

Understanding Islam
(Question 7: What do Muslims believe?)

There are over 1 billion Muslims in the world; it is one of the top two religions numerically (with Christianity). Islam is constantly in the news.

The goal of this study is to outline what Muslims believe and practice.

***Most Important:** Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to model a new way of life. The information in this outline is intended for spirited discussion with Muslims but the first step is to befriend, get to know, listen to and understand Muslims. It is only through a real relationship that any significant growth can happen. Most of all, may we live the way of Jesus: the way of love and peace and reconciliation. No matter what else happens, let us love those often considered our enemies.

Islam means “submission”

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I. Islam: History and Practice

Historical Background

- ◆ Pre-Islamic Arabia (prior to 570 AD) – most were nomads, divided into many tribes
 - Believed in numerous deities (gods)
 - Allah was the high god of the city Mecca – idea of a high god who created the world and left; such a god was distant and rarely called upon for help by humans
 - *Hanifs* – Arabs who worshipped one God (Allah) but were not Jews or Christians
 - Muslims later called this time “*al-Jahiliya*” (“the ignorance”) seeing it as an idolatrous, evil and licentiousness time
- ◆ Muhammad was born 570 AD (Common Era, CE, in many books) into the Quarysh tribe
 - In his 20s he became the manager of a wealthy widow’s caravan (Khadijah) – he impressed her and she married him, though she was 15 years older than he
 - Muhammad often retired to a cave in the hills near Mecca for meditation – in 610 a voice spoke to him (the angel Gabriel) commanding him to recite – the words he recited became the first verses of the Koran (Qur’an 95:1-5).
 - Qur’an means “recitation”
 - *“The verses of the Qur’an were revealed to Muhammad little by little, and he was distinctly aware that they were not of his own conceiving. This point is crucial for Muslims, who regard the Qur’an as being entirely the product of God and not at all of a human being”* (Denny, 63).
 - Early message of Qur’an focuses on God’s judgment – over time God’s compassion and mercy are emphasized
- ◆ Muhammad gained a few followers (the first Muslims) – Khadijah, Ali (his cousin) and Abu Bakr (his father in law)
- ◆ Muhammad began preaching against the many gods of Mecca – this led to persecution of the Muslims; Muhammad was protected by his uncle, Abu Talib, until he died in 619
- ◆ 622 – Year that many Muslims began moving to Medina – Muhammad escaped to Medina – the start of that year (July 16) is the start of the Islamic lunar calendar
 - *The Hijra* – “the emigration”
- ◆ Medina – here is where Muhammad became a statesman and political leader
 - Battles with Mecca; Muhammad gained prestige as Mecca lost it
 - 628 – Muhammad and Muslims allowed to visit Mecca on pilgrimage - a treaty is signed – the treaty is violated in 630 when Meccans kill some Muslims
 - 630 – Muhammad leads large army and Mecca surrenders – city converts to Islam
- ◆ Muhammad’s later life
 - After Khadijah died Muhammad took 10 more wives and 2 concubines
 - By the time he died in June 632 all Arabia was united under Islam
- ◆ Muslim Conquests
 - Egypt conquered in 640; Syria and Mesopotamia also
 - Muslims conquered North Africa and moved into Spain; conquered Spain by 718 and moved into France – Muslims defeated by Charles Martel in 732 at the Battle of Poitiers
 - Islam conquered many historic centers of Christianity (Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Carthage) leaving Rome and Constantinople (which was conquered in 1453)

Five Basic Doctrines of Islam (Denny, 107-112)

1. Faith in the absolute unity and oneness of God (107)
 - a. Allah is One and there is no union with him (Sura 3:18; 112:1-4)
 - b. *Shirk* the association of something else with God (a great sin) (Sura 2:22)
2. Belief in angels and their important work as messengers and helpers of God – the angels include the *jinn* who are fire beings and lower than angels (108)
3. Muhammad is the last in a noble line of prophets and all scriptures are entirely God's work, though the Jews and Christians corrupted their messages prior to Islam (108)
4. The final judgment – eschatology (109-111)
5. Divine decree and predestination – has its basis in the Qur'an but does not unequivocally say that God decrees and determines all that happens from all eternity – both predestination and free will are implied in the Qur'an; God is far above humans and we cannot understand his acts (111-2)

Five Pillars of Islam (Acts of Worship)

- ◆ Before coming to the five pillars of Islam one must undergo purification. Purification is both spiritual and physical – spiritual refers to an awareness, dedicated life in which kindness, concern for others, and openness to God dominate; physical purity is maintained by specific ritual acts (rituals for removing impurity, 113-8)
- ◆ Five pillars:
 - Testimony of the *shahada* – there is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet
 - Salat – worship service – the ritual prayers performed 5 times a day (119-124)
 - Zakat – legal almsgiving – giving to the poor (124-6)
 - Sawm – fasting during holy month of Ramadan (126-130)
 - Hajj – pilgrimage to Mecca once in each Muslim's lifetime (130-6)

The Qur'an

“The Qur'an is a source of inspiration, solace and salvation. It is a companion and guide through life's journey in the Muslim community across the great diversity of its languages and cultures. In the Qur'an a pious Muslim hears Allah's voice guiding and encouraging, consoling and reproaching, promising the righteous mercy and eternal bliss, and threatening the wicked with wrath and eternal torment. The Qur'an is the timeless Word of God which has entered human time, and thus shaped Muslim history, and was itself shaped by it. In its revelation-history, the Qur'an typifies human life in all its dimensions” (Ayoub, 77).

- ◆ Qur'an revealed over 22-23 years – first for 12 years in Mecca as a warner and preacher and then for 10 years in Medina as a prophet and statesman
- ◆ Qur'an was passed on by oral means for first 2 centuries after Muhammad – eventually written, written Qur'an corrected by oral Qur'an – 300 years after M. the standard Qur'an was perfected
- ◆ Divided into 114 chapters (*Suras*) organized from longest to shortest with the exception of the first which is The Opening (roughly parallel to the Lord's Prayer in Christianity)
 - Chronological order – not unanimous agreement on the order the *surahs* were revealed, but there is a general consensus on most of them
 - Medinan *suras* are different from Meccan ones because of the changed circumstances: Muhammad is the head of an independent theocratic community and the passages focus on legal and social matters with emphasis on application to life (i.e. less prominence on warning, judgment, and punishment)
 - *“The place of the Qur'an in the life of the Muslims is only in limited ways like that of the Bible in the lives of Jews and Christians. Scholars have observed that in relation to Christianity, the Qur'an may be usefully compared with Christ, in that it is believed to be God's Word that has miraculously come down into the world in history and humankind. If in Christianity 'the Word*

became flesh, ' in Islam it became a book. And the book is properly appropriated and applied only when it is recited live in a context of belief and obedience” (Denny, 144).

- ◆ Qur’an is not narrative like the Bible – its style is oracular and it is full of repetition which gives the Western reader the impression of disjointedness
- ◆ Muslims say the Qur’an cannot be translated, it must be understood in the original for the beauty to be maintained; no translation can do justice to the Arabic poetry
 - Translations often carry title “Meaning of the Glorious Qur’an”
 - The Qur’an is the chief way to encounter God
- ◆ Muslims do not see the Qur’an as Muhammad’s words – it is God’s Word
 - The Qur’an is Muhammad’s one miracle – he was illiterate so he could not have written it; his illiteracy proves it is from God
- ◆ Focus of the Qur’an is how to live – five doctrines, five pillars, other practical points
- ◆ Qur’an names 25 prophets of whom five are notable: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad – Muhammad is the “seal” (*khatam*) of the prophets in the sense that he is last and that he validates the history of prophecy
 - Before Islam every community had a prophet, many more than one -124000 total
 - Qur’an considers all previous prophecy as complete and perfect, but the peoples to whom the message was communicated distorted it and therefore Muhammad came to transmit the old message anew and establish it universally

Hadith

- ◆ Muhammad gained authority as he revealed more and more of the Qur’an
- ◆ Sunna – the Prophet’s “custom” – his words, deeds and actions
 - Sunna is transmitted in written form through *hadith*
 - *Hadith* were remembered and transmitted by many different people in a wide variety of contexts and regions. Eventually scholars developed methods of sifting through and evaluating them, weeding out questionable or spurious ones and preserving authentic ones in systematic collections – this became a second source of authoritative teaching to assist them in all aspects of life (Denny, 159)
 - Hadith “confirmed, extended, elaborated, explained, and supplemented the revelation as a scriptural compliment to the Qur’an” (159)
- ◆ Two parts of Hadith: First is the opening citation of the persons who transmitted it (*isnad*) and second is the main text (*matn*)
 - *Isnad* was crucial to determine authenticity of the *matn*
 - “Science of men” developed which collected all available information pertaining to every person mentioned in the *isnads* of the *Hadith* – such things as memory, intelligence, reputation for truth telling and piety were important factors in evaluating the chain of authority (also contacts, travels, habits) – different categories of trustworthiness
- ◆ Categories of *Hadith* – to be considered sound a *hadith* must have a perfectly linked and unblemished *isnad* all the way back to the first transmitter who heard it from the prophet; it should not contradict other narrations that occur in great numbers; and no hidden defects
- ◆ If the Qur’an unites Muslims doctrinally and devotionally then the Sunna of Muhammad unites them in the myriad of details of daily behavior and attitudes (167)

Muslim Theology

- ◆ Islam not focused on creeds like Christianity; closest thing is the *shahada*
- ◆ During the low point in the Christian west; Islamic scholars kept Greek learning alive by interacting with Greek philosophy and translating Greek works
- ◆ Some theological debate:
 - Debate on how to handle a grave sinner
 - Kharijites believed the community must pursue perfection, they would kill those guilty of grave sin
 - the Murji'ites believed that judgment should be suspended and left to God, they were called the "postponers" (dominant Sunni majority)
 - Debated free will and predestination
 - Debated the definition of what the *umma* (community) was and the nature of its adherents – there came to be a tolerant sense of community that included diverse and dissident groups – as long as a person proclaimed the *shahada*, performed *salat*, paid *zakat*, recognized Mecca that person was considered a Muslim
 - Debate on whether the Qur'an was created or was eternal (similar to debates Christians had about Jesus Christ)
 - Mu'tazilites argued it was created in time, lest Muslims begin to hold two divine realities (God and the Qur'an) – the Qur'an was the created Word of God
 - Sunni orthodoxy taught that the Qur'an was indeed eternal and perfect in every respect as God's speech – this view won out after bitter struggle
 - "For Muslims, the Qur'an is the literal and timeless Word which entered our time. It became a book which Muslims write down, memorize, recite and live by. The Qur'an is therefore analogous to Christ in Christianity, who is the eternal Logos who 'was made flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1:14)'" (Ayoub, 72)

Law and State in Islam

- ◆ No separation of church and state in Islam – Islam is a way of life that covers both – hard to even conceive of two separate entities in Islamic thought
 - "Islam is complete only as a religio-political and social system governing the life of a society. Islam was revealed to a community" (Ayoub, 176).
- ◆ *Shari'a* – law (the right path) – yet it is more than law, it is also right teaching, right way of life, and the power that stands behind what is right – it unites and guides Muslims; a system designed to facilitate obedience to God
 - "The purpose of *Shari'ah* as a divine law is to enable human beings to live a morally pure and wholesome life of service to Allah and to His creatures" (Ayoub, 138).
- ◆ Qur'an contains the essence of Islamic law and the basis for adjudicating any imaginable situation that might arise, yet it does not show how to proceed on the practical level in all situations
 - Four sources of *Shari'a*: the Book (Qur'an), the life-example (Sunna) of the Prophet, the rational and personal deduction or effort (*ijtihad*) of the scholars, and the consensus of the community (*ijmaa*) (Ayoub, 138)
- ◆ Five Categories of Acts that Islam law recognizes (Denny, 201-2)
 - *Fard* or *wajib* – duties and acts required of all Muslims and whose performance is rewarded and omission is punished (for example, prayer and fasting)
 - *Sunna*, *masnun*, *mandub*, or *mustahabb* – duties and acts that are recommended but not required; performance is rewarded but omissions is not punished (for example, visiting Medina after pilgrimage)
 - *Ja'iz* or *muba*: indifferent actions whose performance or omission is neither rewarded nor punished
 - *Makruh* – actions that are disapproved but not punished or forbidden

- *Haram* – actions that are both forbidden and punished (fornication, drinking wine, etc)

Split between Sunnis and Shi'ites

- ◆ Rooted in the question: who was to succeed Muhammad as leader of the community?
- ◆ After Muhammad died some older Muslims gathered and selected Abu Bakr; others believed Muhammad had appointed his relative, Ali as successor
 - Those in favor of Ali became Shi'ites – all leaders of Muslim community must be relatives of Muhammad
 - Those in favor of Abu Bakr became Sunnis
- ◆ Sunnis believe in the office of Caliphate as leader – Caliph maintains Shari'a but is also subject to it just as the lowest peasant
 - Caliphate fell in 1258 when the Mongols conquered Baghdad – Sultanate became supreme ruler of Islam, but tried to assume religious titles and present themselves as guardians of the faith
- ◆ Shi'ites look to Imam who descend from line of Ali
 - All Muslims call the one who leads community in prayer “Imam”
 - Shi'ites believe Imams are a sort of continuation of Muhammad; uniquely qualified to serve as teachers for the Muslims

Sufism

- Islamic mysticism found among Sufis
- Sufis emphasize the nearness of God; they emphasize his love (without denying his judgment)
- *“Sufism is actually a way of internalizing Islamic faith and practice, taking as its guide not theological or philosophical ideas but the lives of the prophets and friends of Allah”* (Ayoub, 150)

Islamic Life – “We see that Islam is a complete religious, cultural, economic, social and political framework within which many communities of faith can grow” (Ayoub, 168)

- ◆ Birthing, Naming, Learning the Qur'an (as soon as he can talk), Circumcision of boys (when they have recited the entire Qur'an once through, a puberty right), and girls (controversial), marriage (as early as possible, celibacy is frowned upon)
 - In marriage both partners are legal individuals; the woman retains her property and can do with it as she pleases. The man is responsible for providing for his wife and the woman is responsible for managing the domestic side. The wife must properly comport herself and cover her body around other men, even now that women work outside the home the rules for dress still apply, only a woman's face and hair may be visible (Denny, 275)
 - Muslims see sex as one of God's greatest gifts but it must be enjoyed only in marriage – no deviant forms of sexual expression are allowed in Islam (homosexuality, prostitution, extramarital or premarital sex, sodomy, etc.) (Denny, 275)
 - Polygamy is allowed, but is rare – only when there are not enough men, as in the case of war – from Sura 4:3 with warnings in Sura 4:129
- ◆ Food and Eating Habits – Qur'an forbids eating carrion (creature that dies spontaneously from illness or being killed improperly), blood, pork and anything sacrificed to other than God (2:173) – all sea creatures are allowed because the sea is considered pure (even if they died spontaneously)
- ◆ Center of the Islamic town or city is the Friday mosque and this has been since early times – it is a multipurpose building for announcements and proclamations are made, crowds gather in times of crisis (rally for defense of holy warfare for example), Friday worship service is held, and education is given with learned *shaykhs* holding class
- ◆ Public Behavior – in public males dominate, females are basically invisible – it is considered bad to show affection to a spouse in public – men spend much time outside the house at cafes where they socialize and play games

Modern Islam

- ◆ Three Phases of Islamic History
 - Beginning–1200 (Mongol Invasion): “classical” period – Islam controlled a large empire; superiority in learning
 - 1200-1800 – Still great Islamic empires but Islamic civilization no longer found genius in theology, literature, arts, and science, there was a degeneration in these institutions – Western lands grew in these areas and colonized some Muslim areas
 - Napoleon’s entry into Egypt (c. 1800) opened Muslim world to Western influences – today there is continuous interaction between Islam and the West
- ◆ Islamic Revival – “There is no doubt that many, if not most, Muslims would like to see their religion spread to all places. This is at the heart of *da’wa*, the ‘call’ to Islam that is the basis of the missionary endeavors which have been effective in recent decades in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas” (Denny, 345)
 - Fundamentalism
 - Reform for Women – some speak out for removal of the veil; some find modest dress liberating compared to Western sexist preoccupation
 - Muslim community in America is diverse with Muslims from around the world

The Meaning of Jihad (Ayoub, 189-200)

- ◆ “*Islam is not merely an ideal or an abstract social theory, but a process of individual and social transformation. This transformation is to be achieved not through violent revolution where the means often defeat the end, but rather through the patient and sincere call of all Muslims to Allah*” (Ayoub, 189-90)
- ◆ “*The main aim of jihad in society is to eradicate wrongdoing and oppression*” (191).
- ◆ “*What then are the motives or circumstances which call for the jihad of battle? They are: defense of life, property, faith, the geographic and socio-economic integrity of the Ummah, and personal or community honor and dignity. Jihad is never enjoined for the purpose of forcing others to accept Islam, or solely to dominate and oppress another country or people*” (197).
- ◆ First act of jihad is to give up wealth and honor and migrate in the way of Allah (198-9)
- ◆ “*Jihad is a term frequently used in the Qur’an and hadith to mean intense struggling or striving for Allah’s cause...*” (200).

II. Islam and Christianity

- ◆ Muhammad and all other prophets (Jesus, Noah, etc.) seen as sinless
- ◆ Qur'an regards Jews and Christians as "People of the Book" who, though they have authentic scriptures, have over the generations twisted and corrupted it. Some accepted the revelation of M. and would be rewarded (3:199) once they were invited to become Muslim and perfect the religion revealed to Abraham; if they refused they were to be treated justly (as long as they do not oppose Islam) and not be forced to convert (Denny, 65)
- ◆ Differences between the Torah, Gospel and Qur'an are because some Jews and Christians willfully altered words from their rightful places (Surah 4:46); this more in regards to the interpretation or meaning than to the actual texts: for example both scriptures refer to the coming of Muhammad but these prophecies were given different meanings, and Christians misinterpret the message and personality of Jesus – see Surahs 5:17, 73, 116 (Ayoub, 101)
- ◆ Islamic Tolerance
 - *"Islam is a universal brotherhood of faith; if anyone accepts membership in this brotherhood, then he becomes a Muslim without distinction from any other Muslim. But if a person chooses to remain in his religion and allows his faith to be deepened by the teachings of Islam, then he belongs to that wider brotherhood, the brotherhood of humanity. In the end, it is faith and righteousness that matter in Allah's sight and not race, color or even creed"* Surah 49:13 (Ayoub, 105).

Jesus According to Muslims:

- ◆ Jesus was a prophet of God (Allah), sinless like other prophets but just a man. Later Christians, starting with Paul, corrupted Jesus' teaching by saying he was God in the flesh and that he died for our sins and rose again.
- ◆ Muslims believe Jesus was born without a father (Mary was a virgin) but this does not make him the Son of God (Sura 19:16-26; 21:91; 112)
- ◆ Jesus was not crucified – Allah took Jesus away and replaced him (with Judas?) so it appeared Jesus was crucified but he actually was not (4:157-159)
 - Muhammad made statements (in *Hadith*) that Jesus will return one day when Muslims need a leader; he will not start a new religion but will be loyal to the Qur'an and lead Muslims to victory over nonbelievers
- ◆ Source: <http://www.islam101.com/religions/christianity/christmas.html>

Muhammad in the Bible:

- ◆ Sura 7:157 says those who follow Muhammad will find him mentioned in their own scripture; Deuteronomy 18:18 – God promises there will arise a prophet like Moses; Christians say this was Jesus but Muslims say Muhammad is more like Moses
 - Both had a father and a mother, while Jesus was born miraculously without any male intervention (Mathew 1:18 and Luke 1:35 and also Al-Qur'an 3:42-47)
 - Both were married and had children; Jesus was not married and had no children
 - Both died natural deaths; Jesus was kept alive; did not die (4:157-8)
 - Both were kings, in addition to prophets; Jesus said his kingdom was not of this world (Jn. 18:36)
 - Both were accepted as prophets by the people; Jesus was rejected by his people (Jn. 1:11)
 - Both brought new laws and regulations; Jesus did not bring new laws (Matt. 5:17-18)
- ◆ Muhammad is prophesied by Isaiah 29:12 – it is prophesied that one must read who is unlearned and when Gabriel appeared to Muhammad he was unlearned
- ◆ Sura 61:6 – Jesus says one will come after him – Muhammad
 - John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7, 12-14 all speak of a Comforter coming after Jesus – the Holy Spirit was around while Jesus was still here so it cannot apply to the HS; it is Muhammad
- ◆ <http://www.islam101.com/religions/christianity/mBible.htm>

Sharp Disagreements:

- ◆ Muslims say the Bible is full of contradiction and is corrupted (though it is a book revealed by God in some way) while the Qur'an is perfect (though Muslims still use the Bible when it supports them) (<http://www.islam101.com/religions/christianity/diffBQ.htm>)
- ◆ Muslims believe God is ONE (strict monotheism) while Christians say God is ONE in three distinct persons (Trinitarian monotheism)
 - Christians invented the Trinity: http://www.islam101.com/religions/christianity/22_trinity.html

III. Christian Response to Islam

- ◆ *An Evaluation of Islamic Monotheism (Geisler, 135-150)*
 - Muslims emphasize Allah's oneness greatly – the worst sin is associating anything with God
 - Muslim misunderstanding – Muslims misunderstand the Christian teaching of the Trinity; they believe that since there is a Father and a Son that this implies some sort of physical generation based on sex but Christians do not believe God as Father and Son are related in that physical way
 - “Father” and “Son” does not mean God had sex with Mary
 - Qur'an and Oneness of God
 - Muslims scholars, based on the Qur'an, have made distinctions that allow for distinction in God's unity – the Qur'an itself is the eternal speech of God existing for all eternity in the mind of God yet it is not God
 - Muslim scholars insist the Qur'an is uncreated and perfectly expresses the mind of God, yet it is not God – the Qur'an in Islam is greatly similar to Jesus (Son of God, Divine Word) in Christianity – in this way Islam exhibits a plurality in the one God
 - “If speech is an eternal attribute of God that is not identical to God but is somehow distinguishable from him, then does not this allow the very kind of plurality within unity that Christians claim for the Trinity? Thus, it would seem that the Islamic view of God's absolute unity is, by their own distinction, not incompatible with Christian trinitarianism...They themselves allow that something can be an eternal expression of God without being numerically identical to him” (140)
 - Islam is not about knowing God, it is about submitting to God
 - Islamic scholar Al-Faruqi said “He [God] does not reveal Himself to anyone in any way. God reveals only His will” (quoted on p.142)
 - Islamic determinism – “orthodox Islam teaches the absolute predestination of both good and evil, that all our thoughts, words, and deeds, whether good or evil, were foreseen, foreordained, determined and decreed from all eternity, and that everything that happens takes place according to what has been written for it” (146)
 - Qur'an describes God as “the One who leads astray” and “the One who guides”
 - Qur'an admits God could have saved all had he decided to – Sura 32:13
 - Christians believe God gave humans freedom (even Christians who believe we cannot choose God say we have freedom but since we only desire evil we freely choose evil)
- ◆ *An Evaluation of Muhammad (Geisler, 151-182)*
 - Evaluation of Muslim Claim for Biblical Support
 - Deuteronomy 18:15-18 – “I will raise up for them [Israel] a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put my words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him” (v. 18)
 - Muslims say this prophecy refers to Muhammad but it cannot:
 - ◆ It is clear that the term ‘brethren’ means fellow Israelites – it means Israelites in 18:2 and 17:15
 - ◆ ‘Brethren’ does not refer to Arabs – Muslims admit Muhammad came from Ishmael and not Isaac so he is not ‘brethren’

- ◆ Even the Qur'an states that the prophetic line came through Isaac (Sura 29:27)
- ◆ Jesus fulfills this prophecy, for he was among his Jewish brethren (Gal. 4:4)
- ◆ Muhammad did not do important prophetic things such as speaking with God face to face and performing signs and wonders
- Deuteronomy 33:2 – Muslim scholars think this refers to three separate visitations from God; one at Sinai to Moses, one to Seir through Jesus, a third at Paran (Arabia) to Muhammad
 - But if we look at a map we see Paran and Seir are near Egypt in the Sinai peninsula (cf. Gen. 14:6; Num. 10:12; 12:16-13:3; Deut. 1:1) – they are not near Palestine (where Jesus ministered) or Mecca so Muslim interpretation falters
- Deuteronomy 34:10 says “there arose not a prophet since in Israel like Moses” – Muslims say this means the predicted prophet could not be an Israelite
 - The “since” means from Moses death to when this was written either in Joshua’s time or later, but prior to 500 BC definitely
 - The prophecy said the prophet to come would do signs and wonders like Moses did (34:11) but Muhammad, b his own profession, did not do signs and wonders (see Sura 2:118; 3:183; 25:32; 17:105)
- Psalm 45:3-5 – refers to one coming with a sword to subdue his enemies; Muslims say this is Muhammad but the very next verse (43:6) identifies the person spoken of as God who Jesus claimed to be (John 8:58; 10:30) but Muhammad did not
- Matthew 3:11 – John the Baptist speaks of one coming after him and Muslims say this could not be Jesus because Jesus and John were contemporaries
 - But Jesus began his ministry after being baptized by John and John explicitly referred to Jesus in 3:14-15
- John 14:16 – Muslims say the “helper” to come was Muhammad, not the Holy Spirit
 - Based on Sura 61:6 Muslims say the Greek in John 14:16 should be *periclytos* (‘praised one’) not *paraclete* (‘helper’); of the over 5686 manuscripts in Greek of the New Testament no manuscript shows this; Jesus clearly identified the helper as the Holy Spirit
 - The Helper was to abide with them forever (Jn. 16) but Muhammad has been dead for over 1300 years
 - Jesus said the Helper could be “in you” (v. 17) but Muhammad could not be in Jesus’ followers since he did not show up for 600 years
- Muhammad’s Claim of a Divine Call
 - Muhammad questioned the divine origin of his experience fearing he was being deceived by an evil spirit or jinn; Haykal writes: “Stricken with panic, Muhammad arose and asked himself, ‘What did I see? Did possession of the devil which I feared all along come to pass?’ Muhammad looked to his right and his left but saw nothing. For a while he stood there trembling with fear and stricken with awe. He feared the cave might be haunted and that he might run away still unable to explain what he saw” (quoted on 160)
 - On occasion Muhammad had revelation he thought from God but he later changed it
 - Watt notes that Meccans had numerous contacts with Christians as their trading caravans took them to Christian lands
 - Sura 16:103 and 25:4 hint that Muhammad received ideas from certain foreigners, perhaps Christians?
 - One of Muhammad’s scribes in Medina was Abdollah b. Abi Sarh; Dashti relates the following story: “On a number of occasions he had with the Prophet’s consent, changed the closing words of verses. For example, when the Prophet had said ‘And God is mighty and wise’ ... Abdollah b. Abi Sarh suggested writing down ‘knowing and wise’ ... and the Prophet answered that there was no objection. Having observed a succession of changes of this type,

- Abdollah renounced Islam on the ground that the revelations, if from God, could not be changed at the prompting of a scribe such as himself” (quoted on 162)
- When asked to perform miracles to support his claim M. refused to do as other prophets had done (Sura 3:181-4); claimed the language and teaching of the Qur’an were proof
 - Muhammad’s Moral Example
 - Many Muslims say Muhammad was the best model for how one can live and his life is one of the main proofs of his being a prophet
 - Problem of Polygamy
 - Qur’an states a man may have four wives (4:3) but Muhammad himself had more than that; this is defended by saying Muhammad received a special revelation from God that he could have more (33:50), he even received permission to marry Zainab, the divorced wife of his adopted son (33:37); though M. was also told to stop marrying women (33:52)
 - Haykal notes that of the problems stemming from polygamy was that the wives of the Prophet went so far as to plot against their husband
 - Lower Status of Women - Sura 4:34 allows for men to beat their wives
 - Muhammad in need of Forgiveness
 - Sura 40:55 is where God tells Muhammad “Patiently, then, persevere: For the Promise of God is true: and ask God forgiveness for they fault” (see also 47:19; 48:2) – if Muhammad was sinless why did he need ask forgiveness?
 - Other Problems
 - Muhammad once sanctioned a follower to lie to an enemy named Khalid in order to kill him – this he did
 - Muhammad once asked for the assassination of a Jew, Ka’b Ibn Al-Ashraf
 - Qur’an shows that Muhammad broke promises – Sura 2:217; 66:2
 - Haykal, a defender of Islam, responded to this: “*even if their claims were true, we would still refute them with the simple argument that the great stand above the law*” (Haykal 84 quoted on Geisler 181).
 - What it comes down to: Muhammad appears not to be sinless – is it because he sinned or simply because he is above the law?
 - ♦ *An Evaluation of the Qur’an (Geisler, 183-212)*
 - Muhammad claimed the Qur’an was his only miracle; Muslims defend this based on the Qur’an’s unique literary style, Muhammad’s illiteracy, the Qur’an’s perfect preservation and a few other arguments
 - Unique Literary Style
 - All that eloquence proves is that Muhammad was extremely gifted – Mozart wrote his first symphony at age six and all of his music by age 25 while Muhammad did not begin the Qur’an until age 40 so based on this we should say Mozart’s work is miraculous – if eloquence is the test many literary classics from Homer to Shakespeare qualify
 - Islamic scholar C.G. Pfander points out that it is not universal opinion of unprejudiced Arabic scholars that the literary style of the Qur’an is superior to other Arabic books
 - Iranian Shi’ite scholar Ali Dashti writes: “*The Quran contains sentences which are incomplete and not fully intelligible without the aid of commentaries; foreign words, unfamiliar Arabic words, and words used with other than the normal meaning; adjectives and verbs inflected without observance of the concord of gender and number; illogical and ungrammatically applied pronouns which sometimes have no referent; and predicates which in rhymed passages are often remote from the subjects*” (quoted on 192)
 - Muhammad’s Illiteracy
 - Was he? Sura 7:157 has the Arabic ‘*al umni*’ which may mean ‘heathen’ or ‘unlettered’
 - Same term rendered ‘heathen’ in 62:2 (and 2:73; 3:19, 69; 7:156)

- Watt says that many Meccans were able to read and write and Muhammad, to be an efficient merchant, knew something of the arts including writing; even Muslim scholars say Muhammad was perfect in intellect
- Even if he was illiterate it does not mean the Qur'an was from God – he could have dictated to a scribe; Homer was blind and wrote the Iliad and Odyssey in this way
- Perfect Preservation
 - Overstatement – it is true that the present Qur'an is generally a good copy of the seventh century text but this is not exactly how it came to Muhammad
 - During the reign of Uthman, the third Muslim caliph, it was reported that several Muslim communities were using different versions of the Qur'an – it was at this time that an official version was made and others were destroyed
 - Contrary to Muslim claims there were several different texts prior to Uthman's revision – see Arthur Jeffery's *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*
 - Even today not all Muslims accept the same version – Sunnis and Shi'ites differ
 - There was change – the so-called Satanic Verses were revealed to Muhammad and allowed pagan gods but this was later changed and blamed on Satan (Sura 53:21-23)
 - Even today the Qur'an has variant readings in some suras
 - Even if the Qur'an was perfect word-for-word copy it would not prove it was inspired by God; it would just prove to be passed on well
- Unity in the Qur'an
 - Contradictions where later revelations to Muhammad contradict prior ones – in one place it says there is no compulsion in religion (2:256) yet in other place Muslims are told to fight those who do not believe (9:5, 29)
 - Qur'an says there is no change in words of God (10:64) but also says that later revelations annul previous ones (2:106)
 - Progressive revelation makes sense in the Bible that was revealed for 1500 years but the Qur'an was revealed over the course of 20 – why was change needed that quickly?
- Sometimes Muslims argue there is proof in the lives changed by Islam – but most other religions have the same phenomenon
- Some claim the rapid spread of Islam is proof it is of God – but Christianity has this
 - Islam spread rapidly when Muhammad laid aside peace and used the sword to promote Islam; Christianity spread while illegal in the Roman Empire – which is more a miracle?

IV. Conclusion:

1. Islam is a fascinating and deeply-nuanced religion that a Christian must attempt to understand before critiquing
2. Areas for discussion with Muslims:
 - a. They claim a God that is “one” yet lift the Qur’an to the level of god which is the exact problem they have with Jesus in Christianity (Jesus = Qur’an = God)
 - b. Muhammad is believed sinless but the evidence shows otherwise – is he above the law, or did he sin?
 - c. The Qur’an was changed in history and has variants – is the Qur’an really the exact “words” of God
3. Like many other religions Islam gives you a distant God who issues commands which if you obey them you might be accepted
 - a. Christianity gives a God who comes to you and accepts you as you are

Key Doctrine: Jesus as God in the Flesh (The Trinity)

“The doctrine of the Trinity arose as the climax of an attempt on the part of church theologians to address certain foundational questions concerning the Christian faith...Our formulation, ‘one essence, three persons,’ came as the climax to the theological attempts to respond to a problem which has confronted believers from the beginning of the Christian era. The faith of the early disciples required that they bring together three different strands of belief: the heritage of monotheism, the confession of Jesus’ lordship, and the experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit” (Grenz, 54).

***Relational God:** First movement in the one God is generation as the Father eternally generates the Son (without the Son there is no Father, without the Father there is no Son) – this love between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit, the eternal Spirit of the relationship between the Father and the Son (Grenz, 70). God is relational and we can enter into that relationship through Jesus.

***Most Important:** Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to model a new way of life. The information in this outline is intended for spirited discussion with Muslims but the first step is to befriend, get to know, listen to and understand Muslims. It is only through a real relationship that any significant growth can happen. Most of all, may we live the way of Jesus: the way of love and peace and reconciliation. No matter what else happens, let us love those often considered our enemies.

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