

# The Cross and the Crescent

## WHAT CHRISTIANS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ISLAM



The mosque of Gázi Kászim Pasha in Pécs, Hungary is now used by the Roman Catholics

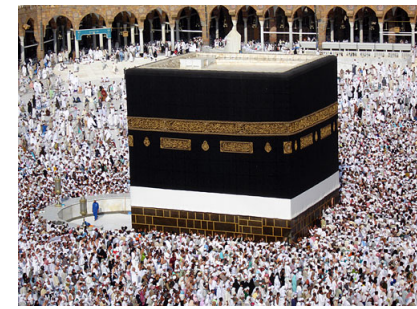
At the time of this writing (late 2011) there are between 1.4 and 1.7 billion Muslims on planet earth, accounting for almost 25% of the world's population. Muslims can be found on every populated continent on the globe, though they are mostly concentrated in the Middle East, north and west Africa, and central and south Asia. Sociologists claim that Islam is one of, if not the fastest growing religion in the world, so reaching such a large segment of the world's population with the gospel should be a pressing issue for each and every Christian.

In order to preach to Muslims, Christians must first understand the basics of Islam, and to understand Islam, one must first start with...

### Islam's Past

Islam dates from the time of the life of its founder, Muhammad. He was born at or around 570 A.D. in the city of Mecca, which is now located in Saudi Arabia.

In the late 6th century and early 7th century, the Arab world was heavily polytheistic. They were pagan idol worshipers. They worshipped the sun, moon, and stars, large and oddly shaped stone, and the spirits of trees, wells, and springs. In fact, one of the largest idol temples in the world at that time was located in Mecca. It was called Ka'ba, meaning "cube," and it housed more than 300 idols.



What is interesting about Ka'ba in Mecca is its place in modern Islam. Today, it is considered Islam's holiest site. It is what all faithful Muslims face when they pray from around the world. It is the destination of the Hajj, the great Muslim pilgrimage. It is ironic that such a heavily monotheistic religion would give such a central role to this site, a former bastion of paganism, but as this article will soon reveal, Muhammad offers an explanation for the Ka'ba's role in Islam.

The Arabs of the 6th century had no religion to unify them, but they also were forgotten in the grand scope of the power structures of that day. To the west was the great Catholic Byzantium empire, to the east the mighty Zoroastrian Persian empire. And in the middle were the heavily tribal Arabs who were constantly feuding and fighting over land, food, and water. This made the Arabian Peninsula ripe for great leadership, for someone to stand up and unify the people behind a common banner and a common goal.

TERM	DEFINITION	(PAGE 1)
Islam	Meaning submission, is the name of the religion	
Muslim	Meaning "one who submits", is an adherent of Islam	
Allah	The Arabic word for God	



This is the world Muhammad grew up in. Muhammad's uncle was a merchant, and he traveled and traded with those around Mecca. In fact, most believe this is where Muhammad learned about monotheism. There were Jewish tribes around Mecca which he would have encountered, and also when traveling just across the Red Sea into Ethiopia he would have acquainted himself with many Roman Catholics as Ethiopia and most of North Africa was heavily Catholic.

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 the Ka'ba. Muhammad believed that he had 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 followers were forced to leave Mecca for Yathrib, a mainly Jewish city two hundred and eighty miles north where Muhammad had converted some pilgrims coming to Mecca. So many became converts that the city's name was changed to Medina, "the city of the prophet."

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 but more than that 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 God's true path came from Ishmael the first 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. Muhammad believed the Ka'ba was originally 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 Abraham.

Muhammad believed this was the time for the rise of the Arab people. He felt that the Law of Moses was God's revelation to the Jews, that the Gospels were for the Greeks, and the Qur'an was for the Arabs; it was simply their turn. He also believed that Moses, Jesus, and others were true prophets, but that the Jews and Christians had distorted their writings. So, if at any point the Qur'an contradicts the Torah or the Gospels, it is the result of changes to those once holy writings that the Jews and Christians made. To Muhammad and all Muslims, the Qur'an is God's perfect and final revelation.

By the time of Muhammad's death, much of Arabia was converted to Islam. With Muhammad's death in 632, disagreement broke out over who would succeed him as leader of the Muslim community, but finally Abu Bakr, one of Muhammad's companions was chosen. Abu set the stage for Islam's great priority which was expansion, and the next three leaders of Islam, known as the Rightly Guided Caliphs, expanded Muslim territory deep into both the Persian and Byzantine empires, as well as north-east Africa.

It was also during the time of the first Caliphs that the Qur'an was assembled. Again, Muslims

believe that the verses of the Qur'an were revealed to Muhammad by God through the angel Gabriel, however very little was actually written down during Muhammad's life. Most of the Qur'an was taken from oral tradition from those who were Muhammad's disciples.

The Qur'an is divided into 114 suras, or chapters, which combined, contain 6,236 verses. The chronologically earlier suras, revealed at Mecca, are primarily concerned with ethical and spiritual topics. The later Medinan suras mostly discuss social and moral issues relevant to the Muslim community. The Qur'an is more concerned with moral guidance than legal instruction, and is considered the "sourcebook of Islamic principles and values."

The Qur'an can be a bit confusing to read, because it runs chronologically backwards. When the Qur'an was put together the longer suras were placed first, and the shorter suras last, but that is almost precisely the reverse of their chronological order. The short suras were proclaimed first, in Mecca, while the longer ones came later in Medina.



TERM	DEFINITION	(PAGE 2)
Muhammad	The "prophet" and founder of Islam	
Qu'ran or Koran	Meaning "the recitation" is Islam's holy book	
Hadith	Traditions of that which Muhammad said or did	

TERM	DEFINITION	(PAGE 3)
Mosque	Meaning "place of prostration," or a place of worship	
Sharia	Meaning "way" or "path" is the moral code of Islam	
Halal	The term designating something permissible	

After the age of the first four Caliphs, or the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Islam began to see some theological divisions. There was dissension concerning who would rightfully lead Islam, and the Islamic empire began to spread so rapidly that it was difficult to maintain order.

From 750 to 1250, often called the Islamic golden age, Islam spread as far west as western Africa and as far east as China. In the 13th and 14th centuries the Islamic Ottoman Empire made inroads through Turkey, into the Balkans and parts of Greece. This brief history should help in understanding Islam's origins. In addition to Islam's Past, one should also be interested in understanding...

## Islam's Preaching and Practices

The teachings of Islam generally find their origin in one of two places, either the Qur'an or the Hadith. The Hadith is a collection of oral traditions surrounding the sayings, teachings, and examples of Muhammad himself. The Hadith has become the standard for how Muslims should live. There are at least six core beliefs of Islam that are held by Muslims from all nationalities:

1. Allah. This is an Arabic term meaning, "the deity." Out of the rampant polytheism in Muhammad's day, the message

1. (cont.) of Islam is that there is only one God. According to the Qur'an it is a sin to worship any other gods, including Jesus, for there is but one God, Allah.

2. Prophets. Muslims believe that Allah in mercy sent many prophets to all the nations of the world to guide men in the right way, and to convey his word to them.

3. Angels and Demons. Muslims engage in a whole series of rituals designed to avoid the curses of demons and invite the blessings of angels. Iblis, or Satan, is the chief enemy of man and is head of all the demons.

4. Final Judgment. Teachings on paradise are very prominent, but Muslims also believe in hell. Even with all their devotion, a Muslim can never be sure of where he or she will spend eternity because one's ultimate destiny is subject solely to the unknown will of Allah. According to Sura 3:157, the only way to know for sure that you will spend eternity in paradise is to die a martyr. All other Muslims must await the day of resurrection where their deeds will be weighed on Allah's scales.

5. Predestination. Muslims believe in Qadar, or divine destiny. This relates to the knowledge and omniscience of Allah. Man maintains free-will in Islamic

5. (cont.) theology, but always remembers the word *inshallah*, which means, "If God wills."

6. Holy Day. Friday is the Muslim Holy Day. Mohamamad preached his first sermon after his arrival in Medina on Friday which then became the day for congregational worship in Islam.

Alongside these foundational truths are the five pillars of Islam. The pillars differ from the core beliefs because they focus on a Muslim's expected behavior and actions.

1. The Confession of Faith (*Shahabad*). To become a Muslim, you must simply repeat this confession in Arabic three times, "I testify that there is only one god Allah and that Muhammad (Peace Be Unto His Name) is his messenger."

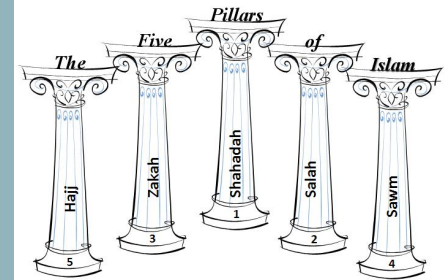
2. The Prayers (*Salat*). This requires practicing Muslims to face Mecca five times a day at specific times for prayer.

3. The Giving of Alms (*Zakaat*). Alms-giving is required to help the poor and the orphans, but also to purify a Muslim's wealth.

4. The Ritual Fast (*Sawm*). The season of Ramadan comes during the ninth lunar month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims have to abstain from all food, drink, smoking, and sexual

4. (cont.) relations from dawn to dusk during this month.

5. The Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca. The Hajj is a pilgrimage that occurs during the twelfth Islamic month to the holy city of Mecca. Every Muslim who is physically and economically able is obligated to make the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime.



Having an understanding of Islam's Past gives perspective on Muhammad's life and teaching. Knowing some of Islam's Preaching and Practices enables one to proficiently talk to a Muslim about their religion. Finally, consider...

## Islam Persuaded

How can one reach a Muslim with the gospel? This is a lofty, and challenging endeavor. Depending on their upbringing, many muslims are taught that Christianity and western culture are one and the same. In the west there is rampant immorality, decadence, lavishness, excess, and greed, and these, in the minds of many muslims,

TERM	DEFINITION	(PAGE 4)
The Five Pillars	The essential expected behaviors and actions of Muslims	
Ramadan	The Muslim month of fasting	
Chriam	A word to encourage unity between Islam and Christianity	

TERM	DEFINITION	(PAGE 5)
Shahabad	The Muslim confession of faith in Allah	
Salat	The daily prayers involving kneeling, touching the ground	
Zakaat	The giving of alms to the poor and needy	

are symptoms of the failures of Christianity. However, there are Muslims who will talk about faith and religion and the first step one must take in trying to convert a muslim must be to be-friend a muslim. Muslims care about character. They have to see that “Christian” is not just a title you wear, but it is a life you live.

When conversing with a Muslim, here are some key topics to cover:

Scripture - Muhammad taught that God gave Moses the Torah, and Jesus the Gospels, but that over time the Jews and Christians corrupted their revelations and that the Qur’an was to take man back to God’s original plan for him. However, this means that muslims will talk about the Bible.

The Fatherhood of God - This is a point that is very touchy for muslims and if you are not careful, you can easily commit blasphemy in their eyes. Sura 112 is recited every day by muslims around the world in prayer: “He is God the One, God the eternal, He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him” (Sura 112:1-4). When Muslims hear Christians call God their Heavenly Father, they shudder with disdain. First, remind them that Muhammad said what he said about God begetting because of paganism which taught that god’s would procreate and have physical

children. This is not what it means to call God the Heavenly Father. Talk about Galatians 3:26: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” Tell them how one is born again into a spiritual family. One of the great pulls to Christianity for a Muslim is the love of God and the intimacy that believers have with God as their heavenly Father which is foreign in Islam.

Sin - Muslims deny inherited sin. They believe, as the Bible teaches, that you sin when you transgress the law of God. Affirm the simple truth of the Bible that “whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4) and “all unrighteousness is sin...” (1 John 5:17).

Salvation - The first step in addressing the issue of salvation is to discuss God’s standard of righteousness. Muslims believe that if they do enough good, it will out-weigh the bad. The problem with this theology, as with any type of theology that operates on the basis of self-righteousness, is that God’s standard of righteousness is not, “pretty good,” it is “perfection.” Remind your Muslim friends that one sin, just one sin makes a person imperfect. Sura 3:140: “God does not love evildoers.” If one sins, does he do evil? And if one has done evil, are there any number of good deeds which can be done that will erase the evil, or that will forgive the evil? No.

For God to accept you, there must be a system in place where sins committed can be totally wiped away, forgiven and forgotten. Islam offers no such system, but Christianity does.

Christ - Muslims deny the deity of Jesus, that He died by crucifixion, and that He raised up from the dead. This makes talking about salvation in Christ difficult. First, prove that without atonement there is no salvation for mankind. Once you have established this foundation, focus in on Jesus. Muslims believe in the virgin birth, they believe Jesus performed miracles including raising people from the dead, they believe Jesus will be one who returns for the final day of judgment, they believe He was one of the greatest prophets who ever lived. But while confessing this, they deny the greatest truths about Jesus. One tactic you might try is to talk about animal sacrifices. Ask them why Moses was command to offer animal sacrifices for sin. What was the purpose? And be sure to remind them that if God is perfectly holy, and righteous and has a standard that no sinner can meet on their own, how can one ever be accepted? Christ’s death is in perfect keeping with what happened in the Old Testament. His death was a substitutionary sacrifice for sin, and thanks to His death, every sin ever committed can be forgiven because He took the punishment that men and women deserved.

This article has considered Islam’s Past and how vital it is to understand the history of this religion if you want to understand anything about the religion itself. Some of Islam’s Preaching and Practices have been explained. While only scratching the surface, the most fundamental and vital doctrines muslims hold dear have been addressed. Lastly, this article talked about Islam Persuaded which highlighted some key talking points and focusing in on the great need mankind has for atonement.

When you study Islam you see glimpses of Judaism and Christianity sprinkled throughout its teachings. These are the areas to focus upon. Find the things that you agree on, and then demonstrate with love and kindness how Islam’s answer to man’s greatest problem is insufficient. Focus on the fact that God is a loving God who desires all to be saved, but He is also uncompromising in His righteousness, and without a method that gives the world complete forgiveness, no one can meet His divine standard.

TERM	DEFINITION	(PAGE 6)
Sawm	The annual ritual feast coinciding with Ramadan	
Hajj	The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca	
Righteousness	Being right with God according to His standard	

This article is based off of a study delivered by Shahe Gergian at the 2011 Grapevine, TX preacher’s study. For copies, please contact:

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