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Islam: What Muslims believe and how to witness to one

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[Notes to accompany **audio recording**:]

Scripture: Isaiah ch 29 v 13

The high levels of immigration in recent years has brought into our country individuals who follow and practice religions other than Christianity. Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists are to be found among us and also an assortment of other religions are practiced. In the light of the teaching of the Word of God all these other religions are false and will never provide any satisfaction in life, comfort in death or enjoyment for all eternity to come.

All these false religions are variations of the religion of Cain. Cain went his own way and offered the fruit of his own hands. There is one thing that characterises all false religions and stands in marked contrast to true Bible religion. False religions are religions of works. A person gains favour with God or reaches a new level of existence or experience by what they do. This is all the hallmarks of the religion of Cain. Bible religion is marked by justification by faith alone and not by works.

We want to briefly consider some of these false religions as to what they teach and how we can witness to them effectively. Tonight we want to commence we the most prominent of these false religions - Islam - the religion of the Muslim.

I. The Origin of Islam

A. Islam originated with Muhammad in the 7th century A.D. Muslims believe that God revealed the Koran to Muhammad, who is God's final prophet, and they regard the Koran and the 'Sunnah' [words and deeds of Muhammad] and interpreted in the 'Hadith', to be authoritative and the fundamental sources of authority within Islam.

They do not regard Muhammad as the founder of a new religion, but rather he is viewed as the restorer of the original monotheistic faith of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets. Islamic tradition holds that the Jews and Christians distorted the revelations which God gave to these prophets by either altering the text, introducing a false interpretation, or both. It was Muhammad who corrected these and gave to the world the true religion of the one God.

B. The term 'Islam' comes from an Arabic word which means 'submission' or 'surrender' and refers to the total surrender of a person's will and spirit to God. Adherents of Islam must demonstrate this submission by worshipping their god, following his commands, and avoiding polytheism [belief in many gods].

An adherent of this religion of Islam is known as a Muslim, which is the present participle of the same verb and means 'one who submits [i.e. to God].

It is reckoned that there are upwards of 1.5 billion followers of Islam in the world. Some estimates put the total as high as 1.8 billion. Most Muslims accept as a Muslim anyone who has publicly pronounced the 'Shahadah' or confession of faith, which states: There is no god except Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.

C. There are a number of sects within Islam which share the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and articles of faith. The differences between these main sub-groups initially stemmed not from spiritual differences, but personal and political ones. In the main there are the Sunnis & the Shias.

Sunni Muslims believed that the new leader should be elected from among those capable of the job.



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Shi'a Muslims hold to the belief that the leadership should have stayed within the Prophet's own family, among those specifically appointed by him, or among Imams appointed by God himself. Shi'as are much more literal in their interpretation and application of the Koran. Because of this they are much more militant and fanatical than Sunnis. The vast majority of Shi'as live in Iran, Lebanon and Syria. They are also found in Afghanistan and Yemen.

D. Islam is a religion of revelation. Muslims believe that there were 105 Books delivered by God to mankind up to the time of Moses. From there onwards they accept:

1. The Torah which was revealed to Moses. They view it as the greatest among the Israelites' books;
2. The Gospel which Allah revealed to Jesus. It is a confirmation of the Torah and a complement to it;
3. The Psalms which Allah gave to David;
4. Tablets of Abraham and Moses;
5. The Glorious Koran which was revealed to His Prophet Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets.

II. The five Pillars of Islam

While there are many different branches of Islam most possess the same set of essential beliefs which form the foundation of a Muslim's life and are succinctly stated in what is known as 'The five Pillars of Islam'. They are:

1. Faith or belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad. 'There is none worthy of worship except God and Muhammad is the messenger of God'. This declaration of faith is called the 'Shahadah' or 'confession', a simple formula that all faithful Muslims pronounce. The significance of this declaration is the belief that the only purpose of life is to serve and obey God, and this is achieved through the teachings and practices of the Last Prophet, Muhammad. Muslims are strongly opposed to any idea of a Trinity of persons.

2. Daily Prayers. 'Salah' is the name to the obligatory prayers that are performed five times a day, and are seen as a direct link between the worshipper and Allah. There are no priests in Islam. Prayers are led by a learned person who knows the Koran and is generally chosen by the congregation.

Prayers are said at dawn, mid-day, late-afternoon, sunset and nightfall, and thus determine the rhythm of the entire day. These five prescribed prayers contain verses from the Koran, and are said in Arabic, the language of revelation for a Muslim. Personal supplications, however, can be offered in a person's own language and at any time.

Although it is preferable to worship together in a mosque, a Muslim may pray almost anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories, airports and universities.

The call to prayer is sounded forth from Minarets and housetops. Before a Muslim prays he must remove his shoes, wash his feet, hands, parts of his face and turn toward the Ka'aba at Mecca. When he cannot go to a mosque to pray he may pray wherever he may happen to be - at work, on a journey, or in the midst of other duties. Most airports and universities now have areas for Muslims to pray. The individual Muslim will carry a bottle of water with him for the ablutions and if water is not available he will use sand or earth symbolically.

As a Muslim recites his prayers he bows, kneels and touches the ground with his forehead twice. This composes one 'Rakah', a word which means 'bow'. In the five times of prayer or worship a day 17 'Rakahs' must be performed.

The worship is acceptable to God if performed properly even if the worshipper does not understand the Arabic words he/she is repeating. On Friday afternoons, which is the only congregational prayertime, a ser-



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mon is also preached in the mosque as part of the prayers. In larger and central mosques a sermon may be preached at the last prayers of any day. Also in larger mosques a separate area is reserved for women worshippers.

3. Concern for and almsgiving to the needy. Since Mohammed was once an orphan and poor, it is natural to find an emphasis in the Koran on the duty of helping the poor and orphans. This pillar deals with the financial obligations placed upon Muslims. An important principle of Islam is that everything belongs to Allah, and that wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust.

4. Self-purification through fasting. This is known as 'Sawm' or Fasting. Every year in the 9th month which is Ramadan, all Muslims fast from dawn until sundown - abstaining from food and drink. Since the Muslim calendar is lunar and not solar Ramadan comes about 10 days earlier each year. It will come therefore sometimes in winter when the days are short and sometimes in summer when the days are long and in many Muslim countries hot.

Muslims believe, based upon a reported saying of Mohammed, that during Ramadan the gates of paradise are open and the gates of hell closed and that all who keep the fast will be pardoned of all their past venial sins. During this month of fasting an additional twenty 'Rakahs' are performed at the night prayer time.

5. Pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are able. The pilgrimage to Mecca known as the 'hajj' is an obligation only for those who are physically and financially able to do so. Mohammed made the pilgrimage to Mecca and performed all the customary rites and his example became the law for his followers. Every Muslim should make this pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Over two million people go to Mecca from every corner of the globe every year.

The annual 'hajj' begins in the twelfth month of the Islamic year so again the hajj falls sometimes in summer, sometimes in winter. Pilgrims wear special clothes, simple garments that strip away distinctions of class and culture, so that all stand equal before Allah. A person who has completed this pilgrimage takes the title 'Hajj' or 'Hajji'.

6. The concept of 'Jihad' or 'holy war' is sometimes referred to as the 6th pillar. In the eyes of some Muslims Jihad is also the religious duty of all adult males who must commit to any summons of war against infidels. By doing so a Muslim will reach heaven. To be martyred for the faith or to give your life fighting against the enemies of Islam will bring an immediate reward: When ye encounter unbelievers, strike off their heads until ye have made a great slaughter among them, and bind them in bonds; and either give them free demission afterwards or exact a ransom... Verily if God please he could take vengeance on them, without your assistance, but he commandeth you to fight his battles...And to those who fight in defense of God's true religion, God...will lead them into paradise... Any who die in such a war are assured of paradise. This is what spurs the suicide bomber or hijacker on in their dastardly deeds.

That paradise to which they go is one where sensual pleasures are the chiefest of the rewards bestowed. Multiple marriages will take place, with all the resultant immoral conduct that such behaviour suggests. Paradise for the martyr is one where sensual pleasure abounds to the full. It is any wonder it is so appealing to the flesh. Wine flows as rivers in this paradise, even though it is forbidden on earth. It is a place of physical, sensual and spiritual pleasure for a Muslim.

III. Sharing the Gospel with a Muslim

What do we need to emphasize when sharing the gospel with a Muslim? Three things:

A. The nature of the God of the Bible. Divine love is a concept that is missing from Islam. There is no concept of a loving, gracious, heavenly Father. The Muslim God Allah is unapproachable by sinful man. Allah is so perfect and holy he can only communicate with mankind through a progression of angels and prophets. To a Muslim Allah is a god of judgment, not of grace; a god of wrath rather than a god of love. The Muslim desires to submit to the point where he can hold back the judging arm of Allah and inherit eternal life. The



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love of God in Christ must be shown.

B. The identity and deity of Jesus Christ. To the Muslim Jesus Christ is another prophet. Muhammad is greater than Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not God, is not sinless, did not die on the cross or be raised again. Muslims believe Jesus Christ substituted Judas Iscariot to die on the cross. They do believe that He was virgin born and that He was taken bodily to heaven without having died.

There can be no salvation without a proper understanding of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done through His work on the cross. He is truly God and is the only way of salvation

C. Salvation is by grace. The Muslim has been taught that Allah must be pleased by works. Some will concede that Allah could bar all from paradise because none is perfect as Allah is. The point to emphasis is that salvation does not depend upon mankind's imperfections but upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, Eph 2:8,9.