

Common Questions About Islam

By John Millam¹

Are Muslims all terrorists or violent? Absolutely not! Most people in the Western world have had little exposure to Islam, except what they read in the newspapers. As a result, many hold Islam in an entirely negative light. This is particularly true in very recent history, with the Iranian hostage situation, violence in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf War, state sponsored terrorism from Libya and Iraq, the rise of terrorist networks, and the events of Sept. 11, 2001. While these events cannot be denied, they do not represent the thoughts or actions of a majority of Muslims. Certainly, the hate speech and occasional violence against Muslims who are living here in the United States is unjustifiable and must be strongly condemned by Christians. In fact, most Muslims here in America are peaceful and pro-American. In general, Muslims are very moral people. This is a sharp contrast to the trend toward immorality, licentiousness, and greed that plagues much of America and Europe. As Christians, we must not be biased or hostile toward our Muslim neighbors but recognize that they need to hear the gospel as much as anyone else.

Is Islam a religion of peace? To counterbalance the negative way that Islam is presented in the media, many have swung to the opposite extreme and have proclaimed Islam as being purely peaceful and tolerant. Also, American culture is becoming alarming Politically Correct and Multicultural, which forbids any criticism of other religious groups. Painting Islam in such a pure light is no truer than opinions that Islam is totally bad. While there is much that is worthy of praise in Islam, we must look at the whole picture and need to approach this issue in a fair and unbiased manner.

Did Islam spread by the sword? If by “spread by the sword” one means forced conversion by threat of violence or force, we can clearly answer “no.” That’s not to say that forced conversion never happened—we do find isolated examples of this happening in the past and present (e.g. Sudan today). However, such examples should not be taken as normative and we should bear in mind that Christians have also been guilty of this at times. With all this said, we should not conclude that Islam spread purely by evangelism and their message. During the time of Muhammad, Muslims used force to gain political and military control of all of Arabia. Over the next 100 years, Muslim armies spread out from Arabia and gained control over a vast empire stretching from Morocco in Northern African to India. While captured countries had to accept the Islamic political system, many people were allowed to keep their religion including Jews and Christians. However, those who did so were really second-class citizens, were prohibited from serving in the military, prohibited from proselytizing, and had to pay an extra tax. Under such pressure, many turned to Islam to avoid taxes and gain cultural and political benefits.

Who are Muslims? Most people picture Islam as being the religion of Arab peoples. While Islam had its origins among Arabs, it has spread far beyond its birthplace and today claims as many as one billion adherents. It would probably surprise most people that Arabs actually only make up about 10-20% of Muslims worldwide. Another large segment of Muslims are

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black Muslims living in Northern Africa as well as many living here in America. Islam is also very prevalent throughout the Eastern world. Indonesia, not the Middle East, represents the largest concentration of Muslims in the world. Large parts of China and the former Soviet Union also contain large Muslim populations. Even more important to realize is that Islam is spreading rapidly in both Europe and America. Islam is said to be the fastest growing religion in the world.

Where do Muslims live? Again, most associate Islam with the Middle East. Actually, Islam extends throughout the 10/40 window (between 10° to 40° latitude) from across all of North and Central Africa, the Middle East, and through Asia out to Indonesia and the Philippines. The 10/40 window countries represent some of the poorest but also the most unreached countries in the world. More importantly, Islam is no longer a religion “over there somewhere” but is gaining a strong foothold both here in America and in Europe. Mosques are springing up everywhere and Dearborn, MI (just south of Detroit) is a Mecca for Muslim and Arabic immigrants. Currently, there are more than 7 million Muslims in the US and in the Kansas City area there are approximately 10,000 Muslims at 5 local mosques.

Is Islam inherently backward? Today, most Muslim countries struggle with poverty, lack of religious freedom, and an absence of many Western advances. This picture that we see today, should not be construed as representing all of Islam. During the heights of Islamic rule around 1000 AD, many Islamic countries were culturally very sophisticated and brought about a number of scientific advances. (See **Accomplishments of Islam** on page 8.) We must be careful to guard against Western biases or judging historical Islam with current circumstances.

Are Muslims reachable? “Many people think the Muslim world is impossibly difficult to reach and for this reason mission efforts to this people have been minimal. Most Muslims, however, have not rejected the Gospel, they have never even heard it. There is an unprecedented receptivity to the Gospel amongst Islamic people. There is consensus that the stage is set, and the time is ripe for a concerted and sustained advance in the Church’s mission to Islam... In the 23 countries which are over 90% Muslim, only 1,293 missionaries and Christian workers are reported active and 1,130 of these are in only three countries: Pakistan, Senegal, and Jordan. This leaves a total of 163 in all the other 20 countries... In the 38 countries of the world which are over 40% Muslim, of the 4,644 reported missionaries and workers, there are only 928 working directly in Muslim church planting.” (Islam Fact Sheet, March 1990.)

No other time in history has the need to evangelize among the Muslims been more important. More Muslims have come to Christ in the last century than in all the preceding centuries. In addition, God is using dreams and miracles to reach Muslims in places where missionaries have not reached. Christian shortwave radio and television in local native languages is a very powerful and effective tool for reaching out to Muslims.

Common Islamic Terms

Islam. The word means “submission” and is closely related to the word “peace” (*salam*). The religion of Islam began with the teachings of Muhammad in the 7th century. The Qur’an is the holy book of Islam, much the same way the Bible is the holy book of Christianity.

Muslim. This means “one who submits” and describes a follower of Islam. Muslims are intensely spiritual people, devout in their beliefs, committed to prayer and fasting. They have a great respect for those who practice holiness and reverence for God.

The Qur’an (or Koran). Qur’an means “recitation” and is believed to contain revelations Muhammad received from the angel Gabriel that he was to recite as his message. This is the holy book of Muslims and is believed to be the final and pure word of God. The Qur’an is about 4/5th the size of the New Testament and is divided into 114 sections known as Surahs. The Surahs are not organized by theme or chronology but are roughly ordered by descending length. The Qur’an contains little reference to historical events or to the context in which the messages were given. What little chronology and context that we have for the Qur’an comes from the Hadiths (see below). Stylistically, the Qur’an consists entirely of Arabic poetry (no prose). Since the rhythm and poetry of the original Arabic as well as word meanings would be lost in translation to another language, non-Arabic translations are never referred to as the Qur’an but only as the “meaning of the Qur’an.”

The Hadiths. The Hadiths are a collection of writings that represent the sayings or actions of Muhammad. In Islam, everything Muhammad did or said is considered revelation and so the Hadiths are almost as important to most Muslims as the Qur’an itself. The Hadith also contain much of the history of Islam as well as containing statements that elaborates on and help explain the Qur’an. While the sayings of Muhammad are considered revelation, not every saying attributed to Muhammad in the Hadiths are considered to be genuine. So, each individual saying is ranked in terms of the believed trustworthiness on the person preserving the Hadith. The first person to collect and write down Hadiths was Ibn Ishaq writing some 130 years after the death of Muhammad and other collections of Hadiths, such as al-Bukhari and Muslim’s, were written even later.

Allah. This term seems to be a Syriac loan word, which would have been the term Christians used for God. Others, however, suggest that Allah, is an Arabic word—the contraction of *al-ilah*, which means “the God.” Both Arabic and Hebrew are Semitic languages, so it should of no surprise that Allah (*al-ilah*) is related to the Hebrew word for God, *El*. Both Jews and Christians in Arabia used the name Allah as a translation for God in the Scriptures. However, Allah was also used to refer to certain local tribal deities worshipped in pre-Islamic times.

Ka’ba. Long before Muhammad, the central attraction of the city of Mecca was a cubic structure called the Ka’ba. (Ka’ba is Arabic for “cube.”) In one corner of the Ka’ba is a black stone (a meteorite). Pilgrims would come to Mecca to worship at the Ka’ba by circumambulating (circling around) the Ka’ba and kissing the black stone. Mecca was the center for pagan idols, including Allah and three female goddesses—Manat, al-Lat, and al-Uzza. (These three idols were known as the “daughters of Allah.”) Muhammad was raised in Mecca, but after he began his ministry, he condemned the idolatry at the shrine. Near the end of his life, Muslims gained control of the shrine and eliminated the idols but kept the circumambulation and the kissing of the black stone. Muhammad taught that the Ka’ba was built by Abraham and Ishmael and according to some traditions, the location for the Ka’ba traces back to Adam.

The Hajj. The Hajj refers to the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims who are able to must go on at least once in their life. Those who do go are referred to as Hajji (males) or Hajja (females) and are given special honors in their hometown. The Hajj is a series of rituals that include walking around the Ka'ba, running between two hills (to commemorate Hagar searching for water), visiting Mina and the plain of Arafat, throwing stones at a pillar that represents Satan, and an animal sacrifice (to commemorate Abraham's near sacrifices of his son).

Qibla. When Muslims pray, they are to face the direction of the Ka'ba in Mecca. No matter where they are on Earth, they are to face toward Mecca. This direction of prayer is known as the qibla. During one period of Muhammad's ministry, the qibla was changed to be toward Jerusalem to gain the support of the local Jewish clans, but it was later changed back to Mecca after a fallout with the Jewish leaders. Many Muslim buildings include a special area for prayer marking this prayer direction.

Jihad. This term draws a lot of attention in the media with its relationship to violence and terrorism. Muslims often respond by stating that the actual definition of "jihad" is "struggle," not "holy war" as it is commonly translated in the West. They say that Muhammad emphasized the "greater jihad," which is the struggle against sin and only when necessary the "lesser jihad," which is actually warfare. While it is true that jihad literally means "struggle," this is really a semantic diversion. Historically, from the time of Muhammad to the present, it has been used to mean fighting against the enemies of Islam until they submit to Islam. Muhammad promised heavenly rewards for those who die in jihad.

Hijab. The veiled covering many women use to cover their hair in public. Wearing a hijab is expected in most Muslim countries and compulsory in others. In some countries, Muslim women must cover their entire face except for their eyes.

Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims. Shortly after the death of Muhammad, there was a split over who was to be the next political and religious leader for the community. The Sunnis believed that the leadership should be decided by community consensus and so followed Abu Bakr, Muhammad's father-in-law. Shi'ites believed that leadership belongs to the family of Muhammad and so followed Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law (since Muhammad had no living sons). Sunni Muslims represent about 95% of all Muslims. Shi'ite Muslims are the minority and are concentrated primarily in Iran.

Sufi Muslims. In orthodox Islam, Allah is impersonal and distant, far removed from humanity and disassociated from human nature. Sufism developed as a reaction to the impersonal ritualistic Islam and emphasized the nearness of God. Much emphasis is placed on the mysticism and intense emotional and religious experience. Dancing and music are common components in Sufi worship. The Whirling Dervishes are one example of Sufi Muslims.

Ramadan. Ramadan represents the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is a month of fasting. The 27th day of Ramadan is said to represent when Muhammad received his first revelation (also known as the "night of power" or "night of destiny"). The month long fast is one of the five fundamental obligations for Muslims. During this time, healthy individuals are to partake in fasting, abstinence from sex and smoking, and prayer during daylight hours for an entire month. The beginning of Ramadan is based on a lunar rather than a solar calendar, so it starts several days earlier each year.

Five Pillars of Islam

Five Pillars of Islam, called *arkan* in Arabic, five ritual duties that mainstream Muslims view as central to their faith. These are:

- (1) pronouncing the confession of faith (*shahada* or *kalima*);
- (2) performing the five daily prayers (*salat*);
- (3) fasting during the month of Ramadan (*saum*);
- (4) paying the alms tax (*zakat*);
- (5) and performing, at least once in life, the major pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*).

In most places where Islam is the official religion, Muslims are not punished for failing to perform these duties. In some Islamic states, however, public denial by a Muslim of the validity, importance, or centrality of the five pillars is generally considered an act of heresy and is punishable by death.

The *shahada* is the Arabic statement “La ilah illa Allah wa Muhammad rasul Allah,” meaning “There Is no God but the one God and Muhammad is His prophet.” In the Shiite sect, believers generally add to this the Arabic phrase “wa Ali Wali Allah,” meaning “and Ali Ibn Abu Talib is the friend of God.” In addition to this confession of faith, Muslims must also express their belief in the Qur’an (Koran), angels, and the Last Day. The *shahada* also is uttered as part of the Muslim call to prayer (*adhan*).

The *salat*—the five obligatory daily prayers—is also known as the *namaz* in Iran, India, and Turkey. These prayers are only performed after ritual bathing and take place before sunrise, at noon, in the mid-afternoon, immediately after sunset, and before midnight. Mainstream Shiites combine the noon and afternoon prayers and also the sunset and midnight prayers so that they need only pray three times a day. Praying in Islam is also associated with a specified set of postures, such as standing, bowing, and prostrating.

The *saum* is a fast prescribed only for healthy, adult Muslims during the 30 days of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. From dawn until dusk, no food, drink, or sexual relations are permitted. Ill individuals and nursing women are excused, but they are expected to make up for missing the fast at other times in the year when they are healthy again or no longer nursing.

The *zakat* or alms tax is levied annually on the crops, livestock, precious metals, and cash of all those living above subsistence and whose debts do not exceed their assets. In theory it is to be collected on behalf of, and then distributed to, the poor. However, many Islamic leaders have collected the *zakat* to add to their royal treasuries. For this reason, the identity of the zakat collector and distributor has often been a mystery. Since the late Middle Ages (AD 476-1453), mainstream Shiites have had the tax collected by their jurists, legal scholars of Islamic law, who act according to their self-styled role as governors of the imam.

The *hajj* is the “greater” of the two pilgrimages to Mecca required of all Muslims. All healthy adult Muslim men and women should perform it at least once in their lifetime if they have sufficient means and safe transport. Unlike the lesser pilgrimage, called *umra*, Muslims must perform the hajj during the first half of the month of Dhu al-Hijja, the last month of the lunar year. Those who perform the hajj can use the honorific title *Hajji* if male and *Hajja* if female.

“Five Pillars of Islam,” Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2000
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Islamic Beliefs

1. **“Allah”:** The only true God is viewed as unapproachable and unknowable. He is a God of judgment and not grace, a God of wrath rather than love. There is no concept of God as a loving and compassionate Father or personal friend.
2. **Jesus Christ:** Islam rejects the deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is seen as one of Allah’s many prophets but superceded by Muhammad. They accept that he was a virgin-born, sinless, servant, prophet, and messenger of God—a man with God-given authority to perform miracles. They do not believe that as God’s Son Jesus was crucified, died and on the third day rose from the dead. Most Muslims believe that Jesus was taken bodily into heaven without having died.
3. **Angels and Devils:** Angels intercede for man and act as his guardian. Satan misleads and causes men to sin. Each Muslim assumes he is attended by two angels, one to record his good actions and the other his evil actions.
4. **Prophets:** God can only communicate to man through angels and prophets. They believe that Muhammad was the Holy Spirit whom Jesus predicted would lead men into “all truth.”
5. **Predestination:** Many Muslims believe that God is absolute in His decrees of good and evil. Nothing comes to pass except by the divine will or fate (Kismet). Man is void of free will. Responsibility for his actions and circumstances is laid upon God.
6. **Books of God:** The four sacred books are the books of Moses (i.e. the Torah), Psalms, the Gospels, and the Qur’an. The Muslim accepts the Gospels, but believes these books have been altered and are untrustworthy. The Qur’an supersedes and corrects previous mistakes.
7. **Judgment, Sin, and Salvation:** Islam has no concept of original sin. Salvation by works is based upon fulfilling the requirements of the five pillars of the faith. Their hope is in the intercession of Muhammad although no man has assurance of salvation unless he dies in a holy war. The Muslim knows he will be examined for his deeds on Judgment Day and fears hell.

Islamic Beliefs about Christianity:

The word Christian conveys connotations of worldliness, materialism and moral decadence. Muslims believe that Christians have been deceived and that they have an obligation to lead them to the truth of Islam. Confusion of terminology in the mind of the Muslim creates resistance in receiving the gospel. Terms such as “salvation,” “cross,” the “son of God” have an entirely different meaning to the Muslim. There is great difficulty in understanding the following Christian concepts:

Trinity: Qur’an teaches that the Christian Trinity is composed of God, Mary, and Jesus. It is considered blasphemy to ascribe a sexual partner to God, and idolatry to worship more than one god.

Love: The Muslim has no understanding of Christian love particularly God’s love. To the Muslim this is weakness and inconsistent with the transcendent greatness of God. For this reason, the Muslim cannot accept Jesus’ death on the cross.

Forgiveness: The Muslim cannot believe that in this life a person can know that his sins are forgiven and that he will go to heaven.

Taken from the Islam Fact Sheet, March 1990.

The Creed of Islam

Allah is Great.

Praise and glory be to you o Allah. Blessed be Your Name, exalted be Your Majesty and Glory.
There is no God but you.

I seek Allah's shelter from Satan, the condemned.

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, The Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds; Most Gracious, Most Merciful;
Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek, Show us
the straight way, the way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, Those whose
(portion) is not wrath. And who go not astray.

Glorified is my Lord, the Great.

Allah Listens to him who praises Him.

Our Lord, praise be for you only. Glorified is my Lord, the Exalted.

O my Lord forgive me and have Mercy on me.

All our oral, physical and monetary ways of worship are only for Allah. Peace, mercy and
blessing of Allah be on you, O Prophet. May peace be upon us and on the devout slaves
of Allah. I testify that there is no God but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is His slave
and messenger.

O God send your mercy on Muhammad and his posterity as you sent Your mercy on Abraham
and his posterity. You are his Most Praised, The Most Glorious.

O God send your Blessings on Muhammad and his posterity as you have blessed Abraham and
his posterity. You are the Most praised, The Most Glorious.

Our Lord, grant us the good of this world and that of the Hereafter and save us from the torture
of hell.

Peace and mercy of Allah be on you.

Accomplishments of Islam²

- 1) Muslims preserved and translated ancient works during the Dark Ages. Manuscripts were translated into Arabic from languages such as Sanskrit, Greek, Pahlavi (Old Persian), and Syriac, which could then be used throughout the Arab world. The house of Wisdom, built by al-Ma'mun, was the most complete library during the medieval period and contained the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates, and Euclid. These and other ancient works had been lost in Europe and were reintroduced to Europe from Islamic countries.
- 2) Muslims also developed large-scale trade between Europe and the Orient. To facilitate transaction, they used orders of payment (roughly equivalent to the modern check). A person could carry a promissory note from their country of departure and have it redeemed at the arrival city, rather than having to carry money or valuables. (The word "check" is derived from the Persian word *Sakk*.)
- 3) Islamic trade connected different parts of the world and allowed ideas to flow freely wherever they traveled. For example, paper was taken from China in the eighth century AD and spread throughout the Islamic world and then later into Europe. Paper proved to be better than parchment (animal skins) and papyrus.
- 4) The concept of the zero and its use in numbering and computation was taken from India but then popularized and extended by Muslims. Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi (ninth century AD) wrote a ground-breaking work *On the Calculation with Hindu Numerals* in 825 AD which popularized this new system. Hindu-Arabic numbers allowed easy computation, including multiplication and division, and replaced Roman numerals and the need to depend upon an abacus for adding numbers. Al-Khwarizmi (Algorismus) also helped develop algebra (from the Arabic *al-jabr*) and the term "algorithm" was named after him.
- 5) Muslims made a number of medical advances, including the first use of anesthesia in surgery, the first cauterization of wounds, the discovery that epidemics arise from contagion through touch and air, developing the first ambulatory hospital (carried on a camel's back), and developing the first prescription, and thus, the separation of pharmacology from medicine. *Canon of Medicine* by Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and *On Smallpox and Measles* by al-Razi (Rhazes) were used as textbooks in Europe for more than 500 years after their deaths.
- 6) Ibn al-Haytham (ca. 965-1039) is referred to as the "father of optics" because of his work explaining how human vision takes place by integrating physical, mathematical, experimental, physiological, and psychological considerations. The treatise of al-Haytham (Alhazen) had an enormous impact on all later writers on optics, both in the Muslim world and through a medieval Latin translation in the West. Similarly, the great Egyptian physician Ibn al-Nafis (d. 1288), discovered the minor, or pulmonary, circulation of the blood.

² For individuals, their Arabic name is given with their Western name given in parenthesis. For example, Ibn Sina (Arabic name) is also known as Avicenna, so is listed as Ibn Sina (Avicenna).

- 7) Muslim engineers made contributions to the area of hydrology and dams, since water was such a precious resource in the deserts of Arabia. They made improvements to dams, bridges, and canals as well as water wheels and water-raising devices.
- 8) Muslim discoveries and advances in astronomy include the clock pendulum, the magnetic compass, and the astrolabe. In about 1,000 AD, al-Biruni (Albiruni) discovered earth's rotation and measured the earth's perimeter. The words astrolabe, chemistry, alcohol, algebra, algorithm, and azimuth are derived from Arabic words.
- 9) Contributions to literature include *The Thousand and One Nights*. Islamic art avoids depictions of people and animals and so instead developed three main forms: geometric, vegetal (Arabesque), and calligraphic. Islamic artists would write verses from the Qur'an into beautiful shapes and patterns.
- 10) Muslims made many contributions to architecture, such as the development of the pointed arch. Famous examples of Islamic architecture include the Great Mosque of Damascus, Great Mosque of Cordoba, Alhambra in Granada, Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, Red Fort in Delhi, The Taj Mahal in Agra, and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

Resources:

George Braswell Jr., *Islam*, (Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 1996).

PBS website for "Islam: Empire of Faith" (<http://www.pbs.org/empires/islam/>).

Brief History of the Life of Muhammad and the Spread of Islam

Muhammad (570-632 AD)

570 AD – Birth of Muhammad (570-632 AD). Muhammad was the son of Abdullah, son of Abd al-Muttalib of the clan of Hashim of the tribe Quraysh. His father died before he was born and his mother, Amina, died when he was 6 years old. He was raised primarily by his uncle, Abu Talib.

595 AD – Marries Khadija. Muhammad was age 25 when he married Khadija who was a wealthy 40-year old widow. He had worked as her caravan agent in trade with Syria and led the business after they were married. They remained faithfully married until her death in 619 AD.

610 AD – First revelation received from the angel Gabriel. Muhammad had a yearly tradition of going to a distant cave at Mount Hira to be alone and pray. It is here that he received the message (Surah 1 of the Qur'an). He was uncertain as to the origin of the message and thought that he might have been demon possessed and even contemplated suicide. His wife Khadija convinced him that the messages came from an angel and that he was a prophet. Khadija's Christian cousin, Waraqah, compared Muhammad's experience to that of Moses and also encouraged him to accept the messages.

613 AD – Muhammad begins preaching. Muhammad's first converts were his wife Khadija, his adopted slave son, Zayd, his cousin Ali the son of Abu Talib, and his father-in-law, Abu Bakr. He also quickly gained many opponents as he attacked the idolatry in the Ka'ba. The Ka'ba was a religious shrine at the center of Mecca. Since pilgrimage to the shrine and associated trade was the primary means of income and prestige, Muhammad's message threatened the very economic core of Mecca and their way of life, causing many to become hostile to Muhammad and his message.

615 AD – Growing persecution. Angry statements became threats causing Muhammad to send many of his followers to Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia) or Medina.

619 AD – Death of Khadija and Muhammad's Uncle, Abu Talib. Both deaths were hard on Muhammad. Abu Talib had been protecting Muhammad from the hostility of the Meccans and his death meant that Muhammad was vulnerable to attack.

July 16, 622 AD – The Hegira (flight to Medina). It is on this day, that 12 men attempted to assassinate Muhammad, but he and the rest of his followers escaped and fled to Medina. Muhammad was accepted as the political head of the community and brought peace between the Muslims, the Medinas, and the local Jewish tribes. This day marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar, 1 AH.

624 AD – Battle of Badr. After coming to Medina, the Muslims began raiding caravans, although most attempts failed to catch their prize. This battle began when Muhammad lead 300 men to raid a caravan guarded by 50 or 100 men. The caravan called in reinforcements and raised their number to 900 men. Muhammad's forces were outnumbered 3-to-1 rather than the reverse as they had planned. They were nearly

defeated until Muhammad proclaimed heavenly rewards for those who fight and die for the cause of Islam. In the end, the Muslims rallied and won the day.

625 AD – Battle of Uhud. This represented another clash between Muhammad’s forces and the Meccan army. Muhammad was seriously injured, and his forces were routed.

627 AD – Siege of Medina by the Meccans. The Meccans assembled a large army and surrounded Medina in an attempt to capture it. The Muslims had enough time to set up defenses and hold the army at bay until it finally disbanded.

628 AD – Treaty of al-Hudaybiyah. Muhammad and his followers went up to Mecca to perform the ritual pilgrimage at the shrine of Mecca, but the Meccans refused to let them enter. Rather than fight, Muhammad signed a treaty with them. In return for a peace treaty, the Muslims would be allowed to perform the ritual pilgrimage the following year.

630 AD – Muslims capture Mecca. According to Muslim tradition, the Meccans broke the peace treaty, allowing Muhammad to march to Mecca and seize the city. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Muhammad’s character is that he avoided the wholesale slaughter and revenge on those who had ridiculed and persecuted him. Only a few individuals were killed and the rest granted amnesty. (Most likely this generosity was due to the fact that people of Mecca were his own people.) Muhammad cleaned out the Ka’ba of its idols and pagan influences. Later, Muhammad won the battle of Hunyan against the nomadic tribes bringing all of Arabia under his control

June 8, 632 AD – Death of Muhammad. Muhammad died of an illness and his tomb is in a Mosque in Medina. He had two sons who died in infancy and four surviving daughters. The most notable daughter was Fatima who married Muhammad’s cousin, Ali.

Early Caliphate Period (632-661 AD)

Following the death of Muhammad, the community was uncertain as to what would happen and who should lead. A large group of leaders selected Abu Bakr to be the first Caliph. Caliph means deputy of the Messenger of Allah and represented the highest political and religious authority among the Muslims. Others protested that Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law should have been the Caliph. This event led to the schism between the Sunni Muslims and Shi’ite Muslims that remains to this day. The Sunni’s supported Abu Bakr and believed that community consensus was the means of political succession. The Shi’ites argued that Ali should have been the Caliph and that only descendants of Muhammad could be Caliphs.

632-634 AD – Abu Bakr, first Caliph of Islam. Abu Baker was Muhammad’s father-in-law and one of the first converts to Islam. During his time, he put down rebellions by various tribes and helped institute the Shari’a (Islamic law).

634-644 AD – Umar, second Caliph of Islam. Umar was appointed by Abu Bakr as his successor. During his rule, Islam expanded into Syria and Iraq by 638 AD, to Jerusalem by 640 AD, and parts of Persia (modern day Iran) by 642 AD.

644-655 AD – Uthman, third Caliph of Islam. Uthman had been a wealthy Meccan and the son-in-law of Muhammad. He was appointed Caliph after Umar had been killed by a Persian slave. During his caliphate, Islamic armies swept across North Africa to Tunisia

by 647 AD and controlled all of Persia by 651 AD. As Islamic armies were spreading far from Arabia, conflict arose because of differences in copies of the Qur'an in different regions of the empire. To solve this split, he had all of the existing copies of the Qur'an recalled, made a single version, then burned all of the originals. He then sent copies of the finalized version throughout the empire.

656-661 AD – Ali, fourth Caliph of Islam. After Uthman had been killed, there was again tension about who should be Caliph. Shi'ites supported Ali as Caliph while the Sunnis wanted Mu'awiya, the nephew of Uthman to succeed. Conflict between these two camps arose, but Ali's forces won. Later, Kharijites, a sect that taught that true sovereignty resided in the community, seceded from the community and one of them later assassinated Ali. To the Shi'ites, Ali represents the first Imam (analogous to the Pope) of the Imamate. Ali's sons, Hasan and Husein represented the second and third Imams.

Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 AD)

Ali had designated his son, Hasan, to succeed him as Caliph, but Mu'awiya forced him to abdicate. Mu'awiya then became the first of 14 Caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty. According to tradition, Hasan was later poisoned by Mu'awiya. After the death of Hasan, Husein sought to be Caliph so Mu'awiya had him and his family brutally murdered at Kerbala. The death of Husein is commemorated by Shi'ite Muslims to this day. His death is considered to be martyrdom and is annually reenacted in a passion play.

The political capital of the Islamic empire during this period was Damascus in Syria. The Umayyad period was a period of conquest and expansion, a time of empire building, of great wealth, family feuding, and a period when worldliness entered official Islam. By 664 AD, Islam had control of India. By 715 AD, Islam controlled everything from Morocco in North Africa, across the Middle East and to China in the East. Islamic armies expanded from Morocco into Spain, which they conquered in 713 AD. When they tried to cross over into France, they were stopped by the army of Charles Martel in the battles of Tours and Poitiers in 732 AD.

Abbasid Caliphate (750-1517 AD)

The Abbasids seized power from the Umayyads in 750 AD. While the Umayyads had been characterized by external expansion, the Abbasids brought about an internal renaissance. During this time, Islam developed a great civilization and dominated the culture and thinking from Spain to India. Most of Islam's greatest achievements occurred during this time period. (See **Accomplishments of Islam** on page 8.) During this same time period, Europe was deep in the dark ages.

Shortly after gaining power, the Abbasids moved the capital to Baghdad, which became a powerful and influential city. However, in 1258, Mongols sacked Baghdad, ending the Abbasid Caliphate and Arab rule. A succession of Caliphates and dynasties swept across Muslim dominated territories in the years from 1258 until 1517 AD. The Mamluk Turks who ruled Egypt, Arabia, and Syria preserved Arab Muslim civilization. They made Cairo the capital after Baghdad had been sacked.

During this era, we also see the start of six crusades beginning in 1099 AD as Europe attempted to recapture Palestine from the Muslims. The Muslim General Saladin became famous for leading the recapture of the Holy Lands from the "Christian" West. The crusades have remained a dark memory for Muslim. Starting around 1100 AD, we see the beginning of

Sufism, a mystical form of Islam that emphasized experiencing God personally. This helped revitalize Islam and became a major missionary movement for Islam.

Ottoman Empire (1517-1924 AD)

After the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols and the splintering of the Islamic Empire, the Ottoman Turks began their rise to power. In 1453, the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople and renamed it Istanbul, ending the Byzantine Empire and making the city the seat of the Ottoman Empire. By the early 1500's, Ottoman rule extended from the border of Austria in the West to the edge of Persia (modern Iran) in the East. Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) was one of the most notable leaders during the early Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire reached its zenith in the 1600's in both power and culture. The invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1799 marked the rise of European colonialism and the decline of the Turkish Empire. Their power was finally overthrown during World War I after siding with Germany. In 1922, Turkey became a Republic and began moving toward secularization.

Islam in the 20th Century (1924 AD to present)

The first half of the 20th century marked the continued decline of Islam around the world. On top of this was an increasing move toward secularization and secularized governments. After World War I, much of the former Ottoman Empire was divided up by Allied leaders, with the British controlling Palestine, the French controlling Lebanon and Syria, etc. This direct political and social control brought back the anger and humiliation of the crusades and earlier colonialism. The creation of an Israeli state in Palestine brought that anger to a fever pitch. The Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple mount in Jerusalem, which represent the third holiest site in Islam, were put under Jewish control. This situation continued to worsen as the Cold War began to heat up and Middle Eastern countries became social and economic pawns caught between dueling world powers. As the Western world became more dependent upon Middle Eastern oil, there was even more interference from outside powers vying for control of their oil.

In the last 50 years, there has been a growing revival in Islam. Oil revenue has helped fund Muslim missionary work and given oil-rich countries a measure of political power as demonstrated by the oil embargo of the 1960's. The biggest revival is a growing movement simultaneously against the political and cultural influences of non-Muslim countries and against secularized Muslim governments. There is a desire to return to a pure Muslim state to restore the glories of the past. In 1924, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was the first significant movement toward revolution and reestablishment of Islam. Although the movement was put down, the influence of their thinking has spread to many other places. The most dramatic expression of this fundamentalist movement was the overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the implantation of an Islamic theocracy in Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.

Today, we see both sides of the Islamic revival. First, the Muslim missionary movement, with the building of Mosques and rapid growth in traditionally Christian areas (US, Canada, and Europe). Such movements are funded by various Islamic governments. Second, the rise of violent and militant fundamentalism that seeks to establish Islamic dominance and restore the prestige that Islam once had.

Information taken primarily from George Braswell Jr., *Islam*, (Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 1996), p. 11-41.

Advice for Witnessing to Muslims

- 1) **Show genuine friendship.**
 - Relationship, rather than reason, should be first concern.
 - Muslims don't understand unconditional love but will respond to it.
- 2) **Be patient. Think long term.**
 - Don't rush to the gospel or debate.
- 3) **Chain link evangelism.**
 - Ask a leading question and let them choose to come back to you.
 - This avoids the perception of evangelism and other misperceptions.
- 4) **Be culturally sensitive.**
 - "Be all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)
 - Be willing to take off your shoes when you enter.
 - Avoid alcohol, pork, etc.
 - Women dress moderately.
 - Men don't shake hands with unrelated women.
 - Avoid politics. Especially avoid the subject of Israel.
 - Men witness to men. Women to women.
- 5) **Don't go immediately to the gospel.**
 - Start with the parables of Jesus or go through the Old Testament prophecy.
- 6) **Avoid unfamiliar Christian jargon.**
 - For example, "saved," "the cross," and "the blood of Jesus," ...
- 7) **Be careful that some terms may be defined differently by Christians and Muslims and that that may cause confusion.**
 - For example, "Christian," "martyr," and "persecution."
- 8) **Avoid calling Jesus the "Son of God" or "divine."**
 - These things are very offensive to Muslims.
- 9) **Show special reverence for the Bible.**
 - Don't set anything on it or treat it like other books.
 - Quote from the Bible. Hold it as authoritative.
- 10) **Be prepared.**
 - Helpful resources:
 - MEET (Middle East Evangelism Training) Seminar
 - Building Bridges by Fouad Eilas Accad.

Key Ingredients For Effective Witness To Muslims:

- 1) **Receive God's heart** for the Muslims through your consistent prayers for their salvation. (Romans 10:1)
- 2) **Demonstrate consistent purity** without compromise in your conversation, attitudes, and lifestyle. (2 Timothy 2:15)
- 3) **Love!** Seek to show friendship and kindness in practical ways. A Muslim cannot comprehend love without ulterior motives. (1 John 4:7, 8)
- 4) **Share your own experience** with the Lord in a natural way. A Muslim's zeal for God causes them to be profoundly affected by a holy person. They are comfortable talking about God.
- 5) **Use the Word of God.** The Bible has its own authority and Muslims have a reverence for sacred writings. (2 Timothy 3:16)
- 6) **Be sensitive.** Respect their sincere intentions and avoid arguments, debate, and confrontation about their beliefs. Too often one will find he has won the argument but lost the friendship and respect of the Muslim person he sought to reach. (2 Timothy 2:14)

The Muslim Convert

"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of the promise. But as then, he who was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." (Galatians 4:21-29)

When Muslims accept Jesus Christ their conversion will have grave consequences and many will pay dearly for their faith.

Islam is more than a religion. It is a political, social and cultural system governing every facet of life and excludes all outside contacts. A Muslim's tie to his community is so strong that it seems impossible for him to sever himself from it to become a Christian. Persecution from relatives, employers, and authorities is usually acute. Converts are mocked, jailed, rejected by family and tribe. The Jihad Fundamentalists in Egypt have issued a call for the execution of Muslims who turn to Christianity.

It is difficult for the Muslim convert to remain true to Christ in a Muslim land. Converts are few and often isolated. Too few congregations of former Muslims exist. Missionaries in restricted nations often cannot locate buildings in which to disciple converts. Dozens of pastors have been killed, churches burned, and Christians targeted for persecution. Muslim converts are often fearful of confessing Christ publicly and joining a Christian church. It is difficult to establish fellowship and a sense of identity among Christians in their communities. Christians aren't always ready to accept and nurture the Muslim converts, fearing false motives as well as open hostility and persecution of the Muslim Community.

Taken from the Islam Fact Sheet, March 1990.