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Précis Islam

Islam is a religion founded by Muhammed (570-622 A.D) in Arabia which is modern day Saudi Arabia. After marrying at age 25, Mohammed spent 15 years in preparation for his ministry. Islamic tradition teaches that while Mohammed was meditating in a cave near Mecca approximately 610 A.D., he was greeted with the voice of the angel Gabriel. At first Mohammed was unsure of the legitimacy of this encounter, but with the encouragement of his wife, and with additional revelations, he became convinced of their genuineness. These additional revelations took place over a period of approximately 23 years.

The message of Islam was initially met with so much derision that Mohammed's followers were "beat with sticks" and "thrown into prison" (Smith, 228). However, as time went on the message of Islam was slowly accepted. The emphasis of the entire revelation given to Mohammed can be summed up in what Muslims call the Shahadah which states, "There is no God but the God, and Mohammed is His messenger." (Smith, 244). The Shahadah is so important, that at some point in the life of a Muslim, he or she must recite it, "slowly, correctly and with conviction" (Smith, 244). The God that Mohammed referred to is called Allah which means "the God" (Smith, 222).

The revelations given to Mohammed are recorded in what is known as Islam's bible, namely the Koran. The Koran is roughly 4/5's the length of the New Testament. Islam attempts to build off the previous revelations of Allah as the Koran mentions the Pentateuch, the Psalms and the Gospels as all coming from Allah. However, the Koran supersedes the present Bible as Islam believes the message to Christians and Jews has been corrupted. The content in the Koran is divided into Surahs which are the equivalent of chapters in the Bible, and they are arranged in order from the longest to the shortest. The Koran emphasizes doing good deeds more so than it does doctrinal knowledge about Allah.

Islam is known for its Five Pillars. The first pillar as mentioned above is the recitation of the Shahadah. The second pillar is praying five times a day. The five times for prayer are upon rising, when the sun reaches its zenith, its mid-decline, sunset, and lastly before retiring for the night. A muezzin calls

Muslims to prayer. The third pillar (zakat) commands giving alms to the poor. This giving must be 1/40th of all Muslims possess. Fasting during the month of Ramadan is the fourth pillar. The fifth pillar requires all able-bodied Muslims who also have the financial means to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

At the end of Muhammed's life, he did not handpick a successor and this ultimately led to three major divisions within Islam, these groups are known as the Sunnis (traditionalists), the Shiites (backers of Muhammed's son-in-law Ali) and the mystic sect called the Sufis. Of these three groups, the largest is the Sunnis.

Islam would agree with Judaism and Christianity in terms of embracing monotheism, a day of judgment, heaven, hell, angels and demons. However, it rejects Christianity's beliefs in the Triune nature of God, and the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Concerning Jesus, Islam believes He was born of a virgin, was the sinless Messiah, and Muslims accept all His miracles "except for Jesus' resurrection" (McDermott, 110). The crucifixion of Jesus is rejected in Islam as it teaches Allah raised Jesus to Himself. According to Islam, Jesus was *just* a prophet, while Mohammed is called the, "Seal of the Prophets" (Samples, 161). In terms of eschatology, Islam teaches Jesus will return and then turn the "world back to the original teaching of Abraham-Islam" (McDermott, 111). Salvation in Islam requires one must believe in Allah and submit to Him by obeying His messenger.

Besides the Koran, the other authoritative writings of Islam are the *Hadith* which is a collection of what Mohammed said and *did*, and a biography of Mohammed written approximately 150 years after his death. The influence of Islam on societies that officially embrace it gives evidence it, "is the most socially explicit of the Semitic religions" (Smith, 249). In Islamic countries Islam is much more than a religion as its doctrines encompass and affect all of civilization. For example, Islam deals with such subjects as economics, the status of women, race relations and the use of force to name a few. In the West, religion tends to be viewed as solely personal. This is not the case in Islamic countries. Imams lead services per the Qur'an Surah 62:9, on Fridays in a mosque which literally means, "the place of prostration" (Samples, 172).