

INSIGHTS INTO ISLAM

A guide to understanding Islam
& sharing Christ with Muslims



WHAT IS ISLAM?

BACKGROUND

Islam originated with the teachings of Muhammad during the seventh century. Muslims believe that Allah (Arabic word for God) revealed their holy book, the Qur'an, to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. They view their religion as the original faith created by God through Adam and believe Judaism and Christianity are distortions of that original faith. To Muslims, Islam is the only true religion.

The noun islām is formed from the verb aslama, a derivation of this root which means “to accept, surrender, or submit.” Islam effectively means submission to and acceptance of Allah. Allah is not the loving, relational God of the Bible, but one who rules with an iron fist.

Islam is not just a religion; it is a political system. It encompasses Muslim politics, culture, and relationships. Islam, through Shari'a law, dictates everything in Muslims' lives, from their social relationships and business ethics to their politics. A detailed set of laws guides their every action.

PRIMARY BELIEFS

Islam includes many practices, although at the root are the Five Pillars of Islam which all Muslims must follow:

1. **Declaration of Faith (the shahada)**
Muslims believe that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.
2. **Prayer (salat)**
Formal prayers are offered five times daily and involve Qur'an verses in Arabic.
3. **Almsgiving (zakat)**
Muslims give annually 2.5 percent of their capital. Everything belongs to Allah, and wealth is held by people in trust.
4. **Fasting on Ramadan (sawm)**
Devout Muslims fast during the daylight hours of the Islamic calendar's ninth month of Ramadan. The observance involves abstinence from all forms of worldly pleasure.
5. **Pilgrimage (the hajj)**
All able-bodied Muslims must make the pilgrimage to Mecca, their holiest city, at least once in their lifetime.

Some of the basic articles of the Islamic faith include:

1. There is one unique, infinite, all-powerful, and merciful Allah, who created and sustains the universe. Although the Qur'an gives 99 names for him, his essence is unknowable.
2. Allah's angels play an active part in human life. They believe that Muhammad received the revelations of the Qur'an through the angel Gabriel.
3. Allah sends his revelations through prophets and messengers. Messengers have universal significance (Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad). They revere Jesus as the greatest messenger before Muhammad, but they do not recognize Jesus as the Son of God.
4. Allah speaks his eternal message through holy books, although Muslims believe the Bible and Torah to be corrupted versions of truth. Jews and Christians have special status in the Qur'an as “People of The Book.”
5. On the Day of Resurrection and Judgment, Allah will hold all people accountable for their actions. Bodies will be resurrected and everyone will receive his or her own “book of deeds.” People will either go to the gardens of paradise or the eternal fires of punishment.

GOALS

Muslims seek Islamic community (umma). Islam seeks to establish Allah's control on earth through a religious-social-political order. While some Muslims view this as simply leading exemplary moral lives, others are working towards government-mandated practice and conversion. Muslims believe that religious pluralism can only be achieved through conquest. Nonbelievers receive the dhimmi treatment, which refers back to the days of Muhammad's conquests when he would offer other cultures three choices: conversion to Islam, payment of a tribute, or fight by the sword.

Muslims are highly motivated by their fear of eternal damnation. Salvation is never guaranteed, with the exception of those who die in jihad (holy war) or in pilgrimage to Mecca, so Muslims work hard to lead a good life. Fear of eternal damnation motivates them to closely follow the Qur'an and the five pillars.

Martyrdom, therefore, is seen both as a way to honor Allah and as a sure path to eternal bliss. Jihad is often referred to as the "sixth pillar" of the religion. While many Muslims claim their religion is peaceful, the Qur'an repeatedly instructs Muslims to kill infidels and to go to war to fight for Islam: "...slay the infidels wherever ye find them...urge the believers to war... Allah loves those who fight in His cause in battle array" (Qur'an 9:5, 8:65, 61:4). It is not that Muslims are inherently violent people, but their goal to secure Allah's kingdom on earth has often involved conquests. In addition, Muhammad's own example points to using force as a means of spreading the religion.

A crucial distinction made in Islamic theology is that between dar al-harb and dar al-islam. To put it simply, dar al-harb (territory of war) is the name for the regions where Islam does not dominate, where divine will is not observed, and therefore where continuing strife is the norm. By contrast, dar al-islam (territory of Islam or peace) is the name for those territories where Islam does dominate, where shari'a and submission to God are observed, and where peace and tranquility reign.

CURRENT SITUATION

Formed in 610 A.D., the religion quickly spread, primarily through wars and conquests. For several hundred years the Islamic civilization was one of the most powerful empires in history, although it declined with Western imperialism. However, within the past 50 years, there has been a growing trend among Muslims to regain their place in the world and to shed themselves of Western influence.

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, with an estimated one fifth of the population being Muslim. More than 20 percent of Muslims are Arab while over 50 countries hold Muslim-majority populations. Conversion rates are often difficult to verify, but many sources cite Islam as the fastest growing world religion.

Muslims are motivated by da'wah, which is similar to the concept of Christian evangelism and missions. They actively send missionaries to other countries and have successfully targeted many minority populations in the United States. Muslims are actively seeking to spread their religion until it subjugates all other religions on earth.

In 2014, news emerged of a new terror threat in the Middle East—the Islamic State (or ISIS). With the goal to establish a global caliphate, ISIS took advantage of the civil war in Syria and the power vacuum in Iraq to conquer villages and slaughter thousands of Christians and Shia Muslims, declaring itself the religious authority over all Muslims. No one should assume Western civilization is safe. Instead, we should heed these warnings, pray for God's wisdom and protection for our nations and leaders, and partner with Christian organizations who are ministering the Gospel in the Muslim world.

Conversions from Islam are difficult because Islam is not only a religion, but also a deeply ingrained cultural heritage. However, many Muslims are seeing the Truth of the Gospel and are converting to Christianity. These new believers need our prayers and support as they face the consequences of Islamic apostasy: extreme persecution and even death.

A SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

| | ISLAM | CHRISTIANITY |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Allah / God | Distant (unknowable). | Personal (knowable). |
| | Does not reveal himself; reveals only his will. | Reveals Himself through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. |
| | Merciful (depending on his mood). | Loving (His love is unchanging). |
| | Capricious (he leads and misleads). | Truthful. |
| | Vengeful. | Just and loving. |
| | Almighty (emphasis on power). | Almighty (power balanced by love). |
| | | |
| 2. Christ | A prophet. | God's Son. |
| | Not God incarnate. | The Word made flesh. |
| 3. Bible | Revealed by God. | Revealed by God. |
| | Changed and corrupted by unfaithful Jews and Christians. | Authoritative Word of God. |
| 4. Trinity | God, Jesus, and Mary (Islam's distorted version). | Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (one God in three Persons). |
| 5. Faith | Intellectual agreement that Allah is One and Muhammad is his Prophet. | Recognition that we are sinners and unable to save ourselves; we trust in Christ's substitutionary payment (atonement) for our sins. |
| 6. Sin | Rebellion against God. | Rebellion against God (primarily). |
| | Result: Shame, embarrassment. | Result: Guilt. |
| | Dishonor to family. | Requires God's forgiveness. |
| | People are inherently good. | People are inherently fallen. |
| | We are absolved by good works. | The penalty for sin is death; Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. |
| 7. Salvation | God saves those whom he chooses. | Salvation is available to all who believe. |
| | Faith and works are required. | Our works cannot save us. |
| | We cannot be assured of salvation. | All who believe in Jesus will be saved. |
| 8. Sanctification | Based on rituals and obedience toward the Qur'an. | Based on our growth in Christlikeness through the work of the Holy Spirit. |
| | Keep the Five Pillars of Islam. | |
| | External and ceremonial. | Inward, spiritual, based on a living relationship with God. |
| 9. Love | Islam recognizes erotic love and family love. | Highest form of love is Christlike, self-sacrificing <i>agape</i> love. |
| | Self-sacrificing love is seen as weakness. | Family love, friendship love, and erotic love have their place, but secondary to <i>agape</i> love. |
| 10. Belief in Supernatural | Belief in unseen world. | Belief in spiritual realm (Eph. 6:12). |
| | Angels (good and evil). | Belief in angels and demons as described in the Bible. |
| | Satan is a force of hate and power. | Satan is the rebellious arch-enemy of God, completely evil, but his power is no match for God's power. |
| | Islamic belief is fatalistic; all events are foreordained by Allah. | Human beings can overcome evil only through the power of God that is supplied by the Holy Spirit. |

SHARING THE LOVE OF CHRIST WITH MUSLIMS

The Great Commission directs us to witness to all people, including Muslims. Many Christians fear witnessing to Muslims because they stereotype them as extremists. They think that their efforts will be in vain because Muslims are resistant and hostile to Christianity. In reality, many Muslims are privately interested in Christianity. Some will accept Bibles and talk about Jesus. They are restless in a religion that always keeps them guessing about their spiritual security. This overview will provide guidelines on how to approach Muslims about Christ and the unique challenges in witnessing to them.

PREPARING TO WITNESS

Pray Regularly and Be Spirit-Filled

You must be engaged in regular prayer and be filled with the Holy Spirit before you attempt to evangelize Muslims. You will be engaged in a spiritual battle and need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will give you wisdom in answering difficult questions. He will equip you to face any witnessing scenario you encounter.

Understand Islam as a Way of Life

Islam is not just a religion—it encompasses all aspects of life, including government, family relationships, social norms, what to wear, and what to eat. If a Muslim is not interested in discussing theology, talk about religion in the context of daily living. Be prepared that when Muslims argue against Christianity, they will not limit themselves to theology, but will talk about social issues, politics, and propriety. They do not separate the Christian faith from the culture in which Christians live, so show them that Christianity is about a relationship with God, not about Western culture.

Recognize Their Risks

Shari'a law says that apostasy is punishable by death. While Muslims in Western countries may not face this extreme consequence, they will face social persecution from their community and possibly ostracism. Asking Muslims to convert to Christianity is no small matter. You are asking them to reject their entire culture and possibly their family relationships. Any conversations they have with you about Christ are huge milestones. You will probably have more success in witnessing one-on-one; a Muslim may be hesitant to express interest in Christianity in the presence of other Muslims.

Build a Genuine Friendship and Be Willing to Invest Yourself

Islamic culture is highly dependent upon community and relationships. You cannot expect Muslims to convert to Christianity by simply providing a few tracts on salvation. You may need to have multiple conversations over many weeks, months, or even years before they begin to understand and accept the Gospel message. Get to know your Muslim friends and ask them what they believe; do not make assumptions that they fit into an Islamic stereotype. Show them authentic love. Express concern for their lives and interest in their viewpoints. Offer them hospitality. Be courteous and respectful. Make an effort to understand their culture. Love them as Christ loves you. Continue to be available to them after conversion. Many former Muslims convert back to Islam because they find the ostracism unbearable. New Christian converts will need discipleship and a strong Christian support system.

Always Remember You Are a Living Testimony

Christians reflect the light of Christ to the world. When we profess Christian beliefs, but then act as the world does, we diminish our effectiveness. This consequence is magnified with Muslims, who do not separate religious and cultural values.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for compassion and love for Muslims.
- Pray for the desire and the discipline required for evangelizing Muslims.
- Pray daily for the Spirit's filling. Ask for His guidance as you witness: in the words you say, in the timing of your conversations, and in the development of your friendships.
- Pray against the fear that encompasses the Islamic culture. Pray Muslims will find strength to hear about Christ and accept Him, especially those who will face persecution in leaving Islam.
- Pray Muslims will be attracted to Christianity's assurance of eternal salvation through Christ and the unconditional love of God for us as His children.
- Pray Muslims will repent of their sins and accept God's forgiveness.

Most Muslims already equate Christianity with the decadent culture of the West, so any immoral behavior they see in your life will only reinforce those stereotypes. Be sure to live out an authentic Christian faith and remember that you are being closely watched by those you witness to. Also, because Muslims treat the Qur'an with great respect, make sure they see you treat your Bible with respect; do not set your Bible on the floor.

ENGAGING IN EVANGELISM

Before you begin talking to Muslims about Christianity, make sure you know what the Bible says about Christ and God's plan of salvation. Always respect the person you are speaking with, even if they try to bait you into an argument. Never condescendingly attack their beliefs, the Qur'an, Mohammad, or Allah. Calmly present the Gospel message and share how Jesus has changed your life. Share about the joy of knowing that you do not have to earn God's forgiveness but receive it as a gift from God through Christ. Share about how you have a close fellowship with God, which is a foreign concept to Muslims who obey a distant and unknowable god or "Allah" out of fear. Perhaps begin a conversation by asking how their sins are forgiven or how they will reach heaven.

Be Aware of Misconceptions

Do not assume that shared terms or concepts will have the same meanings to a Muslim. Do not assume they will understand common Christian terms. For example, a Muslim may accuse you of blasphemy if you call Jesus the Son of God because he assumes you believe that the Son of God was conceived through a physical relationship between God and Mary. Muslims often misunderstand the Trinity and believe that Christians worship three different gods. Convey that the Trinity is one God, but in three different forms. Perhaps use an illustration.

Also be prepared for a Muslim to deny the death of Jesus on the cross. This may be one of the most difficult points to overcome, because they find it incomprehensible that Allah would allow one of his great prophets to die such a humiliating death. The Qur'an itself supports this idea and says, "They killed Him not, they crucified Him not, but it was likened unto them" (Surah 4:157). Muslims believe that it was actually Judas Iscariot on the cross instead of Jesus. Muslims do not see a need for someone to die for their sins. They believe that one word from Allah will absolve them.

Focus on Your Testimony

You do not need to be a master apologist or an expert on Islam. Rather, be a witness to the change that happened in your life when you accepted Jesus and how He has the power to liberate you from all guilt. Your testimony is powerful truth that cannot be denied or refuted. Muslims are not sure of their final destiny until they die. Islam provides no guarantees. Christ, however, gives assurance of eternal life for those who repent and believe in Him.

It can be difficult for those who are unfamiliar with Islam to address the theologically complex differences between Islam and Christianity. So many of the people who have accepted Christ through hearing or watching *Leading The Way* have commented that they were moved by the love of Christ to learn more about our faith. It was then that our on-the-ground follow-up teams, who are well educated in Islam and Christianity, were able to address more complex concerns regarding their faith.

As with all who have not yet embraced Christ, our job is to witness to them—to share what Christ has done in our lives and to give an answer for the hope that is within us. In the end, it is not the knowledge, wisdom, or arguments of man that will bring salvation to the lost. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that saves. Thank you for your desire to reach your friends and neighbors for Christ.



Leading The Way with Dr. Michael Youssef is reaching the Muslim world through 24/7 Arabic broadcasting and field ministry teams—and God is drawing many from death to life in Christ. To learn more or partner with us, please visit LTW.org.