

THE RISE OF ISLAM

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INTRODUCTION

There is much talk today about the subject of Islam. All over the world people have many different views about it. For most Islam is a word that tends to strike fear in the hearts of people. This is largely due to the brutality and violence associated with this eastern religion that has come to be defined by acts of terror. In almost every book written after 9/11/2001 about Islam there is some sort of explanation dealing with way the tragic event happened and the denouncing or condoning of the terrorist act. One is surprised at this seemingly unwarranted violence until one begins to understand church and world history.

In addition a mention of the term separation of church and state must be raised. The role it plays here cannot be underscored. The reality is God's true form of government is a theocracy and in the end during the millennial reign of Christ when He rules from the throne of David there will be no separation of church and state. Throughout eternity God will reign as lord of heaven and earth. The truth is that God's government takes rulership over all and therefore cannot be separated out. But unlike man God is Holy and just, kind and loving, gracious and compassionate. Man on the other hand in his fallen state is sinful and evil and unable to justly govern himself. All his attempts at this endeavor through the centuries have failed one government after the other. But still we try to make it happen. Why?

God made man with two needs among many; one is his need for community, and his other is the need for relationship with a Holy and righteous God. That's why man can't escape his need for government and his need for religion. The real question here is whose government or religion will it be. This will ultimately determine whether we have peace or war.

This sets up the foundation for our study and will help explain many of the things we will discuss here after. As we will see it was one man's need for acceptance and peace with God that

lead to the development of Islam. It would also be rejection by his own people and then others that would lead to Holy Wars called jihads that still exist to this very day.

What is Islam?

Just exactly what the word Islam means today is a cause of great controversy. In the early tribal days before Muhammad the word Islam was a “term use to characterize a desert warrior¹”. This is a term that we don’t fully understand or comprehend. It is a term associated with great courage and heroisms.

On the other hand when Muhammad used this term he said it meant submission. You ask submission to what? Submission to peace! As you can see already there is quite a contradiction here which in reality is no contradiction at all but a merging of the two terms to create one new one. The word Islam is a combining of 7th century culture with a new form of religion derived from many other religions already established as we will see later.

Islam is a complete belief system that demands ones total submission to God (Allah) and complete obedience to Allah will. Islam claims to have all the answers to mans problems in every area of life while it offers peace and protection to the believer. Islam is a religion that offers a meaning full relationship with the creator giving the believer hope in this life and the next.

But for one to truly understand Islam or the Muslim faith you would have to again come to understand the 7th century tribal culture that existed during Muhammad’s day. Deeply rooted in the Muslim faith is the Muslim tribal culture which Muhammad weaved into the very fabric of this religion. Upon a close examination of this and a close look at Muhammad’s up bring and life style will begin to reveal these facts.

1. Robert Morey, “The key to Islam,” in *The Islamic Invasion* (Eugene Oregon: Harvest House, 1992).

The Early Life of Muhammad

Muhammad was born in the year 570 AD. It is said that his father die just before or shortly after his birth so he never know his father. This was to be the beginning of many disappointments for him and one of the reasons for his search for God and peace. Just as he was adjusting to life with one parent his mother die and he became an orphan. As the custom of that day Muhammad was give to the nearest relative that could afford to take care of him. He was given to his uncle at age six and as early as age nine he began to travel with his uncle in the caravan trade.

Muhammad became a shepherd for his uncle and got to travel many places along the established trade route of that day. It is while traveling from city to city he came into contact with many different belief systems such as the Jewish, Christian, and many other pagan beliefs.

When he was 25 or so he got married to a woman that was report ably many years older than him. It was said that she was an every wealth woman. Her name was Khadija and she too was from Mecca. Khadija believed in Muhammad even though he was a young man. She saw something different in him and it draws her to him.

But this happiness was not to last. The couple had six children of which two died. Now as bad as this was sounds what made it worst was the fact that the two that died were his two boys. This meant he had no heir which means little today but in that time no heir to carry on the family name could and in many cause was viewed as a curse from God. This in itself was enough to cause him to do some serious soul searching for the meaning of life and why death comes to some and not to other seemingly more deserving of it. Suzanne Haneef writes “a correct understanding of the human beings true nature and his place in the scheme of things is of vital importance on the Islamic frame work. In this way he will be able to live in harmony and balance

rather than in conflict and chaos during his brief journey from one phase of this reality this earthly life to the next²”.

The Birth of the Islamic Nation

There are many things that lead to Muhammad writing of the Koran. As we mentioned earlier the childhood of Muhammad and the loss of his parents and two sons were some of the contributing factors to the Koran coming into being. Some of the other factors came by Muhammad’s travels giving him opportunity to learn of the belief of other religions. This can be seen clearly as later Muhammad will claim that he has seen the angel Gabriel. Still other factors are the idolatrous customs of the people of Mecca.

This in itself has to be one of the main factors to Muhammad’s reasons to really seek for a Just and Holy God. Some of the customs were “female infanticide, the torture and murder of one’s enemies, slavery, the lack of woman’s rights, tribal warfare and rivalries, drunkenness and gambling, and a cult of idolatry with often contradictory belief³”. Muhammad did not find any comfort in these things but was challenged by the beliefs of the Jewish monotheist monks to live a pure and holy life.

There are a lot of writings that substantiate this fact and the fact that Muhammad had a reputation of living a good moral life. Up until this time he was still married to only one wife even though it would have been perfectly legal for him to marry many times if he wished to do so.

2. Suzanne Haneef, “1 Beliefs,” in *What Everyone Should Know About Islam and Muslims* (Chicago IL: kazi, 1979).

3. Yahiya Emerick, “4 from Citizen to Prophet,” in *the Life and Work of Muhammad* (n.p.: Marie Butler Knight, 2002).

Not happy with the barbaric traditions of his people Mohammad retreated to a small cave high in the mountainous hills surrounding his village. One can't help but wonder if he had learned this from the monks he had contacted earlier.

One night Muhammad began to have dreams and visions. Shortly after that he was visited by the angel Gabriel who changed his life forever. Afterward he had many other vision and visits from Gabriel and soon received the commission to preach the message of Allah to his people as the prophet of God. For as many as five to six years people in Mecca didn't pay too much attention to him. But as his followers grow and his messages became more directed against the immoral custom of the culture he began to face verbal and physical abuse. It became unsafe to walk through the town. Soon the persecution became so great he decided to leave to city and move to Medina. "In the year 622 Muhammad assumed the role of de facto head of state and quickly gathered around him a talented cadre of energetic individuals who would help to make his dream of a home land for monotheism a reality⁴".

The people what lived in Medina truly believe that Muhammad was a true prophet and pledge to give him their support. It was then Mohammad began to change his tactics and train his follower to also be warriors. There were many battles and many people died on both sides "finally in 628AD. Muhammad and Qurahsh entered into a treaty called the treaty of Hodaybiyyah allowing Muhammad to cleans the idols and cult images in the Kaaba". Muhammad declared amnesty for all the inhabitants, and gave generous gift to the Quraysh. Just 4 years later in 632 after his great conquest Muhammad died in the city of Medina were he went to live after Mecca was cleansed⁵".

4. Ibid.

5. unknown, "school house.org," Mecca, Retrieved from <http://www.schoolhouse.org>.

The Spread of Islam

After the treaty of Hudaibiyyah and the cleansing of the city of Mecca the prophet Muhammad returned to Medina where he died in 632. Before his death he was able to begin to lay the ground work for a strong government and political system that would help the next rules continue to promote Islam.

Within one hundred years of Muhammad's death a great empire would be built and expanded into the Middle East and many other areas of the known world at that time. This was to be done in many stages some bigger than other and through a series of many wars.

The first problem to tackle was who would be the next successor since Muhammad didn't name one before his death. As a result the ruling administration at that time chose Abu Bakr an early convert of Muhammad and faithful advisor of his to be the next rule. He was not a prophet but called on the people to continue to follow the teaching of Muhammad. He told them when Muhammad died "Muslims! If any of you has worshiped Muhammad, let me tell you that Muhammad is dead. But if you worship God, then know that God is living and will never die!⁶" in other words we followed Muhammad because he followed God. Muhammad was not God but sent from God to be a messenger to us and to testify of Gods will to the Muslim people. Therefore we must all still continue to follow God and Muhammad's teachings. This was semi successful and some revolts began to spring up as some tribes said their alliance was to Muhammad only and not to God.

6. John Esposito, "The Muslim Community," in *Islam the Straight Path* (Madison Ave. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998).

The Early Years

This brought in the challenge that ultimately would determine whether or not the rest of the tribes would follow Muhammad and for what reasons.

Now Islam would be truly defined as to whether or not it was a religion from God or just another bid for control over the Arab people as some had done in the past. Now it was time for the true followers of Muhammad to proclaim that he was a prophet. That he was sent from God. What his words are from God and God was not dead. Therefore they must continue to follow Muhammad's teachings and stay true to the Muslim way. This was the moment of truth the acid test of all the struggles of the past, of all the bloodshed, of all the suffering, and of all those that died for this cause. Would Islam and the Muslim way of life stand or crumble in the face of mounting opposition? Well in answer to that question "three options were given to the opposers.

1. Conversion, that is, full membership in the Muslim community, with its rights and duties.
2. Acceptance of Muslim rule as "protection" people and payment of a poll tax.
3. Battle or the sword if neither the first nor the second option was not accepted.

In short the astonishing expansion of Islam resulted not only from armed conquest but also from these two peaceful options⁷".

Rise of a Great Empire

The Caliphate (or rulers) was a period that stretched from 632 to 1258. There were three divisions of time associated with them; the first from 632 to 661, the second from 661 to 750, and the third from 750 to 1258. It was during this time that the empire of Islam expanded greatly.

7. Ibid.

In the early years most of the Arab tribes were conquered. In 635 the city of Damascus was taken and that started a real change in the Arab culture. Damascus was close to Greece, and Constantinople. These two cities had been the center of learning and sophisticated culture for centuries and had a great effect on the rest of the world. The Arab leaders recognized their value and began to assimilate the different cult's achievements in to theirs this lead to a number of developments that greatly helped the rising Islamic empire which we will discuss later.

“In 636 Iraq fell, in 638 Jerusalem fell, in 641 Caesarea fell, and Armenia fell in 643. The Muslim armies and their people were able to subdue the Christian part of North Africa in 709 going as far as Morocco. By 732 just one hundred years after Muhammad's death the Islamic armies had pushed their way into France and probably would have over run it if not for the heroic deeds of Charles Martel better known as Fredrick the Hammer⁸”.

The Islamic armies continued to go on to conquer Egypt, and Spain. They invade Sicily and threatened to sack Western Rome. In the east they siege Constantinople in 716 although the city didn't fall until 1453. That defeat of Rome was done at the hands of the Ottoman Turks.

The Muslims armies even invaded India and waged a holy war against the Hindus and Buddhist. They said that they ever “pagan idolaters”. Because they would not renounce their religion they had to be killed. History records that the Muslim armies tried two more times to conquer Europe, once in the 16th c. and again in the 17th c. By the 1500.c they had amassed a great territory and were well on their way to world status.

But what really caused their great success and why there they able to conquer their enemies so quickly? How had they gone from a tribal people that had always feuded among themselves even to the extent of their own destruction to a people with great armies and strong solid

8. Jim Murk, “Holy Jihad,” in *Islam Rising* (Springfield MO: 21st Century Press, 2006).

governments? Was it all the blessing of Allah or was it because of some other forces or variables at work here?

Reasons for Islam's Sudden Rise

Can the sudden rise of Islam be explained by natural things or was it some super natural moving of God. This question can, will and has been answered many different ways depending on where you stand and what your view of God is. It will most likely continue that way till the end of time, but for us we will continue to look at the recorded record that history has left us to work with.

History record many reasons for the sudden rise of Islam and why the Muslim peoples were so successful in the spread of Islam. The first as mentioned earlier is mans need for community and his need for a relationship with God. Muhammad whether he realized this or not employed these factors into his dealing with men. While the events of his early life left him searching for peace with God they ultimately lead him to the two pieces the tribes of Arabia need to unite them.

Upon Muhammad's death in 632 after many years of war and struggle there arose many tribal groups that were ready to break the peace and newly formed unity of the Islamic Muslim faith. Caliph Abu Bakr told the Muslims that if God was still alive and only the prophet Muhammad died then they ever still bound by his teaching seeing that he had been sent from God.

This caused the people to reevaluate just who Muhammad was and lead those to the belief that he was a prophet like Moses or Jesus and just as people still followed the teaching of both these men after their death so they were obligated to continue to follow the teaching of Muhammad. For after all he was as equally just as much a prophet as Moses or Jesus.

The second fact has to do with the way Islam is configured as a complete religion or belief system. Islam unlike some other religions or belief is a complete belief system that encompasses every part of a person's life. There is no part of life that Islam does not touch. If one says that they are a Muslim then their total life belongs to Allah body and soul. This means both the natural realm and the soulful realm are to be under the control of Allah. It may sound normal but in reality as we think in the western world it is far from it. You see in the Muslim world there is no separation of church and state. There is no separation of religion and military. Islam is deeply interwoven into the fabric of all quadrants of life to include social, economical, and political areas. Unlike other religions that don't have control over the government or military Islamic law and ideals dominate everything Muslim.

In the beginning of this paper it was stated that Muhammad and his followers were forced to flee Mecca and take refuge in Medina. It was there that Muhammad's uncle turned his converts into an army of fierce warriors. Muhammad never had an army of converts and an army of soldiers. They were one in the same. This is what the west does not understand about the Muslim faith. Once converted to Islam a person is transformed from what he or she was to a totally sold out submitted Islamist.

The third reason for the success and rise of Islam is the fact that they began to do as the Greeks and the Romans did as they conquered their enemies. As in the past with the former empires the Muslims began to assimilate the greatness of their enemies. John L Esposito said "the genesis of Islamic civilization was indeed a collaborative effort, incorporating the learning and wisdom of many cultures and languages. As in the government administration, Christian and Jews, who had been the intellectual and bureaucratic back bone of the Persian and byzantine empires, participated in the process as well as Muslim⁹".

9. Esposito, *Islam the Straight Path*.

The fourth reason is the fact that the people of the conquered regions were growing tired of the Christian faith and the practices of the Roman Catholic Church. With the Eastern Church divided against the Western church many people of the Christian faith were losing hope. Wide spread corruption coupled with gross immorality, and greed and constant in fighting were all cause to why many people begin searching for other ways to get to God. It was reported that many time the Muslim invaders met little to no resistance from the people they conquered on the contrary the people were glad to be free from the hold of the Roman church.

Islam Today

Today Islam is a worldwide religion. “There are estimated to be over 800 million Muslims. Muslim enthusiast inflates the figure to one billion, about twenty percent of the world’s population¹⁰” Today in America there are an estimated 6 to 7 million Muslim. Muslim in America in some cases out number certain Christian denomination.

“In America today there over 1,290 Mosques and the numbers keep growing. Data collected by military intelligence groups before 9/11 estimates 20,000 Americans convert to Islam every year¹¹”. In addition there are many Muslims here that came as immigrants for various reasons. “These include: Orthodox, Heterodox, Sunni, Shia, and Sufi Muslims. Some have become American citizens while others have not¹²”.

Some come to the U.S. as students while other come hoping to find work and a new life in a free society. This is not a trend that will end soon. More Muslim migrate to the U.S. each year as well as other countries. We in the west must be prepared to live side by side with what some

10. Akbar S. Ahmed, “The pattern of Islamic History,” in *Discovering Islam* (Great Britain: Clay Ltd, St. Ives, 1988).

11. Retrieved from <http://www.riseofislam.com>.

12. Beverly Aminah Mac Cloud, “Islam in the U.S.,” *Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin* (2002).

view as a national threat to our peace and freedom. Militant Islam seems to be everywhere and fear of terror is gripping the hearts of many American citizens. The way seems unsure to many but we as American Christian must continue to stand up and speak out for freedom, liberty, and democracy.

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