

Bible Special 06-06-20a

This is the 20th day of June, 2006. We continue tonight our study on why the Bible, we're examining the religions of the world, the alternatives that people choose when they reject the truth of God as it is revealed in their hearts by God, the Holy Spirit. Let's take a moment as we begin to ask God's blessing on our study.

Father, we are grateful for your provision for us. We are grateful that we have been blessed and we have been provided for so that we can pause at this point in our week to assemble in accordance with the guidance of your word, to share fellowship and to commune together in your word. We ask your blessing on us as we study the unique features of our Christian faith as it compares to the alternatives that are in the world.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will impress on our hearts the priorities and the values and the goals we should have as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We looked last time at the unique features of Judaism, and of course, these are necessarily brief excursions into each of these religions. We could spend a lot of time looking at them, but it's just important to know the highlights. What are the origins? What are the pitfalls? What are the unique features? If we wind up talking to someone who is from one of these backgrounds, we will not be blithely ignorant of their faith.

We sort of expect people to understand the basic tenets of Christianity, and it's only fair that we have at least an exposure to the facets of these others. So tonight, we're going to look at Islam. Now, in the world today, the most prevalent faith claimed by people is Christianity.

There are approximately a third of the people on the planet who claim to be Christians. This is 2.1 billion people. Now, this is self-proclaimed and is very broad.

This includes Catholics, Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, Pentecostals, Anglicans, Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Quakers, anybody who makes any pretense of being a Christian, they're thrown into this giant bin. Of that 2.1 billion, I would say there is a much smaller proportion who are actually Christians. It's just like 80% of the people in the United States claim a belief in God, and 40%, half of those, make some claim about Jesus Christ.

But the actual number of believers, and then within the subset of believers, those who are making some progress in God's actual plan and purpose is microscopically smaller than that. But, protesting Christians in the world today, one third, 33%, 2.1 billion out of about 6.5 billion people on the planet. The second most prevalent religion in the world today is Islam.

1.3 billion, and that is growing by leaps and bounds. 20 years ago, it was just slightly more than half that. It was roughly 800 million.

And in the last 20 to 25 years, Islam has doubled. Beyond that, you have your non-religious, your agnostics, your atheists, your secular humanists, your people who when you ask them what religion are you, they say none. And that's about 1.1 billion.

Following that, you have the Hindus. We talked about the Hindus, about 900 million. You have your Buddhists, which are 376 million.

You have your Buddhists, which are about 1.2 million, less than a third of what you have in Islam. There's the Chinese religion, the Chinese traditional religion. That's about close to 400 million.

And after that, you get down to real strange stuff. As I said, Judaism is 14 million. Spiritism is 15 million.

Baha'i, which is actually an outgrowth of Islam, is 7 million. You have the Sikhs, you have African traditional, and so on. There's lots of other little cats and dogs, neo-pagans.

Rastafarians, you get 600,000 of those. Scientology, 500,000, half a million of those. So, and then there's other things.

There are 2.6 million Zoroastrians, which is a really old religion, going back to before the time of Christ. There's 2 million adherents of something called Tenrikyo. I don't even know what that is.

Sounds Japanese. But tonight we're talking about Islam, 1.3 billion and growing. Growing by leaps and bounds, taking over entire countries as it moves.

And in the last generation, everyone was worried about the communists taking over the world, and the Red Menace, and the Red Scare, and, you know, pinko communist fascists. But what has really taken over the world instead is Islam. I'm going to be relying for a lot of the information I give you tonight.

There's dozens of different sources. But we have this book on our shelf by Dr. Anas A. Shorosh. This was actually written about 20 years ago.

But it is just as timely and just as accurate on the history of Islam now as it ever was. And that's mainly what we're drawing from it. But it's called Islam Revealed, A Christian Arab's View of Islam.

And Mr. Shorosh is unique. He's a Palestinian Arab. He grew up among the Muslims.

His hometown is Nazareth. He has an intimate knowledge from the inside of what Muslims believe. And as a believer, he also knows the distinctions between Islam and Christianity.

But he can read the Quran and the original Arabic. And he is very well qualified. If you read the introduction to his book, you'll see why.

But I want to dive right in. This is a large subject and we want to see if we can cover it tonight. So his summary is probably as concise and accurate as any you will find.

So I'm going to be leaning heavily on him for what I give you. You will find many of these principles in your brochure as well. But what I'm going to give you is somewhat more complete.

Islam is an Arabic word which means submission or surrender. And it is a description of the religion of surrendering your life to Allah. Allah does not just mean God in Arabic.

Allah means the God, the one and only God. Islam is a very monotheistic religion. There is no trinity.

There is no God but Allah. He is one God and they therefore recognize Jesus Christ but deny his divinity. They don't believe in any sort of a Holy Spirit.

There is one God and it's Allah and Muhammad is his prophet. That's the essence of Islam. So the foundation of Islam, since Muhammad is God's messenger, the record, the written record of what Muhammad said during his relatively brief life, is the word of God and that is the Quran.

And although you see this spelled a lot of different ways, probably Q-U-R-A-N is the preferred spelling. You'll see it a lot of times, K-O-R-A-N. But Q-U-R-A-N is a better transliteration out of the Arabic, the Quran.

It is revered among Muslims as the holy scriptures. They treat it with respect, much as the ancient Israelites treated the word of God and modern day Orthodox Jews, you know how the word of God, when the scribes would copy it, anytime they came to the name of God, they would cover the ink until it dried so no dust would get into the name of God. Well, the Quran is treated with great respect.

They never hold it below their waist. When anytime it is stored in their house, it needs to be on the highest shelf or on its own shelf in a place of honor. You never just find a Quran laying around.

They never lay it on the floor. They don't use it as a coaster. By the way, I don't do this with my Bible either.

I think that the word of God and it's not anything that is meaningful to anybody. It's what you make up your mind to do. But I never lay anything on top of my Bible.

I never use my Bible as a coaster. I just think that is the inspired, inherent word of God. And it is such a privilege to have a copy.

We ought to treat it with respect. I don't let my Bibles get raggedy. I don't let the pages get folded over on the corners.

Nothing wrong with that. I'm just telling you that you can sort of understand the reverence with which the Jews will treat copies of the Torah and the respect with which the Arabs treat the Quran. And you think, why would Christians be casual and indiscriminate about the word of God? Do we not value the word of God as much as an Arab values the Quran? We ought to.

If nothing else, it's a symbol. It's a reminder. It's not the physical book.

Doesn't matter if you have a circle on your Bible from setting a Coke there. But the idea is, what do you think of when you look at the word of God? What does it mean? And if it's something you value, just like I wouldn't take my, somebody did a nice thing when Patty and I got married and put our wedding announcement in a frame and put the two parts of it together. Well, I would never take that thing out and use it as a coaster either.

It is a reminder of something. It's a valuable symbol of something. And I wouldn't treat that thing with disrespect.

I wouldn't, you know, hang it over the toilet or something in the bathroom. It means something to me because it's a reminder of something that is deeply cherished. And so I just encourage you to think a little bit about what it says about us.

If somebody finds our Bible dropped on the floor with its pages all crushed, you know, do we value the word of God or don't we? So the Muslims treat any copy of the Quran, you can imagine, you heard in the news last year when there were rumors that the Quran had been flushed down the toilet by jailers in Gitmo or wherever it was, and that this had greatly enraged and incensed the Arab world. Well, you can see why, because they really, really cherish their book. And that sort of treatment would outrage them.

I mean, there were riots in the street and stuff burned in effigy and violence in Arab communities just on the rumor that someone had flushed the Quran down the toilet. They swear by it, they consult it on all occasions. It is probably the most memorized book in the world.

Arabs are more diligent and faithful about memorizing the Quran than Christians are about memorizing scripture. And I'm very pleased to say that I think we are atypical in that we have a really good scripture memory program in our church. But there are a lot of Christians who couldn't quote more than six or seven verses once you get past John 3, 16 and Psalm 23, a lot of Christians kind of run out of gas on scripture memory.

And it's a shame because most good Muslims can quote dozens and dozens and dozens and dozens of passages out of the Quran. And that's not even an inspired book, but they value it very much. It is the first and foremost and major pillar of Islam.

Any Muslim that you find is going to revere the Quran, they revere it, not so much Muhammad. We revere the Lord Jesus Christ as the son of God. Muslims do not view Muhammad as an alternate Christ.

He's a prophet. He is to them what Moses is to the Jews. The Jews don't worship Moses, but they revere the Torah and have ever since Mount Sinai in a lot of ways.

And that's that's the view there. They don't worship Muhammad. They don't like to be called Mohammedans or they don't like their religion being called Mohammedanism any more than Jews would want to be called Moshiites or something.

They believe that the Quran is God's word and they revere it and they cherish it. They memorize it. They swear by it.

They always place it on the highest shelf or in a prominent place of honor in their house. They have a tradition that there's a little section of their Quran that's kind of like the Lord's Prayer to them. It's one of the best known passages in any house where that has been pronounced.

The devil runs away from it because the word of God in their mind is so powerful. They have people who make it their life's task to memorize the entire Quran and recite it. And there's a name for these people.

They're called a Hafiz, H-A-F-I-Z. Which is the Arabic word that means protector. They don't have to understand what it means.

They are just a walking copy of the Quran. They can recite it letter perfect, syllable perfect. A lot of times someone who is blind as a Muslim will make it their goal to become one of these Hafiz and obtain that title.

So we're going to talk about the pillars of Islam. What does it rest on? The Quran is far and away the major foundation. What are the other pillars of Islam? Well, next to Quran in importance and value to Muslims is tradition.

The Arabic word for tradition is Hadith. Does this ring a bell at all? Remember a few months ago there was an incident involving Marines and people getting shot, civilians dying. Do you remember the name of the town? What was the name of the town? Haditha, right? Well, it's a form of this word.

Hadith in Arabic means tradition. And the whole Islamic system of government is based on tradition. And tradition, of course, has its roots in the Quran.

But the tradition goes beyond the Quran in that something that Muhammad did and set an example by is a tradition. And these are derived from the life of Muhammad more than just the words of the Quran. So anything that Muhammad said or did, they think, well, God guided that.

He was completely operated by God in this life. So anything that comes from his life is a valid thing to set as a tradition. So these are divine rules of faith and practice.

And these are called Sunna, S-U-N-N-A. So the Sunna or the Hadith, the traditions, are the second major pillar next in importance to the Quran. Muhammad said in one place in the

Quran, he says, he who loves not my Sunna is not my follower.

He who in distress holds fast to the Sunna will receive the reward of a hundred martyrs. So if you keep not only the Quran, but also these traditions, the example of Muhammad, you get the reward of a hundred martyrs. So if a martyr gets 70 virgins, I guess you get 700 of them.

These have been compiled by later followers of Muhammad. They found as many as 20 to 50 thousand of these examples or these traditions. But then they weeded through and they said, well, some of these are not accurate.

So the actual number of Hadith is more like four to five thousand that they actually follow. Depending on who you listen to, there are 7,275 or there are 4,800. But this is the equivalent.

You remember how you have the Tanakh in Judaism and then you have Talmud, the verbal, the commentary, the Mishnah and so on. Well, this is kind of the Arabic equivalent. The tradition is what goes beyond the Quran and is normative and definitive for faith and practice.

The third pillar of Islam is Ijma, I-J-M-A. This is what the equivalent in the church would be the apostolic guidance or the church fathers for Catholicism. The church fathers are not on a par with scripture, but almost.

If you talk to the Catholics, Augustine is right up there. He's just as close to an apostle as you can get without being one. Well, the Ijma comes from the companions of Muhammad.

There are four systems of Muslim law because Islam is big and there are these big denominations within it. We're going to talk about the Sunni and the Shia and so on. Well, there are four systems of Islamic law that come from the Ijma.

So depending on which of the followers of Muhammad you accept, you end up with one of these. Each of the four great Imams, the Imams, I-M-A-M, are these followers after Muhammad in the early, early days. So all of the Muslims except the Shiite recognize these four great Imams.

We'll talk about why the Shiites don't in a minute, but all the rest of the Muslims say, OK, here's Muhammad, here's the four great Imams. You have these four systems of Islamic law that come from them. Everybody accepts it except the Shiites.

So if you have a judge in the modern day called a Qadi, Q-A-D-I, that judge, if he's going to render a decision in Islamic law, he's got to conform himself to the guidance of the Imams, these four historic guys. The Muftis, M-U-F-T-I, the Muftis are religious leaders who are lower level. They can give legal decisions.

They can give legal guidance, but at a lower level than the judges. They would never render an opinion. And a legal opinion in the Islamic world is called a Fatwa, F-A-T-W-A.

You'll hear some of these words when you study the Middle East and the problems over there

with the Palestinians. And you hear about the Imams and you hear about Fatwa and some of the other terms we'll cover tonight. Well, Fatwa are legal decisions based, going all the way back to this system, this fourfold system of Islamic law that came from these guys right after Muhammad.

So what this means is there is no such thing as change and there's no such thing as progress in the Muslim world. By the way, how do we get from Islam to Muslim? Remember in Hebrew how you can take a word and if you put a main in front of it, it can turn a verb into a noun or it can say that something is from something else. Maim is the preposition that means from.

And so if you have Islam and you put an M in front of it and you get Ma-Islam, it's the same model, it's the same sort of workings as you have in Hebrew. And so you get Muslim, which is really Ma-Islam, from Islam. So anyway, change and progress are impossible in Islam in the legal sense because everything is graven in stone.

You can't do anything that doesn't follow the precedent of this old system. So they can't change with the times. They can't, without breaking with traditional Islam, they can't say, oh, let's adjust and have women's rights.

Let's adjust and have women's education. Let's adjust and have women come in and worship in the same place as the men and so on, because it's graven in stone and it cannot change. And of course, this was the problem with your Taliban types who are ultra conservative and say, we are doing nothing more than sticking with Hadith and Quran and all of this modern modification and softening down is wrong.

And you can see where they get this. So what are our foundations now? Quran, which is the written word, and that's what is worshipped basically is the word of God. Then you have Hadith or Sunnah, which are the traditions based on the examples from the life of Muhammad and the early writings.

Then you have the Ijma, which is the system of law, these legal decisions by the four successors of Muhammad. Those are the most authoritative. Now we have the Qiyas, Q-I-Y-A-S.

Qiyas is the fourth foundation of Islam. It's also called analogy. This is the reasoning of really wise Islamic scholars with regard to the Quran, Hadith and Ijma.

There's a limited amount of deduction and inference that can be brought out of these. The Quran is considered so sacred that only the companions of the prophet, only people, these four successors who actually traveled around with him when he was alive, are qualified to explain the Quran. So nobody goes in and exegetes the Quran.

They don't do observation, interpretation, application out of the Quran. It's forbidden. The only explanation you're going to get is what was made by the first guy.

So this would be like saying, well, you can only go to the Apostle Paul and what he says about

the Old Testament. That's the only legitimate Old Testament interpretation there is. It would be that kind of a thing.

So what people do is they don't try to figure out the Quran. They just try to memorize it. It's good as it stands.

It doesn't need interpretation. It doesn't need expansion. It doesn't need application.

You just memorize it. Don't worry about understanding it. So that's what they do.

They memorize it and they try to master the traditions as well, the Hadith. And so Muslim theology students take a complete course of instruction in grammar, rhetoric, logic, law, and dogmatics before they start studying the science of principles, which is a combination of Quran, tradition, Ijma, and the Qiyas. So Islamic theologians are basically grammarians.

We just want to understand exactly what the Quran says. So this is what our author here, Dr. Anis Shorash says, a good memory, not judgment or analytical thinking is the greatest virtue of a Muslim theologian. You just have to remember what everybody else said.

You don't have to do any analytical thinking. So the word Quran, talking about the reading or the recitation, other names for the Quran are Al-Kitab. Matthew will recognize the consonants in that word.

Al-Kitab, Q-T-B or K-T-B. This, we have a similar word in Hebrew, Kativ or Katav, which means to cut or to write. Kativ, there's a thing in the Hebrew text called Kativ Kere and in Hebrew, this means what is written, what is read.

And so, for example, the name of God is written with consonants, Yod, He, Waw, He, and then it's given the vowel points of Adonai. That's what is written. But what is read is Adonai.

Well, there are many places where there is thought to be a mistake in the text, but the Masoretic scholars did not want to alter the text. So they left the mistake in, but they put a little marker and it's a Kativ marker. And it says, hey, look in the margin.

And so what is written is in the text and what is read is out in the margin. And so they correct the mistakes, not by altering the text, but by annotating the text. So this is Kativ Kere.

Well, Kativ means what is written and Al-Kitab is Arabic for the book or what is written. And that's another popular name for the Koran. And a third respected name for it is Al-Mashaf, which means the handwritten book.

There are 55 different names that Muslims have for the Koran. The actual speaking of these wise sayings by Muhammad lasted about 23 years and passages were noted down by people who heard Muhammad speak. He didn't actually write much of it down at all.

But other people took notes and a lot of people just memorized what he said while he was

traveling around. Well, after his death, many reciters of the Koran were slain. They had this great big battle called the Battle of the Battle of Yamama.

Y-A-M-A-M-A, that's an easy one to remember, the Battle of Yamama. And so a lot of people who knew these Koranic sayings died and they kind of panicked and they said, we're going to lose Muhammad's sayings if a bunch more people die. So people started saying, let's write this stuff down.

And so over the next 40 years or so, they sought out the fragments of the Koran that they could find and they wrote it all down. So the first complete manuscript was compiled 20 years after Muhammad's death. That's the first time you had sort of a complete Koran.

And it was entrusted to the care of Hafasa, one of Muhammad's widows. Many years later, the Caliph Uthman appointed Zayd to make a fresh revision of the work. So he went through and edited it, revised it, updated it, and then they burned every other copy.

So this second revision is the basis for the Koran that you have today. It's written in a kind of rhyming Arabic prose. It has kind of a jingling sound to the Arab ear that they really enjoy.

The Surat al-Fatiha, which is the opening, and this, again, is kind of like the Lord's Prayer or the 23rd Psalm is something every Muslim knows. This is what it says in English. In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Owner of the Day of Judgment, Thee alone we worship, Thee alone we ask for help, show us the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast favored, not the path of those who earn Thine anger, nor of those who go astray.

So it's kind of a Psalm 1, 1 through 6 kind of a thing. Show us the straight path. You're the only one we worship.

Well, those are the foundations. That's where you get your modern religion that's followed by well over a billion people today. The Koran, the tradition, and so forth, the Ijma and the Qiyas.

We'll take our break now. When we come back, we'll see what this all means and how it compares to Christianity.