

WEEK 1 OF 6

Foundations

Muhammad, the Qur'an, and Why This Matters

Christianity & Islam • September 13, 2026

Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church • Tampa, Florida

Why Study Islam?

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect.” — 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

1.8 Billion Muslims

Islam is the world’s second-largest religion — roughly 25% of the global population.

Growing Interfaith Encounters

Muslims are your neighbors, colleagues, and classmates. Ignorance is not kindness.

Equipping for Faithful Witness

Effective evangelism requires knowing what you’re engaging, not just what you believe.

Responding to Qur’anic Claims

The Qur’an makes specific claims about Christianity. We must be able to evaluate them.

Class Schedule

1

Foundations

Muhammad, the Qur'an, key concepts, and why this study matters

2

Tawhid vs. Trinity

Two views of God's oneness: the Qur'an's critique and the biblical answer

3

Jesus in the Qur'an

'Isa vs. the biblical Christ: what Islam affirms, denies, and misunderstands

4

The Cross & Salvation

The crucifixion denial, the "scales" of judgment, and the biblical gospel

5

Scripture Wars

Bible corruption charges, Muhammad in the Bible claims, and manuscript evidence

6

Faithful Witness

Qur'anic textual history and how to engage Muslim neighbors with grace and truth

Muhammad of Mecca

~570 AD

Born in Mecca, Quraysh tribe

~576 AD

Orphaned; raised by uncle Abu Talib

~595 AD

Married Khadijah (his first wife, ~40 yrs old)

~610 AD

First revelation in Cave Hira (Jabal al-Nour)

613 AD

Begins public preaching in Mecca

~616 AD

Persecution intensifies; Muslims emigrate to Ethiopia

619 AD

Year of Sorrow: deaths of Khadijah and Abu Talib

Laylat al-Qadr (Night of Power): First revelation via angel Jibreel: “Read!” (Surah 96:1–5). The beginning of 23 years of revelation.

Muhammad in Medina

622 AD

Hijra — emigration to Medina; Year 1 of Islamic calendar (AH 1)

624 AD

Battle of Badr: ~313 Muslims defeat ~1,000 Meccans

625 AD

Battle of Uhud: Muslim forces suffer setback

627 AD

Battle of the Trench (Khandaq): siege repelled

628 AD

Treaty of Hudaibiyyah (10-yr truce, broken in 2 yrs)

630 AD

Conquest of Mecca; Ka'ba cleansed of idols

632 AD

Muhammad's death; Abu Bakr becomes first Caliph

Rapid expansion 632–732 AD: Arabia → Persia → Egypt → North Africa → Spain → halted at Battle of Tours (732 AD, Charles Martel).

Was Muhammad a Prophet of God?

Because he is identified as a Prophet in the Qur'an?

Pro: Muhammad is named explicitly four times in the Qur'an: most directly in relation to Allah in Surahs 33:40 and 48:29; 33:40 also expressly calls him "the Seal of the Prophets."

Con: Unclear whether references are a name or a title. Surah 61.6 seems to say his name was Ahmed, not Mohanned.

Because he was prophesied in the Bible?

Surah 30:30

Pro: Dt 18:18-19 (I will raise up for them a prophet like you [Moses] from among their brothers); John 16:12-14 ("...when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth..")

Con: These verses are references to (1) Jesus and (2) the Holy Spirit.

Because of his outstanding moral character?

Pro: The Hadith literature says Muhammed taught many good things: feed the poor; love others; abstain from theft, fornication and infanticide, and more.

Con: His aberrant behaviors, love of jihad (war), assassinations, cruelty, slaving, and mass slaughters

Because of his scientific insights, far beyond his times?

Pro: *In the Qur'an and Hadith, Muhammad recorded scientific discoveries unknown until much later, such as embryo development and the geology of mountains.*

Con: *the claimed scientific prophecies were either previously discovered by earlier scientists or are so vague or fanciful they fail to qualify as scientific observations.*

The Qur'an: Basic Facts

114

Surahs (chapters)

~6,236

Ayat (verses)

23 yrs

Duration of revelation
(610–632 AD)

Organization: Length, Not Chronology

The Qur'an is arranged roughly from longest to shortest surah — not in the order it was revealed. The opening Surah (al-Fatiha) is an exception. This makes chronological reading very different from thematic reading.

Meccan vs. Medinan Surahs

Meccan surahs (earlier): shorter, poetic, eschatological, focused on monotheism and judgment. Medinan surahs (later): longer, legal, political, governing community life, warfare, and relations with non-Muslims.

Sacred language: Only Arabic is the Qur'an proper; translations are “interpretations.” Sunni orthodoxy holds it is uncreated and eternal (cf. the Mu'tazilite controversy, 9th century).

How to Read the Qur'an

Abrogation (Naskh): Surah 2:106

“Whatever verse We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We substitute something better or similar.” Later revelations can supersede earlier ones — chronology determines precedence.

Hadith, Sirah & Sunnah

Hadith: recorded sayings and actions of Muhammad. Sirah: recorded biographies of him. Sunnah: his normative practice. They provide the primary interpretive text for the Qur'an. The six Hadith collections (Bukhari, Muslim, etc.) are almost as authoritative as the Qur'an itself for legal purposes.

Tafsir (Commentary Tradition)

Tafsir is the science of Qur'anic interpretation. Classical commentaries by Ibn Kathir, al-Tabari, and others are essential reading. Muslims do not read the Qur'an in isolation any more than Reformed Christians read the Bible without commentaries — context and tradition matter.

Why Christians Find It Disorienting

The Qur'an is not narrative: no Genesis-to-Revelation arc, no redemptive storyline. It is more like a collection of proclamations, regulations, and polemical dialogues. Key Biblical figures (Adam, Moses, Jesus) appear but in different roles and with different outcomes.

Key Islamic Concepts

Mithaq — Primordial Covenant

Surah 7:172

Before creation, all human souls were gathered and testified to God's lordship ("Am I not your Lord?" — "Yes, we testify."). This covenant grounds Islamic theology of human responsibility.

Fitra — Innate Disposition

Surah 30:30

Every human is born Muslim — with an innate orientation toward God (fitra). On this view, it is upbringing (especially non-Muslim parents) that corrupts this original state.

The Five Pillars

Hadith — Bukhari 1:2:7

Shahada (testimony of faith) — Salat (5 daily prayers) — Zakat (almsgiving, 2.5% of surplus wealth) — Sawm (fasting during Ramadan) — Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca once if able).

Ummah — The Muslim Community

Surah 3:110

The worldwide community of Muslims — transcending tribe, nation, and race. Islam is inherently communal and political; there is no private faith divorced from the Ummah's welfare and law.

Discussion Questions

1. Muhammad's Medinan Biography

How does the shift in the Medinan period — military campaigns, political governance, legal revelation — affect how we evaluate Muhammad's prophetic claims? How does this compare with the biblical prophets and with Jesus?

2. The Qur'an's Non-Chronological Structure

The Qur'an is arranged by length, not chronology. How does this differ from the Bible's structure, and why does it matter for interpretation — especially given the principle of abrogation?

3. The Five Pillars and the Means of Grace

What parallels and differences do you see between the Islamic Five Pillars (Shahada, Salat, Zakat, Sawm, Hajj) and the Christian means of grace (Word, prayer, sacraments, fellowship)?

4. Fitra and Reformed Anthropology

The Qur'an teaches every person is born Muslim (Fitra) but corrupted by environment. How does this compare with Reformed theology's doctrine of original sin and the noetic effects of the fall?

Next Week — Week 2 of 6

Tawhid vs. Trinity: Two Views of God's Oneness

How does Islam's doctrine of divine unity (Tawhid) compare with the Christian Trinity? Does the Qur'an critique the real Trinity — or a misunderstood version? We'll examine Surah 5:116, the Athanasian Creed, and the crucial distinction between being and person.

Reading Assignment: White, "What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an," Chapters 3–4.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." — Proverbs 9:10

Christianity & Islam • Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church • Tampa, Florida