

Night and Day

A Comparative Study of Islam and Christianity

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Lesson 1 People of the book

“Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient,’” Exodus 24:7.

Welcome To the Study

There is a God, a Creator of the universe. He fashioned this world and all that is within it. He is not aloof toward His creation, but rather has revealed Himself to those made in His image, humankind. This revelation of Himself and His will for His creation is written and collected as scripture. There is a book.

Succinctly stated, the People of the book is that group of adherents or disciples that surrender and submit their will to conform to God’s will as expressed in His revelation, the scriptures. However, “the People of the book” is a loaded phrase in the religious world today. Its meaning depends upon which book one believes to be the inspired, unadulterated word of God. Here the definitive differences of Islam and Christianity begin.

Walking Bibles

Members of the Lord’s church have diligently pursued being “People of the book.” This is evident by their insistence upon scriptural authority. The motto “give book, chapter, and verse” summarizes the position that the Bible, when “rightly divided” and applied, is the absolute standard and must be appealed to for authority in matters of Christian work, worship, and organization. A consequence of this position is that man-made creeds, confessions, dogmas, or even papal seals are no substitute for the authority of scripture, Matthew 15:8-9.

This is not to suggest that Christians view the Bible as pertaining merely to Sunday-only religious rites. The Bible is relevant to daily life. Christians have active devotional lives and believe that God, through precept and principle of the Bible, dictates their daily walk in life, Jeremiah 10:23; Psalm 119:105; 2 Peter 1:3. So they pursue the word of God through various avenues: memorization of scripture, daily Bible reading, regular Bible classes, and listening to gospel preaching, to name a few.

Christians once had the reputation of being “Walking Bibles.” It was told in jest that if a copy of a Bible could not be procured for proceedings in court, find a Christian and have the witness place his left hand on him to take the oath. Such a reputation is only earned by diligent Bible study, faithful life application, and the ability to teach and explain the Bible to others. As A. Hugh Clark once counseled a

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preacher, “Son, you should always have two Bibles with you, one in your pocket and one in your head.” Many Christians rightly desire to be, “people of the book.”

Who Are The People of the book?

“O people of the book, Our Apostle has come to you, announcing many things of the Scriptures that you have suppressed, passing over some others. To you has come light and a clear book from God,” Surah 5:15.

“The revelation of this Book is from God, the mighty and all-wise,” Surah 46:2.

As the Qur’an states in the above passages, it claims to be the inspired word of Allah, who has revealed the Book (his body of scripture) to different people groups at different times in the past, but ultimately gave the correct revelation of his will to his prophet Muhammad. In the Qur’an, Jews and Christians are identified as the former recipients of Allah’s word.

“We sent down the Torah which contains guidance and light, in accordance with which the prophets who were obedient (to God) gave instructions to the Jews, as did the rabbis and priests, for they were the custodians and witnesses of God’s writ,” Surah 5:44.

“Let the people of the Gospel judge by what has been revealed in it by God. And those who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed are transgressors,” Surah 5:47.

Christians and Jews are called ahl al-kitab (“The People of the book”). Thus, Muhammad instructs Muslims to treat them fairly, respect the common god, Allah, and heed all scripture (the Old Testament, New Testament, and Qur’an).

“Do not argue with the people of the book unless in a fair way, apart from those who act wrongly, and say to them: “We believe what has been sent down to us, and we believe what has been sent down to you. Our God and your God is one, and to Him we submit,” Surah 29:46.

As this Surah continues, it seems that there is an expectation that the people of the book will recognize Muhammad as a true prophet and the authority of his revelations. At least those with honest hearts will.

“That is how We have revealed this Book to you; and those to whom We have sent down the Book will believe in it. Only those who are infidels will deny it,” Surah 29:47.

According to the Qur’an, Christians and Jews should see that they are needlessly divided. If these groups would both recognize Muhammad and submit to Islam, then Allah would unite them all as Muslims.

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“Those among the people of the book who disbelieve, and the idolaters, would not have been freed (from false beliefs) until the clear proof came to them – An Apostle from God, reading out hallowed pages containing firm decrees. The people of the book were not divided among themselves till after the clear proof had come to them. They were commanded only to serve God with all-exclusive faith in Him, to be upright, and to fulfill their devotional obligations, and to give zakat; for this is the even way. Surely the unbelievers among the people of the book and the idolaters, will abide in the fire of Hell. They are the worst of creatures,” Surah 98:1-6.

Yet the harshest punishments are pronounced on those people of the book who do not accept Muhammad’s prophethood, or who refuse to respect the Qur’an as true scripture. Such dangerous people of the book may try to convert Muslims out of Islam and lead them astray into Christianity or Judaism. This is a clear rejection of Allah’s will and Muhammad’s message in the Qur’an.

“Say: ‘O people of the book, why do you reject the word of God when God is a witness to all that you do?’ Then say: ‘O people of the book, why do you turn the believers away from the path of God, looking for obliquities in the way when you are witness to it? And God is aware of all that you do.’ O believers, if you follow what some people of the book say, it will turn you into unbelievers even after you have come to belief. And how can you disbelieve? To you are being recited the messages of God, and His Prophet is among you. And whosoever holds fast to God shall verily be guided to the path that is straight,” Surah 3:98-101.

In fact, even in the early seventh century A.D., most Christians and Jews (apart from some on the Arabian Peninsula coerced by terror and violence) did not recognize Muhammad as a prophet in the Biblical tradition nor his “revelations” as worthy of the canon of scripture. No reason, evidence, or sign has been produced to cause this view to change in the ensuing 1300 years.

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Christianity and Islam are exclusive faiths. We grant them the dignity of their claims by recognizing this fact. Honest evaluation of these beliefs is made by admitting their differences and exploring them.

These religions are *Night and Day* different. Both claim to be the light while the other languishes in spiritual darkness, leading souls astray. Their scriptures make this clear:

“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him -- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day,” John 12:46-48.

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OR

“God is the friend of those who believe, and leads them out of the darkness into light; but the patrons of infidels are idols and devils who lead them from light into darkness. They are the residents of Hell, and will there for ever abide,” Surah 2:257.

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed,” Galatians 1:8-9.

OR

“And We have sent you with the truth to give glad tidings and to warn. You will not be questioned about those who are inmates of Hell. The Jews and Christians will never be pleased with you until you follow their way. Say: ‘God’s guidance alone is true guidance;’ for if you give in to their wishes after having received the (Book of) knowledge from God, then none will you have as friend or helper to save you. Those to whom We have sent down the Book, and who read it as it should be read, believe in it truly; but those who deny it will be losers,” Surah 2:119-121.

Helpful Vocabulary

For our comparative study of Islam and Christianity, it is understood that the primary audience is mostly Christian, or at least holds greater familiarity with the Christian faith. All quotations from the Bible will come from the New King James Version unless otherwise stated. All quotations from the Qur’an will come from *AL-QUR’AN: A Contemporary Translation* by Ahmed Ali, unless otherwise stated.

It is encouraged that students obtain their own copy of an English Qur’an for reading, comparing translations and making their own notes. This study seeks to be as open and fair as possible by allowing the Bible and the Qur’an to speak. Further reading of the Qur’an and Bible will only enhance the process.

There is not a standardized system for numbering the Qur’an’s verses. All English translations follow similar guidelines, so if the verse in your English Qur’an does not follow the quotation given in this workbook, simply look to the verses immediately before or after the quotation and you will find it.

A basic vocabulary is needed to make a meaningful comparison between Christianity and Islam. Over the course of this study, definitive differences will be recognized and examined. New words and doctrines will be introduced which pertain to each lesson. As the study begins, here are some helpful definitions for readers to keep in mind.

- Islam – the religion of submission to Allah
- Muslim – one who submits, an adherent of Islam
- Allah – Arabic for the strictly Unitarian God of Islam

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- Muhammad – Allah’s greatest and final messenger: “The Seal of the Prophets”
- Qur’an – the Holy Book of Islam. Consisting of 114 Surahs, it was revealed by Muhammad
- Surah – Arabic for revelation or recitation. A Surah is synonymous with “chapter” in the Qur’an
- Hadith – Traditions, these are uninspired records of the deeds and teachings of Muhammad. They are relied upon to learn his example, which must be emulated by Muslims, for the Qur’an lacks much narrative about him.
- mosque – the buildings erected for a congregation of Muslims to meet for prayer and instruction from the Qur’an.
- Imam – a prayer leader at the Mosque
- Mullah – teacher and preacher of Islamic doctrine

Our Course of Study

The purpose of *Night and Day: A Comparative Study of Islam and Christianity* is to present a study suitable in length and content for the average person in a small-group or Bible Class setting to 1) receive a clear presentation of each faith from primary sources (the Bible and the Qur’an) for both these works are understandable by their own admission, Surah 12:1-3; Ephesians 3:1-5; 5:17; 2) gain an appreciation of the first principles of both faiths (their history, claims, and precepts); 3) identify definitive differences; and 4) discover the implications of committed discipleship to these mutually exclusive religions.

Christian, Muslim, or Just Curious?

For Christians, this study affirms basic Biblical teaching on the Godhead, Jesus Christ, salvation, the church, and the great commission to take the gospel into the world. Christians will be challenged by considering how “outsiders” view their faith and practice. Christians must address Islam, for it claims to be absolute truth, and is growing in what have historically been “Christian” nations. Christians mindful of “contending for the faith” should know with whom they will contend in the twenty-first century.

For Muslims, this study seeks to be fair. Just as attacks upon the Bible must be examined and answered, so too the Qur’an is neither above question nor investigation. The reason is quite simple. The Qur’an claims that Allah revealed the Bible, and furthermore, Muslims are to receive it as scripture:

“Do not argue with the people of the book unless in a fair way, apart from those who act wrongly, and say to them: “We believe what has been sent down to us, and we believe what has been sent down to you. Our God and your God is one, and to Him we submit,” Surah 29:46.

However, Muslims openly question and attack the authenticity and authority of the Bible whenever it opposes Qur’anic teaching. They claim Jews and Christians

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have tampered with it and re-written great portions to coincide with their unique religious beliefs. Consider: if Allah could not protect his previous holy books from being polluted by interpolations (regardless of who may have done it), as Muslims claim happened to the Bible, surely he can do no better for the Qur'an. It must be examined and tried every bit as rigorously as the Bible for truth. That is fair.

For those seeking genuine answers to questions about God, truth, or salvation, this study invites you to examine the teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible for yourself. This is a simple investigation and discussion. Learn what the sources actually say and make informed choices about your allegiance and the destiny of your soul. Biblical Christianity and Islam both make claims to be absolute truth. Truth has nothing to fear from examination.

Lesson 1 Questions

1. What do you hope to gain from this study of Islam and Christianity?
2. List any questions you have about Islam or Christianity that you hope will be answered during the course of this study.
3. Why might Christians desire to be known as “people of the book?”
4. What kind of commitment to the Bible might earn one the nickname of “Walking Bible” or “a person of the Book?”
5. In your opinion, are many Christians today interested in being “a person of the Book?” Why or why not?
6. Who does Islam label “The People of the book?”
7. Why are these people-groups called “The People of the book?”
8. What did Muhammad say about “The People of the book” that did not accept him as a genuine prophet?

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9. What scriptures teach that Christianity is the light and competing religions are darkness?

10. What verses of the Qur'an teach that Islam is the light and competing religions are darkness?

11. Is it possible that the Bible and the Qur'an are both correct on this point?

12. Were there any definitions in the vocabulary section that surprised you? What words (if any) meant something other than what you thought they meant?

13. Define Islam:

14. Define Muslim:

15. What is a Surah?

Endnotes

¹ Bowman, Dee. Common Sense Preaching. Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College Press, 1999. p.111

² Ali, Orooj Ahmed. Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

³ The Holy Bible: The New King James Version. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996.

⁴ Ali, Orooj Ahmed. Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.