

Islam & Christianity Lesson 6

Competing Claims: The Qur'an and the Bible

Islam has a complex relationship with the Bible, in no small part because of statements made in the Qur'an. In theory, Muslims believe that Allah (God) gave written revelations to men like Moses and David. This, for them, also includes Jesus, whom they refer to as *Isa*. In some places, the Qur'an seems to suggest that the books given to these earlier men ought to be studied. In other places, it seems to suggest that those words have been corrupted. It also claims Allah will not allow his words to be changed. In some places, the Qur'an suggests that Christians worship a trinity of God, Jesus, and Mary—a gross misunderstanding of Christian teachings.

In short, the Bible stands as the strongest empirical evidence against the validity of the Qur'an. There are copies of the Bible, available in museums today, written centuries before the birth of Muhammad. The claim that the text of the Bible has changed cannot be sustained. And yet that text does not agree with the Qur'an or the Qur'an's claims about it.

While the Qur'an is held in high esteem by Muslims, it does not represent exactly the same position within the Islamic faith as the Bible does within Christianity. Its composition, character, and history are extremely different from those of the Bible. And, in the end, the validity of the Qur'an simply cannot survive a sustained comparison with the Christian Scriptures.

How should Christians view the idea of Muslims having dreams/visions about Jesus?

There are many reports of [Muslims](#) converting to Christianity due to having a dream or experiencing a vision in which Jesus appeared to them. The accounts vary, but most of them have some details in common: 1) Jesus appears to them. 2) Jesus tells them to find and speak to a person at a certain place at a certain time. 3) When the Muslim follows Jesus' instructions, he or she finds the person at exactly the right time and place, and the person explains who Jesus truly is and presents the gospel. 4) The Muslim believes that Jesus is the Savior and places his or her faith in Him, renouncing Islam.

Darren Carlson, writing for the Gospel Coalition, has documented some of the

accounts of Muslims having dreams or visions [here](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/muslims-dream-jesus/) (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/muslims-dream-jesus/>).

What are Christians to make of such claims? Given Jesus' appearance to the apostle Paul in [Acts 9](#), we should at least consider that such accounts are genuine. As Paul (then Saul) was [going to Damascus](#) to arrest Christians, Jesus appeared to him in a vision, blinded him, and told him to wait in Damascus for further guidance. Jesus (via a vision) then sent a man named Ananias to Paul. Ananias explained the gospel, and Paul became a Christian. Paul's life was immediately transformed. He was changed from a persecutor of Christians to a follower of Jesus who powerfully declared the gospel through much of the Roman world.

The saving of [Cornelius](#) in [Acts 10](#) is another biblical example of God using dreams and visions to communicate. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, had a vision of an angel of God telling him to call for a man named Peter in Joppa. Cornelius summoned Peter, who had been alerted (via a vision) that men were coming to see him. Peter traveled with the messengers back to Cornelius and preached the gospel to him. Cornelius was saved and baptized that day.

Notice that, in both the case of Paul and Cornelius, the vision led to the preaching of the gospel. The vision was not the only witness; there was also a gospel preacher involved. We believe this is a key point, because "how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" ([Romans 10:14](#)). Our trust is not in dreams and visions but in the authority of God's Word and the power of the gospel ([Romans 1:16](#); [2 Timothy 3:16–17](#)).

God is a [God of miracles](#). It should not surprise us if God chooses a miraculous means of getting a person's attention and directing him or her to the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. Christians need to pray for Muslims, especially for those in lands where there is little gospel witness. At the same time, they should seek ways to provide Muslims with access to the gospel and the solid teaching of God's Word. And they should rejoice in the miraculous ways God may be drawing Muslims to faith in Jesus Christ.

Is it allowable for a Christian to eat halal food?

The word *halal* means "permissible" in Arabic. It refers to food, objects, or actions that are allowed in Islam. Among other things, halal meat must be killed with a sharp knife and drained of blood. No carnivorous animals, birds of prey, or meat

contaminated with non-permissible substances can be used. This, in and of itself, is a healthy way of preparing meat. The problem comes when Allah's name is pronounced over the meat during the butchering process. Many interpret this to mean the animal was sacrificed to a false god—an idol.

Nearly two thousand years ago, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth regarding the permissibility of eating meat sacrificed to idols, because the Corinthians also struggled with this issue. In Corinth, as in many Roman cities, the only meat available at markets was that which had been sacrificed to a pagan idol. Paul told the Corinthian Christians that a false idol is nothing. It has no authority. It did not create the animal or provide the owner with it ([1 Corinthians 8:4](#)). The point, then, becomes not the food or the idol it was sacrificed to, but concern for other people. Mature Christians realize that food, sacrificed to an idol or not, is a neutral entity. Believers have freedom in Christ to eat or not, as they choose. But freedom is useless without love. And if eating meat sacrificed to idols is harmful to another believer, it should be avoided. Many of the poorest in Corinth could only afford to eat meat in the context of a pagan ritual—to them, meat was equated with their previous life. These “weaker” brothers were not yet free of the religious connotation that meat carried. Therefore, a “stronger” brother indulging in meat-eating could entice the weaker into an action that he believed was wrong and was therefore sin ([Romans 14:23](#)). To Paul, another believer's walk was far more important than what he ate.

Paul continues the discussion, giving specifics: If you're buying meat at the market, don't ask where it came from. If you're invited to a friend's house for a meal, don't ask where it came from. If the information is volunteered that the meat was sacrificed to an idol, refrain ([1 Corinthians 10:23-33](#)). But, Paul says, do not refrain from eating because of your conscience—your conscience should understand that you are free to enjoy God's provision ([1 Corinthians 10:30](#))—but for the conscience of the one who provided it. If a weak brother is offering, you may lead him into sin. If an unbeliever is offering, you may be seen as tacitly endorsing the god to which it was sacrificed. Either way, it doesn't become an issue until the other person brings it up.

[Acts 15:23-29](#) puts a different spin on things. Here, the Christian elders in Jerusalem sent a letter to the new believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, giving them certain guidelines: “...that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication.” Why the discrepancy? One possibility is geography. Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia are much closer to Israel

than Corinth. The new Gentile believers would have had much more contact with Jewish Christians who still identified with Jewish law. Like the circumcision issue in [Acts 15:1-12](#), the food regulations would have promoted unity in the church. Corinth, conversely, is in Greece. Meat not sacrificed to idols would have been very hard to find.

Halal food is no different. There is one God who provides for us. Claiming the name of a false god does nothing to the food physically or spiritually. But, like the Corinthians, we should always act out of love. If we are with others who believe halal food is wrong to eat, we should refrain from concern for their conviction. If we are served food by someone who makes a point that it is halal, we should refrain as a quiet sign that we do not accept the authority of the false god to which it was dedicated. If we are in a restaurant or market or school or home that, we suspect, is serving halal food, we should eat and give thanks to the true God who provides.

What is Hallal food?

Muslims prefer halal meat primarily because eating halal is a direct religious commandment in Islam to maintain spiritual purity, obedience to God, and physical health.

Understanding Halal vs. Haram

The concepts of halal and haram govern all aspects of Islamic life, but they are most visibly applied to dietary laws:

- **Halal (حلال):** An Arabic word meaning "**permissible**" or "**lawful.**" It refers to any object, food, or action that is allowed under Islamic law.
- **Haram (حرام):** An Arabic word meaning "**forbidden**" or "**prohibited.**" It refers to anything that is explicitly banned by God due to its potential physical, spiritual, or emotional harm.

What Makes Meat Halal?

For meat to be considered halal, it must come from a permissible animal (such as chicken, beef, or lamb) and be processed using a specific, humane method known as *Dhabihah*:

- **Invocation of God's Name:** The slaughterer—who must be a sane adult Muslim who must pronounce the name of God (*Bismillah*, "In the name of God") at the exact moment of sacrifice.

- **Humane Sacrifice:** The animal must be alive and healthy before slaughter. The sacrifice is performed using a swiftly applied, razor-sharp knife to sever the windpipe, esophagus, jugular veins, and carotid arteries. This instantly cuts off blood flow to the brain, minimizing pain and rendering the animal unconscious quickly.
- **Complete Blood Drainage:** The blood must be entirely drained from the carcass. In Islamic law, blood is considered impure and a breeding ground for harmful bacteria.

What Makes Meat Haram?

Meat is classified as haram if it falls into any of the following categories:

- **Prohibited Animals:** Pork (swine) and all its by-products are strictly forbidden. Carnivorous animals with fangs (like lions or dogs), birds of prey (like eagles), reptiles, and pests are also haram.
- **Improper Slaughter:** Meat from an animal that died by strangulation, a blow to the head, a fall, being gored, or being scavenged by wild beasts (carrion).
- **No Blessing:** Animals slaughtered without invoking the name of God or sacrificed in the name of idols or anyone other than God.
- **Cross-Contamination:** Halal meat that comes into contact with pork, alcohol, or other haram substances during processing or cooking.

Why Muslims Choose Halal Meat

- **Religious Obedience:** Fulfilling dietary requirements is viewed as an act of worship and a way to maintain a clean spiritual connection with God.
- **Hygiene and Health:** Draining the blood removes toxins, bacteria, and uric acid, resulting in cleaner, safer meat with a longer shelf life.
- **Animal Welfare:** Islamic law requires that animals be raised in stress-free environments, treated with respect, and never slaughtered in front of other animals.