

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

MUSLIM AND MU'MIN (BELIEVER) - THE DIFFERENCE

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There is often a degree of confusion as to the meaning of the terms 'Muslim' and 'Mu'min' (Believer).

Please see related article [1] below:

'Muslim' is a term for anyone who submits or surrenders their will to the One true God of the Universe with obedience.

This is irrespective of whether or not they have belief in the veracity of the Quran or its messenger.

In the context of the Quran and the Prophetic ministry, a 'Mu'min' was one that 'believed' in the veracity of the Quran and the messenger (i.e. Prophet Muhammad)^(pbuh) that God appointed to deliver the final scripture to mankind. Therefore, a Mu'min believed in God, all His scriptures and His messengers.

002:285

"The messenger believes in that which has been revealed to him from his Lord and (so do) believers (Arabic: mu'minuna). Each one believes in God and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers - We make no distinction between any of His messengers - and they say: We hear, and we obey. (Grant us) Thy forgiveness, our Lord. Unto Thee is the journeying"

The two terms 'Muslim' and 'Mu'min' have been used distinctly in the Quranic text. Unfortunately, the English translation 'believer' is understood in its vague remit, whereas the Quranic 'Mu'min' is much more specific in its meaning.

For example, one may be a Muslim but may not yet be a 'Mu'min' (believer) as true faith has not yet entered their hearts. There may be some semblance of 'obedience' with practice and purpose but true 'imaan' (deep belief) may still yet remain elusive.

This is exemplified in the following verse:

049:014

The desert Arabs say, "**We believe! (Arabic: Amana)**" Say, "**Do not say you believe (Arabic: tu'minu); but only say, 'We have submitted our wills to God (Arabic: Asalamna),'** as belief (Arabic: I-imanu) has not yet entered your hearts. But if you obey God and His Messenger, He will not deprive you anything of your deeds: for God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

Therefore, being a Muslim first (submitting and surrendering one's will to God) is a pre-requisite to acquiring belief. Once one has submitted their will to God, only then can 'belief' (Arabic: imaan) truly enter the hearts.

Another example is cited with regards Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) who claimed to be the first of the believers at the point when true faith entered his heart.

007.143

"And when Moses came to the place appointed by Us and his Lord spoke to him, He said: "O my Lord! show (Thyself) to me, that I may look upon You." God said: "By no means can you see Me; But look upon the mount; if it remains in its place, then shall you see Me." But when his Lord manifested His glory on the Mount, He made it crumble to dust. And Moses fell down in a swoon / unconscious. When he recovered his senses he said: "Glory be to You! to You I turn in repentance (Arabic: tub'tu) and I am the first to believe. (Arabic: Mumineen)"

Please note that Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) immediately asked for 'Tauba' (repentance) which is invariably linked to what he asked of God with a possible view to strengthen his own heart.

Similarly, there is resonance with a narrative involving Prophet Abraham ^(pbuh) who also asked to have his heart strengthened by a sign.

002.260 (part)

"And when Abraham said: "My Lord, show me how You will raise the dead, " He (God) said: "**Have you not believed (Arabic: awalam tu'min')?**" He said "Yes, but just to reassure / satisfy my heart..."

Also there are countless examples given in the Quran of those who have been described as 'Muslims' but could never have known of the final scripture (Quran) or Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh)

- Prophet Noah ^(pbuh) asks for no reward from his people, he states that he is one of the **Muslimen (10:72)**

- Prophet Solomon's ^(pbuh) letter to Sheba requesting her in the name of the Lord to abandon her blasphemy and for her to surrender with her people and become one of the **Muslimeen (27:31)**
- Prophet Solomon ^(pbuh) acknowledged his own state as being one of those of the '**Muslimen' (27:42)**
- All but one house from the people of Prophet Lot ^(pbuh) submitted to God **(Muslimeen) (51:36)**
- Prophet Abraham ^(pbuh) was one who submitted to His Lord **(Musliman) (3:67)**
- Disciples of Prophet Jesus ^(pbuh) confirm that they submit to God **(Muslimoon) (3:52)**
- Prophet Joseph ^(pbuh) prays to his Lord to die as one who is a '**Musliman' (12:101)**
- Prophet Jacob's ^(pbuh) children at the point of his death professed that they submit to God **(Muslimoon) (2:133).**
- Even the magicians of Pharaoh called themselves **muslims** once they had seen the signs given to Prophet Moses ^(pbuh) **(7:126)**

None of the above people either knew of the final Prophet (Muhammad) ^(pbuh) or of the final revelation (the Quran). However, as they had submitted their wills to God, they had become 'Muslims'.

Therefore, the Quranic definition of a Muslim is not exclusively tied to belief in Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh)

Indeed, at the time of the Prophet Muhammad's ^(pbuh) ministry, there were some amongst the People of the Book that did indeed believe in the veracity of the messenger and of his preaching. These people were 'mu'mins' yet still retained their title as 'People of the Book'. They still followed their own commandments, yet accepted the veracity of the final messenger of God and became witnesses to the truth. **True belief (imaan) had therefore entered their hearts.**

005.083

"And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth: they pray: "Our Lord! **we have believed (Arabic: amanna); write us down among the witnesses (Arabic: Shahadin)"**

003.199

"And there are, certainly, among the People of the Book, those who believe in God, **in the revelation to you, and in the revelation to them**, bowing in humility to God: They will not sell the Signs of God for a miserable gain! For them is a reward with their Lord, and God is swift in account"

People who believed in the previous scriptures were already Muslims as can be seen in the following verse:

028:52-53

"Those to whom We sent the Book before this, they believe in it. And when it is recited to them, they say "We believe in it, surely it is the truth from our Lord, surely **before this (min-qablihi) we were muslims (Arabic: Muslimina)"**

Therefore in the **context of the Quran's revelation and the Prophet's ministry**, we note a clear distinction between the terms 'Muslim' and 'Mu'min' in the Quran, illustrated by the diagram below.

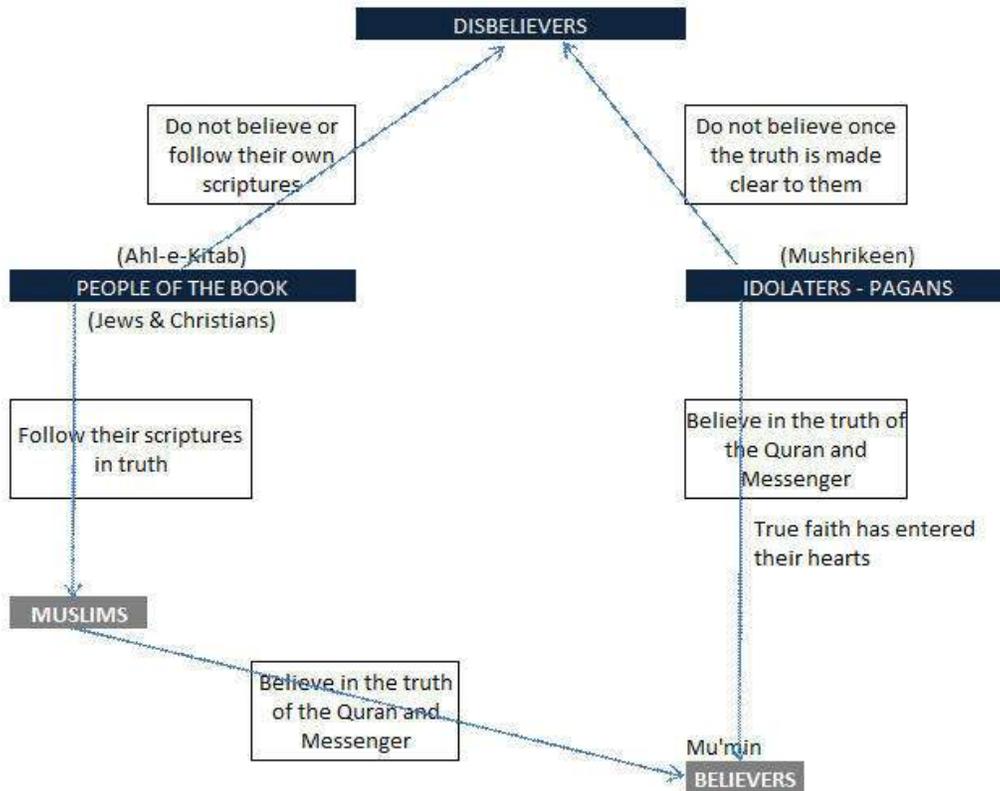


Illustration: Joseph Islam

FINAL THOUGHTS

Muslims are those that submit their will to God and can be from the followers of the previous messengers and scriptures (Jews and Christians included). In the context of the Quran's revelation, a 'Mu'min' is a Muslim but also believes in the veracity of the final message delivered by the final Prophet, Muhammad. ^(pbuh)

The term 'Mu'min' is specifically linked to true faith which enters deep into the hearts of mankind.

Related Article:

- (1) [Why is the term 'Muslims' Hijacked?](#)

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