

Text: Genesis 21:8-21

Title: "Islam: God Speaks Once and For All"

Introduction: Hey, let's pretend. Let's pretend that you have gone to a doctor for a check-up ... a physical exam. Then, let's pretend that the doctor figures out by the test results that you have a curable disease that, without treatment, will soon take your life. Good news = it's treatable and you will be fine and healthy and live long. The bad news = the doctor decides not to tell you about the disease or the cure. The doctor's decision is to tell you that you are fine and then hope you figure out your condition and your cure for yourself.

Anyone have a problem with that? Not a very good doctor, eh?!?

We are in the middle of a series called, "World Religions and the Gospel Truth". The reason we are spending time learning about the other religions of the world is so that we can carry out the Great Commission: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you." (Matt. 28:19-20a)

I do truly believe that Christianity is what the people of the world need. I hear so many people talk about different religions and just say, "Oh, well, we all are headed to the same destination, but we are just taking different roads to get there." Naïve ... Ignorant ... Stop being DUMB!

You and I need to know what other people believe and we need to know what we believe in order to carry out the orders of Jesus. If you and I don't know these things ... if you and I don't understand the consequences of not knowing these things ... we are like bad doctors! Because, if you and I don't know what we believe and share it with others, we are making the decision that those people will figure out on their own that they are not right with God and that the punishment for sin is death.

At this time I invite you to take the (blue?) insert out of your program. On one side you will find our Scripture for today and on the other you will find an outline of how we are going to approach the Islam religion ... complete with fill-in-the-blanks. My hope is that you hear or see something on the screen in these next few minutes that will help you clarify what you believe and why you believe it. As you fill in the blanks and jot down whatever other notes you need, I hope that these are helpful to solidify your faith or help you talk to others on their faith journey.

Of all the religions in the world, Islam is arguably the most important for Christians to become acquainted with. At this time in history, there is more noticeable conflict between our faith and the Muslim faith than there has been in the recent past. For many reasons that you and I do not know, we are essentially at war with strands of the Islamic world.

Unfortunately, most Christians know very little about Islam and their beliefs. It's important for us to understand where they come from in order to carry out our commissioning by Jesus.

Let's start with our Scripture and then I will get into the story of the Muslim prophet, Mohammed.

**READ GENESIS 21:8-21 NOW AND PRAY!**

I. The Story of Mohammed

- A. Like Buddhism, the youngest of our World Religions we are going to study, started with one man. Mohammed was born in 570 AD in Mecca which is in present-day Saudi Arabia.
1. Early life was marked by tragedy ... Father died when Mohammed was born and his mother died 6 years later. He went to live with his grandfather who died soon thereafter.
  2. Mohammed was raised by his uncle. His family was poor, but respectable ... no education opportunities for Mohammed.
  3. Mecca was a center of commerce and pagan worship in Mohammed's day and Mo learned to work with the traders who came in great caravans across the Arabian Desert to Mecca.
  4. As a center for pagan worship, Mecca was a place of worship for the 360 different gods that the Arabian people worshipped.
  5. Like many commerce cities in those days, the pagan worship wasn't always holy ... maybe seldom holy. Like Corinth in Paul's day, Mecca was a center for immorality called "worship".
  6. Although many of the religions had multiple gods, there were a couple of religious groups in Mecca that claimed to serve one God. The Jews and Christians were small parts of the population, but Mohammed found himself attracted to these people of one God.
  7. Mohammed liked their scriptures and stories and the faith they spoke of. For those Christians and Jews there was only one God, who was called, in Arabic: Al Illah ("the God") ... often shortened to "Allah".
- B. Mohammed became a man of deep spirituality. He was a man of his word, other people noticed his integrity and they trusted him.
1. At 25, Mo married a woman named, Khadija who was 15 years older than Mo. She was a widow whom Mohammed had helped with her business affairs.
  2. This developed into a relationship; they married and had six kids; two boys and four girls. More tragedy—both boys died in infancy. "Their deaths deepened Mohammed's longing for spiritual truth." (p.70)
  3. Like the Christians and Jews, Mo believed in just one God ... he was confused about the many idols in Mecca.
  4. Here's where it gets good ... Mo began spending time by himself in prayer in a cave in the mountains around Mecca.

5. When he was 40 he fell asleep while praying (anybody ever done that?). In his dream he saw a spiritual being that he later recognized as the angel Gabriel.
  6. Because he could not read, the angel pressed the words deep into Mo's chest (thought he would die), so the words were written on his heart.
  7. Over the next 23 years, Mohammed had many visions like this. He believed that Gabriel was communicating God's words to him.
  8. Mohammed attempted to pass these words on to the people of Mecca, but, for the most part, they wouldn't listen.
  9. When Mo had about 40 followers, another tragedy... his wife died. Then, he found out that a group from Mecca wanted to kill him for his teachings.
  10. Upon the request of some of the people of Medina (200 miles north of Mecca), Mo and his followers fled Mecca to teach his words in a new town.
  11. Medina became the 1<sup>st</sup> Islamic state, with the worship of Allah as the only true God. Muslim calendar starts in AD 622 when Mo and followers moved to Medina. The Muslim calendar is a bit different from ours ... have to do that another time.
- C. Also important is that, once in Medina, Mohammed became a political ruler ... he was a judge and he led a small army.
1. Once in Medina, Mohammed's visions changed flavor. Now, his visions had less to do with God and more to do with day-to-day matters: how to order society, how inheritances needed to be handled, what was right and wrong in God's eyes and how to lead an army and wage war.
  2. Mohammed started using his army to expand the territory and power of the Muslims and the rule of Allah. After some years, Mohammed finally defeated the army from Mecca!
  3. Mohammed returned to Mecca as it's ruler.
  4. Three years later he died at the age of 62 in AD632.
  5. Within 100 years of Mohammed's death, Islam had spread rapidly across North Africa, the Middle East and Southern Europe.

## II. Basic Beliefs of Islam

- A. **"Islam"** -- Islam comes from the root, "slm".
1. You may recognize that those three letters also from the Hebrew word, "Shalom". Shalom means "peace".
  2. "Slm" means peace too, but it also means "submission" or "surrender". That's what Islam means...

3. Islam is the religion of surrender or submission to Allah. A Muslim (note the “slm” again) is one who is submitted to Allah.
4. Much like Christianity, Muslims are to submit to God as “Lord”.

**B. Allah is God**

1. This is an easy one. For Muslim’s Allah is God. Christians and Muslims intend to serve and worship and pray to the same God.
2. “Allah” is God in Arabic, like “Dios” is God in Spanish.
3. So, Jews, Christians and Muslims intend to serve the same God.

**C. The Quran**

1. The Quran is the sacred writings of Muslims. They believe that Gabriel spoke directly to Mohammed the words of God and the visions that Mo had over those 23 years were written down.
2. Remember that Mohammed could not read or write. “Quran” means “recitations”. Mohammed ‘recited’ the words given to him by Gabriel.
3. The Quran is about 20% shorter than our New Testament, but it’s much different than our New Covenant writings.
4. Our Scripture is mostly stories and poems and revelation about God. Paul, not God, wrote the letters in the NT. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the stories of Jesus’ life, not God. And David wrote most of the Psalms, not God. All were inspired by God, but humans did the writing.
5. The Quran on the other hand, is written in 1<sup>st</sup> person ... like “We say to you, Mohammed, tell the humans to do this.” Or “Human beings, don’t you understand?”
6. Christians would recognize much in the Quran. There are stories of Moses, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jonah, Jesus and John the Baptist. But, their stories don’t always agree with what our stories say.
7. Muslims would say that where the Quran and our Bibles disagree, the Quran is right. The Quran is the correction of Christianity and the Jewish faith ... the most recent word of God.

**D. The Five Pillars of Islam – 5 things we learn from the Quran ... these are obligations to Muslims and are what Islam is built on.**

1. *Shahada* = Belief. This is the confession of faith for Muslims.
  - a. This is their faith statement: “I bear witness to this truth.
  - b. There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet / servant / slave.”

- c. If you confess this and mean it, you have become a Muslim.
- 2. *Prayer* = Prayer
  - a. 5 times a day, Muslims kneel facing Mecca, bow their heads all the way to the ground ...
  - b. They say that their praying throughout the day reminds them to keep on the path of their faith.
  - c. We could learn from that!
- 3. *Zakat* = Charity.
  - a. Muslims pay an annual percentage of their income that goes to the poor and needy.
  - b. This is usually around 2.5% of one's annual earnings.
  - c. A little low compared to our 10%...
- 4. *Ramadan* = Fasting.
  - a. Once a year (in the fall), Muslims fast for a whole month during the daylight hours.
  - b. At night they can eat again, and this reminds them of the first vision given to Mohammed.
- 5. *Hajj* = Pilgrimage.
  - a. Muslims are to make at least one trip in their lifetime to Mecca.
  - b. This is an experience of unity with other Muslims and is a remembrance of Ishmael, their father and Hagar, their mother.
  - c. Muslims believe that they are descendants of Ishmael, son of Hagar and Abraham and that they are the great nation that God promised them in the wilderness!

### III. Differences Between Christianity and Islam

#### A. *Authority of the Quran*

- 1. As I mentioned, Muslims believe that the Quran is the actual words of God and the final edition of God's word that corrects any writings before it ... like the Bible or the Torah.
- 2. As Christians, we would have a hard time agreeing with what we find in the Quran... such as, according to the Quran, Jesus was never crucified, but was taken directly to heaven while another man was crucified in his place.
- 3. Again, wherever the Quran and Old and New Testaments disagree, Mohammed would say that what he heard was directly from God, so those other documents must be wrong.
- 4. How do we trust the revelations of Mohammed? People often say that God has spoken to them, and I cannot help but question it.
  - a. Joseph Smith claimed that God spoke to him as well in founding the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

- b. Smith claimed that God had given him new scriptures through an angel as well ... Book of Mormon.
- c. Do we believe him?
- 5. As Christians, we should measure everything we hear against what we know of God through Jesus Christ and the witness of the apostles who knew Jesus personally.
- 6. Whatever doesn't agree with our New Testament, either historically or theologically, has to be thrown out ... or we are not Christian.

**B. *How Does God Speak to Humans?***

- 1. Muslims believe that Mohammed heard a direct word from God through an angel.
- 2. Christians would say that we need to hear everything through a filter. We all have filters...
  - a. I have had people come up to me after preaching and say that they appreciated that I said this or that...
  - b. Sometimes my response is, "Did I say that? I didn't intend to say that. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure I believe that, so how did you hear that?"
  - c. Everyone hears through their own filters!
  - d. God used to speak to people through prophets and angels, but the message did not always come out right. So, God sent himself in human form ... Jesus.
  - e. Through Jesus God' nature was shown to us ... through miracles and teachings and sacrifice.
  - f. When Jesus died on the cross, we found out about sinfulness and the price that God paid for us to be right with Him again.
  - g. When Jesus rose from the grave we learned about God's views on death, life, hope and joy.
  - h. This happened because God came in human form according to Christianity ... vastly different from the faith of Muslims.

**C. *A Step Back?***

- 1. Maybe this is why the Quran seems like a step back from the New Testament.
- 2. It's a step back toward some of the war and violence that we find in the Jewish/Hebrew Bible ... Mohammed was a warrior who led an army.
  - a. The Quran speaks of using force and killing if you need to ... a reflection of Mo's times.
  - b. In the New Testament we find "turn the other cheek" and "love your enemies" to change enemies into friends.
  - c. But, our Old Testament still has quite a bit of violence in it ... as commanded by God!

- d. Elijah killed 450 prophets of Baal ... In Joshua; the Israelites are commanded to kill men, women and children.
- e. In the New Testament that changes ... the Quran stays in the Old Testament ways of violence.

**D. *Islam on Jesus***

1. If you read the Quran you will find that Mohammed had a very different take on who Jesus is compared to what the apostles said about him.
  - a. Muslims affirm Jesus as a prophet ... perhaps the greatest prophet behind Mohammed himself.
  - b. When Muslims say the name Mohammed, they follow it with "Peace be upon him". They do the same when they say the name of Jesus.
2. Although Muslims believe that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, performed many miracles and was the Jewish Messiah; they do not believe that He was in any way the Son of God.
  - a. Jesus was just a prophet.
  - b. Doesn't make sense. Mohammed accepted the virgin birth, but not the reason for the birth.
  - c. The whole point of the virgin birth was that humanity and divinity (Godliness) had to come together ... God in human flesh.
  - d. Why believe in a virgin birth if there is no reason for it?
3. Similarly, Mohammed did not believe in the idea that Jesus came to die for the sins of humanity.
  - a. Mohammed believed that God forgives us when we sin and counts our good deeds in our favor ... kind of like keeping score.
  - b. Problem: that ignores the meaning of Jesus' name, "God saves..."
  - c. Mohammed believed that someone else was executed in Jesus' place ... no crucifixion of Jesus = no Resurrection.
  - d. Even though Jesus' closest buddies said they saw him after he had been raised from the dead (along with hundreds of others) and said they were willing to testify to this truth with their very lives ... Mohammed rejected this idea.
4. With that, I have a hard time seeing eye-to-eye with our Muslim friends. If Jesus is not Son of God, Savior and Lord, we cannot agree.

**IV. An Invitation**

- A. When we think of Muslims, many of us think of Muslim extremists, but remember that those are just a small percentage of Muslims.
- B. Yet, we have to recognize that warfare is part of the roots of the Muslim faith and is clearly spelled out in the Quran.
- C. Please keep in mind that there are Christian extremists as well ... think KKK and Nazism.
- D. As we think of Muslims, I invite you to remember the non-extremist Muslims as well ... and don't forget that we Christians are far from perfect. Careful how you judge.

V. A Challenge

- A. Let me finish with a challenge please. As I have said, I cannot accept the teachings of Islam and the Quran because of their differences with my Christian faith.
- B. But, let's learn what we can. Wouldn't it be great if we were as bold about our faith and willing to stop whatever we were doing 5 times a day and unashamedly take a few minutes for prayer?
- C. Wouldn't it be great if we all gave at least 2.5% of our income to help the poor?
- D. With that said, let me challenge you that we have something to offer our Muslim cousins (linked through Abraham).
  1. The only way to share what we have in Jesus Christ with Muslims is by reaching out in love to them.
  2. They need to see Jesus' love through us in order to have a chance.
  3. II Corinthians 5:20 = Paul says, "We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you..."
  4. We are called to be ambassadors to all people!
  5. What kind of ambassadors are we ... whether it is with Muslims or anyone else.

Next Week: Be decent humans, more traditions and Jesus isn't the one...

Let's Pray!