

# Islam Versus Christianity

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There are a vast number of religions in the world each having its own unique characteristics that identify it. As with Islam and Christianity, the present character of a religion may differ from its original composition. By looking at the founders, one is able to view a particular religion with a perception more accurate to its original format. This point-by-point research paper will attempt to compare and contrast the founders of two monotheistic religions; Muhammad, the founder of Islam, and Jesus, the founder of Christianity. Both founders show us the way to the one God, but each man purported different methods of leading people to this understanding.

## **Ancestry and Early Years**

Both Muhammad and Jesus considered Abraham as his patriarch. Muhammad came from the lineage of Ishmael the son of Abraham born to him through his wife Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar, who acted as a surrogate wife. Muhammad was born in Mecca in approximately 570 CE into the Hashim clan of the Kuraish Federation. He was orphaned at the age of six years. His uncle, a tribal chief, adopted and raised him to work in the camel caravan. Muhammad married a wealthy woman named Khadija when he was 25 and became a wealthy merchant and military man.

Jesus was of the lineage of Isaac, the son of Abraham and his wife Sarah. Jesus was born to a Jewish virgin in about 4 BCE. The Bible indicates that Jesus had siblings, was familiar with the Scriptures, and attended synagogue. The Bible is silent on his teenage years and young adulthood, but according to *The Lost Years of Jesus*, he too, worked in the camel caravan where

he learned and shared mystical insights within the diverse cultures of India, China, Tibet, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Persia (Iran/Iraq) where he is still known today by the name of Issa. There is no record or indication that Jesus was ever married.

### **The Mission**

Both Muhammad and Jesus shared the conviction that he had been chosen for a mission to convey a message from God to his people. Muhammad held reservation for being known as a prophet of Allah whereas Jesus was eager and willing to do his father's business.

Both men started a public ministry after a supernatural encounter. The angel Gabriel (in Arabic: Jibreel) addressed Muhammad while on a spiritual retreat and instructed him to recite the words of Allah which would be a new revelation for the Arab people. Jesus began his formal mission after enduring a 40-day fast and being baptized (filled with the Spirit).

Gabriel took Muhammad to Jerusalem to the place that is presently known as the Dome of the Rock. From there he was taken into heaven to meet Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Jesus had a similar experience when he took three of his disciples to the top of a mountain in Jerusalem and spoke with Moses and Elijah (Mt. 17:2). Both founders devoted themselves to prayer and to the mission he held.

### **The Message & Its Public Acceptance**

Both founders held deep compassion for people. Muhammad believed that the biggest trouble of his time was the disagreement among the tribes regarding multiple deities. He believed that Christians and Jews worshipped the same God who created the universe. His message was simple: Allah is God, the only god. Muhammad's insistence on monotheism was

not without opposition. He desired peace and initiated a truce to help pilgrims, but when the treaty was broken he gathered his troops and captured Mecca, the Holy City. As Commander in Chief Muhammad killed hundreds of Jews and his own tribesmen while promoting and defending his monotheistic beliefs. He was reported to have taken into his harem the wives of the men he killed. When Muhammad's life was threatened in Mecca, he sought shelter in the city of Medina where he developed a significant following. (Idiot's 91) Disputes between the Eastern Orthodox Christians and the Roman Catholic papacy influenced Muhammad's understanding of Christianity. Eventually he came to deny the teachings of the Church as he brought Islam into the seventh century as a new religion with considerable changes to the tribal society.

Jesus drew the lower classes and outcasts of society to himself. He was a teacher and healer. Many people followed him to watch him perform miracles. Jesus' message was: God is love, and He offers eternal life. Followers of Jesus believed that he was the promised Messiah of the Jews; however the political and religious authorities didn't agree. These men were suspicious of anyone who drew converts away from traditional Judaism because it threatened their own supremacy, and because they believed that the Messiah would be a powerful leader who would deliver the Jewish people from Roman rule. These men eventually plotted the death of Jesus.

### **Death of the Founders**

Muhammad died suddenly after a short-term illness in 632 CE. The religious authorities that were intimidated by Jesus arranged a brutal death through crucifixion for him. It is believed

that Jesus' disciples and followers saw him raised from the dead in the city of Jerusalem three days after his death.

The Islam faith does not worship Muhammad, whereas Christians do worship Jesus as a member of the Trinity. Muhammad is known as the “last prophet” by the followers of the Quran. Those who believe the Islamic faith do not ask the spirit of Muhammad to enter them or direct the affairs of their lives. This is contrasted by Christians who invite Jesus into their heart as a spirit guide or savior through the act of salvation, baptism, or by partaking of the Holy Eucharist (the body of Jesus).

## **Summary**

Humans have always disagreed about who or what God is. No religion or founder has all the answers. Therefore it is important that each person develop his or her own ideas about God. In his book, *The Hidden Gospel*, Neil Douglas-Klotz says,

“We must each create a personal image of the sacred that leads us toward the ultimate mystery. The first and perhaps most difficult step requires us to leave space for that image to develop.”

Leaving space requires us to put aside our biases and religious training, and to begin spending time connecting with the Source itself. I believe this is exactly what Muhammad and Jesus did. In a time when belief systems needed a change, these men brought a fresh perspective to the scene and forever changed the image we hold of God. Muhammad and Jesus spent time in prayer and supernatural encounters that developed their personal belief system from the inside out. Only then did each founder begin to share his insights with society. Regardless of differing

personal beliefs, the ideals that Muhammad and Jesus held were similar in content: each founder held his own monotheistic understanding of the Divine Creator and desired to help his fellow man. Overall, the similarities between Muhammad and Jesus are greater than the differences, and I like to image that the two could have lived and worked peacefully side by side.

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