

Lesson 25 Muhammad

Why Study About Muhammad?

Consider the following statistics:

- Islam is the fastest-growing religion in Europe. Driven by immigration and high birthrates, the number of Muslims on the continent has tripled in the last 30 years. Most demographers forecast a similar or even higher rate of growth in the coming decades.
- According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the World Christian Database as of 2007 estimated the fastest growing religion of the world to be Islam. High birth rates were cited as the reason for the growth.
- According to a CNN report, “Islam (with well over a billion people) is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity. Islam is also the fastest-growing religion. In the United States, for example, nearly 80 percent of the more than 1,200 mosques have been built in the past 12 years.”
- “Once confined to the nation's biggest cities, mosques, Islamic houses of worship, are rapidly becoming a familiar site on Main Streets across the country. There are some 3,000 mosques in the U.S. Fueled by immigration and conversions, Islam is the fastest growing religion in America. (It is also the fastest growing faith in the world.) It is on the verge of surpassing Judaism as the largest non-Christian faith in the country.”

The simple fact is that God has commanded us to take the gospel to the entire world -- and one fourth of that world follows Muhammad. How can we ignore him?

Who was Muhammad?

The religion of Islam is centered upon the person of Muhammad. One cannot fully understand either Islam or the Koran without considering the life and history of Muhammad.

To the Muslim mind, Muhammad is the most important person in all of human history. Although the Muslims do not believe that Muhammad was divine or that he is to be worshipped, they do believe that he was the ultimate example and model of human experience.

There are four primary sources for our historical knowledge of Muhammad: (1) The Koran itself, (2) a biography by Muhammad ibn Ishaq, who died in 773, (3) a biography by Umar al-Waqidi of Medina, who died in 825, and (4) a biography by Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari, who died in 932.

These three biographies serve as the basis for the Hadith, a collection of stories, reports, and oral traditions about Muhammad. At the outset of our study, we should

note that there are no non-Muslim biographies of Muhammad of ancient origin, and thus we are totally dependent on Islamic sources for all that we know about Muhammad.

The traditional date and place of Muhammad's birth is AD 570 in Mecca, a city located in western Saudi Arabia near the coast of the Red Sea. With the inhabitants of Arabia fragmented into tribes, Muhammad was born into the Bani Hashim clan of the Quraysh. That tribe had long been the guardians of the Kabah, which is a cube shaped building in Mecca that Arabs believe was built by Abraham and Ishmael.

Before Muhammad was born, his father, Abd Allah, died while on a trading trip. His mother, Amina, died when Muhammad was six. At that time, Muhammad was given to his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, who treated him with special favor and affection but who died when Muhammad was eight. At that time, Muhammad's care passed to his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, who also treated him with affection. His aunt, Fatimah, became a replacement for Muhammad's mother and, it is said, even favored him above her own children.

From age nine, Muhammad accompanied his uncle on trading trips to Syria and beyond. These excursions would have brought Muhammad into contact with Jewish and Christian influences. While growing up, Muhammad also spent time alone in the desert tending sheep and was trained in weaponry and warfare.

By the age of 20, Muhammad had developed such a reputation as a trader that he was called "al-Amin," which means reliable or trustworthy. That reputation brought him to the attention of a Khadijah, a wealthy widow and merchant in Mecca who asked Muhammad to supervise one of her trading caravans to Syria. Eventually, although 15 years his senior and twice married previously, she offered herself to him in marriage, and Muhammad promptly accepted. The year was 595, and Muhammad was 25.

Although Muhammad later had multiple marriages, he did so only after Khadijah died when he was 50 years old. They had six children, only one of which (Fatimah) survived to provide him with descendants.

For the next 15 years (595 to 610) -- known as the "Silent Period" -- Muhammad presumably carried out the business responsibilities that were part of his wife's trade caravans. But he also spent time in contemplation and religious meditation. For one month each year, he retreated to a cave in Mount Hira a few miles north of Mecca. The month was Ramadan, the month of heat. It was at this location at the age of 40 that Muhammad allegedly received his first revelation. The messenger of Allah who brought the revelation was the angel Gabriel, who told him he would bring additional revelations over the next 23 years. The utterances received by Muhammad in these alleged revelations were recorded in Al-Quran, which means "the reading" or "the recitation."

The first of these revelations left Muhammad in a state of fear and despair. His wife had to reassure him that he was not under the influence of a demon. She went to see her cousin, Waraqa ibn Naufal, an old man who had become a Christian and who believed

that a prophet would come to turn the Arabs away from their idols. Upon hearing about the vision, he declared that Muhammad was that prophet.

Muhammad spent the next three years preaching to his family and friends. His wife was his first convert. His four uncles, however, showed no inclination to follow him. At the end of those three years, Muhammad claimed to have received another revelation commanding him to “arise and warn!” At this time he began to preach publicly in Mecca and he began to face persecution from the local religious leaders.

In 619, Muhammad’s wife died and shortly thereafter his protectorate uncle died and was replaced by the one uncle, Abu Lahab, who was openly hostile to Muhammad.

The next major event in his life involved a purported trip to Heaven. One night he was awakened by Gabriel, who showed him a white heavenly steed with wings. The steed first took him to Jerusalem where he met with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. He was then taken into Heaven itself. It is this event that led to the construction of the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem on the site of the Jewish temple that was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, making that site the third most holy site in Islam.

Muhammad had two more dreams the following year in which he was instructed to marry the six year old daughter of his best friend. While that marriage was being arranged, he met and also married a 30 year old widow named Sawdah. The marriage to the six year old was consummated when she was nine and he was in his early 50’s. (Many years later -- and apparently following the moral lead of Muhammad who is said to be “an excellent example of conduct” for us all -- Iran’s exalted Ayatollah Khomeini married a 10 year old when he was 28.)

In 620, six men from a tribe 200 miles north of Mecca met Muhammad and became convinced that he was a prophet. These six converts went home and made additional converts. Muhammad and his followers in Mecca made plans to move to this other tribe to avoid the persecution at home, which they did after Muhammad miraculously escaped an assassination plot. His escape in 622, called the Hijrah or “flight,” is so important to Muslims that it serves as the starting point of the Islamic calendar. The city to which he fled was Medina.

Upon arriving in Medina, Muhammad purchased land for a mosque. He also tried to incorporate the local Jewish community into his plans to combat polytheists, and although they cooperated to some extent, they no doubt were troubled by the claim that God would send a prophet from the line of Ishmael rather than the line of Isaac.

Soon after his relocation, Muhammad began to raid trading caravans. Permission to do so had come from a special revelation. In the second year after the flight, Muhammad rallied the Muslim population of Medina to attack a wealthy Meccan caravan. Mecca responded with a force of 1000 men to confront Muhammad’s force of 305 men. The army of 1000 was defeated. Mecca then raised a larger army with the goal of marching to Medina to crush Muhammad permanently. This battle pitted 3000 against

Muhammad's force of 700. At one point, Muhammad grabbed a spear and inflicted a mortal wound on one of his attackers.

For the next several years, Muhammad continued to lead raids and to marry local widows. He also increased his persecution of the Jews, eventually forcing them all to leave Medina. His revelations also continued, and curiously came just in time to provide him permission for what he wanted to do.

For example, at one point Muhammad became romantically interested in the wife of his adopted son. The adopted son was willing to release his wife to marry Muhammad, but three things stood in the way: (1) the Islamic stance on the evil of divorce, (2) the limit in the Koran of 4 wives per man, and (3) the social principle that no distinction should be made between adopted sons and sons by birth coupled with the prohibition in the Koran of marrying the wives of sons by birth. What to do? Muhammad soon received a special revelation informing him that the woman in question had been given to him in marriage. Since the revelation spoke of the event in past tense, no formal marriage was held. The same revelation allowed Muhammad to exceed the four wife limit because he was The Prophet.

We should pause here for three important points:

- 1) *One of the surest signs on a man-made religion is a "special revelation" from God for its leader or leaders to engage in sexual immorality. We saw it in an earlier lesson on the Mormons, and we see it again here.*
- 2) *Islam includes a doctrine known as abrogation in which pronouncements of the prophet abrogate (declare null and void) his earlier pronouncements. The importance of knowing which verses abrogate others has given rise to the Koranic science known as Nasikh wa Mansukh, which means the Abrogators and the Abrogated.*
- 3) *With this background, it should not surprise us if the Koran is a confused and confusing mess -- and it is. Muhammad rambles along throughout combining and misstating numerous events from the Old Testament and other sources. The Koran repeats the story of the Exodus 27 times in the first 89 chapters -- and yet never mentions the Passover, presumably so as to avoid the clear connection with Christ. He refers to Noah in 28 of the first 71 chapters. If the repeated portions of the Koran were removed, it would be only 40% of its current size. And he very often gets the details wrong -- in one account of the exodus, Pharaoh asks Haman (a Persian from the book of Esther) to build the tower of Babel. These errors may explain some of his growing antagonism toward the Jews -- they no doubt spotted and ridiculed his errors, casting well-deserved doubt on his status as a prophet.*

Soon the religion of Islam became dominant in Arabia. Several factors contributed to its ascent. First, Muhammad's forces had considerable military strength. Second, the Koran promised that a Paradise in which every desire would be fulfilled was within easy reach. This comforting thought led to the same fanatical resolve in battle that we

witness today. And as we discussed in our previous lesson, Muhammad repeatedly redefined Heaven to be an enormous God-owned bordello in the sky.

In the eighth year after the flight, Muhammad and his forces reentered the city of Mecca. Muhammad rode his camel to the mosque, where he touched the black stone with his staff and said "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar" (Allah is Great).

During the last 10 years of his life, Muhammad personally led 27 military campaigns, and he planned and sent others on 38 other campaigns. During his final years he claimed to have received a revelation denying the divinity of Christ and a revelation that another prophet would reign for seven years just prior to the return of Christ. One of the signs that these final things would be near is that buildings would be built higher and higher.

Muhammad became ill and died in 632 at the age of 63 leaving behind nine widows. As he wished, Muhammad was buried where he died, and that site is now at the center of the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina.

Two world powers existed during the rise and spread of Islam: the Byzantine or East Roman empire, which represented what was known as the Christianity of that day, and the Persian empire, which practiced Zoroastrianism. Islam stripped the former empire of its holdings in Asia and Africa, and it destroyed the latter one completely. Within six years of Muhammad's death, all of Syria and Iraq were tributary to Medina and after four more years Egypt was also added to the Muslim empire.

Questions About Muhammad and Islam

Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God?

No. They do not. Muslims worship a false god; Christians worship the one true God.

Now when I say that I should note that I am disagreeing with our commander-in-chief. George Bush has said on numerous occasions that Muslims and Christians pray to the same God and worship the same God. But Bush is wrong.

John tells us that in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God, and he tells us that the word is Christ who became flesh and dwelled among men. Muslims deny that Jesus is God, and 1 John 2:23 tells us that you cannot have the Father without the Son. Muslims reject the triune nature of God that is revealed in the Bible. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not Allah -- and neither is the God of Ishmael. Allah is most definitely not great.

What are the so-called Satanic Verses?

"Satanic Verses" is an expression coined by the historian Sir William Muir in reference to several verses allegedly delivered by Muhammad as part of the Koran and later retracted.

There are numerous reports on the incident, which differ in the construction and detail of the narrative, but they may be broadly collated to produce a basic account. In its basic form the story reports that Muhammad longed to convert the people of Mecca to Islam. As he was reciting Sūra Al-Najm (Q.53), considered a revelation by the angel Gabriel, Satan tempted him to utter the following lines after verses 19 and 20 ("Have you thought of Allāt and al-'Uzzā and Manāt the third, the other?").

Allāt, al-'Uzzā and Manāt were three goddesses worshiped by the Meccans. The subtext to this allegation is that Muhammad was backing away from his otherwise uncompromising monotheism by saying that these goddesses were real and their intercession effective.

The Meccans were overjoyed to hear this and joined Muhammad in ritual prostration at the end of the Sūra. The Muslim refugees who had fled to Abyssinia heard of the end of persecution and started to return home. Islamic tradition holds that Gabriel chastised Muhammad for adulterating the revelation, at which point a new message was revealed to comfort him, "Never did We send a messenger or a prophet before thee, but, when he framed a desire, Satan threw some (vanity) into his desire: but Allah will cancel anything (vain) that Satan throws in, and Allah will confirm (and establish) His Signs: for Allah is full of Knowledge and Wisdom." Muhammad took back his words and the persecution by the Meccans resumed.

The novel "Satanic Verses" by Salman Rushdie was based on this incident. Recall that everything we know about Muhammad -- including this incident -- comes to us from Moslem sources. Nevertheless, most Muslims reject the account as a fabrication -- although they offer no explanation as to why the same sources are to be trusted on other matters.

Is Muhammad mentioned in the Bible?

The answer is yes and no.

The answer is yes in that the Bible has much to say about false prophets, and Muhammad was most certainly that. But I think we can say that the Bible is more specific than that.

Three of the world's major religions claim Abraham as their father. Abraham came from Ur, which was part of the Chaldean empire, part of modern day Iraq. In Genesis 15, God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerable as the stars, but as the years passed and Abraham had no son he seemingly began to worry about how that promise would come to pass. As Sarah's urging, he had a son by her maidservant Hagar, and that son was named Ishmael. Fourteen years later, Sarah also gave him a son, Isaac.

The history of the world has been shaped by the struggle between these two brothers, one of whom was the child of promise and the other of whom was not. Modern day

Arabs trace their ancestry back to Ishmael, and modern day Jews trace their ancestry back to Isaac.

Even before Ishmael was born, God told Hagar the type of man he would be: “And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” (Genesis 16:12)

Abraham later pleaded with God that Ishmael would not be forgotten, and God told us more about Ishmael: “And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.” (Genesis 17:20; see also 21:13)

Although Isaac was the child of promise, Ishmael was also part of God’s plan. In fact, in Genesis 21, God saved Ishmael’s life when he and his mother were cast out as Sarah’s urging (and with God’s permission). In verse 20, the Bible tells us that “God was with the lad.”

When can learn at least two things from these events:

- 1) God knew what type of man Ishmael would be and yet God spared his life and was with him. In fact, he promised to make a great nation from him, and he did so. We see that nation today, just as we continue to see the physical nation that God made through his brother Isaac.
- 2) Politicians and media pundits can do all they will to anchor our current conflict to this century or the last century, but the truth is that this family feud goes back for over 4000 years. Virtually every Old Testament prophet addressed the conflict, and history tells us it has continue almost unabated the entire time. But, you say, surely no one is fighting in the Middle East today because of things that happened thousands of years ago. Really? Listen to Yasser Arafat: “Be assured that the many indignities heaped upon the Palestinian people since ancient times must and shall be avenged. Israel’s policy in the occupied territories is little more than an extension of the important tactics of the conqueror Joshua. ... Ishmael shall have his revenge.” Or listen to Anwar Sadat: “The assassination of Arab brethren, like Goliath, by Jewish sheep-herders like David, is the sort of shameful ignominy that we must yet set aright in the domain of the occupied Palestinian homeland.”

While the Bible generally discusses false prophets and more specifically discusses Ishmael and his descendants, it is not true that Muhammad is directly mentioned in the Bible. Muslims, however, claim that he is mentioned in at least two places.

One verse that Muslims point to is Isaiah 29:12, which reads: “And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.” Muslims argue that the book mentioned here is the Koran, that the one to whom it is given is Muhammad, and that the one delivering the book is Gabriel. But of course this verse from Isaiah has nothing at all to say about any descendant of Ishmael in AD 600,

but is rather directed to descendants of Isaac in 700 BC. The point being made here is that God's people were refusing to pay any attention to his word.

A second verse Muslims point to is Deuteronomy 18:18 -- "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." But, of course, that verse applies to Jesus rather than Muhammad. In fact, Peter quoted this very verse in Acts 3:22 and applied it to Christ.

The Contrast with Christ

The Cross:

It is interesting that while Muslims accept that Jesus was sent by God, they deny that he was crucified. One Sunni Muslim writes that Muslims believe that Allah saved the Messiah from the ignominy of the cross. Another writes that Muslims honor Jesus more than Christians do because Muslims refuse to believe that God would permit Jesus to suffer death on the cross. In short, Islam has no understanding of the cross and its centrality to the gospel of Christ.

We can see some of this contrast when we look at how Muslims respond to mockery of themselves and their prophet. When Muhammad was portrayed in twelve cartoons in a Danish newspaper, the uproar in the Muslim erupted around the world and continues in places to this very day.

Christians, by contrast, were told to expect mockery. Christ was called names and mocked while on earth, and he told his disciples to expect the same treatment. (Psalm 22:7; Isaiah 53:3; Matthew 10:25) Those who follow Christ are mocked today, and Christ is also mocked. One so-called artist recently portrayed Christ in a manner that is so disgusting and disrespectful that I will not describe it here, but instead will say only that we regrettably were forced to pay for it in that it was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. Christians certainly were angered and grieved and perhaps shocked, but we did not seek to murder the artist. Instead, we know that we must suffer with him outside the gate, bearing his reproach (Hebrews 13:12-13).

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

While Muhammad was swift to shed the blood of others, Christ shed his own blood for others.

The Resurrection:

Another key point of contrast between Christ and Muhammad is that Muhammad is in his tomb and Christ is not. In short, one tomb is empty, and the other is not. But that will not always be the case. The day will come when Muhammad will come out of that tomb at the command of Jesus Christ, and Muhammad will then bend his knee and

confess that Jesus is Lord. At that time, Muhammad will answer for his false prophecies, his thievery, and his sexual perversions -- and the billions who have followed him will answer as well. Our goal as Christians must be to turn as many from that path as we can, and the only way to do that is to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ.