

***Question: Is Allah, the God of the Muslims, different from the God of Christians and Jews?***

Allah is the Arabic translation for the English word “God.” When the Jewish and Christian Bible is translated into Arabic, Indonesian or Malaysian, the word for God is always translated as Allah. While Muslims have some different understandings about God, they do believe that Allah is also the God of all religions that claim Abraham as an ancestor. This would include Muslims, Jews and Christians. When I visited Indonesia in January of 2010, I found the Christians there using the word Allah for God in their hymns. Many of these were traditional hymns that are well-known to us in America. I was told that some Muslims in Malaysia have attempted to prevent Catholics and Protestants in their country from using the word Allah for God, but this has not been the accepted view of Muslims in other countries.

An important difference between Islam and Christianity is not in our understandings of God but in our views of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Muslims do not deny that Jesus lived, but they do deny that he is anything more than another of God’s prophets in a long line of prophets. The biblical idea that God became flesh by being born of a virgin and that he died for our sins is abhorrent to Muslims. They believe that Jesus was a prophet of God but that Mohammed, who came years later, was the last and greatest prophet of God. However, Jesus clearly claimed to be one with God (John 1:1, 14; 8:58; 10:30). In addition, the Bible teaches that to reject Jesus as the descendant of Abraham who would bless all nations is to reject the word of God to Abraham (John 8:31-58).

Still, I believe that a respectful understanding of our common faith in God can establish a beginning point for honest discussion between Muslims and Christians. When the apostle Paul visited the Areopagus in ancient Athens, he observed among their many objects of worship an altar to “AN UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23). Beginning with this common ground, he was able to present the message of faith in both God and the resurrected Christ. We need to follow a similar approach today with Muslims.

During my visit in Indonesia, I found that the vast majority of Muslims there wanted peace and abhorred the evil and terrorism of extremists among them. I visited in their homes, ate with them, talked about religion

with them and made my first visit to a mosque. I was encouraged to find them open to honest discussion of what we believe. Also, Muslims are as offended by misrepresentations of their faith as Christians or Jews are offended about misrepresentations of their faith. Although there are many differences between Islam and Christianity, we do share faith in the same God (Allah) who created our world. This is something that cannot be said of many other world religions. Jesus Christ came and died for all races and nations. Therefore, Christians should pray for and seek peace and complete oneness through faith in Jesus Christ among all men (Ephesians 1:10; 1 Timothy 2:4). This is what Jesus would do.

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