

Why Study and Read About Islam? Eight Books that Will Make You Think

Since the September 11 tragedy people around the world have been asking the question: What is Islam all about? Is the notorious Osama Bin Laden a true representative of his religion? Why did Muslims celebrate in the streets after the terrorist attacks? How can anyone revel in the vicious murder of thousands of innocent civilians? How do we interpret these brutal Islamic terrorist attacks against the financial and military symbols of the United States?

Many journalists, academics, and politicians continue to call Islam a peace-loving religion. They claim that Bin Laden and his cohorts are an aberration, representing only a tiny fundamentalist fringe, a cancer in an otherwise beautiful religion. President George W. Bush even called Islam "a religion of peace." But is this really accurate? It is one thing to say that there are many peace-loving Muslims and quite another to claim that Islam is a peace-loving religion. We must not be naive about Islam, which is anti-Christian at its very core. It is more resistant to the Gospel than any other religion. At the heart of the differences between Islam and Christianity is the concept of sin, the incarnation and the cross of Jesus Christ. We must recognize that it is trying to create for itself a positive image in the West. Many modern Muslims refrain from force, but militant Islamic fundamentalism is growing not only in the traditional Islamic world but also in the world in general. In fact, even now the most strident fundamentalists are working tirelessly in spreading their version of Islam to the ends of the earth.

Islam is no longer a religion far removed from us. Thousands of Muslims are at our doorsteps. Particularly in Western Europe, the United States, and Canada, Muslims have migrated especially from North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Islam has become second only to Christianity in numbers and influence in these countries. In the United States there are estimates of more than five million Muslims. In fact, this country has presently more Muslims than Methodists. In its inner cities there are many African-Americans who have turned from Christianity to Islam. Hundreds of mosques and Islamic Centers dot its landscape. Islamic study programs abound in universities and colleges. Harvard University received a five million-dollar grant from Saudi Arabia to start a center for Islamic studies. Muslim associations seek to gain recognition in American society for observance of their religious holidays in schools.

It is important for Christians to get to know as much as we can about Islam. A basic understanding about the history of Islam and its various factions will be of great help. It is also important for us to understand the impact of American policy on Christian-Muslim relations. The Palestinian question is for the Muslim more than a political-military problem-it is a religious one! Who will control the "holy sites" in Jerusalem?

We must also realize not all Muslims are alike in faith and practice. The Islam world is rich in diversity. For example, Muslims have little argument with the official teaching of Islam. All Muslims believe that faith and life, and faith and politics cannot be separated.

Islam, therefore, by its very nature cannot be pluralistic. But many Muslims find a solution for their personal and local needs within another world view: that of folk (popular) Islam.

So why should we study about Islam? I believe we need to learn about this religion because God may have given us an unprecedented opportunity to reach out to our Muslim neighbors and fellow citizens with the Gospel. Many Islamic governments make it very difficult for missionary outreach. In the West we still have the freedom to witness to the Gospel. Some may say: "Mission work among the Muslims is a tough assignment. Why evangelize? Many Muslims are sincere in their faith." But sincerity and truth are not the same. Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). He has commanded the Church to spread the Gospel throughout the earth (Matt 25:19-20). And how can the Muslims believe in the Lord if no one brings the Gospel to them? (Rom 10:14f.)

Some valuable tools for seeking to understand the relationship between Islam and Christianity, and how to communicate the Gospel of peace to Muslims, are the following works:

Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross

by Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb

Baker Books, 1993

336 pages; Softcover; \$28.99 Can.

This book is an in-depth, lucid, theological analysis of formal Islam and its practices from an evangelical Christian point of view. The authors use primary Muslim sources, such as the Koran and the traditions, and Islamic commentators to explain the Islamic doctrines as clearly and correctly as possible. The appendixes comprise a discussion of Islam sects and movements, Muslim religious practices, the Gospel of Barnabas (a bestseller in Muslim countries), and popular accusations against the New Testament. A helpful glossary of Islamic terms is also included. This is the best book for an in-depth understanding of Islam, but it is a book that takes effort.

Reaching Muslims for Christ

by William J. Saal Moody Press, 1993 223 pages;

Softcover; \$16.39 Can.

Saal's book is not a detailed theological analysis of formal Islam, but a collection of outlines and observations gleaned from men and women who actually ministered to Muslims. He provides the reader with a brief sketch of the history of Islam, compares Islamic doctrines with the Christian faith, and provides Biblical doctrinal details needed to communicate the Gospel to Muslims. He points out that we must pay attention to Islam's language. For example, words such as sin and prayer, which are so important to Christians, are also important in Islamic teaching, but with differences in meaning. Saal's intent is to equip the reader with tools to listen carefully to Muslims and to respond to them with the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. A very readable book, this is a good one for evangelism.

The Facts on Islam
by John Ankerberg and John Weldon
Harvest House Publishers, 1998
44 pages; Softcover; \$5.75 Can.

This booklet is a thumbnail sketch of the origins, faith and practices of Islam. It also provides a general critique of the Koran, and shows the accuracy of the New Testament. Although it is a quick introduction to a complex subject, readers should take note that the authors are pre-millennialists. It's a good book if you want to learn only the basic facts, but it's not useful for evangelism.

The Bible and Islam: Sharing God's Word with a Muslim: A Basic Guide
by Bassam Michael Madany The Back to God Hour, 1987 115 pages;
Softcover; \$10 Can

Rev. Bassam M. Madany, retired pioneer radio pastor for the Arabic *Back to God Hour* Broadcast, is well known for his relevant Biblical approach in reaching the hearts and minds of Muslims. Although retired, he is still active through his writings, speaking engagements, and web site materials. His slender book has been translated into various languages and has been greatly used by the Lord in helping Christians to grasp what is at the heart of the clash between Islam and Christianity. He points out that the greatest difference between the two religions is the doctrine of man. According to Islam, human beings are not sinful in the sense of having inherited a powerful inclination to sin, rather they are inherently good. They are basically a decent lot. Since Islam does not believe in original sin nor recognize a general or radical corruption of human nature, Muslims don't see the need for the Savior and redemption. Islam is a religion of law and works. Anyone who teaches a course on Islam in church or school should use Madany's booklet. His thoroughly Biblical confessional approach provides profound insights and useful evangelism tools. A very readable book.

Muslims and Christians at the Table:
Promoting Biblical Understanding Among North American Muslims
by Bruce A. McDowell and Anees Zaka
P&R Publishing, 1999
326 pages; Softcover; \$23.50 Can.

This book is co-written by the Missions Pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and the president of the Biblical Institute for Islamic Studies. A practical guide for evangelism among North America Muslims, it is divided into four parts, packed with information, and clearly written. First the authors describe the growth of Islam in North America, focusing on the Black Muslim Movement, Sufism (the mystical tradition in Islam), and the goals of the Muslim community. Second, they explain the historical and cultural background of Islam. Third, they show the radical difference between Islam and Christianity. Fourth, the authors provide a theological basis for Muslim evangelism. They teach how to witness to Muslims more effectively. Guidelines are given for friendship evangelism and studying the Bible with them. This is the best book for evangelizing specifically to North American Muslims.

What You Need to Know About Islam & Muslims

by George W Braswell Jr.
Broadman & Holman Publisher's, 2000
183 pages; Softcover; \$15.99 can.

Braswell, Professor of Missions and World Religions at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, lived in Iran for seven years and observed Islam first hand. His excellent, informative, and clearly written book provides primary information about Islam, including folk-Islam and a detailed chapter on Muslims in the United States. He analyses Islam's challenges to the western world and the Christian faith, and the reasons for the sharp differences between these two world religions. He points out that Christians must be unyielding in their "un-acceptance of Muhammad as the last prophet and of the Quran as the final revelation of God." He also incorporates a glossary of special terms, maps of worldwide Islamic expansion, and a helpful bibliography for further study. Another very readable book, it provides an up to date overview of the history of Islam and its doctrines.

The Unseen Face of Islam: Sharing the Gospel with ordinary Muslims
by Bill A. Musk, Marc
Evangelical Missionary Alliance, 1992 315 pages;
Softcover; \$17.95 US

Most current books on Islam focus on its formal faith and practices. They don't take into account the beliefs and practices of ordinary Muslims. For many Muslims in the Middle and Far East, Islam is a veneer which covers ancient animistic beliefs. In his careful, well-documented and organized book (which for best effect should be read alongside a book on formal Islam) Dr. Bill Musk exposes the powerful mixture of Islam and occult practices found throughout the Muslim world. At first sight the world of folk or popular Islam is a strange one in the eyes of the West. It is a world full of all kinds of "beings" and "powers." Musk writes about the mysterious Evil Eye, saints and festivals. He shows why Muslims in folk-Islam live in constant fear of the unknown, fears of evil spirits, and feel helpless in crisis, and in sickness. To get his point across, he uses short stories based on actual experiences while serving as a missionary in the Middle East and with the Episcopal Church in Egypt. By reading Musk's book not only a greater understanding is gained of Islam as it is practiced by millions of Muslims, it also encourages the reader to pray meaningfully for the millions of followers of Muhammad living in spiritual bondage and fear. This book is an eye opener and a must read for anyone who wants to understand the thinking of the average Muslim in your neighborhood.

Ministry to Muslim Women: Longing to Call Them Sisters
edited by Fran Love and Jeleta Eekheart
William Carey Library, 2000.
268 pages; Softcover; \$17.99 US

In 1999 a Consultation on Ministry to Muslim Women was held in Mesa, Arizona. This book is a slightly edited compilation of its sessions. All the contributors were or are active in ministries among Muslims. The questions following each chapter are intended to stimulate discussions on the difficult ministry among women in male

dominated Muslim societies. Islam has a low view of women. It teaches that women ensnare men, incite them to lust, and distract them from reason and righteousness. A woman's testimony is worth only half a man's testimony. And her relationship with Allah is shaky. Debi Bartlotti shows how the needs of men and children always come before those of women. She writes about her experiences in Afghanistan. She saw firsthand the pain, the fear, the loneliness, poverty, and despair felt by the displaced Muslim women under the Taliban regime.

Amal notes that the majority of Muslim women live in developing countries, areas of conflict, war zones, or countries prone to catastrophic natural disasters. Furthermore, the overwhelming masses of Muslims live in abject poverty. She also mentions that it is especially important for Christians to recognize the expressed concern of women in Muslim society about their struggle with the lack of forgiveness in the family and society. Furthermore, women often turn to occult practitioners; a practice not approved by orthodox Islam. Miriam Adeney observes: 'As for religion, many Muslim women know little about Islamic doctrines and theology. They resort to folk religion, shrines, sacrifices, amulets, divination, and spirit possession as often as they turn to Muslim institutions. Others are well grounded in the teachings of the faith. Some belong to radical fundamentalist sisterhoods. For others, political activism in solidarity with other Muslims or co-nationalists is what counts, rather than religious activism.'

Ministry to Muslim Women offers not only an excellent insight into a world of which so little is known by the West, it also provides constructive ideas on how Christian women can reach Muslim women with the saving Gospel of Jesus and minister to and pray for them.

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