

## WHY I AM NOT A MUSLIM

One of the fun challenges of trying many of my cases has been the reconstruction of history. Most every lawsuit involves trying to piece together some aspects of the past. It may be what happened last year, last decade, or even last century.

There is a cancer caused by asbestos that is called mesothelioma. I have had the opportunity to represent a number of people afflicted with this disease. The cancer usually has a latency period of 30 to 40 years, meaning that the cancer manifests itself 3 or 4 decades *after* one is exposed to the asbestos. By the very nature of the disease, to build a case, we must reconstruct history and determine where and how one was exposed to this toxic mineral a long time before.

Personal exposure to asbestos is not the only history I have to reconstruct. The history of scientific knowledge and the role of asbestos manufacturers is also required. So it is that I have spent a great deal of time combing through libraries, document repositories, published literature, and historical testimony trying to understand who knew what, when, and how that knowledge was handled.

In the mid-90's, we were well aware that a study had been commissioned by a coalition of asbestos companies in the 1950's to study the effects of asbestos on the men who mined it in eastern Canada. The study was ultimately published in 1960, and it claimed to find that asbestos did *not* cause cancer. There was a rumor that the study results had been altered before publication. Some had said that the original study had in fact found that asbestos caused cancer, but the asbestos companies had altered that finding before publishing the results. Unfortunately, all of the original drafts of the study had reportedly been destroyed.

We had some meager evidence to the alteration, but in one day, all that changed. There was a fellow in Quebec, Canada who had been cleaning out an attic. He found some papers in the attic and posted them for sale on EBay. Included in the papers was one of the original 62 copies of the draft report. Bound and marked, "CONFIDENTIAL: Restricted copy 7 of 62," that copy had not been destroyed. An executive put it in a box in his garage where it lay for almost 40 years.

I bought the original, flew up to Quebec to get it, lest it get lost in the mail, and had my rock solid proof of what had happened decades earlier.

This is the bit of lawyering that is akin to detective work. It is all part of getting history right. Accurate history is important. With good history, you have truth. Without it, you are basing decisions on illusion. It is true in law, and it is true in matters of faith and religion. This is one of the core reasons I cannot be a Muslim.

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all share a common trait as religious systems. They are all history-based religions. By that I mean that each believes it records certain historical facts, and the truth of much of the faith lies in the truth of its history. Without a historical Abraham, there is no patriarchal Jewish faith. Without a historical Jesus crucified and resurrected, there is no orthodox Christian faith. In the same way, Islam rests on a recounted history, making claims about that history that form a basis of the faith. If the history is correct, the faith is likely solid. If the history isn't, the faith isn't.

I don't find history as recounted in the Qur'an accurate. I don't think it measures up to what we reasonably can reconstruct historically using other documents and common sense. Furthermore, I believe we can reasonably determine how history could produce the Muslim scriptures without a divine revelation. The process of trying to reconstruct this history also affirms my faith in the Jewish Scriptures, as well as the Christian writings commonly called the New Testament.

In this chapter, my goal is to set out the historical problems I have with the Muslim view of history from its holy writings while also analyzing the veracity of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

## **THE DIFFICULTIES OF REASONING FROM HISTORY**

We all have our ideas of what happened in the past. It is hard to shake anyone of these opinions, especially if one bases their lives on them. If one is raised in the Muslim faith, one is taught that the Qur'an is accurate in its recording of history. One believes it, and to persuade such a person with an alternate history is always a difficult chore. The same is likely true for me as a Christian. To try and move me from my belief of history that leads to my faith is undoubtedly difficult also. Similarly, one who disbelieves in the authentic history of Islam, Christianity, Judaism or some other historically based faith will likely be hard pressed to accept one of these histories since it means admitting that one was wrong. That is always a hard thing to do!

Still, recognizing this inherent bias we each carry is taking an important step in trying to find truth and build a reliable history to inform a reliable faith. So we begin by exploring Islam, placing Islam into its historical context, and then exploring its scriptures and the history they relate. We can compare the Qur'an to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures and try to reconstruct a history that seems most reliable.

## **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MUHAMMAD AND ISLAM**

Western civilization is frequently tied back to origins in the Roman Empire. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, the empire had split into two divisions, the Eastern and Western. From the Western Empire comes our term for Western Civilization. As time passed, the Western

Empire crumbled before invading forces of Goths, Lombards, Vandals and others. Although the Eastern Empire was still in place with the Emperor ruling from Constantinople, by the 600's the Western Empire wasn't really recognizable. The Eastern division of the Roman Empire is called the "Byzantine" or "Later Roman Empire," and while it was the Christian power in what we today call the "Near East," it was not the only power in that part of the world.

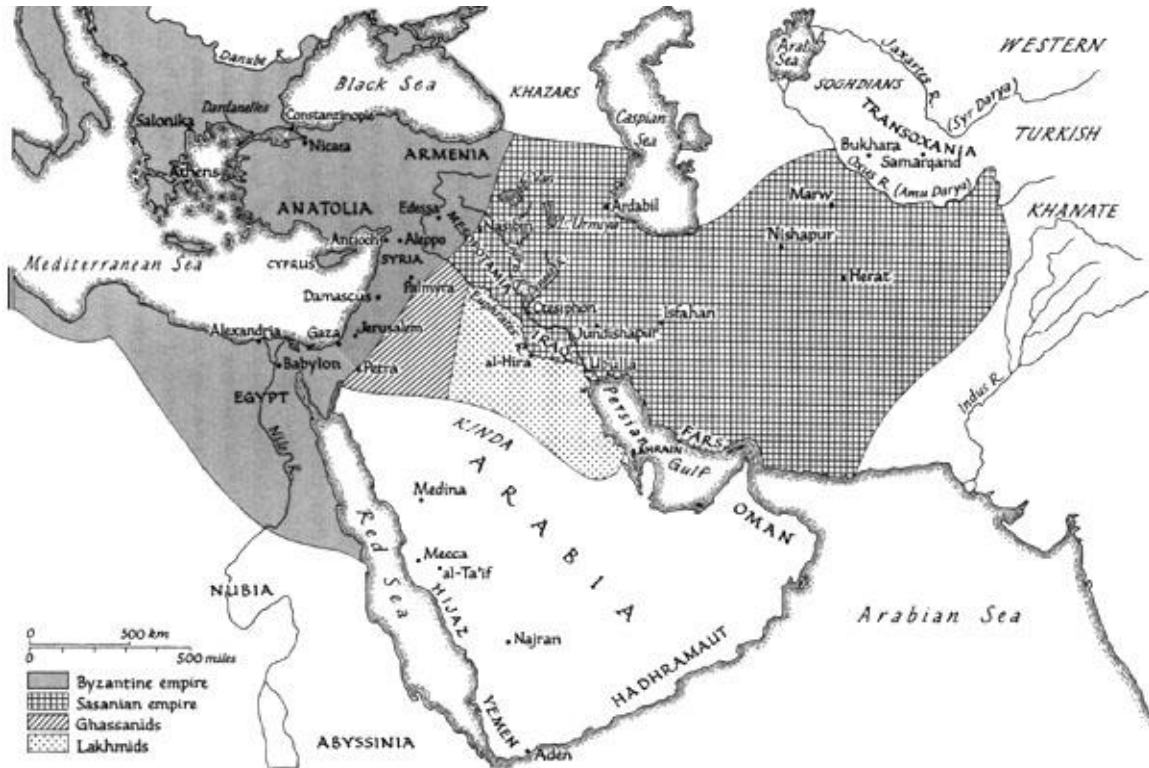
At its peak, the Roman Empire had spanned much of the Mediterranean world. A representative map is below.



While this map shows the Roman Empire at its peak, it is apparent that the whole world is not covered! To understand the roots of Islam, one must fill in more territory. To the East of Rome's territory were remains of the old Persian Empire as well as the Arab peninsula. By the 500's, the old Persian Empire was called the Sasanian Empire. In addition to the Sasanian Empire, there was a large number of people who inhabited the Arabian Peninsula. These were nomadic tribes that were rather independent, not belonging to any united empire or kingdom, although some of them kept a loose affiliation with the Sasanians. To better follow these peoples, I have set out a map on the next page.

The difference between the Byzantine Empire and the Sasanian/nomadic people was not simply geography. The Byzantine Empire was built on a Greek/Roman culture. While Christianity replaced the early Greek and Latin paganism, Christianity was still taught and

understood in light of Greek philosophy. The Byzantine alphabet was based on Greek and Latin letters. The science came from Greek and Latin schools.



Map 1. The Middle East on the eve of the Muslim era.

The Sasanians and Arabs, however, rejected all things Greek as alien. The Sasanian culture was based upon ancient Iranian and Semitic<sup>1</sup> cultural traditions. The Arabs were also Semitic in origin. This meant that the Sasanians used an entirely different alphabet (even writing right to left instead of left to right), had different religious conceptions of God and right and wrong, not to mention different foods, and had different day-to-day perceptions of both community and family life.

The main religion for the Sasanian Empire was Zoroastrianism, so named because it followed the teachings of Zoroaster. He was deemed a prophet from what is now northeast

<sup>1</sup> “Semitic” as a word comes from the name of “Shem,” one of Noah’s three sons. The name has come to describe a culture and group of people who allegedly descended from Shem. These are Near Eastern people who include the Hebrews, the Babylonians, and others of that region. These people also speak languages that are termed “Semitic.” (Whereas English and other Western languages are classified as “Indo-European.” Bigotry towards Jews is termed “Anti-Semitism” using another form of the same word.)

<sup>2</sup> The Jews in Babylon in the 300-500’s reduced a good bit of Jewish tradition into what is now known as the “Babylonian Talmud.”

Iran, supposedly living around 1200BC. This faith taught that there was a creator God (“Ahura Mazda”) and an evil demon (“Angra Mainyu”). One’s eternal afterlife is determined by whether a person chooses mostly good or evil in her/his life (good go to Paradise; bad go to the place of torment). Because your afterlife is based on choices and works, rather than beliefs, Zoroastrianism is very tolerant of other religions. Hence, this was a natural destination for exiled Christians. (This was the faith of Cyrus the Great, who ruled from Babylon while the Jews were in captivity.)

That is not to say that there was no interaction between the peoples who inhabited each Empire. For example, the Byzantine Empire had a number of Jews living in it. A number of those Jews had never fully been Hellenized (read that “Greek-ified”). In many ways, they had more in common with the Semitic people living in the Sasanian and Arabic lands. By the same token, there were many Jews living in Sasanian and Arabic lands that certainly had many religious concepts in common with the Byzantine Christian Empire,<sup>2</sup> for those Jews had as Holy Scriptures what the church came to call the Old Testament.

Similarly, there were times when the church and the Byzantine Emperor would exile those who failed to agree with certain official Christian positions. These exiles frequently made their way into these Sasanian and Arabic lands. An important example is the bishop of Constantinople Nestorius. Nestorius had heretical views of Jesus and his divinity. As a result, Nestorius and his followers were expelled from the church and, since the Empire was “Christian,” from the Empire. He and a good many of his followers went into the Sasanian and Arabic lands, carrying on their beliefs in exile, setting up monasteries and propagating what was deemed heretical teaching.

Between the 300’s and 500’s, the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires frequently battled each other over borders, with both sides using or fighting the Arabic tribes in the process. There was a lucrative trade that went on with India and the lands to the East that had silk, incense, spices, and other goods. The trade routes went through these lands as well as the nomadic lands of the Arabian Peninsula, and the people that controlled these routes controlled something most valuable, so there was a lot worth fighting for.

The nomadic people of the Arabian<sup>3</sup> Peninsula (there were also nomadic people in the Sasanian lands) are of unique interest in understanding Muhammad and the early years of

---

<sup>2</sup> The Jews in Babylon in the 300-500’s reduced a good bit of Jewish tradition into what is now known as the “Babylonian Talmud.”

<sup>3</sup> These are true “Arabs.” They are distinct from those of the Middle East that we may think of as Arabs. For example, the Palestinians are not considered true Arabs. They were originally the sea people that settled the coast near modern Israel. Historically, their name has been some variation of Palestinian, either Pelagians, Pelagasians, or Philistines. True Arabs traditionally trace their lineage back to Abraham through Ishmael (see Qur’an 2:121-127) and his great grandson Adnan as well as the Biblical Joktan (Qahtan to the Arabs).

Islam because these are the people of his heritage. The nomadic tribes were affected by the sparse desert climate. These were people who moved around, led by the needs of their flocks. These families maintained tribal affiliations as they moved from area to area where climate and resources allowed their flocks to graze. The settled life of towns, and with it the more specific trades (blacksmiths, weavers, bakers, teachers, etc.), were unknown in many parts of this land.

By and large, these people were outside the realm of governmental control. They lived in loose affiliation with each other based upon heritage and family relations. Each tent represented a family. The tents that camped and traveled together were a clan.<sup>4</sup> The clans that kept up a relationship were considered a tribe. This situation persisted for centuries in the semi-arid lands of that region, so the tradition and culture was well established.

## ENTER MUHAMMAD

As we turn to the life of Muhammad, we are automatically at a bit of a historical disadvantage in comparison to what I have set out previously. I have been able to keep the footnotes on the above to a minimum because the history is fairly accepted by most. I haven't set out anything beyond the basics. In college-speak, I have written some World History 101.

In writing on history, as much as possible, one should use contemporary documents and original primary source material. One relies on these documents because the primary documents produced by a source in the same time frame are typically more reliable than later materials. Later materials suffer from the ravages of time and its effect on memory. Agendas also add up over time and it becomes more difficult to delineate their effect on what is written.

In the case of Muhammad, we do not really have any contemporary documents. We are forced to read and interpret documents written by people much later. For example, the *Hadith* (the "Sayings") are collections of statements attributed to Muhammad, his family, or his companions. The most commonly used set of these sayings was compiled by al-Bukhari who died in 870, over 200 years after Muhammad. The other biographies were also written over 100–200 years after Muhammad. Ibn Ishaq (d. 768) wrote the *Sira* and the *Maghazi*. For fuller details on much of this material, I recommend reading a

---

<sup>4</sup> Typically, the oldest or wisest among the clan, the "elder," was the clan leader. The Arabic word for "elder" is *shaykh* or in English, "Sheikh." Clans would also have an elected leader, a *Sayyid*.

comprehensive book like *The Oxford History of Islam*<sup>5</sup> or *Muhammad the Prophet*.<sup>6</sup> Because of several centuries of passing time, I am automatically guarded about what I assert as historical.

For many non-Muslims trying to understand the story of Muhammad and Islam, it is difficult to readily grasp the facts due to the unfamiliarity of the names and language. In an effort to keep this as readable as possible, and yet accurate, I am using footnotes to be clearer on the various terminology used in Islam while trying to maintain a more reader-friendly text.

The tribes and clans in Muhammad's day worshipped various divinities. In Mecca, the largest and most important city in the Arabian Peninsula, there was a large cube in the middle of the city called the Ka'ba. The Qur'an (2:121-127) claims that Abraham and Ishmael built the original cube, although there is no earlier authority or reference for that history.<sup>7</sup>

Mecca kept an idol of every clan and tribe's divinities (a total of 360, one for each day of the lunar year), and as a result, Mecca was a focus point for annual pilgrimages where the Arabian nomads came to sacrifice and worship. The *Quraysh*<sup>8</sup> tribe kept control of Mecca and held a strong economic control over most aspects of the pilgrimages. This tribe would give various roles with accompanying economic opportunities to its various clans. For example, one clan would distribute water to the pilgrims from a certain fountain. Another clan would collect offerings and distribute food. Another clan would resolve disputes, *etc.*

Muhammad was born around 570.<sup>9</sup> His father, who died before his actual birth, was in the clan in charge of distributing water from the Zamzam spring (see fn. 7) (the Hashimite

---

<sup>5</sup> (Oxford University Press 1999) John Esposito, editor of the four-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, put together this work combining chapters written by 16 leading scholars on Islam (both Muslim and non-Muslim).

<sup>6</sup> (Thunder Bay Press 2004). This book is written by a Muslim and was originally published in August 2001, one month before the events of September 11, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Muslim faith teaches that Abraham brought Hagar and Ishmael to the valley of Mecca ("Makka") and abandoned them there with limited food and water. After two nights and a day, Hagar despaired for lack of water. While Hagar paced and pleaded with God, Ishmael miraculously uncovered a spring with his hands. Ishmael cried out, "Zummi, zummi" imitating the sound of the gurgling water. This spring supposedly became the holy well "Zamzam." Abraham returned later and built the temple/original Ka'ba, with Ishmael's help. (See, *Islam in the World*, Malise Ruthven (Oxford Univ. Press 2006) p. 13-14).

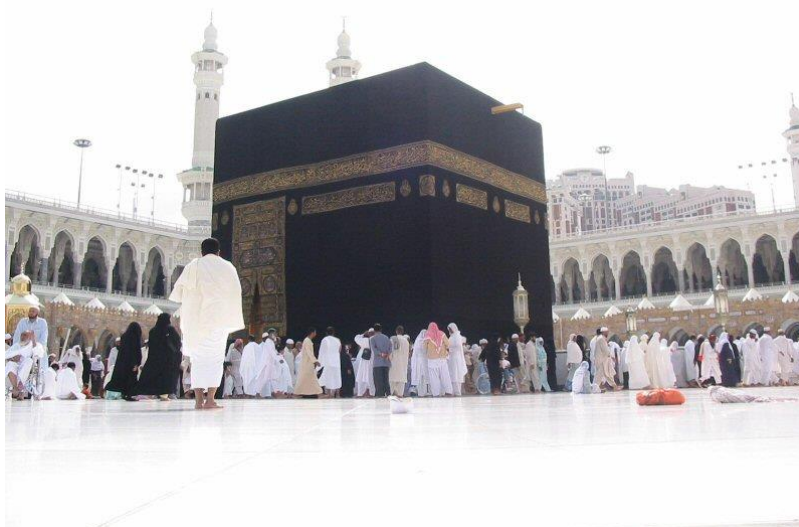
<sup>8</sup> From the Arabic word *qirsch*, which meant "shark." The Shark was the emblem of this tribe.

<sup>9</sup> Certain Muslim writings and traditions give the birth of Muhammad as September 1, 570, but scholars disagree on the accuracy of this date.

clan). By age 6, Muhammad's mother also died and Muhammad became an orphan. Much of his childhood was spent in the deserts in a nomadic life raised by relatives. There is an interesting history that relates that Muhammad came into contact with a Syrian monk between the ages of 9 and 12. Muslim writings relate that this monk recognized Muhammad as the Prophet. Christian history from the Byzantines relates that this monk was actually a Nestorian.

Noted earlier, Nestorius was the exiled bishop of Constantinople who lost his position and Empire residency over his failure to accept the orthodox view of Jesus as fully God and fully human. Nestorius was responsible for teaching that Jesus was two different persons, one human and one divine. As such, there is room for Muhammad and others to deny the full deity of Jesus, being able to separate out Jesus as a human. If this history is correct, and the Nestorian/Muhammad connection was made, then one readily sees how the Nestorian heresy could have affected the ultimate teachings of Muhammad. The Qur'an relates that Jesus was a prophet, but not the divine God of Gods. Byzantine history indicates that this monk was a likely source of some of Muhammad's later visions and ideas that became the Qur'an.

As Muhammad matured, he married a distant cousin from the Quraysh tribe who gave him four sons (each dying early in life) and four daughters. Muhammad took a life as a caravan leader, where he maintained a reputation as scrupulously honest. Muhammad's early reputation was greatly enhanced when he took on responsibilities to rebuild and restore the Ka'ba. This seminal event in his life requires a bit more understanding of the Ka'ba itself.



The Ka'ba, pictured above, is the most sacred and important holy site of Islam today. It is located in the center of the Mecca courtyard Mosque. It is cube shaped and roughly 50 feet



high. It preexisted Muhammad and was recognized by all the different clans as a place of worship, regardless of which deity the clans followed. There is one door into the cube. Within the Ka'ba is a large black stone 14 inches in diameter.<sup>10</sup> Also in the Ka'ba today is Muhammad's sword, a letter Muhammad wrote, as well as other items holy to Islam. While the original structure was probably made of wood, the structure today has stonewalls covered by Egyptian cloth.

During Muhammad's early adulthood, a storm damaged the Ka'ba, and the four main tribes of Mecca decided to repair it. Each tribe was to rebuild a side. The tribes fought, however, over who would get to place the stone back into the structure. To resolve the dispute, the tribes decided the next person to enter the structure would get to place the stone. Muhammad entered the structure next. Showing the wisdom for which he was famous, Muhammad decided to place the stone on a blanket. He then took a representative from each tribe and had them take one of the four corners of the blanket. Together they lifted the stone and carried it into the structure where Muhammad then placed it.

While Mecca and the Arab tribes were both basically pagans and polytheists, there was a definite movement of Arabs who followed Abraham's teaching of one God. These monotheists were called *hunafa*. Nearing the age of 40, Muhammad sought out a greater understanding of the divine. While frequently taking contemplative hikes in the desert and mountains, Muhammad related a profound experience while on Mount Hira.<sup>11</sup> In the year 612 (the 27<sup>th</sup> day of Ramadan), Muhammad is recorded to have received an angelic visit from Gabriel ("Jibra'eel"). The angel told him to, "Recite!" (Qur'an 96:1-5).

Somewhat disturbed by the visit, Muhammad sought counsel from his wife<sup>12</sup> as well as another relative who we are told was a Christian. Muhammad received a prophecy that he would be rejected from his people because of his message, but that it was a message from God nonetheless.

Muhammad began to register and recite the visions he received. In Islamic terms, these revelations "descended" on Muhammad. Through these visions, Muhammad proclaimed

---

<sup>10</sup> The history of the stone is unknown. It predates Muhammad. While the stone is worn smooth from centuries of kisses by the faithful, it has not always had such veneration. When Muhammad had his last pilgrimage journey, he reportedly kissed the stone. A successor to Muhammad (named "Umar") is reported to have said, "I know you are nothing but a stone, have no power to do either good or evil, and had I not seen the Prophet [Muhammad] greet you, I would not do so."

<sup>11</sup> This mountain is today called Jabal al-Nur, which means the "Mountain of Light."

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad actually had over a dozen wives. Polygamy was culturally accepted and a way of binding tribes together to care for widows and fatherless children. Interestingly, among the wives of Muhammad was one who was Jewish. Islamic law limits polygamy to four wives, but Muhammad was not bound by this in that his marriages were seen as necessary to establish and secure the presence of the Islamic faith.

that God was angry at the polytheism of the people. These visions set out commandments, instructions, and historical material that were put into what is now called the “Qur'an.” This is why Muhammad is called, “The Messenger of God.”

Interestingly, Islam claims that in this way, Muhammad actually fulfilled a prophecy of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> In John 16:7-14, Jesus states:

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you.

To Muslims, the “Counselor” is Muhammad.<sup>14</sup>

If we read John in the original Greek, the word translated “Counselor” or “Comforter” (depending on translation) is *parakletos* (παράκλητος). Muslims teach that *parakletos* means “worthy of praise.”<sup>15</sup> In Arabic, “worthy of praise is “Muhammad.” This seems, to many Muslims, a precise fulfillment of the promise of Jesus. However, the Greek word does not mean “worthy of praise.” It means, “One called alongside” as in “one who helps.” It was a word used for a lawyer, as counselor, or advocate. There is a Greek word that sounds similar, *pericleitos* (περικλειτός), which means “praised” or “far-famed.” But, this is a very different word than the one Jesus used.

Christianity teaches that Jesus is referencing the Holy Spirit. In fact, Jesus indicates such when he refers to the *parakletos* as the “Spirit of truth” earlier in John 14:17. As Christians, we see this prophecy fulfilled at Pentecost when the Spirit descends on the people and convicts them of sin, righteousness, and judgment, just as Jesus said (see Acts 2).

---

<sup>13</sup> See Khan at 45. This is found first in the Sirah of Ibn Hisham (d. 834).

<sup>14</sup>This brings up the question of how Islam can use Christian and Jewish scriptures, but still embrace the faith of Islam. There are several Muslim approaches to Christian scriptures. One is that the original Christian and Jewish scriptures were authentic and accurate, but that over the years they have become corrupt. Another view is that the scriptures are still fairly reliable, but that the exegesis or understanding of the scriptures is defective.

<sup>15</sup> See Kahn at p. 45.

This is the same *parakletos* that Jesus refers to earlier in the same discussion with his apostles found in John 14. There, Jesus says he will:

...ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor [*parakletos*] to be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you... On that day, you will realize that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. (Jn 14:16-20)

Jesus taught that the apostles already knew the *parakletos* because He was living with them. He certainly was, for Jesus was filled with that very Spirit. Jesus then points out that once he has gone, he will ask the Father who will send the Spirit to actually indwell the apostles. Then, the Spirit will not just live with them (as it did before Jesus left) but would actually be *in them*. This indwelling would be when the apostles would actually understand that Jesus was one with God, that the apostles were in Jesus and that Jesus was in the apostles. These were spiritual truths that the apostles did not understand at the time. It was not until the Spirit came down on Pentecost that the apostles finally understood what Jesus was talking about! This is why Paul would later write that spiritual truths cannot be understood without the Spirit's own enlightenment (1 Cor. 2:8-14).<sup>16</sup>

After these visions descended on Muhammad, he spent three years preaching monotheism to his family. Then, Muhammad started teaching others around the Ka'ba. This teaching certainly had potential to wreak some economic havoc on various clans that depended on the economic benefits of the idol worship of various nomadic clans and tribes. It is not surprising that the Quraysh, save two men of note, rejected this early teaching of Muhammad.

Some of the Quraysh sought to kill Muhammad, but were hesitant for fear of starting a blood feud. So on September 24, 622, Muhammad took his family and fled to Yathrib (called "Medina" today).<sup>17</sup>

In Medina, Muhammad was respected and quickly recognized for his wisdom as the town's moderator. He built the first mosque in Medina, which served as a place of worship as well as his court and headquarters. During this time, the Quraysh continued to plot against

---

<sup>16</sup> Many Muslims also teach that Muhammad was foretold in the Old Testament. The passages seen to reference Muhammad are many of those that Christians see as passages foretelling the coming Messiah, Christ. These are found in a variety of places, for example, Dt 18:15: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You must listen to him."

<sup>17</sup> Muslims call this (622) the "Year of Flight." In Latin/Arabic, it becomes *Anno Hejirae*. It is the start of the Muslim years. They are noted as A.H. as opposed to the Christian system of A.D. (for Latin *Anno Deus*, or "Year of our Lord").

Muhammad. They were joined in their plotting by two Jews. Islamic writings note that the Jews even willingly bowed to the idols of the Quraysh to show their trustworthiness in betraying Muhammad.

Muhammad starts a military campaign against the Quraysh. He begins by raiding caravans. These raids soon progressed into actual battles with each side bringing their military forces to bear. While Muhammad lost an occasional battle (including more perceived treachery and betrayal by Jews), he won the war. The Quraysh capitulated, as did the other tribes, and by 630, Muhammad had basically united the Arab Peninsula under the banner of Islam. Those who were not converted to the faith were assessed a tax, but were allowed to live in peace, absent some act of treachery.

Muhammad died in 632. But in the year or two before his death, he had another encounter with Christianity. About 60 learned Christian men from Najran (modern Yemen) made a journey along with their Bishop to discuss with Muhammad the nature of Christ. Muhammad, as will be seen later, taught that Christ was a prophet, but not the Son of God in the unique way understood by Christian orthodoxy. As Jesus supplanted the prophet Moses, so the Muslims believed that Muhammad supplanted Jesus.

The debate centered on the nature of Jesus, whether fully God and fully man. The Christians claimed that Muhammad was carrying on the heresy set out by Euthyches and rejected by the Council of Chalcedon. Muhammad remained unconvinced of Christian orthodoxy, and according to Islamic writings, proposed a showdown of sorts (termed an “ordeal”). This was where the parties gathered in an agreed place, called down the curses of death from their respective deities/positions, and then watched to see who survived the encounter.

As the Islamic history recounts the day of the ordeal, the Christians arrived and proposed instead that they pay a per-person tax and then be allowed to worship freely as they saw fit. Muhammad accepted this and granted those who paid the tax freedom to worship.

The Qur'an is in accord with this when it states, “Lo! Those who believe and those who are Jews and the Sabaeans and the Christians and whosoever believeth in Allah and the last day and doeth which is right shall have their reward with their Lord: fear shall not come upon them, neither shall they be grieved” (Qur'an 2:62; 5:69; 22:17).

## **POST-MUHAMMAD**

Once Muhammad died, serious questions arose as to his successor.<sup>18</sup> Muhammad was not going to have a successor as the “Messenger of God.” The question arose as to the successor of his temporal powers as the leader of the Muslims. There was a struggle in Muhammad’s family over succession.

Some thought that Muhammad meant to transfer his temporal authority to Ali, his son-in-law. Others put up a man named Abu Bakr as their new leader. Abu Bakr seemed to get the greatest number behind him and he started collecting the various pronouncements of Muhammad into one place (what became the Koran). Abu Bakr did not live long and was succeeded by Umar. Umar continued the military conquests of Muhammad and conquered the Sasanians. This brought Islam right up to the border of the Byzantine Empire as well as India. When Umar died in 644, Uthman succeeded him and conquered much of North Africa as well as the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean.



*The Spread of Islam. The rapid spread of Islam created within a century a unified cultural and economic zone from India to the Atlantic Ocean within.*

Meanwhile, there was still a strong contingent of Muslims who believed that the right of succession actually belonged to Ali and his line, as noted previously. These two factions continued to dispute in spite of the assumption of actual rulership by Abu Bakr as noted earlier. There were even poisonings and assassinations. Those who believed the rights of succession were legitimately Ali’s formed their own sect of Islam. The Arabic word for

<sup>18</sup>These are successors in the sense of leaders and teachers in the community of believers. Although there were many prophets prior to Muhammad, Islam teaches that there would be no more after him. For this reason, Muhammad is called, “The Seal of the Prophets.”

“sect” is *Shi’a* and these people today are known as *Shi’ites*. The *Shi’ites* lost their chance to command the majority of Islam when their revolt was quelled in 698. Since that time, the sect has continued as a religious movement with definite political overtones.<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned earlier, there are writings, the *Hadith*, that are supposed to supplement the Koran as sayings of Muhammad and his companions/successors. These are subject to study by many Muslims. Those who follow the teachings of these *Hadith* are termed Sunnis. The Shi’ites, not surprisingly, follow only the supplemental sayings of Ali, deeming the sayings of Muhammad’s other companions as those from improper successors.

### POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth... He will bring glory to me [Jesus!]”* (Jn. 16:13-14).

Muhammad is not the *parakletos*, for the *parakletos* brings glory to Christ. He guides us into truth in ways that lift up Jesus as worthy of our worship. If I am to be guided in this truth, I need to lift up Jesus. My glory needs to be in him and what he has done for me. As a Spirit-filled Christian, this needs to be my number one goal and focus this week.

2. *“Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you have received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you ... that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day”* (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

Christianity is an historical faith. The key to this history for Paul, for me, for any believer, is the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus on my behalf. This transforms history, infuses my faith with meaning, and should guide my life individually and in how I interact with others. Amen!

3. *“If we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned.”* (Gal. 1:8).

History and truth matter. I want to determine truth and stand on it.

---

<sup>19</sup> There are significantly fewer Shi’ites than Sunni’s in the Muslim world. Most Shi’ites are concentrated in certain areas. Iran is one of those areas. In Iran, 90 percent of the population is considered Shi’ite. The Ayatollah Khomeini was a Shi’ite cleric and political leader of Iran after the Shah of Iran was overthrown in 1979.