

Islam

Basic Facts

Founded

About AD 610, when Muhammed first reported a vision from the Angel Gabriel

Key Figures

- **Muhammad** (570 - 632): Founder and first ruler of Muslim empire; a merchant from what is now called Saudi Arabia
- **Abu Bakr**: Muhammad's father-in-law, 1st Caliph (632 - 634), first leader of Sunni Islam
- **Ali**: Muhammad's son-in-law, 4th Caliph (656 - 661), first leader of Shi'a Islam
- **Twelve Imams**: In Shi'a, the first 12 "true" leaders of Islam (not recognized by Sunnis)
- **Mahdi**: The 12th Imam, who disappeared and is expected (mostly by Shi'ites) to return and establish a global Muslim kingdom

Geography

Middle East, Northern Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, South Asia

Adherents

About 1.8 billion worldwide, 90% of whom are Sunni

Basic Beliefs

Qu'ran/Koran

Considered by Muslims to be God's pure revelation to Muhammad. A collection of Muhammad's visions and sermons from throughout his lifetime, divided into 114 *sura*. Written in Arabic. Translations are not considered to be true versions of the Koran. Each *sura* begins "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." In Muslim belief, the Koran occupies a place more akin to Jesus (as the complete revelation of God) than to the Bible.

Shahada ("Confession")

There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet.

This statement is considered to be the fundamental expression of truth by Muslims. "There is no God but Allah" (literally "there is no God but God") is not a statement to distinguish God from other gods, but is an expression of radical unitarian monotheism. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is considered polytheistic.

The Five Pillars

Often called the "five pillars," these are the five basic worship practices of Islam:

- **Confession of God** (see above)
- **Prayer**: Five or six times a day, facing Mecca. Muslim prayer is a ritualized set of body positions and statements, repeated different numbers of times depending on the time of day. Expected to be performed in a mosque, if possible, but prayer can also be performed anywhere. Before prayer, Muslims will wash themselves, especially their feet. Men and women pray separately.

- **Fasting:** Muslims are expected to fast during the daylight hours of Ramadan, the month when Muhammad began receiving in his visions. The fast is broken each day with a large family feast, and Ramadan concludes with a festival, Eid-al-Fitr (lit. "Festival of Fast-breaking"). Pregnant women, young children, and the infirm are not expected to fast.
- **Charity or almsgiving:** Muslims are expected to give one-fortieth (2.5%) of their net income to the poor. Muhammad was an orphan, so caring for orphans is very important to many Muslims.
- **Pilgrimage (*hajj*):** Muslims are expected to make at least one pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca during their lifetimes. The pilgrimage involves seven components, and takes place over about a week during the Muslim month of Dhul Hijjah. The center of the pilgrimage is the Kaaba, a large cubical building covered in black silk which contains the Black Stone. This rock of unknown origin was sacred to Arabs prior to the founding of Islam. Muslims believe that Abraham built the original Kaaba, and some believe that the Black Stone crashed to earth during the time of Adam and Eve. The city of Mecca is closed to non-Muslims.

Further Resources

Websites

www.urbana.org - InterVarsity's triennial missions conference. Includes a wealth of information about cross-cultural missions, and provides a searchable database of missions organizations.

www.comenserv.org - Don Tingle's organization. Supported by Lakeside. Serves Muslims in Europe. Includes a downloadable version of Don's *Handbook on Islam*, written for the U.S. Armed Forces.

www.frontiers.org, www.om.org, www.encounteringislam.org - Missions organizations with suggested reading about Islam and resources on Muslim countries.

Books

Please note that I have not read these books myself, but they are recommended by reputable sources.

Cross and Crescent by Colin Chapman (InterVarsity Press) - This book explores contemporary conflicts between the Christian and Muslim world views.

Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue by Badru D. Kateregga & David W. Shenk (Eerdmans, 1980)

Islam: A Christian Perspective by Michael Nazir-Ali (Westminster John Knox) - A history of Islam by a Pakistani Anglican bishop whose father converted from Islam to Christianity.

For more recommended books, visit:

<http://www.urbana.org/books/islam>

<http://frontiers.org/books>