What do all these countries have in common?
* Sudan * Egypt * Libya * Algeria * Morocco * Somalia
* Sahara * Saudi Arabia * Oman * North Yemen * South Yemen
* Mauritania * Burkina Faso * Mali * Niger * Qatar
* Syria * Iraq * Iran * Afghanistan * Pakistan
* Turkey * Jordan

The answer: Each nation has a Muslim population of at least 50%. Most of them would be over the 90% figure. The largest bloc of unreached people as far as the Gospel is concerned is the Muslims. Many of us, when we read news articles or current events or see the TV reports, conjure up an Arab people - hate in their eyes, guns or knives in their hands, bombs strapped on their backs, screaming slogans against America and democracy.

On the other hand, we may think of megabucks oilmen driving limos and living in mind-boggling palaces.

The truth, as usual, lies somewhere in the middle. Delmar Kingsriter, who for a long time headed up the Assemblies of God Center for Ministry to Muslims, made some vital observations for the uninitiated in such matters:

Islam is more than just a religion. It is a law which governs the Muslim culture and touches ever facet of life - personal, social, economic, religious and political. The Islamic teachings create an awareness of the duties each Muslim must fulfill in all these areas of life. A Muslim belongs to a community in which he functions as a member. From birth to death, he lives a life related to other members of his community. This is one reason why it is so difficult for a Muslim to become a Christian.

Here are several terms with which you should be familiar as we study tonight:
ISLAM - means “submission to God”
MUSLIM - means “one who submits to God”
THE KORAN - is the holiest book of Islam, believed by Muslims to be the final and complete revelation of God to man. To them it is more important than all previous revelations, including the Bible.

I have compiled these notes with help from many sources, especially the Islamic belief system. For that I turned to my friend Muhamed al Darsani, the local Muslim Imam. We discussed this study together and he sanctioned the belief system you will read of here. Much of the rest of these notes were taken from my Revivaltime book, The Call of Mohammed, written 1989.

MOHAMMED

Six centuries after Christ, in the city of Mecca (located on the Arabian peninsula) a child was born in the Kuriash tribe – a descendant of Ishmael. His name was Mohammed. His father, Abdullah, died just before Mohammed was born. The mother, Amina, passed away 6 years later. The youngster was reared by his uncle, the chief of Mecca and the keeper of a pagan shrine. He used the boy as a shepherd and goatherd near the city. Eventually Mohammed became a camel driver, accompanying his relatives on trading journeys to Syria.

When Mohammed reached the age of 25, he was hired by a wealthy widow named Cadija to manager her caravan to and from the city of Bosra (near the border of Palestine - as the country was then labeled by Rome). The young camel driver was so good at his job that the widow offered her hand in marriage. Thus Mohammed became the owner of the caravan and had a source of great wealth. He also became an astute observer of life around him.

Through contacts with Christians and Jews on trading journeys, Mohammed learned of the Jewish and Christian faiths. He appears to have had a growing revulsion to the paganism of his tribe and especially to the many deities they worshiped. Perhaps he was seeking for something to satisfy his heart’s desire and was trying to understand Jewish and Christian doctrine. Later he included in Islam some Jewish and Christian practices, such as fasting and regular hours for prayer.

DAVID IRWIN, AUTHOR OF “WHAT CHRISTIAN NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MUSLIMS

Mohammed soon came to the fervent conclusion that there was only one God – not many as his tribesmen believed. His wife Cadija believed her man’s message and became on of his earliest disciples. Soon Mohammed declared himself God’s prophet – greater
even than Moses and Jesus. He claimed he had started receiving divine revelations and wrote them in the book we know as The Koran.

In Isaiah 1:18, God called humanity to REASON with Him: *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* Islam did not spread through “reason” but rather by the sword. The people of Mecca did not receive Mohammed and his new teachings so he began to cast about for a more favorable setting. When his wife Cadija passed away, Mohammed moved 400 miles away to Medina in the year 622 A.D. This move - or flight - is known to Muslims as the Hegira. Muslims date time from that year.

With a different locale, the cause of Mohammed began to move ahead with incredible speed. In only 15 years, the Muslims conquered most of their known world - including what was then known as Palestine - which set the scene for the bloody crusades which followed. Remember the prophecy regarding Ishmael in Genesis 16:12, “Ishamel will be a wild man; and his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him.”
SEVERAL HISTORIC REASONS FOR THE RISE OF ISLAM IN THE 7TH CENTURY

One of the reasons for such a swift escalation of this religious fervor was the degenerate and disorderly period of world history in the sixth century. Persia's influence had waned to weakness and humiliation. Rome was no longer the mistress of the world and was wracked by inner decay. Invading hordes of barbarians kept Rome on the defensive, so much so that she could not long stand, and her web of power decayed and crumbled. This left two world actions – the East and the West. (Europe and Asia Minor) Western Europe could not rise to the challenge of supremacy and its Byzantine sun soon sank into the horizon of oblivion. That left a power vacuum that would soon be filled by the Muslims.

Following In The Shoes Of Mohammed

Mohammed died in 632 A.D. in his early 60's. In his short career he had united countless wild and unrestrained tribes of Arabia under his leadership. His successor was Abu Bekr, who before long had dispatched armies into the covered fertile crescent with goals of military conquest. A lieutenant named Khalid led the first Muslim army into the Euphrates, the country of the Babylonians. From there he entered Syria. Then to Bosra on the Syrian/Palestinian border. There the city fell to the sons of Ishmael, and the governor, Romanus - a Christian apostate - renounced his faith.

His statement: *I renounce your society (that of Christianity) both in this world and in the world to come. And I deny him that was crucified and whosoever worships him. And I choose God for my Lord, Islam for my faith, Mecca for my temple, and the Muslims for my brethren, and Mohammed for my prophet, who was sent to lead us into the right way, and to exalt the true religion in spite of those who join partners with God.*

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE / VOLUME V / PAGE 418

From there Khalid brought his forces to Damascus where another spectacular victory was won. It was at this time that Abu Bekr died and was succeeded by OMAR (whose golden-domed mosque desecrates the site of the Jewish temples of Solomon and Herod). On and on went the Muslim juggernaut until it reached the area just south of the Sea of Galilee. There they were met by a great number of Christian in 636 A.D. The fighting there was intense and bloody. And when the dust had settled, it was another notch in the sword of Islam. Now it was on to the holy city of Jerusalem!

Defended on every side by deep valleys and steep ascents and having within the city the Church of the Holy Sepulchre - which the Christians felt honor-bound to defend - the besieged fought the besiegers almost every day for four months. All fanatical zeal was
The Dome Of The Rock, Islam's Third holiest site, sits atop the rock where tradition holds Abraham offered Isaac and where both Solomon and Herod built the great Jewish temples. Encircled is the Western Wall (Wailing Wall), which was the retaining wall on the west side of Herod's Temple. To the right of the picture is the Kidron Valley and the Garden of Gethsemane (east). To the (top of the picture) is the Pool of Bethesda.

unavailing, however, for at length the perseverance of the Arabs won the day – and the Holy City. News spread to Medina and Caliph Omar set out for Jerusalem where he showed mercy to the Christian population by permitting them liberty of conscience in religious worship and undisputed possession of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He then decreed that a mosque should be built on the Temple site where Solomon and Herod had built their great houses for God. Omar's armies pushed westward to Gaza, then to Egypt and Alexandria. From there the Muslims conquered North Africa and by 711 A.D. had even reached Spain. Now Europe itself was threatened, and it was Charles Martel who collected the necessary troops to defeat the Muslims in the famous battle of Tours (732 A.D.).

The Dark (Middle) Ages

And now the darkness of the Middle Ages fell upon mankind, not to be lifted until the Renaissance and Reformation. Feudalism, tyranny, ignorance, superstition and degradation were the trademarks of this period.
The Christian Church was virtually helpless during this time of the Middle Ages. Most of its leaders were licentious and arrogant men who knew no more about God’s trace than a heathen. Thus the people of Europe drifted into extremely sinful living. To atone for their sins, should their consciences demand it, they paid the church, did penance, and went on pilgrimages. It was just such a pilgrimage to Jerusalem that set the first that launched the Crusades in a “holy war” to retrieve Jerusalem from the Muslims. Blood soaked the dirt of continents as men, in the name of religion, sought to kill each other. The words of the angel to Hagar echoed through the hills of history: “Ishmael will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man and every man’s hand against him.”

THE FAITH OF A MUSLIM

Mohammed’s ideas have exploded around the world to the point where one of every five persons is a Muslim. Here are some facts from Len Bartlotti, a missionary to southern Asia:

- Islam is the religion in an estimated 4,000 of the world’s 17,000 remaining unreached peoples - ethnic and cultural groups with no viable church in their midst.
- Of the five major blocks of unreached peoples (Tribal, Muslim, Hindu, Chinese and Buddhist), Islam is the least penetrated with the Gospel.
- Islam is the only non-Christian religion that has any sense of world mission.
- Islam is the only global religion that is younger than Christianity.
- Islam is the only religion that has overcome Christianity in certain areas of the world
- Through the years, Islam has proven to be, by far, the most resistant to all the non-Christian religions
- Fewer than 2 percent of all evangelical missionaries are reaching out to the followers of Islam.

Beliefs of Islam

(The following several pages are the word-for-word explanations of definitions of Islam provided for me by Imam Mohamed al Darsani, head of the local “Islamic Center for Peace.” I will earmark my observations from time to time by starting the line with “Betzer”. This will differentiate the following words between Mohamed al Darsani and myself.)

1. Concept of God in Islam

Every language has one or more terms that are used in reference to God and sometimes in lesser deities. This is not the case with the word “Allah.” Allah is the personal name of the One True God. Nothing else can be called Allah. The term has no plural or gender.
Some non-Muslims allege that the concept of God in Islam is that of a stern and cruel God who demands to be obeyed fully. He is not loving and kind. Nothing can be farther from the truth than this allegation. It is enough to know that with the exception of one, each of the 114 chapters of the Koran begins with the verse: “In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.” In one of the saying of the Prophet Mohammed we are told: “God is more loving and kinder than a mother to her dear child.”

Besides being Merciful, God is Just, too. Hence evildoers and sinners must have their share of punishment and the virtuous their rightful reward.

Islam rejects characterizing God in any human form or depicting him as favoring certain individuals or nations on the basis of wealth, power or race. They may distinguish themselves and earn His favor through virtue and piety alone. Betzer: This is a denial of the Jews being God’s chosen people and a rejection of the promises God made to the Jews in the Old Testament.

The concepts that God rested on the seventh day of creation, that God wrestled with one of His soldiers, that God is an envious plotter against mankind, or that God is incarnate in any human form are considered blasphemy from the Islamic point of view. Islam considers associating any deity or personality with God as a grave sin that God will never forgive if the person dies without repenting. Betzer: Genesis 2:2 “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.” This does not mean God was worn out; it means simply that creation stopped; He was done; the work was complete. The Islamic denial that God ever wrestled with any of His soldiers, I suspect, is a rebuttal of Jacob wrestling with the angel in Genesis 32. Line 18 informs us of the denial of Muslims that God was ever “incarnate” or came in the flesh. This, of course, is a total denial of the Gospels. John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] The same was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. [4] In him was life; and the life was the light of men. [5] And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. Line 20, according to Islam, makes our belief in the Trinity and Jesus being the Son of God an unforgivable sin to God. To which the Koran rebuts: “No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him.” Al-Quran 23:91

In order to be a Muslim, it is necessary to believe in the Oneness of God, in the sense of His being the only Creator, Preserver, Nourisher, etc. “O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion; nor say of Allah ought but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was no more than a messenger of Allah and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him; So believe in Allah and His messengers. Say not
“Trinity”: desist; it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah.” Al-Quran 4:171

Betzer: Lines 37-40 clarify the Islamic position on Jesus - “He was no more than a messenger” from God. This is a denial of the divinity of Jesus. Quite a few Islamic links on the internet deny emphatically that Jesus was God. Jesus did not deny it. The Apostles did not deny it. Scripture did not deny it. Mohammed denied it. So then - who was Jesus anyway? Again from the local Imam:

Jesus lived about 2,000 years ago in ancient Palestine when the Roman Empire was at its zenith. Betzer: At the time of Jesus - and until 100 years later - the land was known as Israel, not Palestine, which means “Land of the Philistines.” Jesus was not conceived in the usual way, but was implanted in the womb of a young woman named Mary. God simply commanded, “Be,” and he was. He was the last in a long line of religious guides sent to the Jews. On a day that seemed no different from the rest, an angel of God visited Mary, disguised in the likeness of a human. Betzer: Scripture teaches the visitor was the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26). Afraid of so strange a sight, Mary prayed for protection, but the strange being assured her and declared that he was a messenger from the Lord to announce the glad-tidings of a faultless son. When she felt the little child within her, she fled her sanctuary out of fear of what her family would do or say when they heard the news. In her despair she cried out to God for oblivion. A voice soothed her and she found shade and a cool spring. Under a date palm in the warmth of late summer, she made her dwelling and there bore the child unlike any other in human history. Betzer: The Bible - both Old and New Testaments - make it clear that Jesus’ birth would be - and was - in Bethlehem, Israel.

Shortly thereafter, Mary returned to her community caring the child who was to be called Messiah, Jesus, and son of Mary. When her people saw her with the baby in her arms they couldn’t believe their eyes, let alone accept her word. They refused to believe when she told she was chosen above all other women to carry this burden. They accused her of infidelity and implied that she had ruined the family name. Betzer: this is man-made fiction, of course, and has nothing to do with the Bible account or the O.T. prophecies that validated Jesus’ birth.

When he came of age, Jesus began to travel and preach throughout the land of Palestine about a return to the truth of old revelations and a rejection of all that man had added. In his task, he was supported by the spirit of truth, the angel Gabriel. He taught that love and mercy overcome hate and anger and that a man of only a true and sincere faith in the Creator and obedience to His will can bring a person salvation in this life as well as the next. To reinforce his message, God granted him the performance of miracles. He soon attracted an inner-circle of devoted followers who listened to his teachers with fervor and
humility. These disciples, among them Peter, Barnabas and John helped him carry the message of divine love to the people.

ISLAMIC REJECTION OF THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

(Again from the Imam) As the message of Jesus began to gain wider acceptance, a small clique of hypocrites and evil men began to plot against him. They were the priests and leaders of the Jews whose position and wealth depended upon their place as the sole interpreters of religion to the masses. They pursued him and his followers and eventually captured him. Though they abused him, he never renounced his faith in the one God. So in their anger they plotted to crucify him on a Roman cross. But Jesus slipped from their grip at the last moment, and all the while they thought they had succeeded. They were sure they had killed him but God answered Jesus’ prayer and saved him from their schemes. Confusion overtook the mob and they might have killed the man who betrayed Jesus instead. In any case, Jesus escaped from their grasp. Then God removed Jesus from this world into another dimension to a place with Him, not to return until a later time.

Betzer: I know of few statements more at odds with historic Christianity than the one above. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Thy will be done,” and made no attempt to evade the cross. History has proven that (1) Jesus Christ was, indeed, crucified under the orders of Pontius Pilate, Roman Governor of Judea, and (2) that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. So note very carefully: Muslims do not believe that Jesus died on the cross. It is also interesting to me that when mentioning Allah or God, the Muslims use a capital letter to begin the word; however, with Jesus no capitals are used, indicating their belief that Jesus was not divine. The “mob” mentioned above did not kill Judas nor attempt to for he hanged himself in shame and remorse. Muslims employ blatant historical revisionism time and again in proffering their doctrine.

With their teacher gone, the devoted followers of Jesus tried to maintain the purity and simplicity of his teachings. But they were soon besieged and overtaken by a flood of Roman and Greek influences, which eventually so buried and distorted the message of Jesus that only a little of its truth now remains. Strange doctrines of Jesus being a man-god, of God dying, of saint worship and of God being made up of different parts came into vogue that were accepted by many of those who took the name “Christians” centuries after Jesus.

Betzer: Again - historical revisionism. The early followers of Jesus were persecuted by those opposed to Jesus’ teachings and were dispersed over the known world. The Gospel spread like wildfire until three centuries later, Christianity was the universal faith in the Roman Empire. It was only after Emperor Constantine officially declared everyone a
Christian in the fourth century, with no “new birth” necessary, that Christianity became polluted and the antithesis of the teaching of Jesus. It must be said, however, that the apostasy of Christianity became the fertile soil for Mohammed’s teachings.

The only records that have come down to us concerning Jesus are some sketchy biographical material, poorly researched and compiled, which can in no way be representative of the full and accurate message of Jesus, the son of Mary. The time of the final and incorruptible Message was not yet at hand. It would be left to the last prophet of God, Muhammad (peace be upon him), to clarify the truth from man’s additions and deletions. Jesus taught the same eternal message that was taught by all the Messengers of God, from Adam, on through Noah, Abraham, Moses and ending with the mission of God’s last Guidepost to humanity, Muhammad (peace be on them all), who coming was foretold by Jesus himself. Jesus was the last of a series of Messengers sent to the Israelites, but they consistently strayed from the path of surrender to God.

Betzer: The history of Jesus Christ is one of the most thoroughly documented lives ever lived. The Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - are the records of Jesus from eye witnesses. Paul met Jesus personally on Damascus road. Libraries are filled with thousands of volumes written on the life of Christ through the first few centuries of His time on earth. To simply “banish” Jesus bios on the word of a “Johnny-come-lately” who had his own agenda is patently absurd. Jesus did not teach the same basic salvation message as did the Old Testament saints for their message was based upon human “works,” while that of Jesus was based on “faith” in what He would accomplish on the cross. And to state that Jesus foretold the coming of Muhammad is superb fiction.

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I will present more on the teaching of Islam in next week’s session. But first a warning in any discussion with a Muslim:

As is the case in dealing with any person outside of Christianity—and certainly with anyone in a cult or faith that is foreign to Scripture—it is necessary to clearly define terms. Words and phrases mean different things to different people. For example, one may listen to a Mormon and think there are great similarities in the Christian faith and Mormonism. But the differences in the two religions are cavernous. When key terms are DEFINED, that fact becomes obvious.

And so it is with Islam. “Terms such as SIN, SALVATION, CROSS, and SON OF GOD have an entirely different meaning for the Muslims. The Muslim cannot understand the meaning of our salvation terminology as long as he denies that Jesus died on the cross.
When discussing the Bible with a Muslim, it is important that verses be read in contexts. The Muslim has developed an intricate system of "abrogation," or substitution of one verse for another, due to the random way the Koran is written.” David Irwin - former head of the Assemblies of God Ministry to Muslims, tragically killed in a car wreck the day before he opened the Center For Muslim Ministries.

I have found that witnessing to my Israeli friends was virtually impossible for a number of years. The situation changed only when I had proven myself to them by consistently living what I believed. Then they felt they could trust what I said, even though they still had to come to that knowledge themselves. It is much the same way with the Muslim. Only when he or she observes a life-style in a Christian believer which gives foundation to the believer’s witness will there be any meaningful dialogue at all. If the life of Christ truly shines forth from the Christian, there can be opportunity for witness.

No one wants to hear his belief debunked or mocked. And so any communication with a Muslim must be devoid of derogatory remarks about Mohammed, the Koran and Islam. Even if the Christian faith is questioned severely, the Christian must remain calm and patient, winning the Muslim’s friendship before winning the soul.

IT IS JUST ABOUT IMPOSSIBLE TO WIN ANY PERSON TO CHRIST IF THAT PERSON DOES NOT LIKE YOU.

Flaunting western cultural mores and wearing immodest clothing is a sure way to end dialogue with Muslims. And the witness must be male to male, female to female. Muslims forbid physical contact with persons of the opposite sex until after engagement and marriage. Respecting these facts, these social norms, of the Muslim is mandatory to creating a climate in which witnessing can be effective.

Let’s remember that the most effective human key we have in witnessing to the Muslim is our genuine friendship. Until that occurs, nothing truly lasting will occur with our witness, no matter how fervent we may be.

THIS LESSON CONTINUES NEXT WEEK - MORE ON ISLAMIC BELIEF AND BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE HEART OF A MUSLIM.