

## A Christian's Guide to the Koran. Lesson 1 : **The Koran and Islam, some facts**

### **The book itself**

The word Koran (I will use this anglicized spelling throughout) means "a reading". The sayings that reportedly came to the prophet Muhammad were meant to be read aloud, recited. The book is divided simply into a long series of chapters, known as "suras", 114 to be exact. There are no other "books" within the book. The term sura carries with it the idea of a series. Within the sura is a series of what we would call verses, but which in the Koran are "ayahs". Islam teaches that even the verse arrangement was ordered by Gabriel, the angel who supervised all.

### **Its popularity and size**

As to its worldwide popularity over the years, the Koran is the third best seller of all times. Over 800 million copies have gone out, as compared to 900 million of Chairman Mao's *Quotations*, and 5-6 billion copies of the Bible. For further comparison, consider the Book of Mormon at 120 million.

It is roughly 4/5 the size of the Christian New Testament. That's like starting at Matthew and ending at Hebrews.

### **Its style and content**

Its style is semi-poetic, forced throughout even in sections that would not normally demand a poetic adaptation. But to the Muslim, especially a devoted one, the Koran is the very essence of style and language.

Those who know the book well have further identified and classified content based on the location of Muhammad when uttered. There is an identifiable "Meccan" period, before A.D. 622, when he was a powerful leader in Arabia. The suras tend to be non-threatening in this period. At the other extreme, Muhammad is the despised preacher of Medina, to which he has run for cover. Under severe threats, he lashes out in suras that show us what Islam can be, and many want it to be, in our age. The heart of Muhammad is exposed. His religion turns out to be very human after all. One cannot help but think of the "gods" of the ancients who behaved incredibly like men.

The Speaker within the text is nearly always God. The Royal "We" is used, and the command for Muhammad to "Say" whatever it is that follows. The angelic Messenger behind the revelations is referred to as the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, or Gabriel.

### **Changes from Bible truths and facts**

There are obvious changes in the Bible stories quoted by the writer. Those who do not believe this was God's revelation have proved that Muhammad used Jewish and apocryphal New Testament sources throughout, except where there were simply mistakes, which of course cannot be conceived by a true Muslim.

### **Islamic thought**

The sources of Islamic thought are the Koran (first and foremost), the Hadiths or sayings and actions of Muhammad, and the words and lives of the so-called "Companions", that is, those who knew and shared the life of Muhammad.

In addition, 25 men are listed as prophets of Islam. 21 are from the Bible, and are as follows: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Aaron, Ezekiel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Zechariah, John the Baptist, Jesus.

Another important Islamic list is the so-called books of God. Many are listed, five in particular are hailed, but only the Koran exists today, per the Muslim.

The other four books are the Scrolls of Abraham, the Law of Moses (Torah), the Psalms of David, and the Gospel of Jesus. In every case, the titles given do not match the corresponding parts of the Judaeo-Christian Holy Books, but instead refer to a supposed *original* text that told truth in its pristine form, then was corrupted by.... well, we don't know whom or how, but definitely corrupted, says Islam in unison, and the resultant corruption is our current Bible. All of this corruption, per Islam, was the reason Muhammad had to come, to set everyone straight about the truth.

I know, that's quite a stretch, but it is Islamic belief.

### **The Islamic population (per Wikipedia)**

In 2009 it was found that there are 1.57 billion Muslims in the world, nearly one fourth of Earth's population. 48 of the 232 countries have a Muslim majority. Most live in Africa and Asia, with 62% in Asia alone. Anywhere from 30 to 60 million Muslims live in Communist China. 2-3 million reside in Europe, and over twice that many in America.

### **Islam's "denominations" (per Wikipedia)**

80% to 90% of Muslims belong to the Sunni branch, which follows the Koran and many "hadiths" or sayings and doings of Muhammad, referred to collectively as "Sunnah." Sunnis are further divided into four schools of thought, all in varying degrees accepting of one another, including the ultra orthodox Salafi, or as opponents call them, the Wahhabi. From this latter group comes much of the literal interpretation of Islam, and calls for violence and holy war. Saudi Arabia is governed by Wahhabi thought. To believe the Koran literally is to be a believer in violence.

10% to 20% of Muslims are of the Shia persuasion, differing mainly in their conception of the succession of caliphs, and the use of certain of the "hadith" literature. Though strife between the two can become quite intense, much of the core belief is the same, as the Koran tends to unify them. Several groups subdivide within the Shia.

The Sufi are a minority group of Muslims whose main thrust is the spirit and the inner man. Some Sufi actually are Sunni or Shia, some refuse either name.

And as in Christianity, there are a host of other small sects and divisions that spin off from all of the above.