

Transforming American Thinking

Understanding Islam

By

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Introduction

One of the greatest obstacles for the Heart for Lebanon (H4L) foundation is communicating to the American Christian investors, that their gift (or potential gift) to a foundation that supports/ministers to exiled Muslims (many who are believing Islamist others are not), is in fact a gift that God would readily accept as a gesture of being led by His Spirit.

Frankly, the behavior of giving by the Christian is probably the most misunderstood behavior of all, aside from that of understanding of forgiveness. The issue here in this section is not the focus on giving, but the focus on something more important than giving. That is, the chief attribute of the Christian life, which is Love.

Historical Background

Since the disagreement and separation of two brothers in Biblical history, Jacob and Esau, there has been continual discord passed down from history. One side argues that they are blessed of God and follow the only true God; the other states the same thing. On the other hand, Esau's clan states that Jacob stole their birthright and Jacob's clan states that he respectfully took what was being rejected or taken for granted. This has been a war, ever since.

Based on Christian history, many races and religions have spawned off Esau and Jacob, particularly Muslims and Jews and sects of each. Muslims have Sunni and Shia religions coming out of the Esau line and Jacob has Christians and Catholics out of his line. There have been countless wars and never-ending debates and presently we are experiencing something coined as "extremism." Each religion is at fault for their version of extremism. Muslims have Islamic terrorists and Christians have Evangelical radicals. The religious foundation of these two groups have been sadly misunderstood and misused, not to mention taken out of the context of their origination.

Three Schools of Thought on Islam's Origin

There are 3 schools of thoughts of when the Islamic religion actually was formed. Christian history suggests a Jacob and Esau dispersion, but even before Jacob and Esau was Ishmael and Isaac.

The first school of thought is that many Christian theologians and teachers hold to the biblical interpretation that Islam began its roots in the account of Genesis 16::1-19, 17:20, 21:8-18, 25:18, and Galatians 4:21-31 which references Abraham taking his maidservant Hagar, an Egyptian woman as a segregate mother to his child. She birthed Ismael who was not the chosen child that God had promised Abraham. He became a child of man and of Abraham and Sarah's (Abraham's wife) on doing. We later learned that Ishmael was never God's plan for Abraham's offspring, but would thru Sarah, specifically Isaac. A promise would come from Abraham, Sarah and Isaac (the family) and not Abraham, Hagar and Ismael. Hagar and Ismail were eventually dismissed, and God visits her and promised that through her son, would also be a nation. Later, God makes a promise to Abraham. This promise was an expanding promise found in Genesis 26:1-5.

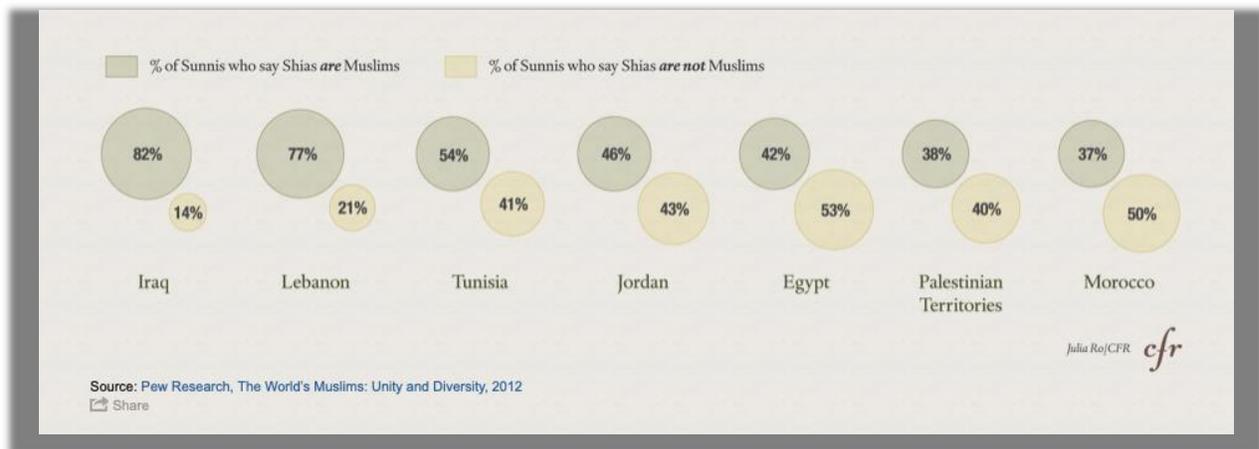
Second school of thought is that Jacob and Esau, the offspring of Isaac (Abraham's son from Sarah) was key to the origins of Islam. Esau and Jacob were born at the same time, as seen in Genesis 25 from Rebekah, Isaac's wife. Esau was first and then Jacob. Later in Genesis 25:27-34, we find Esau giving up his blessing of the birth right to be heir of Abraham and Isaac over a bowl of stew to his brother Jacob. Furthermore, you find that Jacob and his mother later maneuvered themselves to take that blessing or birth right from Esau in Genesis 27. This story has brought much debate over the land of Israel as the Jewish origins came from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Christian teachers go on to claim that Esau became the father of the Muslim world.

Interestingly enough Muslims believe that Allah used Jacob to carry out the Islam legacy. Jacob is mentioned some 16 times in the Quran. Some believe that the line of Esau come the Muslim Nation.

The final and third school of thought is that of Muhammad, who was born around 570 BC and in his 40's, around 610 BC had a self-proclaimed revelation from Allah that he was the final profit and became the founder of the Islam religion. Muhammad's father (Abdullah) and grandfather (Abd al-Muttalib Shaybah Ibn Hashim) is the decendant of Ishail, son of Abraham and Hagar (Abraham's Egyptian maid servant).

Mohammed successfully spread his Islam ideology throughout the area known as Arabia, (Today, known as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon Israel Jordan Iran and other areas). In 632 BC, Mohammed died, leaving followings debating who was to lead their faith. Many chose a companion of Muhammed to be the Caliph or leader of Islam. His name was Abu Bakr. Others opposed and wanted to have Muhammed’s cousin and son in law to lead. His name is Abi Ibn Abi Talib and married Muhammad’s daughter Fatimah. Those who elected Abi Talib became known as Partisans of Ali or “Shi’atu Ali (Shiites). From this point on the Muslim sect was split between Sunni believers, those leaning or favoring Abu Bakr and those that are Shiite, who favor Abi Talib. Muslim History will outline a series of generational family assassinations for position of power and ruler-ship over the Islam faith.

It should be noted that 85% of the Muslim world is of a Sunni population. The follow figure breaks down what and where the sects are dominate:



Therefore, the Muslim world has always been in a state of constant conflict and in need of truth and not of power.

Understanding Islam

Christianity vs. Islam

It should also be stated at this point that this case study is written from a Christian perspective and submitted to a Christian college. Therefore, some readers may sense a bias. Nonetheless, with respect to keeping things very simple, there is one never ending fact that Christianity offers that Muslim belief does not, even through its 5 pillars of Islam principles and that is, Christianity offers a person who not only showed us who God is within himself, but equally showed us the pathway to God, again, pointing to himself. Jesus, made claims to be God in the flesh and proved it by conquering death. Although important, yet more important, He did not leave us without a guide, a comforter an inner reason or voice to direct us. Mainly, His Holy Spirit helps the Christian navigate the life that is well pleasing to God, that is, the Life of Christ.

After the three and one-half years of public ministry, Jesus told those that followed along with him to do one thing: Go and make disciples, life-long students that learn the teaching of Jesus Himself. Once learned, obey those teachings. (Matthew 28:19-20).^x

That statement above was one of the last commands Jesus gave to His followers and still was not the most important. The most important was the teaching to Love God and Love others as you love yourself. (Matthew 22:38-40).^{xi} This is often forgotten in the sight of achieving the Christian life.

Discipleship at its core: Love

As American Christians we often focus on the need to change ourselves through keeping church doctrine, biblical mandates and the latest new bible teaching that comes from the local pastor's pulpit. We fail to remember the greatest command of all which is loving God and loving others. He never said love God and like others or love God and change others, nor love God and only love others if they agree with you, believe like you or worship like you. The bottom line is, we are to love others as we love ourselves. From a personal example, sometimes I really get messed up about things, do the wrong things, make the wrong decisions and yet, I still don't mind being with me. I still have a love for myself, even when I am really out of my mind. It goes without saying that is what Christ is asking us to do as American Christians, even with those that we consider a threat or that worship God in the wrong way.

Scriptural Discipleship

A walk thru scriptures will reveal the life and times of Jesus and how he healed people without asking them about their religion, their sin or their origin of living. He spoke to the woman at the well and offered her living water, regardless of how many acts of adultery she had performed. He healed a nobleman's son and did not ask him where he went to church. He served wine at a wedding and ensured everyone would be able to have some, without condemning them for drinking. He healed a lame man by the pool of Bethesda without asking him about his family heritage or doctrinal background. He shared the story of the Good Samaritan who was considered of a less favored Hebrew race while also down playing the lesser deeds of the elite religious, Hebrew priest and Levite.

Applicable Discipleship

Finally, Jesus taught the way the truth, the life we are to live amongst each other regardless of our race and religion and even gave us simple principles to live by. It is better to give than receive; love than hate; feed the poor; take care of widows and orphans; teach instead of dismiss; serve instead of be served; to walk in humility instead of seeking fame. This is not the American culture and often times not the American Christian way. It is often mentioned as a good principle to understand, but what about obeying it?

It is true that it is hard to relate to someone that is extreme and that does not believe like we do, but the fact still remains and has for the last 2000 years that as Christ followers are called to a higher plane. News reports of constant extremism here and abroad desensitize the Christian American. The constant reinforcement to be mad and hate other cultures because of their infrastructures in religion, education and politics has diminished the Christian believer's value to think less of others who have equally been created in the image of God and think more of themselves. This is nothing more than spiritual pride and this is what Jesus hated more than anything else. Furthermore, it is not teaching Christ, but rather consciously and willfully choosing to dismiss him altogether.

How does H4L change the way American Christians view a ministry opportunity to Muslims? It really comes down to a revelation of the truth for many Christians. It is recommended to not attempt to change the American way of thinking to a more Christ-like view of humanity, but rather constantly reinforce how the teachings of Christ are changing lives. The Apostle Paul wrote that we are to be "living epistles" (a living letter, living out what we

know). As stakeholders of the Heart For Lebanon organization, each person is called to live above the noise of rhetoric and walk out their faith with a sense of prayer for those that are in need of H4L support and prayer for those the H4L representatives speak to about the way they can support the organization. If anything, H4L is telling the story of Syrian lives that are changed through Christian relief how kids and mothers are fed and taken care of. It is recommended to continue telling the story, use more radio and social media to promote the work of Christ in the lives affected by H4L. Mostly, the most powerful way to help Christians reframe their thinking of supporting Muslim refugees is to have some of the indigenous staff from Lebanon tell their story to the American Christian population. There is nothing more important than a testimony of a changed life.

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