

## Aim of lesson

In schools in Britain religious education covers all the major world religions, and any young person who follows the Lord Jesus Christ is likely to be expected to justify their beliefs in this context. Islam (the faith of Moslems) has been chosen because of the large, and increasing, numbers of Moslems in the western world, and because of the direct relationship between their faith and Bible teaching.

The aim of the lesson is that the young people should

- understand something of the faith of Moslems
- be able to explain the difference between the Koran and the Bible
- learn to appreciate and value God's message in the Bible

Many young people with Christadelphian parents are troubled by the thought that 'they are only Christadelphians because their parents are'. As a teacher you may be concerned about the prospect of introducing the beliefs of others into a Christadelphian Sunday School, but lessons like this should be seen in that context, both as a direct way of helping the young people and, by way of example, to show them that we are not afraid to think about other faiths.

## Bible background

2 Timothy 3:15-17

2 Peter 1:20-21

## Preparation required

There is too much material in the students' notes for them to assimilate in one week, so you will need to decide how much time to spend. Depending on their interest, or local conditions, you may devote two or more weeks to this topic, or select parts to be considered. Any material not used should be useful to the young people for later reference.

## Suggested outline of lesson

Spend a few minutes on a general introduction, asking the young people what they know of other faiths. They may have been taught something of the beliefs of Buddhists, Hindus and Moslems, though the lessons will probably have concentrated on their practices rather than the underlying beliefs.

Turn to the Islamic faith and bring out some key points about the life of Muhammad (or Mohammed). Make sure the young people realise that he lived some time after the Bible had been completed. It is worth bringing out the reverence with which Moslems treat the Koran (Jews and Hindus treat their writings with the same care). This is a positive lesson for us.

If you do not want to deal in any detail with the extracts from the Koran, a simpler approach to the lesson is simply to consider the questions at the end of the Students' Notes, and to pick one or two extracts that illustrate the answers.

There are some important lessons that emerge from the extracts from the Koran:

### How should we treat other people?

Against the background of the many acts of terrorism around the world that are carried out by Moslem extremists, adherents are commonly accused of belonging to a violent faith. The normal response is that Islam is a peaceful faith and that terrorists are not following the teaching of the Koran.

The truth, of course, is somewhere in between. There are many peace-loving Moslems as well as terrorists. Nonetheless, it has to be said that Islam is the only major religion where so many believers systematically try to achieve their aims by terrorism. It will be argued that 'Christian' countries such as the USA use violence to further their ends, but the justification in those cases is political rather than religious.

It is also true that God instructed the Israelites to destroy the nations in the land of Canaan, but that was at a particular time and for a specific reason, rather than the general teaching of the Koran to 'fight against those who believe not in Allah'.

### Is Jesus the Son of God?

This is a straightforward and fundamental difference between the teaching of Islam and the scriptures. The main point to be made is that both cannot be right. The teaching that Jesus is the Son of God is absolutely fundamental to the Christian faith. If it is not true then the New Testament is false; but if it is true, then the Koran is false and Mahommed cannot be a prophet.

So there is no room for compromise, or for the point of view which argues that all faiths are basically going in the same direction. The gospels were written 'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31 ESV)

## Was Jesus Crucified?

The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is of course the cornerstone of the teaching of the apostles, and the Koran seeks to undermine this by denying that Jesus was crucified - in other words, his disciples believed he had risen from the dead when he had in fact never died.

Moslems refer to the 'Gospel of Barnabus', which also claims that Jesus escaped crucifixion, and accuse the church of suppressing it. However ...

As regards the "Gospel of Barnabas" itself, there is no question that it is a medieval forgery ... It contains anachronisms which can date only from the Middle Ages and not before, and shows a garbled comprehension of Islamic doctrines, calling the Prophet the "Messiah", which Islam does not claim for him. Besides its farcical notion of sacred history, stylistically it is a mediocre parody of the Gospels, as the writings of Baha Allah are of the Koran. (Cyril Glassé, The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989)

## Salvation

Of all the major world religions, Christianity is the only faith that faces up to the fact that human beings are sinful, and need a personal saviour to rescue them from the death that comes as a result. Islam brings a promise of sensual delights to those who do good works.

## Questions

The Student's Notes go on to ask some questions:

### **What do the Bible and the Koran have in common?**

They are both based on the same historical events. It also seems certain that the name 'Allah' used by Moslems has its origin in the Aramaic name 'Elahh' used in those parts of the Old Testament that are in Aramaic (Ezra 4:8 - 6:18 and Daniel 2:4 - 7:28). For example, this name for God is used in Ezra 4:24, and Daniel 2:18-20)

### **What are the differences between them?**

These are evident in the examples that have been quoted.

### **Some people think that all religions serve the same God, so there is no difference. What would you say to someone who thought that?**

Although it is true that Islam has its roots in the teaching of the Old Testament, the Moslem faith differs from Christianity in every important respect. It cannot be true that salvation is through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ and, at the same time, that the New Testament account of his death is wrong.

### **How would you justify believing the Bible rather than the Koran?**

The Koran does not contain prophecies such as those about Babylon which we considered in lesson 2. It is also evident from modern history that the Jews are still God's witnesses in the earth.

### **What can we learn from the way Moslems regard the Koran?**

We can learn from their respect for it, and their dedication to reading it. In addition, their commitment to teaching from the Koran and to regular prayer often put us to shame.

## Relevance to our lives

The aim is to help young people develop a reverence for the Bible as the word of God that will let its message influence their lives. They should also understand and respect the right of others to view their own scriptures as sacred, and that in our relations with them we should always be prepared patiently to explain our faith without mocking or deriding theirs.

## Prayer

Consider what our attitude should be to Moslems - on the one hand Islam is the faith most directly opposed to the truth of the gospel; on the other, Moslems are lost people in need of salvation. Compose and offer a prayer.

## **Other suggestions for activities**

- Get the young people to write a set of notes about the Bible, and how they regard it, that they could give to a Moslem, or to compose a letter to a Moslem that they know.
- A final discussion could focus on the respect and reverence shown by others towards the texts they regard as sacred. By reference to the previous two lessons clarify the way in which we view the Bible. How can we show our respect and reverence in our a) daily life b) worship?