Charlemagne who was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800.

Today, Islam is the second largest and the fastest growing religion in the world. According to the 2009 CIA World Fact Book, 22.43% of the world population is Muslim (compared to 33.35% of professing Christians). Although Islam was born in Arabia, today most of Islam's adherents are not of Arab descent. Countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India have large Muslim populations.

### **Islamic Groups**

The two major groups within Islam are the Sunni and Shi'ite. The Sunnis comprise about 85 percent of all Muslims. Shi'ites comprise less than 15 percent with other smaller sects making up the rest. The schism which originally divided these groups began when Muhammad failed to appoint a successor before his death. The Sunnis believe that the successor should be elected, where the Shi'ites believe the successor should come from among Muhammad's blood relatives. The Sunnis stress the authority of written traditions, whereas the Shi'ites stress the authority of pop-like leaders. The Sunnis separate the offices of religious and civil authorities, whereas the Shi'ites join the offices of religious and civil authorities.

Shi'ite populations constitute a majority in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan. There are also significant Shi'ite populations in Afghanistan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen.

### **Muslim Beliefs**

There are five primary beliefs of Islam delineated in Sura 1:177: "Righteous is he who believes in Allah and the last day and the angels and the scripture and the prophets."

1. Allah: There is one true god (Allah). Many Christians believe that the Muslim Allah is just another name for the God of the Bible. This is not so. The central attributes of Allah include his absolute unity, complete sovereignty, mysterious will, ultimate justice, arbitrary mercy, and his utter unknowability. According to Muslims, humans cannot comprehend Allah's nature or character, but can only know the will and commands of Allah. Many Muslims believe Christians embrace a Trinity that resulted from a sexual union between God the Father and Mary, by which Jesus was born.

2. The last day: The Qur'an says that in the end each person will be resurrected in order to face judgment. This judgment will be based on the good deeds that one has performed during their life and obedience to the five pillars and the Qur'an. The books that the two angels have been writing will be weighed.

“Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy, — They will attain salvation: but those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls; in Hell will they abide” (Sura 23:102–3).

Heaven is a place of everlasting bliss.

“God hath promised to believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God: That is the supreme felicity.” (Sura 9:72)

Hell will be a place of everlasting torment.

Their scorched skins are constantly exchanged for new ones so that they can taste the torment anew (Sura 4:45). They drink festering water, and though death appears on all sides, they are not able to die (14:16–17). People are linked together in chains of 70 cubits (69:30–32), wearing pitch for clothing and fire on their faces (14:50). Boiling water will be poured over their heads, melting their insides as well as their skins, and hooks of iron will drag them back should they try to escape (22:19–21). CRI Statement: DM809; Understanding and Reaching Muslims by Abdul Saleeb & Norman L. Geisler (Parts One and Two)

3. Angels: Angels were created by Allah and are his servants. Evil spirits are called Jinn. Everyone has two “recording angels” – one angel records our good deeds, the other our bad deeds. Muslims believe in Satan, he rebelled against Allah, and he is the chief deceiver of humankind leading all astray from Allah's will.
4. The scripture: Muslims believe there are four books of Scripture – the Torah, the Psalms of David; the Gospels of Jesus, and the Qur'an of Muhammad. However, they believe that the first three have been corrupted either in manuscripts or interpretation. The Qur'an is God's full and final revelation. It is claimed that the Qur'an was dictated in Arabic by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad and were Allah's precise words. Islam teaches that it contains the total and perfect revelation and will of Allah. The Qur'an is about four-fifths the length of the New Testament and is divided into 114 “surahs” or chapters. While Islam respects the Torah, the psalms of David and the four Gospels, the Qur'an stands alone in its authority and absoluteness. It is believed to be most perfectly understood in Arabic and it is a religious obligation to seek to read and quote it in the original language.
5. The prophets: Islam teaches that there have been 124,000 prophets, one for each nation from the beginning. Six are considered to be the highest rank: Muhammad (the apostle of God), Jesus (the word of God), Moses (the speaker with God), Abraham (the friend of God), Noah (the preacher of God), and Adam (the chosen of God). Of Jesus the Qur'an states:

“Christ the son of Mary was no more than an Apostle.” (Sura 5:75)

“it is not fitting to (the majesty of) God that He should beget a son” (Sura 19:35).

In addition, the idea of sin in Islam is that man is not fallen, but is considered weak and forgetful. The most serious sin that can be ascribed to people is that of considering Allah as more than one. Muslims also have dietary codes that forbid the eating of pork and the use of intoxicating beverages. Other meats may be eaten from animals slaughtered by devout Muslims.

The five pillars of Islam are the framework for the Muslim's life and discipline. Successful adherence to the pillars satisfies the will of Allah. They form the basis for the Muslim's hope for salvation along with faith and belief in Allah's existence, the authority of Muhammad as a prophet, and the finality and perfection of the Qur'an. The five pillars are:

1. The duty to recite the confession of faith (Shahadah): the declaration that "There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the prophet (messenger) of Allah." Sincerity in the voicing of the confession is all that is necessary to become a Muslim. It must be held until death and repudiation of the Shahadah nullifies hope for salvation.
2. The duty to pray (Salat): Muslims are required to say 17 prayers a day and pray five specific times a day, preceded by ceremonial washing. The five times of prayer are before sunrise, noon, midafternoon, sunset, and two hours after sunset. The Muslim is required to pray facing Mecca. Specific formulas, recited from the Qur'an (in Arabic), along with prostrations are included. Prayer is, in this sense, an expression of submission to the will of Allah. On Friday, Muslims are required to meet in a Mosque to pray.
3. The duty to give alms (Zakat): The Qur'an teaches the giving of one-fortieth (2.5 percent) of one's capital wealth to the poor and/or for the propagation of Islam.
4. The duty to fast (Sawm): During the course of the lunar month of Ramadan, a fast is to be observed by every Muslim from sunrise to sunset. They are expected to refrain from eating during the daylight hours. After sunset, feasting and other celebrations often occur. The daylight hours are set aside for self-purification. The month is used to remember the giving of the Qur'an to Muhammad.
5. The duty to make the pilgrimage (Hajj): All Muslims who are financially and physically able are required to journey as a pilgrim to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. The pilgrim must wear simple white garment which eliminates distinctions of class or status and stresses the notion of equality before God. Another element of the Hajj is the mandatory walk of each pilgrim seven times around the Kaabah—the shrine of the black rock, the holiest site of Islam. Muhammad taught that the Kaabah was the original place of worship for Adam and later for Abraham. The Kaabah is thus venerated as the site of true religion, the absolute monotheism of Islam.

Some Muslims consider there to be a sixth pillar.

6. The holy struggle (jihad): Many Muslims believe jihad is a sixth pillar of their faith. One Hadith (saying of Muhammad) describes it as second only to belief in God. Jihad is the belief that the Muslim should engage in a holy struggle to preserve Islam against non-Muslim beliefs. While orthodox Muslims consider jihad a literal, even military, struggle against unbelievers, some more liberal scholars interpret it as a spiritual struggle. Both the wording of the Qur'an and the militaristic life of Muhammad favor an emphasis on the literal understanding of Jihad.

"Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture and believe not in Allah nor the last day" (Sura 9:29)

"O ye who believe! Take not Jews and Christians for friends. They are friends of one to another. He among you who takes them for friends is (one) of them. Lo! Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk" (5:51)

"O' Prophet! Exhort the believer to fight. If there be of you twenty steadfast they shall overcome two hundred...who disbelieve, because they are folk without intelligence" (8:65)

"Those who believe do battle for the cause of Allah; and those who disbelieve do battle for the cause of idols. So fight the minions of the devil" (4:76)

Christians are referred as “people of the book”. However, since they do not conform to the confession of Islam they are unbelievers to Muslims. Here is a concise comparison of Islam with Biblical Christianity.

	<b>Islam</b>	<b>Biblical Christianity</b>
Authority	Qur’an is the only source of uncorrupted authority. The Torah, Psalms of David, and the Gospels of Jesus are Scripture, but have been corrupted.	The Bible is the only source of authority. It is the uncorrupted Word of God
God	Absolute unity (one person in one nature); unknowable	Plurality within unity; (three Persons in one nature); personal
Jesus	Merely a prophet; did not die on a cross; Did not rise from the dead	Both God and man; died on the cross for our sins; rose from the dead for our justification
Humanity	Good by nature	Sinful by nature
Salvation	By works – through a good life and accomplishing the five pillars	By grace through faith

Here is a comparison of Jesus and Muhammad from the Qur’an. Jesus is superior to Muhammad even from the Qur’an.

<b>Jesus in the Qur’an</b>	<b>Muhammad in the Qur’an</b>
Sinless	Sinful
Virgin born	Not virgin born
Called “Messiah”	Not called “Messiah”
Called “Word of God”	Not called “Word of God”
Performed miracles	Refused to perform miracles
Bodily ascended to heaven	Did not bodily ascend to heaven

### **Witnessing Strategies to Muslims**

Let’s remember some of our general strategies from last week.

1. Sanctify your heart. (1 Pet 3:15)
2. Pray – this is a spiritual battle for the truth. (2 Cor 10:3-5)
3. Be ready with a good understanding of the Scriptures.
4. Do not argue. Do not attack the person. (2 Tim 2:24-26)
5. Make sure you define words.
6. Do not get off on tangents. The important points are the source of authority, the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus, the nature of man, and the means of salvation.
7. Avoid Christian jargon – it has no meaning for the unchurched.

Some things to avoid:

1. Even though it is stated above. Do not argue with Muslims. Their culture does not permit them to lose face or lose an argument.
2. Do not use a marked Qur’an or marked Bible. This is a sign of desecration. Muslims never hold their Qur’an below their waist. They try to hold it high and place it in the highest position on a shelf.
3. Do not speak to Muslims in groups. Peer pressure is a negative factor.

Some things to do:

1. Pray with them. They have a strong belief in prayer, and the Christian's personal relationship to the heavenly Father is something Muslims do not have.
2. Speak of Jesus, whom they respect as one of the great prophets. Use the parables of Jesus (such as the Lost Son). They love stories. They are often impressed by the Sermon on the Mount, which puts Jesus in strong and loving contrast to the violent life of Muhammad.
3. Respect their dietary restrictions.
4. Be sensitive to male-female relational boundaries, and especially make sure to dress modestly.
5. Show love to them. An act of kindness, such as escorting them to the store would help build bridges.
6. Some Muslims regard Christians as their enemies and in some Muslim lands Christians are persecuted; this provides Christians an opportunity to provide a practical demonstration of the superiority of the gospel of grace (Matt 5:38-47; Rom 12:17-21).

<sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.’ <sup>39</sup>But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. <sup>40</sup>If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. <sup>41</sup>Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. <sup>42</sup>Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. <sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup>If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Matt 5:38-47

<sup>17</sup>Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. <sup>19</sup>Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>“BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Rom 12:17-21

7. Provide them with evidence for the Bible's reliability.

In general, Muslims have significant misunderstandings of Christian belief that need to be cleared up. From CRI Statement: DM809; Understanding and Reaching Muslims by Abdul Saleeb & Norman L. Geisler (Parts One and Two)

1. “Christians believe in three Gods.”

The oneness of God must be stressed. Verses such as these can be used: Deut 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one”; Ex 20:3: “You shall have no other gods before me”; Isa 45:18: “I am the Lord, and there is no other”; Mark 12:29: “‘The most important one [command],’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one...”’”; 1 Cor 8:4: “We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.”

2. “God cannot have a Son.”

Many Muslims think that Christians believe the Trinity came about through Jesus being born of a sexual union between God and Mary. Such a belief, of course, is blasphemous, and it is clearly not what Christians believe (see Matt 1:21; Luke 2:1–7).

3. “God would not allow his servant to die on a Cross.”

One of the roadblocks in conveying the gospel to Muslims is their belief that God would not allow one of his servants to suffer such an ignominious death as crucifixion. In response, several facts can be pointed out. First, according to Muslims, Allah can do anything He wants. If so, God could allow Jesus to die on a cross. Second, Jesus did not suffer such an ignominious end, for the crucifixion was not the end. He experienced a glorious resurrection.

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