

Isaac and Ishmael

Israel, Arabs and the Middle East

Part 4

Most people in the United States, including our politicians, know very little about the history or the distinctions of Islam. This is more than unfortunate, it's scary. Islam is not only a major force in the world of today, but it figures prominently into the future. In this fourth article of our series, we will look at the founder of Islam, the growth of Islam and Islam's sacred book.

Muhammed and Islam

Muhammed was an Arab who at age 35 began the practice of meditation in a cave outside of Mecca. During one of his times of meditation in the year 610 AD, Muhammed claimed that the angel Gabriel appeared to him and commanded him to recite. Though Muhammed could neither read nor write, this recitation which Muhammed received over a 23 year period became the Qu'ran.

Muhammed made it his mission to proclaim the truth of Islam, submission to Allah. At the time of his first recitation, Arabs were polytheistic idol worshippers. Muhammed called on them to repent of their idolatry, to do good and to serve Allah.

In the beginning, Muhammed's preaching convinced only a few converts. The small group of Muslims were persecuted in Mecca so Muhammed relocated with his converts eventually settling in Medina. While in Medina, a revelation came to Muhammed permitting him to raid passing caravans. As his raids produced wealth, his message attracted more followers. Soon he had a small army of 350. His men defeated an army of 1,000 at the battle of Badr. This success gave him more confidence, encouraged more converts and eventually allowed him to return to Mecca in 628 AD where he entered the city unchallenged. From that point on, Muhammed's movement grew stronger and stronger. Although Muhammed died in 632 AD, the religious and political movement of Islam spread rapidly through the use of the sword. From 623 AD to 777 AD there were 83 military conflicts involving Islam. By 750 AD the Muslim empire reached as far as Spain in the west and India in the east. In later centuries, Islam penetrated into Africa and Asia reaching as far as the Philippines. Islam enjoyed a

"golden era" which produced some of the world's finest philosophers and mathematicians. Eventually, it clashed militarily with Christianity as a result of the Crusades to reclaim the Holy Land from the Muslims. After the Middle Ages and the failure of the Ottoman Empire to modernize, many parts of the Muslim world were colonized by European countries. Political and economic domination continued until the end of WWII and this domination produced deep anger and resentment among Muslims. After the discovery and development of vast oil reserves in Muslim lands, Islam began to re-emerge as a powerful force in the world. After having suffered for centuries, the Islamic sword is once again asserting itself.

The history of Muhammed and Islam is the fulfillment of Genesis 16:12, "He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." Historian Paul Johnson writes:

The history of Islam has essentially been a history of conquest and re-conquest. The 7th center "breakout" of Islam from Arabia was followed by the rapid conquest of North Africa, the invasion and virtual conquest of Spain and a thrust into France that carried the crescent to the gates of Paris.

The Qu'ran

The beliefs of Muslims can be as diverse as those among Christians. However there are six basic articles of faith and "Five Pillars of Islam" which outline the good deeds required for entering paradise. The first pillar is the most important— the recitation of the creed: "There is no god but Allah and Muhammed is his prophet."

Muslims and Our World

One of the practices of Islam is jihad which means "struggle" or "exertion" on behalf of God. Jihad is the means by which non-muslims are brought into Islam. For peaceful and moderate Muslims, the method of jihad may be persuasion but for most Muslims in the Middle East, jihad means the use of force or "holy war." Violence used to propagate Islam and annihilate Israel enjoys wide

support, especially among the Palestinians. Young Palestinians, male and female, are lining up in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to volunteer for suicide missions with the promise of immediate paradise.

What's the Difference?

The history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is certainly a history filled with bloodshed. But the history of the world in general is one of war. Land and ideas have been fought over many times. Is there a difference between one group of soldiers and another group?

With regard to Israel, the answer is yes. In an earlier article, we discussed the divine fiat by which God gave the land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The deeding of

that land is nearly 4,000 years old. If you believe the Bible, you understand Israel's right to the land. The Jewish people have the right to defend their land. God not only gave them the land but they actually purchased it from the land owners in the 20th century.

With regard to Christianity, the answer would be that there is no Christian nation with physical boundaries. There are countries such as America with large numbers of Christians among the population which were founded



Dome and rooftop of Al-Aqsa Mosque

on Christian principles. However, Jesus taught that we are to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's. Christianity, when it is rightly understood, recognizes that the advancement of God's kingdom is not necessarily a political one. The New Testament never advocates the overthrow of the Roman Empire. Christians are given the example of Christ who gave His life so that even His enemies might believe and come into His kingdom.

John Bell