

Understanding Muslims – Understanding Islam



Facts and figures

- There are 1.3 billion Muslims (20% of the world)
- Indonesia is the country with most Muslims (210 million)
- Muslims are the majority in 45 countries
- Only 25% of Muslims are Arab
- Many Muslims live in Europe: 5 million in France, 3.5 million in Germany, 1.5 million in the UK

What Muslims believe

- **God:** There is only one God ('Allah' in Arabic).
- **Angels:** There is a hierarchy of angels in between God and mankind. The lowest angels 'jinn' are mostly evil.
- **Prophets:** Muslims believe there have been 124,000 prophets including Abraham, Moses and Jesus – all sent to a particular age. Muhammad (570 - 632 AD) was sent for all time and is the last and greatest prophet - the 'seal of the prophets'.
- **Holy Books:** Four of the prophets were given books of divine revelation – Moses was given the Torah, David the Psalms, Jesus the Gospel 'injiil' and Muhammad the Quran. Muslims believe that only the Quran has been preserved in an uncorrupted state.
- **Day of Judgement:** Each person's good and bad deed will be judged and rewarded with hell or paradise. There is no assurance of heaven and therefore many Muslims live in fear of God.
- **The will of God:** Muslims often use the words 'in sha allah' or 'if God wills'
- *Muslims believe in God as creator, His power, mercy, the virgin birth of Jesus, that he was a prophet, did miracles, and that he will come again to judge the world. (This is more than most Jews believe!)*

The 5 pillars or practices of Islam

NB 'Islam' means submission

- **The declaration or confession "shahada":** 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is His messenger (apostle)'
- **Prayer "salat":** Muslims should pray 5 times a day facing Mecca.
- **Fasting "sawm":** During the month of Ramadan, eating, drinking, smoking and sexual relations are forbidden during daylight hours.
- **Giving "zakat":** Muslims are commanded to give 1 fortieth (2.5%) of their income to the poor and needy.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca "hajj":** Muslims should make the pilgrimage once in their life time.

Muslims think that

- Christians believe in 3 gods
- The Bible has been corrupted
- Being western = being Christian and therefore materialism, capitalism, globalisation, fighting Islam (e.g. the Crusades, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq...) are all part of Christianity. *Islam does not easily distinguish between spirituality and politics.*
- God can simply erase sin therefore there is no need for sacrifice. There is not the same understanding of the seriousness of sin.
- The whole world should become Muslim.
- Christians are totally biased in their uncritical support of Israel and disregard for the human rights of Palestinians.

What Christians should NOT do:

- ✗ Don't think that all Muslims are fundamentalists, or that all fundamentalist are terrorists! Many Muslims are God-fearing people trying to live good lives. There are also many secular and nominal Muslims.
- ✗ Don't think that Islam is one unified religion: there are many divisions within it. The 2 main branches are Sunni (83%) and Shiite (13%) but there are many sub-divisions within each.
- ✗ Don't insult Islam, Muhammad or the Quran.
- ✗ Don't offer pork or alcohol, but do offer hospitality.
- ✗ Don't place your Bible on the floor.
- ✗ Don't argue about politics – focus on Jesus.
- ✗ Don't assume Muslims will understand 'sin', 'prayer', 'love' etc the same way you do. Check what they think you have said.

What Christians SHOULD do:

- ✓ Pray for opportunities to befriend and share with Muslims.
- ✓ Try to understand what they think and believe.
- ✓ Show love and respect: ('Love' is not one of the 99 names for God in Islam and it is hardly mentioned in the Quran).
- ✓ Admit the mistakes of the church and Christians in history.
- ✓ Try and explain the difference between real and 'nominal' Christians.
- ✓ Offer to pray with a Muslim – they will rarely refuse.
- ✓ Offer a Bible in his/her own language and encourage him/her to read it.
- ✓ Share what Jesus has done for you personally and how you have a relationship with God.
- ✓ For more information see for example: www.answering-islam.org