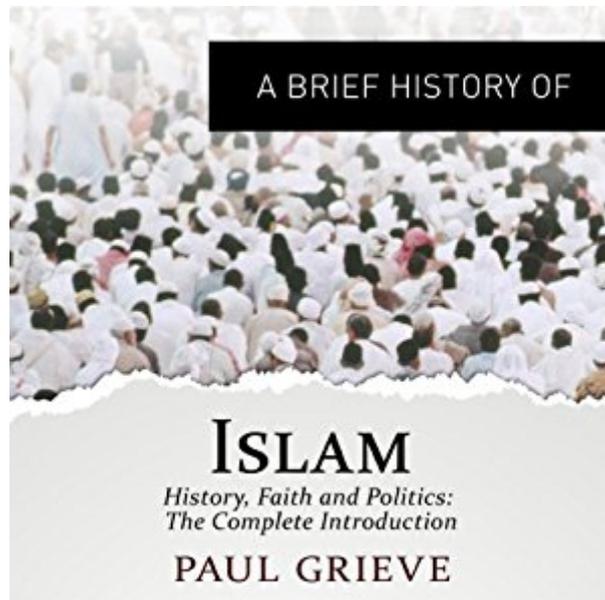


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# A Brief Guide To Islam: Brief Histories



## Synopsis

Exploring the beliefs, history, and politics of the ordinary people of Muslim countries, Grieve cuts through the complexities as he examines all aspects of Islam. He also addresses the big issues: Can Islam support true democracy? Is true democracy what the West really wants for Muslim countries or are we merely seeking a cover of legitimacy for a policy of 'might is right'? Paul Grieve is an unbeliever - he is not a born-again Muslim, a proselytizer or a frustrated desert romantic. His aim is to inform. The result is an accessible but never simplistic guide that challenges stereotypical views, from women and banking to war and Malcolm X. Complete with advice for visitors to Muslim countries, and with carefully chosen primary sources, maps, and illustrations, this is the ideal summary for the listener looking for an unbiased overview of the religious and political world issues that have become part of our everyday lives.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is a very good introduction to Islam. It is educational and interesting. It is written so that the most important information is presented first, and less important (and more detailed) information is presented later. For instance, Muhammed's biography, the Five Pillars of Islam, and a comparison between Islam and other world religions are all within the first half of the book. Short stories on topics of interest are spread throughout the book, and that makes the reading easier. However, I cannot give the book 5 stars because it seems like the author seeks to praise Islam at the expense of Judaism and Christianity. He seems to willingly accept stereotypes of these religions while trying to debunk stereotypes about Islam. For instance, Grieve states, "Death is not

itself regarded as a punishment in Islam, as in Christianity." I'm not aware of any Christian denomination that presents death as punishment. It's almost as if Grieve acquired his knowledge of Judaism and Christianity from characters in fictional television series. While reading the book, I couldn't help but compare the author to a protective mother who sees no wrong in her own child but will lash out at anyone else who dares to offer advice or criticism. In this light, the words on the jacket seem to be more defensive than factual: "Paul Grieve is an unbeliever -- he is not a born-again Muslim, a proselytizer or a frustrated desert romantic." Having said all this, I still highly recommend the book. The simple fact is that I learn more when I read a book that challenges my preconceived notions. When Mr. Grieve sticks to talking about Islam instead of other faiths, his writing is very engaging. It's just unfortunate that the bias is most evident in the first 20 pages of the text.

Anyone with a typical westerner's knowledge of Islam ought to read this book. It is an incredibly comprehensive overview of Muslim theology, traditions, history, law, and polity. A lot of us ask about Islamists, "what is it that they want": this book goes a very long way to explaining that. For me it successfully defines the concept of "Salafiyya"; a return to a purer Muslim observance and observance of Shariah law that would render virtually paradise on earth. Mind you, the author doesn't overlook the nuances of Salafiyya, from the Muslim Brotherhood, to Saudi Wahhabism, to the primitivist Taliban. Western political and cultural influence both are seen as anathema to the achievement of the ideal Islamic community. The author is at all times sympathetic towards Islam and takes its point of view throughout, (actually POINTS of view) -- this is only what you would hope for from a book with this one's purpose. Granted, sometimes he invidiously compares Judaism and Christianity, but never unreasonably I feel. He is relentlessly critical of historic & current western, including American, policies towards Muslim countries, not to mention the actions of the Israeli state. In my opinion, like the author's, there are huge injustices here which some of us would rather overlook: too bad if we do. In the end, however, I feel I have come to understand the essence of Shariah law and hence the Islamist threat. The problem with Shariah law is not that it discriminates against women, (which it does), nor the barbaric, "prescribed" punishments, (e.g. cutting of the hands of thieves, which is would apply only extreme cases anyway). But in that Shariah depends NOT on the will of the governed, (as does western law in general), but SOLELY on the Will of God.

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