



Introduction to the Koran

SESSION 1

A basic understanding of the Koran, the holy scriptures of Islam, can be beneficial in understanding our Muslim brothers and sisters.

Introduction

Some knowledge of the Koran, the holy scriptures of Islam, will help in understanding the influence of Muslim peoples upon the world today. Because the Koran is written in Arabic, it is spelled in English as either Qur'an or Koran. This survey of the subject will cover four points: (1) the origin of the Koran, (2) its form, (3) its function, and (4) its content. In general we shall follow the traditional Islamic point of view in describing the Koran without dealing with questions of historical criticism or Christian theology. The author has translated all the passages found in this study from the original Arabic.

The Origin of the Koran

Muslims believe that the message of their sacred scripture was a part of the store of divine wisdom from which revelations to other peoples were taken. So there is no contradiction between the basic teaching of the Koran and that of any divinely revealed scripture. What makes the Book unique is that it was revealed in the Arabic language to people, the Arabs, who had had no previous written message from God.

Muhammad ibn Abdallah of Mecca, Arabia, was the human messenger who received the words of the Koran and passed them on orally to his friends and followers. It is believed that the angel Gabriel was the one who actually delivered the messages to the prophet Muhammad. This process of prophetic communication began about the year 610 when the Prophet was forty years old, and it continued for about twenty-three years. Several of the revelations coincided with momentous events in the early history of Islam. Muhammad's words, delivered



The Koran is the same size as the New Testament, divided into 114 chapters or suras.

in the form of proclamation, were not written down at first but were preserved and treasured in the memories of the early believers in Islam. In ancient Arabia people cultivated remarkable memories, since writing was little practiced. Eventually, of course, the prophetic messages were recorded in writing, many of them during Muhammad's lifetime. He is said to have employed secretaries for this task. A few years after his death in 632, it became evident that in the interest of the growth and development of Islam, the words of revelation had to be collected and put into definitive form. This was begun by the first caliph, or successor to Muhammad, Abu Bakr, who governed from 632 to 634.

The chapters of the Koran, called suras, were copied from many scattered manuscripts and arranged in order. The resulting book was delivered for safekeeping to one of the early women leaders of Islam, Hafsa, the daughter of the second caliph, Umar. By the time of the third caliph, Uthman (644–656), versions of the Koran had proliferated. One reason was that in the beginning the text was written with Arabic consonants only. In general this was no hindrance to understanding the meaning