

Introduction to the History of Islam

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Declare God's glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples.
(I Chronicles 16:24)

As believers we are under mandate to express our faith to all peoples. We can do this best when we have an enlightened understanding of the peoples around us with whom we work and live. This three-part lecture series is meant to be a brief introduction to the religion of Islam including a history and understanding of Islamic society.

Introduction: Please note the quote from Winfried Corduan, Neighboring Faiths, Intervarsity Press

I. Life of Muhammad the Prophet

- A. Born in Mecca (*Makkah*) in the Arabian peninsula about A.D. 570.
 - 1. Father died before Muhammad's birth; mother died when he was six years old; raised by his grandfather and an uncle, Abu Talib.
 - 2. Until age 25 Muhammad was a poor, illiterate camel driver.
- B. Married his employer, a wealthy widow named Khadija in A.D. 595.
- C. At age 40 he began to have visions while meditating in a cave (A.D. 610).
 - 1. It is said that the Angel Gabriel spoke to him words from God and told him, "Recite".
 - 2. He began to recite these prophetic utterances and gathered a group of followers. Khadija was his first convert.
 - 3. After his death the revelation Muhammed recited were written down in the Quran (recitation)
 - 4. In 622 Muhammad and his band fled from Mecca to Medina.
 - a. This is known as the *hijra* and is the beginning of the Islamic calendar.
 - b. The year A.D. (Anno Domini) 2002 is A.H. (Anno Hegirae) 1422. The Islamic Calendar is based on a lunar month which makes a year approximately 11 days shorter than our Gregorian Calendar year.
 - 5. Muhammad died in Medina at the age of 62 (A.D. 632, A.H. 11).

II. Arabia in the time of Muhammad

- A. The Arabian peninsula was a significant thoroughfare for commerce and extensive cross-cultural interaction.
- B. Their indigenous religion was a mixture of polytheism and animism.
- C. Mecca was a prosperous city which attracted many pilgrims. Some of the religious attractions were the Ka'ba (a cube shaped shrine containing a sacred meteorite) and the sacred well, Zamzam.
- D. From one point of view, Muhammad's mission was to fight idolatry and eliminate it. Of course, this did not make him popular among those who were profiting from the local religion.
- E. It is often noted that there was considerable influence on Muhammad from the two great monotheistic faiths. He called Jews and Christians "People of the Book".

III. The Spread of Islam

- A. In approximately the last 25 years of his life, Muhammad established the Islamic community (*umma*) in Medina, built the first mosque, organized an army, began to unify the separated Arabian tribes, and was their prophet, ruler, judge, commander in chief and prayer leader.
- B. By A.D. 650 Islam had conquered the cities of Damascus, Antioch, Jerusalem, Caesarea, Alexandria, and, in addition, the Persian Empire had fallen to Islam.
- C. By A.D. 715 they had swept across North Africa and into Spain.
- D. All of the above cities and nations were, at least, nominally Christian. J. Herbert Kane, A Concise History of the Christian World Mission, Baker, explains that the church in those regions was numerically large but spiritually weak. Some of the contributing factors were that it was not truly indigenous, they did not have the Scriptures in their own language, and the church had lost its missionary zeal to extend the faith.
- E. Muslim progress into Europe was stopped by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours A.D. 732. About this time Islam also entered India and advanced into Central Asia.
- F. Many believe The Crusades (seven in all) between A.D. 1095 and 1272 were a failure and continues to contribute to hostility between Muslims and Christians.
- G. Another wave of Islamic expansion occurred in the 13th and 14th centuries led by the Ottoman Turks and the Mongols of Central Asia.

- H. There has been a resurgence of Islamic influence and expansions since World War II. The "petro-dollar" is financing the building of Mosques and Islamic Centers all across Europe and the Americas.

IV. The Major Sects of Islam and Folk Islam

- A. Shi'a Muslims After Muhammad's death Muslims were divided over leadership. The Shi'a believe that leadership was passed on to his cousin, son-in-law, and first male convert, Ali, and to his sons after him. Shi'as make up about 10% of the world's Muslim population. Iran is the only state that is officially Shi'a, but they also live in other places.
- B. Sunni Muslims Sunni Muslims comprise about 90%. They believe God has given leadership and insight to religious scholars who in turn keep the community on the right path.
- C. Folk Islam Many of the ordinary believers (whether Shi'a or Sunni) practice a type of "Folk Islam" which tends toward animism. Corduan respectfully says (page 89), "The common nomad or villager may be occupied mainly with warding off evil spirits. Facets of Islam such as the five pillars may become subordinated to this animism and may come to be thought of as tools for dealing with the spirits rather than aspects of submission to Allah in their own right."