

CHRISTIAN HISTORY 101

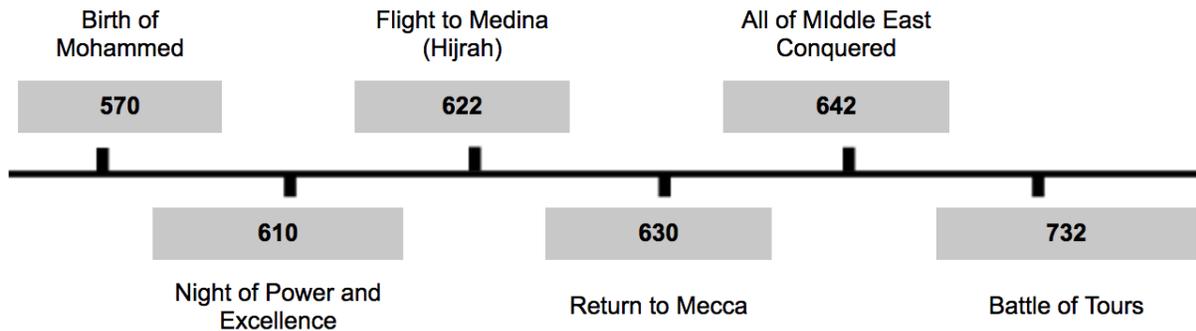
SESSION FIVE: Out of Arabia

- Introduction: The Rise of Islam alongside Christianity
- Origins: Mohammed and the Quran
- Expansion: An Arabian Empire
- Institutionalism: The Five Pillars of Islam

INTRODUCTION: The Rise of Islam alongside Christianity

Islam (Literally meaning “submission”) began with one man in the Arabian Peninsula and today makes up nearly 25% of the world’s population. There are 1.6 billion Muslims (“one who submits”) with 2.2 billion Christians (the closest “competitor” is Hindu with 1 billion adherents; there are only 14 million Jews, making up less than .05% of the world’s population).

EARLY ISLAMIC TIMELINE



ORIGINS: Mohammed and the Quran

Mohammed was born in 570/571 in Mecca and raised largely by his uncle who was a trader and caravan driver. Mohammed was known by the nickname, “al-Amin,” the “trusted one.”

The Arabian Peninsula during Mohammed’s early life was under siege from within and without. Byzantines to the north, Abyssinians to the south, and warring tribes following different leaders and up to 400 local deities.

Mohammed was exposed to regional religions and on his many travels, to Judaism, Christianity, and the religions of Persia and Africa. He married a wealthy woman 15 years older than him, allowing him the luxury of pursuing faith.

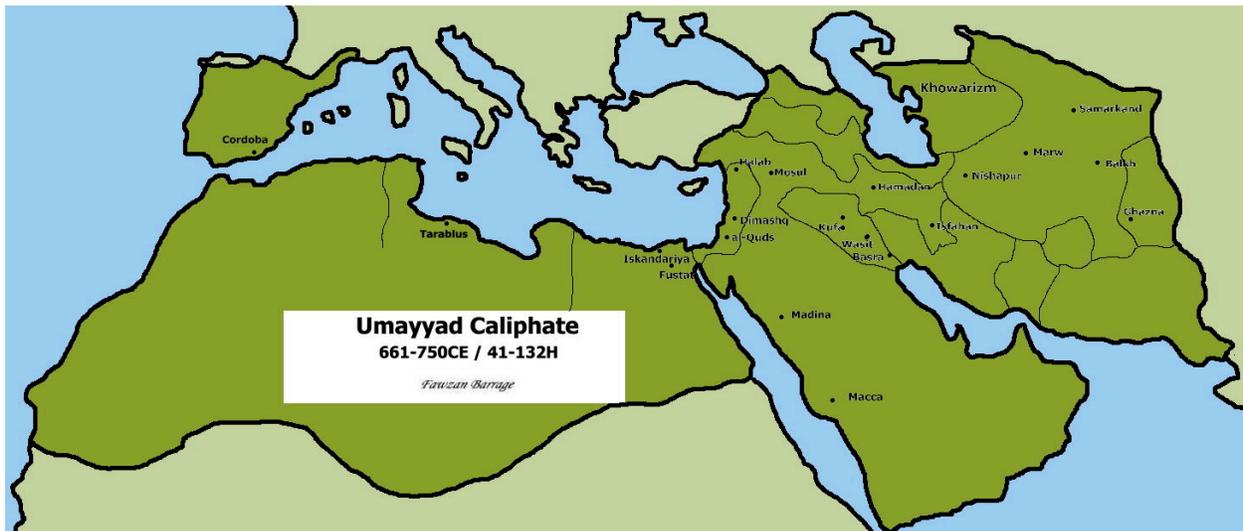
In 610, when Mohammed was 40 years old, he testifies that the angel Gabriel visited him in a cave during his meditation and commanded him to speak the word of God as God's messenger. This was one one true God of Judaism and Christianity, Allah (the Arabic name for God).

After a decade of preaching and teaching in Mecca, Mohammed was forced out of town with a few hundred followers. He escaped (the Hijrah) to the northern desert oasis of Medina (622, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar). Within a few years Medina and Mecca were at war. Mohammed reentered Mecca in 630 as the absolute tribal leader with an army of 10,000.

Immediately Mecca became a theocracy with Mohammed renovating the Kaaba and reopening the Well of Zamzam, incorporating them into the Islamic narrative. Mohammed died unexpectedly in 632.

The Quran: Contains the revelation of God as revealed to Mohammed over his twenty year career. It has 114 chapters and is about 4/5 the size of the New Testament. It is a non-linear text of sayings and was codified in 650 during rapid Islamic expansion.

EXPANSION: An Arabian Empire



Regions fell like dominoes over a period of only a century: Palestine, Egypt, Syria, North Africa, Iraq, Persia (Iran), Central Asia (The “Stans”), and finally Spain.

The early expansion of Islam was not purely “religious.” It was imperial, a “breakout” from isolation. Arabs, for the first time in history, were united.

With early Islamic conquest, Christian and Jewish communities welcomed the Islamic armies because they brought stability and freedom of worship. Christian and Jewish holy places were preserved and Muslims chose Fridays as their holy day in deference to the Sabbath and Sunday.

The Battle of Tours in 732 stopped the Islamic expansion into Europe.

INSTITUTIONALISM: The Five Pillars of Islam*

Islam is not monolithic. There are hundreds and hundreds of different schools (denominations) within three major categories: Sunni (84%), Shia (15%), and Sufi (1%).

1) The Confession (*Shahada*)

“There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet.”

2) Prayer (*Salat*)

Performed five times per day, kneeling on a prayer rug, facing the Kaaba in Mecca. Sometime a simple, *Allah Akbar*, or the *Fatiha*: “In the name of God, the infinitely Compassionate and Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds. The Compassionate, the Merciful. Ruler on the Day of Reckoning. You alone do we worship, and You alone do we ask for help. Guide us on the straight path, the path of those who have received your grace; not the path of those who have brought down wrath, nor of those who wander astray. Amen.”

3) Almsgiving (*Zakat*)

In Muslim countries a tax is imposed on personal annual income to collect alms for the poor, usually 2.5 to 3 percent. In non-Muslim countries, alms are collected at local mosques in the form of voluntary offerings.

4) *Ramadan*

A month long season of daily fasting and purification. Marks the beginning of the lunar year, so the date moves year to year based on our Gregorian Calendar (2017: May 26 - June 25).

5) The Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)

Every able-bodied Muslim must make the pilgrimage to Mecca if at all possible. Those who complete the journey can take the title *Hajji* into their name.

*6)The “sixth pillar” of Islam is *jihad*.

It is incorrect to refer to *jihad* as “holy war.” The word means “to struggle.” There are four elements of *jihad*: The heart (personal); the tongue (verbal); the hand (economics); and the sword (physical). *Jihad* in scholarly islamic thought is utterly distinct from *harb* (war). The very idea that Muslims might kill themselves for sake of religion was unheard of before 1983.