

Abraham and Islam

Father Abraham – Part VIII

Romans 4:20-21

The History of Islam

In the sixth century—AD 570, to be exact—a little boy was born in the city of Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula. Even though he was distantly related to the Arab royal family Hashim, the particular branch of the family into which he had been born was poverty-stricken. The newborn boy was named Muhammad. After both of his parents died during his early years, he was shuttled between relatives until a poor uncle took him in.

According to Muhammad’s biographers, he was a normal Arab boy who enjoyed talking with the travelers in caravans and exploring desert caves. The only thing that was unusual about his childhood was that he began to experience religious visitations. Muhammad’s mother Aminah had often claimed to have visions and paranormal experiences as well. She was involved in what we would call today the occult arts.

At the age of forty, Muhammad claimed to once again have a heavenly “visitation from the angel Gabriel.” He would declare from that experience that he had been chosen by Allah as the next prophet and apostle.

His choice of the words *prophet* and *apostle* is interesting. As one author pointed out, there was no tradition of prophets or apostles in Arabian religion. The term *prophet* was more than likely used in the hope that the Jewish people would accept Muhammad as their next prophet, and *apostle* was probably used in the hope of persuading Christians to follow him as well.

Muhammad said that Gabriel had visited him and placed on him the prophetic mantle. This, he maintained, inspired him with God’s newest revelation, summarized and recorded in the *Hadith* and the *Quran*.

Unholy War

At first Muhammad preached to the Jewish people that he was God’s newest prophet in the line of Abraham and Jesus. It is interesting to note that when Muhammad began his rise as a tribal leader and

self-proclaimed prophet, he adopted many Jewish customs. These included their dietary laws, the observance of Saturday Sabbath, and praying toward Jerusalem. In addition to this, he praised the Old Testament scriptures, and in the *Quran* he referred to the Jews as “people of the book.”

When it became obvious that the Jewish merchants were not going to become his disciples, Muhammad decided to drop all observances of Jewish rituals, according to historians and the evidences of the actions that followed his decision. He changed the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca, threw off the Saturday Sabbath, and adopted the religious rites in which he had been raised.

Ultimately, he began to war against the Jews, pillaging their villages and plundering their homes. It is interesting that the response to comments made by the late Jerry Falwell and Franklin Graham regarding Muhammad were not only condemned by Islamic nations, but were followed by death threats on the two men.

The truth of these accusations, however, is a matter of public record. The *Quran* and the *Hadith* support such conclusions, as well as secular texts such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Western historians and even Muslim scholars attested to the fact that Muhammad gained power and prestige by plundering and by killing Jews.

It is a well-documented fact that after one Jewish town surrendered, seven hundred men were beheaded in one day and the women and children were sold into slavery. It is also true, according to sacred Muslim writings, that Muhammad married a young girl (among others) and consummated the marriage when she was only nine years old.

Moonstruck

As Muhammad’s power and tribal leadership grew in Mecca and Medina, so did his religious views. These views were nothing more than a combination of Jewish tradition and the Bible, mixed with the well-known worship of the moon god Sin.

Sin was considered by the Arabs to be the supreme deity among all other gods. It is interesting

that when the Israelites frequently fell into idolatry in the Old Testament, one of the forms of idol worship was the moon god.

According to numerous inscriptions discovered in North and South Arabia dating back to the time of Muhammad and even to centuries earlier, the Arab name for the moon god was Sin, but his title was *al-ilah*, meaning “the deity.” Before Muhammad was even born, the moon god came to be known by his title Ilah rather than his name—and we know it today as Allah.

Years before Muhammad’s birth, Arabs often named their children Allah in honor of their most powerful deity. Allah worship was the ancient middle-eastern astral worship of the sun, moon, and stars. For this reason, it—as well as the astral worship of Baal—was condemned in the Old Testament.

Muhammad took one of his fellow Arabs’ many gods and began to teach that Allah was not only the greatest god but the *only* god. This aspect of monotheism became part of his teaching—teaching that became known as Islam. Unbelieving Arabs could still believe in the moon god Allah. Jews and Christians could also be told that Allah was their one true God.

One author summarized:

Islam was Muhammad’s repackaging of the ancient moon god worship. Modern Islam still uses the symbols, the rites, the ceremonies, and even the name of its god which came from the ancient religion of the moon god, Allah.

The symbol of this worship, by the way, is the crescent moon. It is the sliver of the moon which is visible to the human eye during a particular phase.

Is it any surprise that the symbol of Islam is the crescent moon? It sits atop their mosques. It is on the flags of Islamic nations. One of the holiest periods for Muslims (Ramadan) is the ninth lunar month, and it involves fasting and praying for thirty days. It begins and ends with the appearance of the crescent moon in the sky.

A Contrary Gospel

At the very outset of this study, you need to know that Allah is not Elohim, the one true God of the Bible. Just as Joseph Smith (the founder of Mormonism) said an angel came to him and gave him a revelation and an honored calling as a prophet of God, an angel also came and delivered to Muhammad

a new revelation and the honor of being the next in line of God’s prophets.

I personally do not doubt that angelic visions or apparitions were a part of either experience. Both of these men led millions of people to deny the deity of Jesus Christ. I can only quote the warning Paul gave when he wrote in Galatians 1:8-9:

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

So, what exactly is Islam? The word which originally denoted heroism, especially in the context of a willingness to die in battle, slowly developed and changed into “submission or surrender”—but submission and surrender for whom?

Islam Today

Just how attractive is Islam in the world today? How compelling is this amalgamation of Jewish tradition, biblical teachings and Christian beliefs that are mixed with Arabic culture, worship rituals, and ceremonies of the moon god Allah?

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, the most reliable current estimate placing the number at one and one-half billion adherents. In England there are more practicing Muslims than evangelical Christians. Funded by the vast resources of Arab oil money, Muslims are buying abandoned Anglican churches and turning them into mosques. This is occurring at such a rate that some Muslims claim that England will be the first European Muslim country. I read recently that the legal situation has reached the point where the English Parliament has been forced to rule that Muslims do not have to observe English Common Law in the matter of divorce; they can follow Islamic Sharia Law instead.

What is the status of Islam in America? No one knows for sure, but estimates of the number of Muslims in North America range from a little over one million adults to seven million adults and children, with five to seven million of them in the United States.

A Muslim mosque or worship center is completed nearly every month, numbering nearly 2000. There are already more than five hundred Islamic centers in the United States. They are similar to the one in Washington, D.C., that opens its doors

to curious people daily so they may come in and be kindly taught the philosophy, art, and culture of Islam.

The internet is home to multiple sites for theologically motivated Western converts to Islam to express their views, and it's the source of information for non-Muslims seeking a knowledge and understanding of Islam.

Technically speaking, Islam does not claim to be a new religion formulated by the prophet Muhammad. Instead, it claims to be a "continuation of all former religious principles decreed by God through His revelations to all prophets."

The list of Islamic prophets includes Jesus Christ, according to Muhammad and the *Quran*. Muslims revere Jesus as a true prophet of God, but nothing more. Just as Mormonism does not do away with Christ but rewrites who He is, so Islam does the same, as we shall see.

Abraham: Father of All

I believe it is impossible to teach on the life of Abraham without exposing other religions that view Abraham as the father of their faith, especially:

- given the rise of Islam today;
- given that the name Allah is recognized now more than ever before;
- given that Muslims now intersect our lives in the Western world every day.

And my job description, according to the Scriptures, is to not only teach the Word, but to expose and warn of the error of false doctrine in the world.

Jude warned the believers in verses three and four of his epistle:

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus (both young pastors) in Titus 1:13b-16 to

[R]eprove them severely so that they may . . . not pay attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from

the truth. . . [men who] profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

Several times Paul wrote to warn the believers of false teachers and false teaching. In fact, entire letters from Paul were written to expose and challenge the heresy of those who ultimately denied the grace of God and the divine cross work of Christ.

So, just how important is Abraham in all of this?

You need to know that Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike claim Abraham as their founder and spiritual father.

- Muslims believe they are related to Abraham as descendants of Ishmael. Every one of the five prayers that Muslims pray during the day end with a reference to Abraham. Yassar Arafat's liaison for religious dialogue emphatically stated that Abraham belonged only to the Muslims.
- Jews believe they are related to Abraham as descendants of Isaac and as the keepers of the covenant.
- Christians are clearly taught that they are the true sons and daughters of Abraham, being related to Abraham by virtue of their faith in Abraham's God.

Paul wrote in Romans 4:11 that Abraham is

the father of all who believe . . .

So, who is right?

I will address this issue from the Islamic claim to Abraham.

Abraham and Islam

One tenet of Islam includes the belief that the very first Muslim was none other than Abraham. Muslims look to Abraham as their spiritual father.

Why? Because Abraham surrendered to God; Abraham submitted to God, thus Abraham displayed the very meaning of Islam, which is to surrender to God's will. In fact, the Arabic noun form of the verb "to surrender" is the word Islam.

In researching Islam and reading an entire book on the life and teachings of Muhammad, I found that dozens of times in the *Quran* he told his followers to check his teaching with the Old and New Testament scriptures to see if he was, indeed, telling the truth. If they had evaluated the two inspired works of Muhammad's teaching (the *Hadith* and the *Quran*) as

he claimed they could, Islam would have died in the seventh century, along with Muhammad.

Muhammad had only a general sense of the stories of the Bible, and he taught them incorrectly. He totally mixed up characters and historical timelines. For example, he taught:

- that the flood occurred during the days of Moses;
- that Pharaoh's wife (instead of his daughter) adopted Moses;
- that Nimrod threw Abraham into a fiery furnace, where he was unharmed by the flames—even though Nimrod lived centuries before Abraham;
- that Moses' sister, Miriam (instead of Mary) was the mother of Jesus;
- that Jesus was born under a palm tree instead of in a stable;
- that Jesus was not crucified but that Judas was mistaken for Jesus and crucified in His place, while Jesus was taken up to heaven.

Obviously this was not only a distortion of the Scripture that Mohammad claimed to agree with but was effectively the eradication of the Gospel and redemption by faith in the sacrificial atoning death, burial, and literal physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Islam is not just another word for the worship of God—Muslims have a different god entirely.

Abraham and Christianity

I think it is ironic that as Paul began to discuss this key figure Abraham in biblical history, he asked in Romans 4:3,

[W]hat does the Scripture say? . . .

So, what does the Scripture say?

The Revelation of God to Abraham

This is the revelation of God to Abraham in Romans 4:20a:

[W]ith respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief. . .

Now wait a second. What was the promise again?

Paul clarifies it in Galatians 3:16. This is a verse that was as important to that generation as John 3:16 is to our present one. Galatians 3:16 delivers this stunning announcement to the Jewish people and to the Muslim people of the world:

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many [people], but rather to one [descendant], "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

In other words, "Here is the promise, Abraham: from you will come the Messiah!"

Earlier in Galatians 3:7-9, Paul spoke these incredible words,

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you." So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the . . .

Who?

- Abraham, the Jew? *No!*
- Abraham, the Gentile? *No!*
- Abraham, the Muslim? *No!*
- Abraham, the . . . *believer!*

And, that promise came true! The Redeemer would be born with Jewish and Gentile blood coursing through His veins; the descendant of Abraham; the descendant of Ruth and Bathsheba; the descendant of David and Boaz; the One promised to Abraham who would come and be a blessing to all the nations of the world. And yes, one day people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will worship the Lamb who sits on the throne—He, the promised seed, Jesus Christ, God the Son, deity robed in flesh—and give Him all praise and honor and glory and blessing!

The Response of Abraham to God

Now having seen the revelation from God to Abraham, notice the response of Abraham to God in Romans 4:20b,

[Abraham] grew strong in faith, giving glory to God

Abraham had two responses. The first was that he grew in faith.

There are at least three kinds of biblical faith.

1. **Decisive or saving faith**

Saving faith is a transaction that occurs once for all time in a person's life when they ask Jesus Christ to become their personal Savior and make them a child of God. Once that

faith is acted upon, the issue of salvation is settled forever.

2. **Doctrinal faith**

The word *faith* is used in the New Testament to refer to a body of truth or doctrine. As we read earlier, Jude told believers to contend for—to defend—the faith.

3. **Daily faith**

This is total reliance and submission to our Lord for the events of each day. Paul said in II Corinthians 5:7, “for we walk by faith, not by sight.” In Ephesians 6:16 he told the believers to take up the shield of faith in the daily struggle against the evil one and temptation. Then, in Acts 14:22 he encouraged the believers to “continue in the faith.” This is not a reference to losing salvation. Decisive faith is different from doctrinal faith and daily faith.

Abraham grew in his daily faith in the promise of God.

Abraham’s second response is given in Romans 4:20*b*. Abraham not only grew in faith, but he was *giving glory to God*.

That is another way of saying that Abraham was thanking God in advance for what God promised to do.

How many of us have ever thanked God in advance for keeping His promises to us?! How many of us have ever started the day by saying, “Lord, I want to say ahead of time that whatever happens today, You have promised that everything is going to work out for my good so that I might be conformed just a little more into the image and likeness of Christ. So, in light of that promise, I want to thank You in advance for whatever will happen today”?

That was the revelation from God to Abraham and the response of Abraham to God.

A Christian’s Response to Islam

We have talked about the revelation from God to Abraham and the response of Abraham to God, but what about the response of Christians to Islam? There is a three-fold response in the form of three key words:

1. **Respect**

As with any religion we encounter, there should be respect for the persons involved; care and compassion should motivate us to show love for them as individuals. They are not the enemy;

they are our mission field. If you happen to work with or live near Muslims, invest the time to listen to and acknowledge them with respect.

2. **Recognition**

While you respect them as individuals even though you disagree with them, at the same time you need to recognize (and help *them* to recognize) that the *Quran* disagrees time after time with the Bible. They need to know that Allah is not Jehovah. Even though the religion of Islam worships only one god, that god is not the one true and living God who introduced Himself in Genesis 1 as Elohim.

The Jesus of the *Quran* is not the Jesus of the Bible. According to the *Quran*, as taught by Muhammad, Jesus was not the only Son of God, Jesus did not die for our sins; Jesus was not divine, only human; Jesus Christ did not come from heaven to save the lost.

3. **Rededication**

When you discover the passion and zeal of a Muslim for his religion and his god, it should challenge your own faith and commitment to the true God of Abraham.

Practicing Christian Rededication

Examine your own commitment to the truth.

- **Prayer:** No matter where Muslims are, they pray five times a day. How often do you pray? Missionaries to Muslims in Africa gave me a Muslim prayer mat, which I have often rolled out on my study floor and knelt to pray to Yahweh. I am so convicted by my lack of prayer when compared to the Muslim who will unroll his prayer mat five times a day, face Mecca, and pray to the moon god.
- **Fasting:** This is part of the Muslim’s religious observance. When have you ever skipped a meal in order to pray and focus on your Lord and His Word?
- **Dress guidelines:** Standards of dress among Muslim women are more than modest. In fact, they are seventh-century customs that are being imposed in a twenty-first century world. Nevertheless, this is in great contrast to the women of the western, Christianized world. Is your clothing honoring to the God of the Bible?

- **Passion for the reputation of our Lord:** Muslims revere the name of Allah. Everywhere they go their greeting of “Allah is great!” is broadcast. How often do you talk to others about your living Lord?
- **Passion to sing to our Lord:** With fervor, Muslims chant their songs to Allah. How do we sing to our triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?!

The Great Divide

In spite of their zeal and passion, Islam is a worldwide religion that gives its followers no assurance of heaven—none. The Muslim martyr—one who dies in a jihad (a holy war against the enemies of Allah)—is guaranteed that he will go to Paradise.

Surely the great prophet Muhammad was certain of Paradise. But no! Even Muhammad said, “Although I am an apostle of Allah, I do not know what Allah will do to me.”

The religion of Islam provides no assurance to Muslims that they will go to heaven.

Did you notice what God’s promise in Romans 4:21 did for Abraham?

[A]nd being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

Dear friend, Abraham does not belong to the Muslim or the Jew or any denomination or nationality. He belongs, as the Scriptures have taught us, to those who place their faith in the promised Redeemer.

John Ashcroft, former Attorney General of the United States, was quoted by Cal Thomas, a Christian journalist, in summarizing the key difference between Islam and Christianity. I believe this says it all:

Islam is a religion where you send your son to die for God; Christianity is a faith where God sent His Son to die for you.

This manuscript includes extensive quotes, adaptations and references from the following resources:

Robert Morey, The Islamic Invasion (Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House Publishers, 1992).

Don Richardson, In Their Hearts, (Ventura, CA, Regal Books, 1981).

Frank S. Mead, Handbook of Denominations, (Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press, 1980).

Time, (Sept. 30, 2002).