

The Rise and Threat of Islam

Islam's History and Theology

Introduction

- The Islamic faith, from its beginning to now, has always been the greatest political and military threat to Christianity. It also has been the greatest challenge to Christian missionaries.
- The religion was founded by Muhammad (570-632 CE) roughly 600 years after the birth of Christ.
 - Islamic apologists will immediately dismiss the notion that Muhammad founded Islam, but instead they will claim it was the religion of Adam, Abraham, and Jesus. They believe that Muhammad simply was the final prophet of this religion.
- It posed a political and military threat because Islam attempted to conquer the world for Islam by means of war. This brought them into a collision with both Eastern and Western Christianity.
- The impact on the church cannot be underestimated.
- This lesson will discuss Islam's early history, it's doctrine, and its interaction with Christianity.



The Life of Muhammad

- Muhammad was born in a violent polytheistic Arab culture that was divided by tribal lines.
- His personal life was one of much tragedy.
 - His father died right after his birth, his mother died when he was six years old, his grandfather died when he was eight years old, and he lived thereafter until adulthood with his uncle Abu.
- Abu operated a caravan that traveled to Palestine, Syria, and Persia, thus bringing Muhammad into contact with Jews and Christians.
 - It is worth noting that the Arabian world was religiously Pagan (Arab Paganism), but there was a strong Jewish economic presence, and there were scattered Monophysite and Nestorian Christian populations.
 - Therefore, Muhammad was widely exposed to both Judaism and forms of Christianity.
 - He engaged in many religious conversations on his caravan travels.
- There were also Arab monotheists that were neither Jewish or Christian, but were influenced by them. Muhammad became one of these monotheists before inventing a new religion.
 - When he was twenty-five years old, Muhammad married a forty-year old rich widow named Khadijah, had three sons with her, but all three sons died.
 - After this, Muhammad became deeply religious, often meditating in the caves of Mecca.

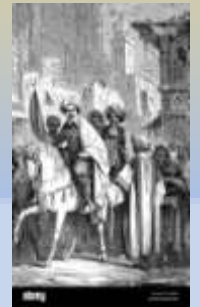


Muhammad's "Revelations"

- It was at this time, in the year 610, that he began to receive revelations.
 - He likely suffered from epilepsy (or worse) because his revelations often caused him to fall to the ground in convulsions while foaming at the mouth.
- Muhammad concluded that these were demonic attacks, but Khadijah convinced him to listen to the revelations believing they were from God.
 - The messenger claimed to be the angel Gabriel, and for the next twenty-years Muhammad received these revelations, and they still bore the symptoms of epileptic seizures.
- Gabriel commanded him to recite the revelation, which later was put to writing in the Qur'an.
 - The Qur'an is comprised of the written records (or surahs) of these recitations.
- Muhammad claimed to be a new and final prophet of the true religion of Islam with the mission of restoring the original religion of the true God.
- In a haphazard manner, Islam blended Jewish and Christian ideas with Arabic ones.
- Initially, Muhammad's new religion was not well received in Mecca, and not long after Khadijah died (as well as his uncle Abu), he was forced to flee Mecca in 622.

Muhammad in Medina

- This moment in Muhammad's life is called the Hijra, which means flight, and it is the official start date of the Islamic calendar.
- Muhammad fled over 200 miles north of Mecca to the city of Yathrib.
 - There he became a successful man due to his political shrewdness and ability to mediate disputes between the tribal leaders.
 - He emerged as the leader of the city and united it under his banner by politically marrying women from the tribal families.
- Yathrib was declared an Islamic city under Muhammad and was renamed Medina, meaning "City of the Prophet."
- After Khadijah, Muhammad married twelve other women, but still sired no surviving sons.
 - Since he married these women for political and social power, it is reasonable to question that his first marriage to Khadijah also was a strategic move for him, since she was wealthy.
 - In fact, only one of his marriages gained him no social advancement—his favorite marriage (to Aisha)—and yet this marriage was quite disturbing. She was the daughter of his friend Abu Bakr.
 - Muhammad married and consummated the marriage with her when she was only nine years old. The prophet was a pedophile.



Theological Conflict with Jews and Christians

- In Medina Muhammad tried to spread the faith to Jews and Christians.
 - This resulted in many favorable statements about Judaism and Christianity in the parts of the Qu'ran that were written early.
 - Perhaps he used flattery in an attempt to win these other religions over to Islam.
 - In fact, the Qu'ran claims that previous revelation from Allah is found in the Torah, Psalms of David, and the Gospels of Jesus.
- As the Christians and Jews rejected Muhammad as a prophet, he became upset with them and received later revelations that condemned them and encouraged their killing if they would not convert.
- The Jews in particular offended Muhammad since they publically debated him, scoffed when he could not produce signs or prophecies, and ridiculed him.
 - He would later carry out an annihilation of Jews in the Arabian Peninsula.



The Conquest of Mecca & Unification of Arabs

- After his position was secure in northern Arabia, he waged war against the Meccan caravans as a means of luring Mecca into a larger war.
- After winning a series of major battles, Muhammad conquered Mecca in 630 and made it the capital of Islam.
 - All of the idols in the Kaba were destroyed, and the worship site was dedicated to Allah alone.
- Muhammad proceeded to weld all of the Arab tribes into a theocracy with himself as the head of the society. Two years later, he died.
- Following his death, the Arabs now united under Islam, turned their constant inward fighting outward and proved to be an unstoppable force.
 - There was some fighting at first as some tribes rebelled during the reign of his successor, but they were quickly reunited and their aggression was turned outward.
- The world was now set to face a unique army. The soldiers were brave, tough, and sober. And they fought with a zeal for their faith that made them unafraid of death. The Islamic hordes will capture much territory very quickly.



Factors that Favored Islamic Expansion

- Muslim victories were not necessarily due to the toughness of the Islamic armies, as tough as they were.
 - There were other factors that eased their victories. Had Islam been founded even 50 years earlier, their initial success would not have happened.
- First, the Byzantine Empire was badly split along geographical lines due to the Monophysite controversies.
 - The Coptic Egyptians, the Syriac Syrians, and the Armenians were opposed to Byzantium. They did not resist Islamic invasion because they saw them as liberators.
- Second, the Persian Empire was finally destroyed by the Byzantines by 628.
 - The Byzantine forces could not stay in Persia, however, since their forces would be stretched too thinly. So they returned home.
 - Muhammad was still battling Mecca during this time. No one saw any threat from Arabia. But the Persian defeat now left a huge vacuum in Mesopotamia and Iran.
- The Byzantine lands closest to Arabia were Egypt and Syria, the two parts of the empire that wanted to be free from it.
 - So Islam will not have a difficult time claiming the Middle East (former Persian territory) or the eastern periphery of the Byzantine Empire. It would be an easy fight.
 - From there, they could use those gains and the momentum from them to rapidly expand their conquests.

Islamic Conquests

- Muhammad died as master of Arabia in 632. His successor kept all Arabs united by the time of his death in 634.
- In 635, the Muslims besieged and captured Damascus.
- In 637, they took Jerusalem.
- In 638, Antioch, Caesarea, and 17 other Syrian cities fell.
- By 639, they had all of Syria under their control.
- In 640, the Muslims invaded Egypt. Alexandria fell in 641.
 - And the Monophysite populations welcomed these invasions. The Muslims would not have conquered these lands so easily if the Syrians and Egyptians did not already feel alienated and disloyal to the Byzantine Empire.
- Because of these easy conquests, three of the five great Patriarchates (Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch) were now under Islamic control.
- Within 9 years of Muhammad's death, that large of a dent was made into Christendom. The only two patriarchates left were Constantinople and Rome.



Islamic Conquests Cont'd

- The Muslims invaded the Persian lands in 639, which was an easy victory since Persian power was shattered by the Byzantines 11 years earlier.
- From there, they were able to stretch into the furthest Persian territory—Afghanistan and Northern India.
 - They will have those under control by the early 8th century (700s).
- The Muslims sought to use their momentum to destroy the Byzantine Empire, which was now pushed back deep into Asia Minor.
- The Muslim fleets defeated and captured many of the Mediterranean islands, like Cyprus in 648.
- The southern part of Asia Minor was under their control by 651. So was Armenia.
- They then nearly destroyed the Byzantine fleet in 655.



Islam's First Defeat

- The Muslim land army then thought it could strike the deathblow by taking Constantinople.
 - Thus, the land and sea forces besieged the capital for five straight years (673-78) only to be defeated. This was their first defeat, and it actually was a total failure.
- A new Byzantine invention known as Greek fire ravaged both land soldiers and ships.
 - It was a chemical mixture that burned even worse when you put water on it.
 - By hurling this on the besieging Muslim army, it had a destructive effect. Some say it was the nuclear bomb of medieval warfare.
- A storm off the coast of Pamphylia destroyed the Muslim fleet.
- Then the Byzantine Emperor, Constantine IV (668-685) annihilated the Muslim army at the battle of Syllaeum in 678.
- In 679, Constantine IV and caliph Muawiyah stopped fighting and officially recognized each other's territory.
- Islam's Eastern conquests were halted here, and Constantinople will last until 1453.



Islam's Western Invasion & Its Limits

- In the West, the Muslim advances will continue for decades after their Eastern setback.
- From Egypt, they invaded West Africa, but encountered fierce resistance from the Berber population.
 - Savage fighting that lasted 50 years swept over the land. Eventually the Muslims gained control and the Berbers converted to Islam becoming zealous soldiers themselves.
- The Muslim Berber armies crossed over from North Africa into Visigothic Spain in 711. By 718, they conquered all of Spain except the northern coastlands.
- The Muslims then pushed up in France where they were decisively defeated by the Franks under Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours in 732.
 - This permanently stopped the Muslim expansion into Europe. They forced the Muslims back into Spain where they stayed the next 700 years.
- There will be constant struggling between the Muslims and Christians in Spain until the Muslims are finally expelled back into North Africa in 1492 by the great Spanish Catholic king, Ferdinand of Castile and Aragon.



The Fracturing of Islamic Unity



- The unity of the Islamic Empire was very impressive at first, but it did not last.
- After the murder of the third Caliph in 656, Uthman, Muslims divided into two parties.
- One party thought leadership should be hereditary to Muhammad and go to his nephew Ali.
 - Ali married Muhammad's daughter, and so their children were Muhammad's grandchildren.
 - This party was called the Shi'ites. They held that a living leader called an imam that descends from Muhammad's family was essential for true guidance of the Islamic community.
- The other party believed that the nation's elders should freely elect each new caliph, or that the caliph should appoint his own successor.
 - They argued that it is not necessary for the caliph to be descended from Muhammad.
 - That party was called the Sunnis. They argued that an accurate hadith, Qur'an, and imja (community consensus) was more important than a living leader.
- This led to a civil war where Ali emerged as the 4th caliph, but his opponent, Muawiyah, built up an army and had Ali assassinated in 661.
- Muawiyah then became the 5th caliph.

Fractured Islamic Unity

- Under the reign of Muawiyah's son, the Shi'ites revolted. This led to their defeat and the massacre of Ali's family.
 - This secured a permanent division between the two parties.
- Shia is a minority in Islam (about 15%) and it is dominant in Iran.
- Islamic unity was weakened even more when Muslim Spain broke away from the rest of the Islamic empire in 756.
- In the 9th century, Shia Persia gained independence from Sunni caliphs ruling from Baghdad.
- Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya in Northwest Africa did the same.
- In the 10th century, Egypt seceded and became an independent Muslim kingdom.
- This fracturing of Islam opened the door for Western Catholic conquest of the Middle East in the Crusades in the 11th century.



Islamic Theology

- Doctrinally, Islam has five dominant doctrines and a sixth less emphasized one.
- First, there is only one god, Allah. The word Allah simply means, “The God.”
- Second, God has sent many prophets to guide men, but Muhammad is the last and greatest of them, being called the seal of the prophets.
- Third, although there are four inspired books (Torah, Psalms, Gospels, and Qu’ran) the Qu’ran is the most important.
 - In fact, Muslims believe that the Jews and Christians are “people of the book,” and corrupted their revelation thus necessitating the Qu’ran to fix it.
- Fourth, Islam focuses heavily on intermediary deities such as angels, demons, and jinn through a complex angelology.
- Fifth, they believe in a final day of judgment in which all men will be resurrected and sent to either heaven or hell based on their works.
 - Heaven is a place of sensuous delight for males, as they will be served by women for all eternity.
- The sixth, and less emphasized doctrine, is that of *hismet* or fate.
 - In Islam, fate means there is no free will, or any real autonomous volition, but instead Allah controls everything from the movements of leaves to every decision and word that every person speaks.
 - There is little in common between this view of fate, and the compatibilism of scriptural (Calvinistic) Christianity.

Five Pillars of Islam

- There are five pillars of belief and practice that all Muslims are to obey.
- First, a person must recite the following creed (*shahadah*), “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.”
- Second, a Muslim must pray five times a day facing Mecca (*Salah*).
- Third, alms giving is required by those who are in a position to give (*Zakah*).
- Fourth, all Muslims must observe the month-long fast of Ramadan (*Sawm*).
- Fifth, all able-bodied Muslims are to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives (*Hajj*).
- These five pillars demonstrate Islam to be a moralistic religion that focuses on works-righteousness.
- Jihad exists as a sixth less emphasized pillar of Islamic practice that is highly pervasive.
 - Jihad, or holy war, is the obligation of all Muslims against infidels, or nonbelievers.



Greater and Lesser Jihad

- Muslim apologists often claim jihad primarily refers to spiritual war within the individual Muslim.
 - Although this is true, and this internal war is called greater jihad, the Islamic apologists should not make light of what is called lesser jihad, which is physical warfare against all non-Muslims.
 - It is pervasive throughout the Qu'ran and the Hadiths, and even a minimal knowledge of world history can attest to the historic interpretation of Muslims regarding the duty to spread Islam by the sword.
- There have been many death threats in recent years against non-Muslims who speak offensive things against Islam.
 - The prevailing narrative defends Islam by dubbing the terrorist attacks against the West as radical Islam rather than orthodox Islam. When one compares Islamic history to this label, however, honesty requires us to acknowledge that up until a century ago, much of Islamic civilization was radical Islam.
- Today, when an Imam claims that Muslims must defend themselves from a particular satanic threat, he can call for a holy war against that threat. The threat can be identified a single person, in which the Imam places a ban on that individual, thus charging all Muslims with the duty of killing him.
 - A famous example in recent memory is found in Salman Rushdie. He wrote a book that spoke of the "Satanic Verses" in the Qur'an where Allah allowed polytheistic worship alongside him. Muslims put a ban on Rushdie for exposing this truth. This ban is still in effect against him.

Other Islamic Doctrines

- Salvation is also determined by fatalism.
 - People are saved because Allah decides it. Fatalism of Islam should not be confused with election and predestination in Christianity.
- The force of evil in Islam is a devil called Iblis (sometimes Shitan), but he does not receive near the same attention that Satan does in Christianity.
 - There are angels in Islam, but the chief one is Gabriel and he is the messenger of Allah.
- In terms of eschatology, there is great diversity. Many await the 12th Imam called the Madhi to lead their armies.
 - There will be a final cataclysmic day when Allah will judge the world when a trumpet is sounded. All heathen Arabs will be slain.
 - At the end of life, there is a long and narrow bridge that is hard to balance on. You must cross it for eternal life. Sinners will fall off, the elect will make it across. Those who fall, land in eternal fire.
 - Those who make it to the other side, enjoy a sensuous eternal reward. There is a pool of wine that does not intoxicate (a buzz but no hangover). To satisfy the lusts of men, there are numerous earth women as sex slaves. There are also heavenly virgins for men. There was no such reward for women.
- Women have a clear second place in Islam. In Christianity, they were elevated.



Christians Under Islamic Rule

- Muslims only forced Arabs to be Muslim. They had no choice.
- Persians were allowed to practice Zoroastrianism.
- Christians and Jews were allowed to remain as they were, but had to pay a heavy tax.
- Muhammad considered them worshipers of Allah, so they were awarded a little better position than other non-Muslims.
 - But they were still segregated second-class citizens.
 - They had to appoint a bishop that was responsible for them. Any non-Muslim nation under an Islamic state was considered *dhimmi* or protected if they signed a treaty of surrender. That protection, however, when applied to Christians required an expensive poll tax and distinct clothing.
 - They could not own swords or horses. They were not allowed to have public processions where they carry crosses or icons. They could no longer ring bells or beat drums to announce Christian worship services.
 - Christians were not allowed to marry Muslims. Worst of all, it was illegal for Christians to evangelize Muslims. Any Muslim that converted would be punished by death.
- For these reasons, the churches in Islamic lands steadily decreased in numbers over the centuries.
 - The majority of professing Christians converted to Islam to secure the full benefits of citizenship.
 - Also, violent local persecution was a normal part of Christian life in Muslim lands.

Christian Contributions to Islamic Civilization

- Some Muslim rulers did place Christian and Jewish scholars in high positions.
 - When the capital was moved to Baghdad in 750, the first principal of its university was a Nestorian.
 - Many of these folks translated the Greek philosophers into Arabic so that they could benefit from the wisdom of ancient Greece.
- The most outstanding Christian to work under Islamic rule was John of Damascus (675-749).
 - He is often called the last of the Greek Church Fathers. Early in life, he was the prime minister of a Muslim Caliph in Damascus.
- Later he became a monk in Jerusalem and wrote the theological masterpiece *The Fountain of Knowledge*.
 - In it, he deals with philosophy, heresy, and a magnificent presentation of Chalcedonian Christology taking into account the contributions of Maximus the Confessor.
- One of his works was translated into Latin in the 12th century, and had a huge impact on the development of Western systematic theology.
- He also wrote a powerful defense of icons in the iconoclastic controversy.



Christians in Islamic Spain

- In Spain, once the Muslims seceded from the Islamic Empire, they treated Christians much better.
- The Berber Muslims in Spain (they were called Moors) were very tolerant to Christians and Jews, and their communities developed very well under their rule.
 - The only times the government cracked down is when the Church criticized Islam or tried to convert Muslims.
- Relations were favorable to the point that Arab culture even won over the Spanish Church. Spanish Christian scholars translated the Bible and the church's liturgy into Arabic.
- It was through Muslim Spain that the achievements of eastern civilization (which combined Greek and Islamic elements) made its way into Western Europe, which was still somewhat uncivilized.
- Western Christian scholars often learned philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine from Spanish Muslim schools.



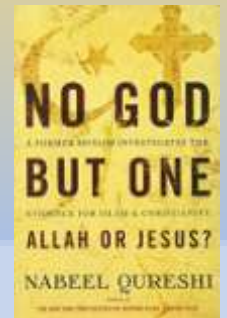
Christian Response to Islam

- What was the Christian response to Islam?
- They could either resist with the sword or pen.
 - In Christian societies, writing theological works would change many minds.
 - With Islam, writings didn't matter much. The only way to halt Islam was with Christian armies.
- There were, however, notable attempts in the Middle Ages by Christians to evangelize Muslims.
- The Church also produced a stream of Christian literature that exposed the falsehood of Muhammad's religion while at the same time defending Christianity against its arguments.
- The greatest apologists against Islam were John of Damascus in the East and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in the West.



Christian Apologetics Against Islam

- The Christian arguments were divided in two ways: 1) Discrediting of Muhammad; 2) Arguments about the doctrine of God (Trinity; Incarnation; Divine Sovereignty; Worship).
- When it comes to discrediting Muhammad, the following points were raised
 - Muhammad performed no miracles and produced no accurate prophecies.
 - Muhammad testified that Jesus was sinless, but the Qur'an records that Muhammad sinned.
 - Muhammad's revelations were likely demonic deceptions.
 - Muhammad married a lot of women for political reasons. He also married a nine year old.
 - Muhammad used religion to make himself wealthy and powerful. He also used the sword to spread his religion rather than a proclamation of good news.
- When it comes to the doctrine of God:
 - Trinity: Muslims consistently misunderstood the Christian doctrine. It is still monotheistic. Also, Muslims wrongly thought it was Father, Mary, and the Son.
 - Incarnation: Christians pointed out that some of the Qur'an's own claims show that Christ was more than a prophet (Sura 4:171 calls him the Word of God).



Christian Apologetics Against Islam

- The Doctrine of God continued:
- Divine Sovereignty: The Muslim view makes God the author of evil.
- Worship: The Muslims accused Christians of idolatry with the icons and the veneration of Mary (this charge was harder to defend against).
 - Mariolatry grew from respect to improper exaltation. Only Tertullian rejected the idea of perpetual virginity, but as that became standard, so did saying she was resurrected and ascended, so did writing songs to her and praying to her, etc.
 - The Christians could only return fire on this account.
 - The Muslims believed in all kinds of intermediaries between God and man, things like Jinn that they would appease with magic.



Conclusion

- The rise of Islam posed an enormous threat and challenge to Christianity.
 - Through conquest, it effectively destroyed three of the four patriarchates in Eastern Christianity.
 - To this day, the most venerable cities and churches of early Christianity are gone. In their place exists a society with no memory of the Christianity that once flourished.
 - Due to its anti-conversion laws and the harshness of the penalty, evangelization of Muslims is still the most difficult task that faces the church.
 - The sword has been an effective tool in the spread of Islam and protection from Christian missionaries.
- The Western Franks effectively halted Islamic conquests into Europe.
- Christians have effectively used the same apologetic arguments against Islam to this day.
- The Islamic invasions, the decline of Byzantium, and the ascendancy of the Papacy will provide the conditions for period of the Christian Crusades, where the Western Church tries to take back former Christian lands from the Muslim kingdoms.