

ISLAM

Overview: Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. It makes up about 20% of the world's population, trailing only members of Christian religions. Muslims are spread over every nation but are primarily in the regions of North Africa, the Middle East, South-Central Asia, and Indonesia. Even though Islam began with the prophet Muhammad in Arabia, today non-Arabs Muslims outnumber Arab Muslims 3 to 1. The term "Islam" means "submission" to the will of God and the person who submits is called a "Muslim". They believe God has sent prophets (such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus, though most are unknown) to every nation and each was given for a specific age except Muhammad who is the last and only prophet for all time, he is considered to be the "Seal of the Prophets" (Halverson, 106). There are two major sects of Islam, Sunni about 80% of population, and Shi'ite. There are also several minor sects of which the most notable and influential is Wahhabis (primarily in Saudi Arabia). Also, two other religions have developed at least in part from Islam: Sikhism and Baha'i.

History:

Muhammad ~ Born in A.D. 570 into an Arabian tribe called the Quraysh who were influential because they controlled the city of Mecca. Mecca was the chief resting place for trading caravans. It was the center of religious activity because of the Ka'bah, a cubical structure containing 360 deities. Each Arabian tribe had hand-picked its own god to place there for a yearly pilgrimage to pay homage to its God. Muhammad is said to have received his first revelation from the archangel Gabriel in A.D. 610 at the age of 40 while in a cave in Mount Hira. He is said to have doubted the origin of these initially, but his wife Khadijah (who was from a rich and powerful family) convinced him that they were from God and that he must preach the message received. As he preached against polytheism persecution increased that eventually forced he and his followers to flee to the city of Yathrib (Medina) in A.D. 622. Muhammad led his army against Mecca in raids and sieges. He eventually took control of the city in A.D.

630 without a fight. He personally destroyed all the idols in Mecca. Within one year he had united all tribes on the Arabian Peninsula under the religion of Islam. He died on June 8, 632.

Sunni ~ Upon Muhammad's death a dispute takes place over who would be the first *caliph*-or successor. One group believes they should elect the new leader. This group eventually wins the argument and becomes the Sunni sect. Sunnis believe in a separation between civil and religious authorities. They have filled in many areas where the Qu'ran is silent with the Sunna ("custom").

Shi'ite ~ The Shi'ite Muslims believed that the successor should come through Muhammad's bloodline, which would have meant his Son-in Law and cousin Ali, would have become the new leader. They are more authority oriented and believed that God spoke through an Imam, much like the Catholic Pope. In the ninth century however the twelfth Imam became hidden (occultated) and the source of authority was passed on to the ulama until the Imam returns.

All Muslims ~ Religion of Islam breaks down into beliefs (iman) and obligations (deen). The central confession in Islam is the *shahada*, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet." Other obligations include: To pray, To fast, To give alms, To make the pilgrimage (Hajj). To become a Muslim all one has to do is to recite the *shahada* with sincerity, "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger"

Views of God:

A singular unity. No partner is to be associated with God.

Views of Humanity:

They are good by nature.

Views of Sin:

Sin is thought of in terms of rejecting right guidance. It can be forgiven through repentance. No atonement is necessary. They reject any concept of a substitutionary atonement.

Views of Scripture:

The Torah, Psalms, Gospels were part of God's message to man but has been corrupted and replaced by the Qu'ran.

Views of Salvation:

The standard for salvation is having one's good deeds outweigh one's bad deeds.

Views of Jesus:

One of the Major Prophets. To associate him with God is blasphemy. They affirm the virgin birth and the miracles Jesus did.

Views of Life After Death:

According to the Islamic tradition, Jesus did not die on the cross. Instead he ascended to heaven, and Judas died in his place on the cross. Muslims believe it is disrespectful to believe God would allow one of His prophets to be crucified.

Approaching Muslims With The Gospel:

- A very difficult thing to do and against the law in most Islamic countries.
- But if you have the opportunity to study with a Muslim it will probably have to be done one to one since they would feel a duty to defend their religion in front of others.
- Handle your bible with respect, they will not lower the Qu'ran below their waist and they place it on the highest shelf in their house out of respect for God's word.
- Be very patient, they are notoriously slow in conversion.
- They are probably not ready to go to church with you at first, since many things done there, they believe would dishonor God, such as men and women sitting together and casually touch each other.
- You will have to deal with these objections:
 - The Bible has been corrupted.
 - The Trinity- One God –Three persons. They see Christians as polytheistic.
 - The crucifixion.

Works Consulted

Halverson, Dean C., The Compact Guide To World Religions, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1996

Nummela, Tom: Editor, One God Many Gods, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1998