

## 10 Things Every Christian Should Know About Islam by Zane Pratt

Islam is a fast-growing religion, especially in the Western world. Christians increasingly need to be aware of Islam and, most importantly, how to engage its adherents with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here are 10 things I learned about Islam during my 20 years as a missionary in a Muslim-majority country.

### 1. “Muslim” and “Arab” are \_\_\_\_\_ the same thing.

“Muslim” is a religious term. A Muslim is someone who adheres to the religion of Islam. “Arab,” on the contrary, is an ethno-linguistic term. An Arab is a member of the people group who speak the Arabic language. It is true that Islam originated among the Arabs, and the Qur’an was written in Arabic. However, some Arabs have historically been part of the ancient orthodox Christian churches. On the other hand, Islam spread far beyond the Arab world, and today *most Muslims are not Arabs*. This includes the Turks, the Kurds, the Iranians, the Pakistanis, other South Asian Muslims, the Malaysians and the Indonesians, almost all of whom are Muslim but none of whom is Arab.

### 2. The word “Islam” means \_\_\_\_\_.

A Muslim is someone who submits to God. The Islamic conception of who God is, and how he is to be worshiped and served, is based on the teaching of Muhammad. Thus the Islamic creed is: “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his prophet.”

### 3. There are \_\_\_\_\_ major denominations of Muslims.

The two major denominations of Muslims are Sunni and Shi’a. Sunnis are the vast majority, at 85 percent of all Muslims. The split occurred in the first generation after Muhammad’s death and was based on a dispute over who should succeed him as leader of the Islamic community.

### 4. Islamic theology could be summarized as belief in \_\_\_\_\_ God, his prophets, his books, his angels, his decrees, and the final judgment.

Islam teaches that humans are born spiritually neutral, perfectly capable of obeying God’s requirements completely, and that they remain this way even after they’ve personally sinned. The need of humanity, therefore, is not salvation but instruction; hence Islam has prophets, but no savior.

### 5. Islam teaches that Jesus was a great \_\_\_\_\_.

Islam affirms that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he lived a sinless life, that he performed mighty miracles, and that he will come again at the end of history. It even calls him a word from God. However, it explicitly denies the deity of Christ and repudiates the title “Son of God” as blasphemous. It also (according to the majority view) denies he died on the cross, claiming that Jesus’ visage was imposed on someone else, who was then crucified, and that Jesus was taken up into heaven without tasting death. Islam explicitly denies the possibility of substitutionary atonement.

**6. Islamic practice can be summarized by the Five \_\_\_\_\_ of Islam.**

These are composed of the *confession of faith* (“There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his prophet”), *prayer* (the ritual prayers said in Arabic five times a day while facing Mecca and performing the prescribed set of bowings, kneeling, and prostrations), *alms* (taken as a tax in some officially Islamic countries), *fasting* (the lunar month of Ramadan, during which Muslim believers fast during daylight hours but can eat while it’s dark), and *pilgrimage* (the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim believer should make once in his or her lifetime).

**7. The vast majority of Muslims are not \_\_\_\_\_.**

In fact, normal Islamic religious law forbids the intentional killing of non-combatants in battle. It also forbids suicide. It’s a small minority view that allows these things, and it’s a small minority who engage in terrorist activities.

**8. Muslims can be some of the \_\_\_\_\_, most hospitable people on earth.**

They make great neighbors and great friends. No Christian should be afraid to build a relationship with a Muslim.

**9. Muslims need \_\_\_\_\_ through Jesus Christ.**

They are lost exactly like any other non-Christian—neither more nor less than anyone else. Furthermore, Muslims do come to faith in Jesus Christ. It usually takes time, and extended exposure to the Word of God and the lives of Christians, but more Muslims are coming to faith today than at any other point in history.

**10. God \_\_\_\_\_ Muslims, and so should we—even those few who are our enemies.**

We should love them enough to befriend them, love them enough to make them welcome in our homes, and love them enough to share the gospel with them.

*This article originally appeared in the Summer 2013 issue of Southern Seminary Magazine.*

**Misconceptions about Muslims by JD Greear**

**Misconception 1: Most Muslims \_\_\_\_\_ Terrorism.**

**Misconception 2: All Muslim women feel \_\_\_\_\_.**

Three things to keep in mind about the women of Islam:

- A. Many Muslim men and women are happily married.
- B. Women are often the most ardent defenders of Islam.
- C. There is no denying, however, that the Qur’an and Hadith speak disparagingly of women. The Hadith says that 80 percent of the people in hell are women. In explaining why the witness of a woman is equal to only half of a man’s in court, it says, “Because of the deficiency in their brains.” The Qur’an says that Muslim wives “are like a field to be plowed,” which has often been used to legitimize patriarchy and male dominance. And none of this takes into account localized practices which often exceed the Qur’an in brutality.

## Understanding Islam (From the Watchman Profile Notebook by James Walker)

**Founder:** The Prophet \_\_\_\_\_ (570-632 AD)

**Official Publications:** The \_\_\_\_\_,<sup>1</sup> which the Prophet Muhammad claimed was dictated to him by the angel *Jibrīl* (\_\_\_\_\_) initially in a cave on Mount Hira near Mecca in present day Saudi Arabia. This scripture is divided into 114 *surahs* (chapters) containing over 6,000 *ayats* (verses).

*Hadith* are collections of reported verbal chains of witnesses to accounts of sayings and actions of Muhammad . The two parts of each report, *matn*-the saying and *sanad*-the persons who form a chain from the compiler back to the person who heard Muhammad make the statement. Muslims have developed standards to evaluate both elements for probable accuracy.

### Key Words:

\_\_\_\_\_ is the one true God of Islam.

\_\_\_\_\_ is the foundation of Islamic monotheism and maintains that Allah is a “unified —one,” forever separate from creation.

The word Islam means “\_\_\_\_\_” or “submission to God (Allah).” One who submits to Allah is called a Muslim.

\_\_\_\_\_ is the most serious sin in Islam which involves ascribing any partnerships to God, such as, “God the Father” or “God the Son”<sup>2</sup> or ascribing the attributes of the one true creator God to anything physical or anything that is created.

\_\_\_\_\_ is the legal system of Islam and is the standard for both secular and religious law.

\_\_\_\_\_ is an authoritative but nonbinding legal opinion given by a *mufti* (legal scholar).

### History of Islam

Muhammad was born about 570 AD into the Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula in present-day Saudi Arabia. It is believed that his father, Abdullah, died before he was born and his mother, Amina, died when Muhammad was only six. He was raised by his uncle, Abu Talib. At age 25, Muhammad was hired by a wealthy widow, Khadijah, to lead a caravan to Syria. He later married Khadijah and they had several sons, all of whom died in infancy, and four daughters. Only one daughter, Fatimah, survived Muhammad.

While there were monotheists, including Christians and Jews, living in Arabia at the time, the majority of the people were polytheistic and idolatry was rampant in Mecca. Muhammad claimed to have been sent by God to turn the people away from idolatry to worship the one true God and to turn to the correct path. There was much political opposition and persecution from the Meccan polytheists who largely rejected the prophet's message. In 622 AD, Muhammad and his small group of followers left Mecca and immigrated to Medina 210 miles to the north in a journey called the *Hijra*. In Medina the prophet's message was more widely accepted and Muhammad took on the role of political as well as spiritual leader. Jews who refused Muhammad's leadership were banished from Medina or in some cases sold as slaves or killed. For years, warfare escalated between the Muslims of Medina and the Meccans culminating in the final Muslim conquest of Mecca 629 AD and its mass conversion to Islam.

In 632, a few years after conquering Mecca, Muhammad died. By that time he had succeeded in uniting the majority of the Arabian Peninsula politically and spiritually under Islam. Immediately following the prophet's death, the new faith was led by a succession of four close companions and trusted advisors of Muhammad called the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Disputes over leadership eventually led to *Fitna* (upheaval or chaos), ultimately dividing Muslims into Sunni and Shia camps. Most accepted the leadership of all four Caliphs and became known as Sunni, meaning "the path." A minority, however, rejected the authority of the first three Caliphs, maintaining that the fourth Caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib, (Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law) was actually the first Imam. This sect of Islam, the Shia, believes that Ali and his descendents alone are the only rightful successors to leadership of the Muslim people following the Prophet's death.

Despite the schism, Islam continued to spread quickly through Islamic conquests throughout present-day Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and across North Africa. Eventually the message of Islam permeated much of Europe and Asia. Despite its rapid growth, Islam continued to be plagued by internal conflicts and in-fighting, sometimes marked by open violence and assassinations. In a struggle to maintain a unified caliphate, the Umayyad dynasty was conquered by the Abbasid dynasty which was eventually displaced by the great Ottoman Empire. In 1453, Muslim Turks conquered the city of Constantinople and at its zenith in the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire controlled much of Western Asia, North Africa, and Southeastern Europe. Similar Islamic expansion occurred through the Mughal Dynasty in India and South Asia as well as with the Shia in Iran through the Safavid Empire in the sixteenth century.

According to some estimates, by the twenty-first century, there were about 1.8 billion Muslims in the world. Approximately 90% are Sunni and 9% are Shia. The remaining 1% consists of various sects including Sufism, a mystical/experiential form of Islam and the Kharijites. Like in Christianity, there has also been groups breaking away from Islam and claiming to be the true or ultimate expression of Islam such as Ahmadiyya Islam, and the Nation of Islam. In just 1,400 years, Islam has grown to be the second largest religion in the world.

## **The Qur'an**

In 610 AD at the age of 40, Muhammad received his first revelation while in private meditation in a small cave in Mount Hira near Mecca. Muhammad reported that he heard the voice of the angel Jibreel (Gabriel) commanding him to "recite." The angel dictated to Muhammad the first passage (Surah 96:1-5) of what later became the Qur'an. The prophet continued to receive additional revelations for the next 23 years that were preserved mostly through oral tradition.

Following Muhammad's death, Muslims recognized the need for a complete, authorized written text. This culminated with the Uthmanic Recension, an edition of the Qur'an compiled by a committee under the direction of Uthman, the third rightly-guided Caliph, who commanded all other editions and written variants destroyed.

Only the Arabic Qur'an is considered authoritative. Any translation is not considered to be a true Qur'an and may be viewed as merely an interpretation.

## **Doctrine**

The word Islam means submission and one who submits to Allah is a Muslim. Muslims see Islam as the one true religion of God which has always existed. Thus, the first prophet of Islam was not Muhammad but the first man, Adam, who submitted to Allah and was therefore a Muslim.

Muhammad is viewed as the final and greatest in a succession of prophets including the biblical figures Adam, Moses, Abraham, David, Jesus, etc.

Some Muslims claim that God sanctioned 124,000 prophets from Adam to Muhammad. Muslims maintain that they believe all the prophets but that Muhammad is the final prophet, or seal of the prophets, whom Allah used to restore the true teachings of the earlier prophets which had become altered or corrupted. Muslims believe in all the earlier revelations from God's prophets particularly the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament), the Psalms of David, and the Gospel (teachings of the Jesus).

Muslims believe in Jesus (Isa) as one of the prophets or messengers of Allah. They believe that he was born of a virgin and is the Messiah. However, they do not believe Jesus was God incarnate or that he was the Son of God as this would violate the *Tawhid* of Allah and lead to the sin of *shirk*. They also teach that Jesus was condemned to die on the cross but was never actually crucified nor did he rise bodily from the dead.

The Qur'an places great emphasis on the final Day of Judgment and a literal Heaven and Hell. Salvation in Islam ultimately involves scales of justice where one's sins are weighed against one's good deeds.

Central to the proper practice of Islam are the five pillars of the faith which are the duty of every faithful Muslim. There is an emphasis on performing each pillar properly with the correct form.

## **The Five Pillars are:**

### **Shahada (the \_\_\_\_\_):**

The first pillar is a verbal confession of faith acknowledging Allah's uniqueness and Muhammad's status as prophet. The Shahada, which is to be recited in Arabic, proclaims, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet." Public confession of the Shahada in Arabic is the first step to becoming a Muslim. To convert to Islam, non-Arabic speakers are led by knowledgeable Muslims to properly repeat each Arabic word correctly.

### **Salat (the \_\_\_\_\_):**

Muslims are to perform the obligatory prayers during five specific time periods each day. These five prayer times may sometimes be consolidated into three sessions. When possible, the prayers should be in the company of other Muslims in the *masjid* (mosque). Ritual washings precede each prayer which is performed facing Mecca. The head must be covered and the prayers must be recited in Arabic. Great emphasis is placed on performing each step correctly with proper body posture when bowing.

### **Sawm (the \_\_\_\_\_):**

During Ramadan, the ninth month of the lunar calendar, Muslims are required to abstain from all food and liquids as well as sexual relations during daylight hours. Muslims may awake early before sunrise for a meal before starting the fast and each day's fast may end after sunset with a special meal called *iftar*. Ramadan ends with a three-day holiday called *Eid Al Fitr*.

### **Zakat (the \_\_\_\_\_):**

Each year Muslims are required to pay 2.5% of their wealth which goes to the poor and oppressed (Qur'an 9:60). Muslim communities generally apply standardized rules for determining one's worth and in Islamic countries the government may collect the alms through a zakat tax.

### **Hajj (the \_\_\_\_\_):**

Unless prevented by poverty, it is the duty of every Muslim to make at least one spiritual journey to \_\_\_\_\_, Saudi Arabia during *Dhu al-Hijjah*, the final month of the Islamic lunar calendar. During the Hajj, Muslims perform rituals commemorating events in the life of Muhammad, Abraham, and others including a ritual of stoning the devil, drinking from the Well of Zamzam, and performing the *Tawaf*, marching counterclockwise seven times (circumambulating) around a black, cube-shaped structure called the Kaaba. On each lap, participants point towards, or if possible kiss a black stone located on the eastern side of the Kaaba which they believe dates back to Adam and Eve.

## **Jihad:**

**While not a pillar of Islam per se; *jihad* is an important \_\_\_\_\_ for Muslims.** Many Americans were introduced to the term following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 as the Muslim hijackers were said to be waging a “Holy War,” called *jihad*. Actually, the Arabic word is better defined as “strive” and is often used to describe the internal struggle or effort one exerts in submitting to Allah. It is with this understanding that many Muslims minimize the “lesser jihad” of war against the infidels and emphasize the “greater jihad” of personal compliance and obedience to Allah. Nevertheless, the principle of *jihad* in connection with warfare is found in the Qur’an. In the famous “sword” passage, the Qur’an also commands Muslims to fight, kill or subdue the idolaters and nonbelievers saying “slay the Pagans wherever ye find them” (9:5). Jews and Christians, called the “People of the Book,” are called “cursed” and specifically targeted for warfare and subjugation (9:29-30). The Qur’an also promises Paradise to faithful Muslim killed in battle of *jihad* (47:4-6; 48:16-17).

### **Differences and Incompatibility between Christianity and Islam**

“Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? Does the answer to that question have significant implications for how Christians and Muslims engage each other in the world today?”

Some attempt has been made within the modern “history of religions” movement to affirm the similarities between the three great living world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Because all three religions share an “Abrahamic” origin, or so the argument goes, these three faiths exhibit complementary perspectives on God and the world.<sup>[5]</sup> To make such a claim, however, is to do violence to the truth claims of all three religions, Christianity and Islam in particular. While we might say that each religion claims common roots, we cannot say that any combination of the three contain finally reconcilable presuppositions. The understandings of monotheism are fundamentally different.

**Islam explicitly rejects \_\_\_\_\_ and Christianity**

**Islam \_\_\_\_\_ that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God.**

For the Muslim, a re-explanation of the Mosaic law to national Israel comprised Jesus’ primary mission while on earth. In addition, according to the Qur’an, Jesus was never crucified, nor did he die, but he ascended directly to heaven by the power of God.<sup>[8]</sup> For Muslims, equating Jesus with God commits the idolatrous fallacy of suggesting partners with God (called *shirk*, in Arabic).

**One of the most significant differences between Christianity and Islam is related to salvation.**

**Islam stands as a paragon of \_\_\_\_\_-righteousness. Christianity alone stands as a religion of grace.**

The Qur'an gives a long and detailed list of how to act, dress, think, and behave. If you follow carefully these instructions, Allah will approve of you, and you are more likely to be accepted into eternal bliss. Islam is the ultimate religion of works. From top to bottom, it exemplifies the principle "I obey; therefore, I am accepted."

**Islam's path to righteousness never works, for three reasons:**

(1) Works-righteousness fails to address the "\_\_\_\_\_" idolatries that drive our sin.

(2) When our \_\_\_\_\_ is based on our performance, we exacerbate two root sins in our heart: pride and fear.

(3) The insecurity of always wondering if we've done \_\_\_\_\_ to be accepted causes spiritual fatigue and even hatred of God.

Only the gospel of God's perfect, unconditional love for us can create a real love in our hearts for Him.

To summarize John Owen, religious devotion may trim down the fruits of sin, but only the love of Jesus can pull up the roots.