

The Qur'an contains a number of stories similar to those found in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Many of these existed hundreds of years before the Qur'an was written, but Muslims claim that Jews and Christians distorted these stories, and that the Qur'an's versions are the true accounts.

It is estimated that there are 1.4 billion Muslims. It is the second-largest religion in the world.

Only 20 percent of Muslims originate from Arab countries.

Islam is the second largest religion in the United Kingdom and it will soon be the second largest in the United States.

If you only get one book on Islam get...

Islam in Conflict, Past, Present and Future

Peter G Riddell and Peter Cotterell, £9.99, IVP, 2003, ISBN 9780851119984

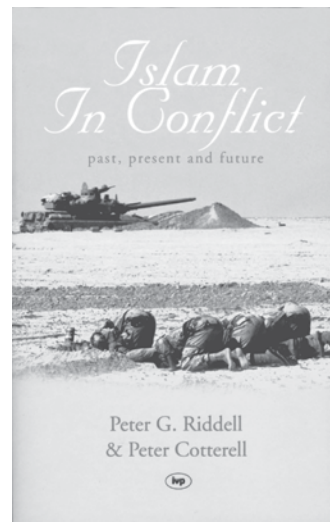
Riddell and Cotterell are both based at the Centre for Islamic Studies at London School of Theology. Between them they have a wealth of experience of working and 'dialoguing' with Muslims. Their knowledge of Islamic history and and its present reality puts them in an excellent position to assess trends and analyse possible future developments.

The book has three aims:

To help readers understand Islam, where possible from a Muslim point of view.

To set current Islamic conflicts in an historical context.

To identify viable ways to help resolve these conflicts.



Northolt Park Baptist Church, 31-9-2006

5 minutes on... **Islam**

Islamic history begins in 7th century Arabia with the birth of Muhammad. His father died before he was born, and his mother when he was 6-years-old. He was raised by an uncle, and worked for him as a shepherd.

Not much is known about his teenage years, but by the time he was a young adult he was a businessman based in Mecca.

7th Century Arabia was populated by a number of people-groups. The majority followed traditional religions, with a smattering of Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism.

The city of Mecca was a religious centre featuring a sacred well and a small temple. Muhammad hated the idolatry. He spent many evenings in a cave in the local hillside, meditating, fasting and praying.

It was here that Muhammad claimed he received revelations from the angel Gabriel, and that he was commanded to pass them on to others.

Muhammad believed he had been chosen by God to preach repentance, submission to God, and a coming day of judgment.

He attracted a significant number of followers, along with persecution from the Meccan authorities for his preaching against the town's worship of idols.

To escape persecution, Muhammad and his followers moved to the neighbouring city of Medina. Mecca then attacked Medina. Muhammad and his followers won one battle and stalemated another.

Over a period of years, Muhammad became a warrior king and through a mixture of conquest and conversion assembled an army which marched on Mecca.

Mecca surrendered without a fight.

In the following centuries, Islam continued to expand throughout the world through a mixture of conversion and conquest.

Islamic Word Meanings

Islam means 'Submission to God'.

Muslim means 'A person who submits wholeheartedly to God'.

Main Beliefs

Muslims believe that God revealed his direct word for humanity to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel and earlier prophets, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

Muslims believe that Muhammad is the last and supreme prophet.

Muslims assert that the final, perfect written record of revelation to humanity is the Qur'an. It is a collection of Muhammad's teachings, put together by his followers after his death.

The Qur'an is only authoritative when read in the original Arabic.

Fundamental practices

Shahadah

The basic creed of Islam is the Shahadah:

'I testify that there is none worthy of worship except God and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.'

Salat

Muslims are required to perform five prayers during the course of each day. These combine specific words and movements, preceded by ritual washing. It is an act of submission to God and functions as a reminder to do good and refrain from evil.

Zakat

Giving to the poor and helping those in distress is an important part of the Islamic tradition.

Sawm (Ramadan)

Muslims must abstain from food, drink and sex from dawn to dusk during this month. This is intended to allow Muslims to seek nearness to God as well as remind them of the needy.

Hajj

The pilgrimage to Mecca during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah is required for all Muslims who are physically and financially able to make the journey.

God

The fundamental concept in Islam is the Oneness of God. Muslims reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, seeing it as polytheistic.

Islamic law

The Qur'an is the primary reference point.

Islamic law covers all aspects of life, from civil law and foreign relations through to personal lifestyle issues.

Denominations

Like the Christian Church, there are many, but the major schools of thought are Sunni and Shi'a.

Approximately 85% of Muslims are Sunni. Sunnis trace their roots to the four leaders (Caliphs) who guided Islam after Muhammad's death.

Shi'a Muslims reject the authority of the first three Caliphs. They honour different accounts of Muhammad and have their own legal traditions.

Extreme Sunni sects (including Al Qaeda) consider Shi'a Muslims to be heretics.

Islam and other religions

Islam, like Christianity, is an exclusive religion.

Although Muslims have a deep respect for Jesus as a prophet of God, they do not accept that he died for our sins.

The Qur'an is ambiguous on how Muslims should treat other religions, containing some commands to respect their beliefs, and others that tell Muslims to fight and subdue those who do not practice Islam.

Historically Islamic societies have allowed Jews and Christians to privately practice their faith and follow their own family law.