

Islam FOR DUMMIES



Islam: in a nutshell

"Islam" is the Arabic word meaning 'submission'. It started with the prophet Mohammed from Mecca and follows the Quran (Koran) holy book. Committed Muslims fit into two main categories:

Classical Islamists – follow the exact example of Mohammed; beyond the Quran they follow a system of laws and rules called "sharia" law

Moderate Muslims – seek to discover principles applicable to modern life

Life of Prophet Mohammed (AD570 – 632)

Mohammed was born in Mecca (Arabia), and at a young age became an orphan. He worked as a businessman for a widow, whom he later married. Every month, he would go into the wilderness to pray and fast and in 612 he was called by an angel to be a 'Prophet'. Mohammed's message was simple: there is only one God who demands worship to Him alone and expects justice and honesty in life, because a judgment day awaits. Mohammed fled to Medina to escape persecution, where he managed to unite conflicting tribes. After eight years of fighting, his followers conquered Mecca and by the time of his death, most of Arabia had converted to Islam.

Practice, Practice, Practice: "Five Pillars"

1. Declaration of faith: there's one God and Mohammed is His Messenger
2. Daily prayer: five times a day; together at the mosque on Fridays
3. Tax for the poor: 2.5% for the underprivileged and the spread of Islam
4. The fast of Ramadan during daylight hours: month-long commemoration of the Quran
5. Pilgrimage to Mecca: journey to the birthplace of the Prophet; believed to wash away past sins

Some say 'jihad' is the sixth pillar because it is the duty of all Muslims to seek to spread Islam and the rule of Islam.

Today, almost all Muslims believe violence is not permissible to spread Islam.

Types – or "denominations" of Islam

While there are differences in teaching and minor differences in practice, the division is basically political:

1. **Sunni** – majority of 'traditional' Islam (85% of the world's Muslims)
2. **Shi'ite** – dedicated to Mohammed's family
3. **Sufi** – mystical branch of Islam

Connection and Distinction with Christianity

- ✓ Muslims and Christians both believe in one God, however Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet like Mohammed, not the Son of God
- ✓ Muslims believe in the prophets, including Moses, Abraham and Jesus, but they believe these prophets preached Islam
- ✓ Muslims give respect to some Christian holy books: the Torah (first five books of the Bible) the Jabbour (Psalms) and the Injil (the Gospels). Most believe the books have been changed from an original Islam focus and are therefore untrustworthy and not worth reading
- ✓ Historically, the Islamic perspective on Christians is that they:
 - lead 'unclean' lives in terms of diet and personal hygiene, because Christianity gives principles for behaviour rather than laws, leaving too much room for error
 - are sexually immoral, primarily because of how life in 'Christian' countries is portrayed by the media
 - worship three Gods: Father, Son, and Mother Mary

Snappy Stats

Second largest religion in the world with 1.3 billion believers, making up 22% of the world's population.

Australia's Muslim population is over 300,000, having more than doubled in the past twenty years.

Islam is growing faster than Christianity by biological growth and slower by conversion, but overall exceeds the growth of Christianity. There's dramatic growth of Islam in Europe and Australia, where Christian numbers are shrinking and Muslim immigration and evangelism are very active.