

A Christian's Guide To World Religions Part-1  
**“What About Islam?” Galatians 2:17-21**

**Introduction**

A missionary in India spoke near a fountain on the subject, “Jesus, the Water of Life.” A Muslim interrupted, “Your religion is like this little stream of water, but Islam is like a great ocean!” “Yes,” said the missionary, “but there is this difference: When men drink ocean water they die of thirst. When they drink the water of life which Christ gives, they live forever!” The stream is small, but it can satisfy your thirst. Jesus Christ came into the world as a little baby that He might show that no one is so little or so insignificant that the great God will not come to dwell within him.

**Transition**

This morning we will embark on a three part journey, exploring the three most prominent world religions, other than the largest faith; Christianity. This week we celebrate veteran's day and since we have many American troops serving overseas in what are predominately Muslim areas, it seems appropriate that we begin with the religion that Muhammad founded; **Islam**.

In the following two weeks we will discuss the next two largest world religions; Hinduism and Buddhism. My focus will be providing a basic understanding of the history, major beliefs, and holy writings of each of these three religions and then to provide a concise comparison of them with Christianity. Then I will ask the simplest of questions of each of them: “What think ye of Christ.” (Mathew 22:42)

You see, unlike the droves of spiritual teachers of this postmodern era, I am compelled toward a high view of the uniqueness of the Cross of Jesus Christ and therefore a high view of the uniqueness and authority of the Christian faith in regard to all matters pertaining to faith in and worship of *Jehovah El Elyon* (Genesis 14:22), The LORD, the Most High GOD.

Mortimer Jerome Adler, the American Philosopher, once wrote that, “Christianity is the only world religion that is evangelical in the sense of sharing good news with others. Islam converts by force; Buddhism, without the benefit of a theology; Hinduism doesn't even try.” It my deepest and strongest desire to show the uniqueness of the gift that we have been given in Christ by comparing and contrasting the pure religion of Jesus Christ with these three false, vain, empty religions.

In so doing, I trust that we may all have a renewed sense of awe at the advent of Messiah, Jesus Christ. Let me say in advance that this will not be an exhaustive treatment of the history or practices of Islam. Such a treatment would require a lengthy series of sermons. We'll be doing a bit of a "fly by," skimming the tree tops to get a sense of the nature of the forest.

### **Exposition**

*Background.* Islam dates from time of the last ten years of the life its founder, Muhammad Ibne Abdullah, or simply the prophet Muhammad. He was born at or around 570 A.D. in the city of Mecca, which is now located in Saudi Arabia. Muhammad was orphaned early in his life and tradition says that he was raised by his grandfather and then his uncle, Abu Talib. Muhammad was a poor man until he married a wealthy widow named Khadija. At about the age of 40, Muhammad is said to have begun to see visions and receive revelations.

It was at this time that Muhammad began preaching publicly against the multiplicity of idols which were worshiped at Mecca's central shrine, the Ka'ba. Muhammad believed, or at least reported, that he has received his visions from Allah, through the angel Gabriel. For his monotheistic beliefs he was an enemy to many, not the least of which were the merchants whose wealth stemmed from the sale of goods and idols to pilgrims traveling to the Ka'ba to worship their gods.

Muhammad and his many followers were forced to leave Mecca to what became known as Medina for a time. From that time it took Muhammad, only ten years to build his band of followers into a strong army which conquered nearly all of central and western Arabia. Muhammad, who had been previously cast out of Mecca, returned less than a decade later and made it his capital.

Muhammad was clearly a great military leader. He also considered himself to be the prophet of Allah, and as such, he founded Islam, which he taught was a return to the pure worship of the one true God of Abraham. Muhammad believed that was a descendant of the son born of Hagar to Abraham, when Abraham disobeyed God's command to wait for a child to be born of his aging wife, Sarah.

This connection is crucial to understanding the Islamic religion. The Ka'ba, which was the central shrine of Arabs in Mecca, Muhammad believed to have been built by Abraham as a place of worship to God. Muhammad considered Abraham to be his father and thus, the religion he founded was to be, not so much a new thing, but a return to the worship of the one true God of his father.

It is important to note, however, that the name given to god by Muhammad, Allah, does not find its roots in the true worship of Abraham, but in pagan traditions. “Allah corresponded to the Babylonian god Baal, and Arabs knew of him long before Mohammed worshipped him as the supreme. Allah was the god of the local Qurish tribe of whom was Mohammed’s tribe before he invented Islam to lead his people out of their polytheism.

Allah was known as the Moon God, of which he had 3 daughters who were viewed as intercessors for the people into Allah. Mohammed drove the other idols away; he made one God now the only god and he was its messenger. Mohammed used the name Allah, which was of a specific idol without ever distinguishing it from the idol the Meccans were already worshipping... These names show the devotion of Mohammed’s pagan roots, and also prove that Allah was part of a polytheistic system of worship before Allah was made the supreme and only god from the other God's. The crescent moon was the symbol of the moon God Allah and is used as a symbol of Islam today.” (www.answers-islam.org)

God had already preserved His written word through the nation of Israel, through Abraham’s son Isaac. He had already fulfilled the promises made to Abraham through His son, Jesus Christ.

Islam did not arise until the Church was more than six hundred years in existence. Muhammad’s interest in establishing Islam seems to be almost entirely driven by a desire for power and a desire to unify that power around a central ideal or religion.

In driving out the other pagan gods, the pantheon of more than 360 gods worshipped in the region of Mecca, and unifying people around just one of those gods, Allah, the moon god, he effectively unified his power by merging his political power, which had won by the sword, and his religious power where he had claimed to be the prophet of the only god worthy of affection.

*Writings.* The primary sources of knowledge of Islam for a Muslim are the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Qur'an is the central source for Muslims. It is considered to be Allah’s final revelation to humanity and is said to have been revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel over a period of 26 years. The Hadith are a collection of oral traditions surrounding the sayings and teachings of the prophet Muhammad. Both are widely accepted among Muslims.

*Practices.* To our western minds, I think it does a disservice to refer to Islam as merely the religion of much of the world.

That is because in the west we tend to view our religious convictions as a major, even central, part of our life. But in Islam, the teachings of Muhammad dominate all areas of personal and social life.

In a country where the pure Islamic faith is present, you find that it dominates the legal system through what is known as Sharia law. The term means “way” or “path to the water source”. Sharia is the legal framework for all that goes on in a Muslim society. It offers strict guidelines for politics, economics, family, banking, sexuality, hygiene, and social issues.

Under Sharia law women are treated as second class citizens with little or absolutely not voice whatsoever. The Islamic worldview is based on upholding the five pillars of Islam. For a Muslim, God has not provided a savior; there is no shed blood of Calvary for them. In their view, they are working hard every day to perhaps earn the opportunity for eternal life and favor from God.

The first pillar is *Shahadah*. It is professing the oneness of Allah and accepting Prophet Muhammad as his messenger to humanity. As a profession of this faith, they would say, in Arabic, “I testify that there is only one god Allah and that Muhammad (Peace Be Unto His Name) is his messenger.”

The second pillar of Islam is *Salat*. This requires a Muslim to pray five times a day at specific times. The third pillar is *Zakaat*. This is alms-giving which is required from all who are able to do so.

*Sawm*, the fourth pillar, is ritual fasting during the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic year, the season of Ramadan. Muslims have to abstain from food, drink, and sexual intercourse from dawn to dusk during this month. They are also to be especially mindful of other sins.

The last pillar is the *Haji*. The Haji is a pilgrimage that occurs during the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah to the holy city of Mecca. Every able Muslim is obliged to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime if they can afford it.

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, following only Christianity. It boasts 1.5 billion adherents, which Christianity, the largest world religion, boast 2.1 billion followers. Islam is most prevalent in the northern half of Africa, the Middle East, and it is in India and Russia to a lesser degree.

Islam is on the rise, though. In the west a more moderate form of Islam seems to be taking root in academic circles, in large cities such as Chicago and elsewhere. I am blessed to have a friend in Bishop E.C. Okoye of Nigeria, Africa.

From his first hand accounts in Nigeria, I have learned why it is that Islam is on the rise today. He tells me that in Nigeria and elsewhere, the reason Islam grows is because they are very proactive in their missionary efforts.

Islam in Africa receives support from Islamic leaders in oil-rich Islamic nations for the building of schools, roads, and hospitals. When you are poor and Islam built the school you attend and the hospital that cares for you it is easy to trust in Allah.

I am not of the school of thought that says that Islam is a peaceful religion which has been perverted by a few extremists. The evidence is to the contrary. Islam is a religion of works which was created by a warlord. Muhammad conquered territories and then rallied the conquered peoples around one central religion, which, do not forget, he created. Islam is a religion bathed in bloodshed.

There are moderate Muslims, especially in the United States, to be sure, but I want to speak plainly to this issue, Islam is not another way of worshipping the one true God. It is not a similarly peaceful religion. It is a religion of working to earn Allah's favor and of evangelism by the sword.

Jerry Rassamni, a former Muslim extremist who converted to Christ, wrote the book "From Jihad to Jesus." He writes, "In Islam, the world is traditionally divided into two camps. Those are Dar Al Islam (literally house of Islam or submission) meaning House of Peace, and Dar Al Harb (House of War).

Although the exact definitions of these terms vary widely, a traditional definition is as follows: Countries that are under Muslim rule are grouped in the House of Peace, whereas countries that are not are grouped under House of War. Muslim fundamentalists have Islamic world domination in mind.

They are on a jihad until the whole world confesses the Islamic creed which is featured on the Saudi Arabian flag. The Wahabis are the dominant Islamic sect in Saudi Arabia. Their war cry was: "kill the infidels." The national flag of Saudi Arabia, the religious center of Islam has the words, "La Illaha Illa Allah" (There is no god by Allah).

Beneath those words, is the key to making that happen – a [depiction of a] sword."

## **Conclusion**

I am compelled by a straightforward study of the Scriptures, that there are not many paths leading toward the same God, no, there is a clear stream of life proceeding from one source, God, the one true God of Israel, in Jesus Christ. Our hope is not build on so much shifting sand, but on the very word of God.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:5-6 NET) It is by God's grace alone that men are saved. All of our efforts, all of our works, are like filthy rags in the sight of God.

Islam is not the good news of Jesus Christ dying for the sins of the world. In Islam there is no savior, only the shackles of working to earn mercy. In Christ God has revealed His loving nature; grace.

We are told to lay down the sword and pick up the Cross! We are told to let go of our earthly treasure and power and follow after the Master of Mercy! In Christ, God did what we could not do for ourselves. In Islam, I am left to my devices, working to earn the mercy of Allah. Islam, therefore, fails the litmus test of salvation which I proposed earlier in this sermon; "What think ye of Christ?"

In Islam Jesus is merely a wise prophet and there is no savior but one's own works. But that isn't enough. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. If He was not then he is a blasphemer, not a prophet. And if He is the Son of God then He is Saviour.

Where Christianity offers hope, Islam only offers enslavement to the law. Where Christianity offers peace with God through Jesus Christ, Islam only offers war within me as I strive to please God and war with others; as I am commanded not, as in Christ, to share the truth in love and service, I am told to convert the infidel by whatever means necessary, including the sword.

We need not concern ourselves with the five pillars in an effort to please God; it has already been done for us, in Jesus Christ. Be reminded today, child of God, that in Christ alone is found the grace of God. We don't have to wear shackles of guilt and shame; working to please God. We are freed from our chains by grace in order that God, working in us, might bring glory to Himself.

Amen.