

Islam

A Religion Profile from International Students, Inc.

Islam: An Overview

Number of Adherents

The adherents of Islam number more than 1.2 billion, or between 19 and 22 percent of the world's population. Islam is the second largest religion in the world and is growing at about 2.9 percent per year, faster than the total world population growth.

Islam Among the Nations

Muslims (followers of Islam) are spread primarily over the areas of North Africa, the Middle East, south-central Asia, and Indonesia.

No more than 20 percent of Muslims live in the Arabic-speaking world. The four nations with the largest number of Muslims are all outside the Middle East:

- Indonesia—182,570,000, 88 percent of population
- Pakistan—134,480,000, 97 percent
- Bangladesh—114,080,000, 85 percent
- India—over 100 million, 12 percent

Approximately one-fifth of the more than 500,000 international students studying in the U.S. come from Islamic countries. Most of these countries have a minimal number of Christians in their populations. Moreover, their governments have either closed the countries' borders to missionaries or have made evangelism illegal, or both.

The Founding of Islam

In A.D. 570, Muhammad was born into the Arabian Quraysh tribe, an influential tribe because it controlled the city of Mecca. Mecca was important economically because it served as a convenient resting place for trading caravans. It was also important religiously because the *Ka'bah* was located there.

The *Ka'bah* was a cubical structure that, at the time of Muhammad, contained 360 deities. Each Arabian tribe had

hand-picked its own deity and came to Mecca each year to pay homage to its god.

It was the custom of those who were spiritually minded to retreat to a place of solitude once a year. Muhammad observed this practice for several years in a cave in Mount Hira. In the year 610, at age 40, Muhammad reportedly received his first revelation from the angel Gabriel, the beginning of a series of revelations that were eventually compiled into Islam's sacred scripture, the Qur'an, which means "recitations."

Muhammad is said to have doubted the origin of these new revelations at first. He thought perhaps he had been possessed by *jinn*, or demons. His wife, Khadijah, however, reassured him and encouraged him to teach that which had been revealed to him.

Muhammad's religion started slowly, but as he began to preach more publicly, the leaders of his own tribe pressured him to keep quiet about his message of strict monotheism. They viewed it as a threat to their polytheistic religion—and their livelihood, since they benefited economically from pilgrimages to the *Ka'bah*. Muhammad, however, refused to stop. As a result, persecution increased against the followers of this new religion until around 100 Muslim families were forced to flee to a city named Yathrib (now called Medina), about 225 miles north of Mecca. Muhammad followed them shortly thereafter, fleeing to Mecca in 622. Muslims now look to the year of his flight to Yathrib as the beginning of the Muslim calendar. This event is known as *Hijrah* (also spelled *Hegira*), meaning "a series of migrations."

After several successful sieges and military victories against Mecca, and after making treaties with the Quraysh tribe, Muhammad and his army took control of Mecca in 630 without a struggle. Upon entering the city, he personally destroyed the idols in the *Ka'bah*. Within a year of Mecca's submission to Muhammad, he was able to unify all the tribes of the Arabian peninsula under the religion of Islam.

On June 8, 632, Muhammad died.

The Sects of Islam

The two major sects of Islam, Sunni and Shi'ite, were divided originally over a dispute as to who should serve as the first *caliph*, or successor, to Muhammad, who had failed to appoint one before his death. The Sunni Muslims insisted that Muhammad's successor should be elected. The Shi'ite (or Shia'h) Muslims thought he should come through Muhammad's bloodline, which would have meant Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, would be his successor.

The majority of Muslims are Sunnis, and they differ from the Shi'ites in several other ways as well. The Sunnis say their prayers five times a day, while the Shi'ites pray three times a day, having combined a couple of the prayer times.

Initially, the Sunnis and the Shi'ites also differed with respect to their source of authority. The Sunnis emphasized the authority of the written traditions, which included not only the Qur'an but also the *Sunnah* (Muhammad's conduct) and *Hadith* (Muhammad's non-Qur'anic sayings), and the principles that the *ulama*, religious scholars, arrived at by consensus based on the traditions.

The Shi'ites, on the other hand, believed that God spoke through an *Imam*, the Muslim equivalent of the Catholic Pope. In the ninth century, however, the twelfth *Imam* became hidden, and the source of authority was passed on to the *ulama*, who considered themselves collectively to be the general representatives of the hidden *Imam*. The Shi'ites await the return of the twelfth *Imam*, called the *Mahdi*, similar to the way Christians look for the return of Christ.

Another difference between the two sects is that the Sunnis believe there should be a separation between civil and religious authorities, whereas the Shi'ites maintain that the religious authorities should also exercise political power.

Sufism is the mystical third wing of Islam. The goal of the Sufi is to renounce worldly attachments, to see only God in all things, and to attain assimilation of the self into the vast Being of God.

There are also several minor Muslim sects, including the Wahhabis (primarily in Saudi Arabia), the Druze (Primarily in Lebanon, Syria, and northern Israel), the Alawites (primarily in Syria), and the Ahmadiyahs (primarily in Pakistan). Beyond the major and minor sects, Islam has also spawned two religions: Sikhism and Baha'i.

The Beliefs and Obligations of Islam

The term "islam" means "submission" to the will of God, and the person who submits is called a "muslim." The religion of Islam can be divided into beliefs (*imam*) and practices (*deen*).

The major beliefs of Islam include the following:

- **God**—The central doctrine of Islam is that God is one and that no partner is to be associated with him. To associate a partner with God is to commit the sin of *ishrak* (also spelled *shirk*), or blasphemy, for which the Qur'an offers no forgiveness (Surah 4:48). Obviously, the doctrine of the Trinity is offensive to Muslims.
- **Angels**—In the gap between the God of the Qur'an and humankind exists a hierarchy of angels. The archangel Gabriel is of the highest rank, succeeded by the rest of the angels. Each person has two angels assigned to him or her, one to record the person's good deed and the other to record the bad deeds. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the *jinn*, from which we get our word "genie." Muslims believe that the host of *jinn* were created from fire, are usually bad, and are able to possess people.
- **The Prophets of God**—According to the Qur'an, God has sent a prophet to every nation to preach the message of the one God. In all, 124,000 prophets have been sent, according to tradition. Most are unknown, but many include biblical personages such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jonah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Each prophet was given for a particular age, but Muhammad is the only prophet who is for all time. He is considered to be the "Seal of the Prophets."
- **The Holy Books**—Four of the high-ranking prophets were given books of divine revelation. Those four are Moses, who was given *Tawrat* (Torah), David, who was given the *Zabur* (Psalms), Jesus, who was given the *Injil* (Gospel), and Muhammad, who was given the Qur'an. Of those four books, Muslims contend that only the Qur'an has been preserved in an uncorrupted state.
- **The Day of Judgement**—The God of the Qur'an has decreed that there will be a day when all will stand before him in judgment. On that day, each person's deeds will be weighed in the balance. Those whose bad deeds outweigh their good deeds will be damned, but those whose good deeds outweigh the bad will be rewarded with Paradise. Whether one's good deeds outweigh one's bad deeds is a subjective matter, though. A Muslim, as a result, has no assurance that he or she will be accepted by God.

The obligations of Islam include the following:

- **To Recite the *Shahadah***—The word *shahadah* means "to bear witness." When reciting the *shahadah*, one says, "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger." Saying the *shahadah* with sincerity is all it takes to become a Muslim.
- **To Pray (*Salat*)**—A muslim is required to say 17 complete prayers each day. Muslims may pray either individually or in a group. The noon service on Friday is the only time when Muslims are expected to gather at the Mosque.
- **To Fast (*Sawm*)**—In commemoration of Muhammad receiving the Qur'an during the ninth lunar month of *Ramadhan*, Muslims are expected to fast during the

daylight hours that month. During the fast, they must abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual relations. After sundown Muslims are allowed to partake of all those things again until sunrise.

- **To Give Alms (*Zakat*)**—Muslims are commanded to give one-fortieth (2.5 percent) of their income primarily to the poor and those in need.
- **To Make the Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)**—Every Muslim must make the trip to Mecca at least once during his or her

lifetime, provided he or she is able with respect to health and finances. Each pilgrim must wear the white garments called *ihram*, which eliminate all class or status distinctions during the *hajj*. The process of visiting several sacred sites usually takes more than a week, and sometimes even a month. After the pilgrimage, the pilgrim is entitled to be referred to as a *Hajj*.

Islam and Christianity Contrasted	
Islam	Christianity
God	
A singular unity. No partner is to be associated with God.	A compound unity; one in essence, three in person.
Humanity	
Good by nature.	Sinful by nature.
Sin	
Sin is thought of in terms of rejecting right guidance. It can be forgiven through repentance. No atonement is necessary.	Sin is serious (Rom. 6:23, Eph. 2:1). It reflects an attitude of moral rebellion against the holy God, which causes us to be alienated from Him. An atonement is necessary.
Salvation	
The standard for salvation is having one's good deeds outweigh the bad. Therefore, it is based on human effort.	The standard for salvation is the absolute holiness of God (Matt. 5:48). Therefore, it can only be offered as a gift through the grace of God and received through faith.
Jesus	
One of the major prophets. To associate Jesus with God (i.e., to call Him the Son of God) is blasphemy. Muslims affirm the virgin birth of Jesus and the miracles that He performed.	The one and only Son of God. John wrote, "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22).
The Death of Christ	
According to Islamic tradition, Jesus did not die on the cross. Instead, He went to heaven, and Judas died in His place on the cross. Muslims believe that it is disrespectful to believe that God would allow one of his prophets—and especially one of the most honored of the prophets—to be crucified.	Jesus died a physical death as a substitute for our sins. He then rose from the dead in a physical but immortal body and appeared to hundreds of witnesses (1 Cor. 15). God's specific purpose for sending Jesus into the world was for Him to be crucified and to die for our sins (Matt. 20:28; John 3:16; Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:19-20). Jesus voluntarily gave His life for us (John 6:51; 10:11-17). The end was not that of dishonor but that of the highest exaltation (Acts 2:29-33; 5:30-31; Phil. 2:8-11).
The Bible	
Corrupted. Abrogated by the Qur'an.	Authentic. Divinely inspired. The final authority in all matters of faith and truth.

Evangelism Do's and Don'ts with Muslims

Do's

- Love and respect them.
- Pray *with* them and *for* them.
- Consult the Bible often to explain and support what you believe. This will expose your Muslim friend to the Bible's ring of authority and authenticity. At an appropriate time, offer to study the Gospel of John with him or her.
- Meet with them individually. Witnessing to Muslims is best done one-to-one. When you meet with Muslims in a group, they tend to be defensive of their religion and will not open up.
- Point to Jesus as often as you can without being offensive.

A former Muslim said, "It is vital for a Muslim to see Christianity as not a religion but as a living, new relationship with God."

- Use Jesus' parables and stories about Him. Muslims are more influenced by stories and parables than they are by logical arguments.
- Read at least a few portions, if not all, of the Qur'an so that you will become familiar with the Muslim concept of God.
- Be patient and persistent. Muslims are notoriously slow in turning to Jesus Christ for salvation.
- Handle the Bible respectfully. The custom in Islamic countries is to not lower the Qur'an below the waist. Muslims also keep the Qur'an on the highest shelf in the house, for nothing should be placed above or below the Qur'an.

The God of the Qur'an and the God of the Bible Compared

Is the God of the Qur'an the same as the God of the Bible?

They share the following characteristics:

- Both are one.
- Both are transcendent Creators of the universe.
- Both are sovereign.
- Both are omnipotent.
- Both have spoken to humanity through messengers or prophets, through angels, and through the written word.
- Both know in intimate detail the thoughts and deeds of men.
- Both will judge the wicked.

They differ in the following ways:

- The God of the Qur'an is a *singular unity*; but the God of the Bible is a *compound unity* who is one in essence and three in person (Matt. 28:19; John 10:30; Acts 5:3-4).
- The God of the Qur'an is not a father, and he has begotten no sons (Surahs 19:90-92; 112:3); but the God of the Bible is a triunity who has eternally existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; Luke 3:21-22; John 5:18).
- Through the Qur'an, God broke into history through *a word that is written*; but through Jesus Christ, God broke into history through *the Word who is a Person* (John 1:1, 14; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:2-3, 1; John 4:9-10).
- The God of the Qur'an "loves not the prodigals" (Surahs 6:142; 7:31); but Jesus tells the story of a father, a metaphor for God the Father, who longs for the return of his prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24).
- "Allah loves not the wrongdoers" (Surah 3:139), and neither does he love "him who is treacherous, sinful" (Surah 4:107); but "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8).
- Allah desires to afflict them for some of their sins" (Surah 5:49; also see Surahs 4:168-169; 7:179; 9:2; 40:10); but the God of the Bible does not "take any pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezek. 18:23) and is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).
- The standard for judgment for the God of the Qur'an is that *our good deeds must outweigh our bad deeds* (Surahs 7:8-9; 21:47); but the standard of the God of the Bible is nothing less than *complete perfection* (Matt. 5:48; Rom. 3:28).
- The God of the Qur'an provided a messenger, Muhammad, who warned of Allah's impending judgment (Surahs 2:119; 5:19; 7:184, 188; 15:89) and who declared that "no bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another" (Surahs 17:15; 35:18); but the God of the Bible provided a sinless Savior, Jesus, who took our sins upon Himself and bore God's wrath in our place (Matt. 20:28; 26:28; Luke 22:37; John 3:26; 10:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:9-10).

Don'ts

- Don't be critical of Islam, the Qur'an, or Muhammad. In fact, try to avoid such subjects altogether. Instead, accentuate the Good News of the Gospel.
- Don't take your Muslim friend to church until you know he or she is ready for it. There is much that happens at a church service that the typical Muslim would find

- dishonoring to God. If you do bring a Muslim to church, discuss with him or her what to expect. It is best to begin by taking your Muslim friend to an informal Bible study.
- Don't argue with your Muslim friend. It should be understood that a Muslim cannot lose an argument, because he or she would then lose face. Try to sensitively provoke your friend's thinking instead.

Islam: Answering the Objections

The following are some of the common objections to Christianity Muslims raise, along with suggestions as to how Christians can address those issues.

The Bible Has Been Corrupted

For some Muslims the Bible carries no credibility because they have been taught that the early texts of the Bible were corrupted by Jews and Christians. This is known as the doctrine of *tahrif*, or alteration.

As support for this doctrine, Muslims point to the passage in the Qur'an that speaks of those who "used to hear the word of Allah, then altered it after they had understood it, and they know (this)," and of some who are "illiterate; they know not the Book but only from hearsay, and they do but conjecture. Woe! then to those who write the Book with their hands then say, 'This is from Allah;' so that they may take for it a small price" (Surah 2:75, 78-79, quotations from the Qur'an are taken from Ali).

These Qur'anic passages, however, speak of *misinterpreting* Scripture and of *passing something off as Scripture* that is not Scripture, but they *do not speak of the alteration of the actual biblical manuscripts themselves* (Parrinder, p. 147).

The Qur'an itself, moreover, considers the previous revelations contained in "the Book" to be authoritative and authentic revelations from God (Surah 2:136; 4:136). The Qur'an encourages Jews and Christians to "observe the Torah and the Gospel and that which is revealed to you from your Lord" (Surah 5:68). It uses the Torah and the Gospel to authenticate Muhammad as the prophet (Surah 7:157), and it encourages those who doubt Muhammad's teachings to "ask those who read the Book before thee" (Surah 10:94). The Qur'an also urges people to believe in the previous Scriptures (Surah 2:136; 4:136).

Clearly, it would be inconsistent for the Qur'an to, on the other hand, advise people to consult and to believe in the previous Scriptures, and, on the other hand, teach that those Scriptures are corrupted and therefore untrustworthy. With as much as the Qur'an talks about the previous Scriptures as being revealed from God, the Muslim contention that

Jews and Christians have altered these Scriptures flies in the face of the Qur'an's own statement that, "There is none who can change His words" (Surah 6:116; also see 6:34; 10:64). Consider also the impossibility of corrupting the biblical texts. To accomplish such a feat would have meant that the worldwide community of Jews had agreed to the textual changes that the remote and relatively insignificant Jewish community in Medina was suggesting. Then it would also have meant that the Christians of the world, who also possessed the Torah, assented to the changes among the Jews even though the Christians could not agree among themselves concerning doctrinal issues.

Furthermore, the manuscript evidence does not support the accusation of textual corruption. With respect to the authenticity of the Old Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date from 100 B.C., confirm in an astounding way the accuracy of the Masoretic manuscripts, which date from A.D. 900 (Geisler & Nix, pp. 405-408). The significance of those dates is that they show that the manuscripts that existed *after* the Muslim accusation of *tahrif* are identical to those that existed *long before* Muhammad even lived.

With respect to the authenticity of the New Testament, biblical scholars have found 3,157 Greek manuscripts that contain either portions or all of the New Testament and that date from the second century on (Geisler & Nix, p. 466). Of the variants (textual difference) between these manuscripts, 95 percent have to do with trivialities such as a letter being deleted by mistake. In response to the accusation by Muslims that the variants significantly changed Christian doctrine, it must be stated that no Christian doctrine rests solely on, *or is even affected by*, a debatable text (Bruce, p. 20; Geisler & Nix, p. 474).

The Doctrine of the Trinity

In light of the Muslim sin of *ishrak*, associating a partner with God, Muslims raise several objections to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Objection Number 1: Christians Worship Three Gods

The first objection is that Christians worship three gods. There are several ways to approach this objection.

First, affirm your agreement with your Muslim friend that there is only one God. Look with him or her at biblical passages that assert that (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29-32; 1 Cor. 8:4).

Second, point out that the Bible speaks at times of a compound unity rather than a simple, undivided unity. In other words, the word “one” often means there is a plurality in the oneness (Gen. 2:24; Exod. 24:3; Judg. 20:1,8,11; Rom. 12:5).

Third, explain that it is not surprising that we, as God’s creatures, would not be able to fully understand the nature of our Creator. The difficulty of understanding and explaining the concept of the Trinity is, in fact, evidence for its divine origin. Such a concept would certainly not be manmade.

Fourth, clarify the make-up of the Trinity. Because of the following verse in the Qur’an, some Muslims believe that the Trinity consists of God, Jesus, and Mary, “And when Allah will say: O Jesus, son of Mary, didst thou say to men, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah?” (Surah 5:116).

Fifth, consider together the biblical evidence for the triunity of God. In the Bible, the Father is referred to as God (Matt. 11:25; John 6:27; 8:54; Eph. 4:6), Jesus is recognized as God (Luke 5:17-26; John 1:1; 20:28), and the Holy Spirit is identified as God (Acts 5:3-4). Even though each is referred to as God, the Bible does not speak of three gods but of the three as being one: “baptizing them in the *name* (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

Plus, the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit are all identified as having attributes unique to God. For example, each Person of the Trinity existed before anything was created, and each was active in the creation of all things (God: Ps. 146:5-6; Mark 13:19; Acts 4:24; Jesus: John 1:1-3, 14; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17; Holy Spirit: Gen. 1:1-3).

Moreover, each Person possesses the attribute of omnipresence, or being present to all things (God: Jer. 23:24; Acts 17:24-25; Jesus: Matt. 18:20; 28:20; Eph. 1:23; Holy Spirit: Ps. 139:7-8).

Objection Number 2: God Has No Sons

The second objection that arises from the doctrine of the Trinity has to do with Christians referring to Jesus as the Son of God. When Muslims hear the phrase, “Son of God,” they understand it to imply that God had physical relations with women in order to have a son. The Qur’an says, “Such is Jesus son of Mary—a statement of truth about which they dispute. It beseems not Allah that He should take to Himself a son” (Surah 19:34).

In the Arabic language there are two words for expressing “son of”: *walad* and *ibn*. *Walad* definitely denotes becoming a son through the union of a male and female. We, as Christians, would agree that Jesus was not a *waladdu’llah*—son of

God—in that sense. After all, the Bible says Jesus was born of the *virgin* Mary (Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:34). Moreover, the Qur’an itself does not deny Jesus’ virgin birth (Surah 3:46).

Unlike *walad*, the word *ibn* can be used in a metaphorical sense. For example, Arabs themselves talk about a traveler as being an *ibnu’ssabil*—son of the road (Fellowship, p. 6). It is in that wider sense that Jesus is the Son of God.

When Jesus referred to God as “My Father” and to Himself as “the Son” (Matt. 11:27; John 5:17, 22-23), He was not talking about His physical birth. Instead, He was claiming to have a special relationship with God, that of identity and equality. To be the “son of” someone is to be of the same order as and to have the same qualities as that person. The Jews of Jesus’ day made it clear that this is how they understood Jesus’ statement when they said, “He was even calling God his own Father, *making himself equal with God*” (John 5:18, emphasis added). In another instance, Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). For making that statement, the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus for “blasphemy, because *you, a mere man, claim to be God*” (John 10:33, emphasis added).

One Iranian Christian says that he deals with this controversial issue by specifying that Jesus is the spiritual Son of God. This is not to deny, though, Jesus’ humanity.

Another approach is to ask, “Are you saying that something is impossible with God? Are you not limiting God by saying that He is unable to express Himself through human form?” Remember that the angel declared to Mary that “nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

Objection Number 3: The Doctrine of the Trinity Contradicts Itself

Muslims claim that the doctrine of the Trinity contradicts itself. After all, how can something be both three and one?

In response, for a statement to contradict itself it must both affirm and deny the same thing in the same respect. Does the doctrine of the Trinity do that? The answer must be no, because it states that God is *one in essence* (or being, or substance) and *three in person*. Essence and personhood are different. God is three in person in that each Person of the Trinity is distinct within the Godhead; God is one in that each Person of the Godhead shares the same self-existing essence and other qualities unique to God.

This simultaneous distinction and sameness is seen in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The word “with” indicates a distinction and a relationship between the Persons of the Son (the Word) and the Father (God), while at the same time the phrase, “the Word *was* God”—a verb of being—indicates the sameness of essence between the two Persons.

Another way to approach the doctrine of the Trinity is by

pointing out how practical it is in that it meets each person's felt needs, such as:

- **Love:** God the Father demonstrated His love for us historically by sending His Son to save us (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9-10).
- **Freedom from Guilt and Sin:** God the Son took our sins upon Himself, paid the penalty of death on our behalf, and rose from the dead to give us victory over sin and death (Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 5:21; 15:3-4). Through Jesus we can receive the forgiveness of sins and be free from guilt (1 John 1:9).
- **Empathy:** Because the Word became flesh and lived among us, we know that God, through Jesus, is able to empathize with our suffering.
- **Hope:** Because Jesus physically rose from the dead, we have the hope of personal survival after death. Moreover, because of the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, we have the assurance of eternal life (Rom. 8:11; also see 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14).
- **Transformation:** The Holy Spirit indwells us (Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 3:16); makes our spirit, which was dead, alive (John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 3:5); and gives us the power to submit to God (Rom. 8:5-17).
- **Communication with God:** We can have a personal relationship with God, because Jesus has broken the barriers between us and God (Eph. 2:12-18; Col. 1:21-22); because He serves us as mediator with God (1 Tim. 2:5); and because the Holy Spirit assists us in our communication with God (Rom. 8:26-27).

The Crucifixion

Muslims believe that the God of the Qur'an would not dishonor his chosen prophet by allowing him to be crucified. They, therefore, deny that Jesus was crucified. They believe instead that He was caught up into heaven and that someone (some say Judas) took His place on the cross. One Iranian student said, "Do we not honor [Jesus] more than you do when we refuse to believe that God would permit Him to suffer death on the cross? Rather, we believe that God took Him to heaven" (Woodbery, p.164).

The primary passage that Muslims use to deny the crucifixion is Surah 4:157-158:

And for their saying: We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah, and they killed him not, nor did they cause his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them as such. And certainly those who differ therein have no knowledge about it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for certain. Nay, Allah exalted him in his presence. And Allah is ever Mighty, Wise.

A careful reading of the above passage, though, shows that it does not deny that Jesus was crucified, but it instead denies

that *the Jews* caused Jesus to be crucified. In point of fact, the Jews did not crucify Jesus, but the Romans did (John 18:31). Even more important, God was the ultimate cause for Jesus being crucified (Rom. 8:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:18-20). Even the Qur'an alludes to that fact in the following verse: "When Allah said: O Jesus, I will cause thee to die and exalt thee in My presence and clear thee of those who disbelieve and make those who follow thee above those who disbelieve to the day of Resurrection" (Surah 3:54).

In light of the above passage, it is effective to have the Muslim also read Isaiah 53:4-11 to see why God caused Jesus to die. Following that, consider together the story of God ordering Abraham to sacrifice his son in Surah 37:101-107 (although the passage is not explicit, Muslims understand the son to be Ishmael):

So We gave him the good news of a forbearing son. But when he became of (age to) work with him, he [Abraham] said: O my son, I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice thee: so consider what thou seest. He said: O my father, do as thou art commanded; if Allah please, thou wilt find me patient. So when they both submitted and he had thrown him down upon his forehead, And We called out to him saying, O Abraham, Thou hast indeed fulfilled the vision. Thus do We reward the doers of good. Surely this is a manifest trial. And We ransomed with a great sacrifice.

There are three questions to ask a Muslim with respect to the above passage. First, if salvation is only a matter of rewarding those who do good, and if God's purpose was only to test Abraham's obedience, why then was there a need for "a great sacrifice"? Second, who provided the "great sacrifice"? Third, is a goat enough to pay for the sins of men? In light of the above passage from the Qur'an and the previous three questions, read what Jesus said concerning His mission: "The Son of Man [Jesus] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28, emphasis added). Jesus is the great sacrifice.

A former Muslim who wrestled with the issue of Jesus' crucifixion said one thing that really affected him was to see that Jesus "over and over mentioned and predicted His death, and it happened—it really happened." It might be helpful, then, to point out the verses in which Jesus predicted His death (Matt. 12:39-40; 16:4, 21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:2; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; Luke 9:22, 44; John 10:11, 17-18; 12:32-33).

Concerning the issue of God dishonoring one of His chosen prophets, point out through Philippians 2:8-11 what God did after Jesus was obedient unto death (also see Acts 2:29-33; 5:30-31).

Who, moreover, is being disrespectful: those who say God would deceive by replacing Jesus with someone who looks like Him, or those who say God is able to raise His Prophet

from the dead and to thereby conquer sin for all humanity?

Ultimately, the argument concerning the significance of the Cross of Christ must not be a theological one, but a personal one—what Jesus' death means to you. The Muslim must be shown the difference between the uncertainty of salvation by attempting to live up to the law versus the certainty of salvation by receiving God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

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