

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH- Red Bud, Illinois
Adult Bible Class “Islam: A Religion of Peace or a Life of Fear?” (Session Four)

“It wouldn't be too much of an exaggeration to say that on September 10, 2001, the Muslim American universe was largely invisible. The only Muslims most people here knew by name were Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan and Muhammad Ali. If their doctor or accountant was Muslim, the average American probably didn't give it much thought. The Muslim community itself was partially responsible for this isolation, many hunkered down in ethnic enclaves. They strove to fit in, but quietly.” (Lisa Miller, “American Dreamers,” Newsweek, July 30, 2007, page 28)

A. History: Muhammad's Major Move to Medina and Militant Messages

AD 622 marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. In September of that year Muhammad was asked to come to the town of Yathrib (250 miles north of Mecca) to mediate a dispute between warring tribes. He agreed to do so only if they accepted his new religion. They changed the name to Medina (“the prophet's city”) to honor him. This move is called the *Hijra* (“a breaking off from one's own tribe”). This begins the era of Muslim expansion and militarism. This also is the beginning of the concept of *umma*. This is community which crosses bloodlines and brings people together on the basis of religion.

Muhammad now took his third wife, Aisha. She was the daughter of his best friend, Abu Bakr. He had been engaged to her for three years. He was in his mid-fifties, she was nine years old. Passages in the Quran from these years are much more militant, aggressive and violent. “This man who had faced so much opposition in his rise to the top came to a point where he would no longer tolerate any opposition. ‘God and His apostle’ announced time and again that no opposition would be tolerated. This is such a different Muhammad than the pleading-for-a-hearing Muhammad of the early chapters of the Qur'an” (James Dretke, “Muhammad—Saint, Seer or False Prophet? Issues in Christian Education, Fall 2004, page 9). (Islam went from holding hands and singing “kum-by-ya” to shouting “praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.”)

At this point Muhammad prepared a “holy war” against his enemies and armed his followers. They attacked caravans heading to Mecca. At the Battle of Badr they defeated a force of a thousand men, giving Muhammad his first military victory. They captured and killed the Jewish banuQurayzah tribe, cutting the heads off of over six hundred men. He conquered one village after another and built strength for an attack on Mecca. In AD 630 he conquered that city and purged the chief shrine (*Ka'bah*) of more than 350 idols that were worshipped there. The citizens of Mecca embraced Islam. Muhammad returned to Medina where he became ill and died on June 8, 632 at the age of 61. By this time he had conquered most of Arabia.

B. Numbers and Growth

“Islamization begins when there are sufficient Muslims in a country to agitate for their religious privileges...When Muslims approach 10% of the population, they tend to increase lawlessness as a means of complaint about their condition. Any non-Muslim action offends Islam and results in uprisings and threats. Such tensions are seen daily.” (Peter Hammond, Slavery, Terrorism and Islam: The Historical Roots and Contemporary Threat).

Muslims began coming to America in large waves after 1965, when U.S. law changed to allow increased immigration from countries beyond Western Europe. However, most Muslims in the United States are not of Arab background. About 1/3rd is African American and another 1/3rd are from South-Asia and Southeast-Asian countries.

<u>Year</u>	<u>In United States</u>	<u>In the World</u>	<u>Percent of World's Population</u>
1900		200 million	12.3%
1970	100,000		
1981	2 million	720 million	16.25%
1990	4 million	800 million	18%
1995	5 million	One billion	19%
2001	6 million	1.2 billion	20%

C. Sources

The *Ijma'* is the consensus of the *'ulema'* or the learned. Muhammad validated this by assuring his faithful and learned followers that they would never “agree on an error.”

Both Sunnis and Shi'ites agree on the valid and infallible sources as being the *Quran, Hadith and Ijma'*. The Sunnis (majority) are organized horizontally, as a community based on a local mosque without a clergy structure. They are guided by the *Qiyas*, analogies for life that are based upon the three sources of Islam. The Shi'ites (minority but the majority in Iran) have a vertical hierarchy, beginning with the mullah in the individual mosque upward through the ayatollahs and grand ayatollahs and finally to the Imam.

D. Teaching

Fasting (*Sawm*)- Muslims go without food, drink, music, entertainment and sexual relations from dawn to dusk during the lunar month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic year (thus it rotates through all seasons, we are in it now; it ends July 17). The fast is broken after the light of day has disappeared. Muslims believe that this fasting teaches self-discipline and aids in the curbing of appetites also at other times. Pregnant and nursing women, those who health is bad, and others with special circumstances are exempt from the fast. The month of Ramadan ends with the *Id al-Fitr*. This is the second most important Muslim festival. It generally lasts for three days.

E. Divisions (Sunnis, Shi'ites, and others)

The *Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement* was founded during the 1880s in India by Hazrat Ahmad who called himself *Mahdi* (“guided one”) and claimed to be a messiah in the image of Muhammad. He also claimed to have found the tomb of Jesus in Kashmir, India. (He was crucified, fainted and was restored later by a potion, then traveled to India, where he died at the age of 120). This is a mission-minded group that reaches out to Africa, the United States and Europe. They give 16% of their income for the purpose of sending missionaries to non-Muslim countries. Their publications are emphatically anti-Christian. Mainstream Islam considers this group heretical.

F. Correspondence and Contrasts Between Islam and Christianity

One of the most famous stories from Muhammad's life is that of his “night journey” (*isra*). It comes from one passage in the Quran, Sura 17:1. Tradition says that Muhammad traveled through the air from Mecca to Jerusalem on the winged horse al-Buraq. From there, along with the angel Jibril (Gabriel), Muhammad claimed to have ascended through the seven heavens into God's presence. Then he returned to Arabia, all within one night. The Muslim Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (Islam's third most sacred shrine) marks the spot. It is built on the mount where the biblical temple once stood. (see Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12.)

As Christians we feel that it is strange that Jews do not see and accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's ancient promises of a Savior. Why don't they confess a faith in Jesus as the Son of God? Why don't they accept the books of the New Testament as God's inspired Word of life? Likewise, it appears equally strange to Muslims that Christians reject Muhammad as God's final prophet and do not accept the Qur'an as God's perfect revelation of Himself.

G. Christian Witness to Muslims (Focus on Jesus!)

1 Peter 3:15 But in your _____ set apart Christ as _____. Always be prepared to give the _____ for the hope that you have. But do this with _____ and respect.

Understanding: “To befriend is also to understand. Muslims continually plead for better understanding. They feel that the West (including Christians) is ill-informed, that Islam is constantly misrepresented and Muslims are regularly caricatured. They have a point. Learn to appreciate Muslims as you would be appreciated by them—for their own sake and for the sake of genuine friendship, not for the sake of manipulating them.” (Ernest Hahn, How to Respond to Muslims, CPH, 1995, page 52)

They are people who want to tell us about themselves. We are doing this study as a way of understanding Islam as we would want a Muslim to have a better understanding of Christianity. First, though, we need to have that better understanding of Christianity so that we can share our faith with them.