

Understanding Islam

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Week 1: ISLAM IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Romans 1:20-22: *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him (kafir), but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."*

To understand and discuss the world's second largest belief system it is important to understand the basics of its history. This first session will briefly cover the who, what, when, why and where of the religion known as "Islam".

1.1 When did it start?

- Early 7th century AD
 - Muhammad's "recitations" begin in 610 AD
 - Muhammad dies in 632 AD, leaving tens of thousands of followers behind

1.2 Where did it start?

- Arabian peninsula
 - What is now known as "Saudi" Arabia: literally, the Arabia controlled by the Saud family
 - Desert country, populated by polytheistic and animistic feudal tribes

1.3 Who started it?

- Muhammad, name means "highly praised"
 - son of the Arabic Kareish tribe
 - Self-made caravan leader and philosopher
 - Possibly a "hanif", one who worshipped the chief god, *Al-Ilah*, "The God"

1.4 What were its roots?

- 595 AD
 - Muhammad becomes a caravan leader for rich widow Khadija
 - Likely encounters Christian and Jewish groups in his travels
- 600s AD:
 - Begins retreating by himself in a hillside cave outside Arabian "capital" of Mecca
 - Possible synthesis of Christian, Jewish, and Arabic religion?
- 610 AD:
 - Receives a "revelation" from the angel Gabriel
 - He is to be the mouthpiece of the definitive revelation from *Allah*
 - The recitation, or *Qur'an*, is to be spoken in Mecca
- 622 AD:
 - Muhammad and band of a hundred or so followers utterly rejected by Meccans
 - Some tribes in Arabic city of Yathrib ask for his help, so he flees there: the *Hijra*
 - Unites the five tribes of Yathrib; the *recitation* becomes more detailed in nature
 - City is renamed "Medinat al-Nabi" – The City of the Prophet, shortened to *Medina*
- 630 AD:
 - Under continual attack from other Arabic tribes, Muhammad leads an army to Mecca

- Defeats Mecca, and the city converts to *Islam*, Muhammad's religion of submission
- 632 AD:
 - By his death Muhammad had united the Arabian peninsula under the banner of Islam

1.5 Why did it take hold?

Islam:

- Was a *natural step* for the tribes:
 - The idea of one God already existed among the *hanif*
 - See the reading from Romans
- Was a *nationalistic* religion:
 - God had chosen Arabic as the language in which to reveal the Divine Book
 - The Arabs now fit collectively in a cosmic scheme as the descendants of Ishmael
- Had a charismatic and bright leader and statesman in Muhammad
- Read Dune by Frank Herbert to see the unifying effect of religion under a charismatic leader



Week 2: ISLAM'S GLOBAL PRESENCE

2.1 The Early Years of Islam

After 632 AD:

- Muhammad dies, and a successor to the movement must be found!
 - The majority elect Abu Bakr as the first *khalifa* of Islam
 - A minority want Ali ibn abu Talib, Muhammad's son-in-law, to take over

632-632 AD: Abu Bakr

- Rules from Medina like Muhammad

634-644 AD: Umar

- Islam spreads to Jerusalem (Palestine), Damascus (Syria), Egypt
- Loss of control of the Christian Byzantines (Eastern Roman Empire)

644-656 AD: Uthman

- Collects the Qur'an into its written form: up until this time, it had been circulating orally?
- Islam spreads to all of Northern Africa

656-661 AD: Ali

- Ali is eventually made the 4th khalifa
 - He is overthrown by the Islamic governor of Syria, Muawia
 - Muawia attributes Uthman's assassination to Ali's connivance
 - Ali is himself assassinated

680 AD: Shia / Sunna Split

- Followers of Ali attempt to create an independent Islamic group in Persia
- They are led by Hussain, Ali's son, who is massacred along with his followers

661-750 AD: The Umayyads

- "Capital" of Islam moved to Damascus
- 733 AD: Muslim fighters stopped in Europe (France) by Charles Martel

750-1258 AD: The Abbasids

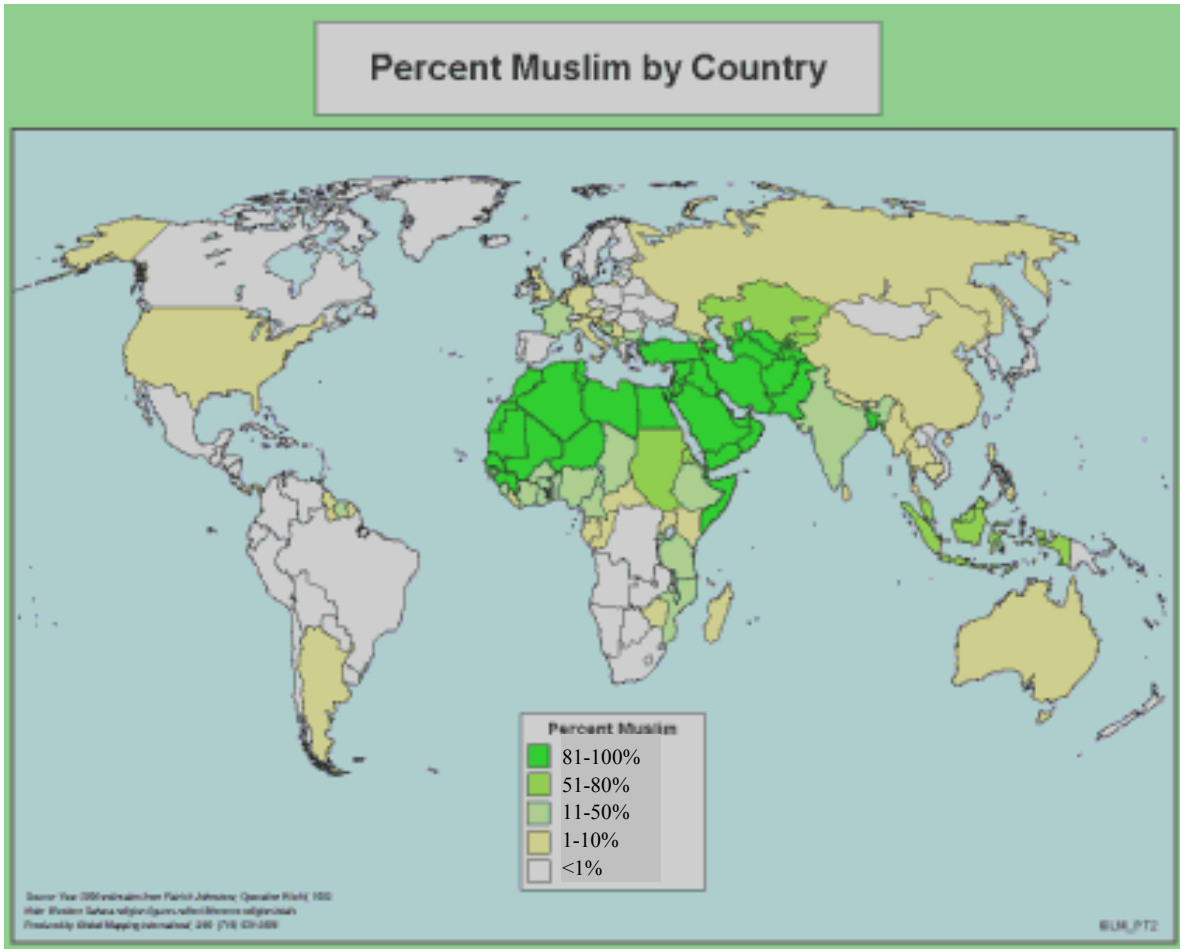
- "Capital" of Islam is in Baghdad, contested by the remaining Umayyads in Spain
- The definitional period for Islam; after this time, the *door to ijtiihad* is closed

2.2 Top 10 Largest National Muslim Populations

Country	Muslims
Indonesia	170,310,000
Pakistan	136,000,000
Bangladesh	106,050,000
India	103,000,000
Turkey	62,410,000
Iran	60,790,000
Egypt	53,730,000
Nigeria	47,720,000
China	37,108,000

2.3 U.S. States With Highest Proportion of Muslims

State	Percent
New York	0.8%
California	0.6%
New Jersey	0.6%
Washington, D.C.	0.6%
Illinois	0.4%
Massachusetts	0.4%
Ohio	0.4%
Rhode Island	0.4%



Week 3: THE BASIC TEACHINGS OF ISLAM

3.1 The Basic Subdivisions of Islam

<u>Sunna</u>	<u>Shia</u>
87% of Muslims	12% of Muslims
Middle East, Africa, Asia	Iraq and Iran
Governed by an elected khalifa	Governed by imam descended from Muhammad
No organized clergy	An organized clergy
Only Qur'an and Muhammad authoritative	Qur'an, Muhammad, Fatima Ali all authoritative
More literal reading of the Qur'an	More symbolic reading of the Qur'an

3.2 The Five Pillars

Shahada: Confession or creed. The Muslim creed is “La ilaha illa ‘Ilah” - “There is no God but God” - and Muhammad is His Prophet.

Salat: Liturgical prayer. Prayer is expected of Muslims 5 times a day each day: after waking, noon, afternoon, sunset, and before sleeping. All prayer begins with ceremonial washing. Communal prayer occurs Fridays at noon. Most mosques have a “Noon-*Imam*”.

Sawm: Fasting during the month of Ramadan. Fasting is expected from sunrise to sunset, including sexual abstinence. This can become very difficult in northern climates when Ramadan falls during the summer.

Zakat: Alms. In most Islamic countries this is a “tax” of 2 ¼% of income + % of produce and of land value. It is not simply a giving of monetary income, but of the value of all your possessions.

Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca. Required once in a lifetime, if you have the means. Sacrifice of an animal on 10th day. An allusion to the journey of Abraham and Sarah, and the (almost) sacrifice of Isaac

Jihad: or “Holy War”, “war in the cause of Allah” ALMOST became 6th pillar. Idea only appears later during the Medina period. Salat and Zakat seen as passages from Medina period as well.

3.3 The Haddith

The traditional teachings of Muhammad as encoded a hundred or so years after his death. Similar in form to Luther’s “Table Talks”, but serve as a commentary on life and on the Qur’an.

- *"Whosoever of you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart—and that is the weakest of faith."*
- *"None of you (truly) believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself."*
- *“Were people to be given in accordance with their claim, men would claim the fortunes and lives of (other) people, but the onus of proof is on the claimant and the taking of an oath is incumbent upon him who denies."*

3.4 The Sharia

Islamic law as derived from the Qur’an, the *Haddith* – the sayings of Muhammad - and to some the *Sunna*, the deeds of Muhammad.



Makkah al-Mukarramah—"Makkah the Honored"—was the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad in 570. Within today's city, at the center of the Sacred Mosque is the focal point of Islamic prayer worldwide—the Ka'ba. The 15-meter-high (48'), roughly cubical structure was first built as a place for worship of the one God by Ibrahim (Abraham) and Isma'il (Ishmael), and it is thus a physical reminder of the links between Islam and the dawn of monotheism, between the Qur'an and previous revelations, and between the Prophet Muhammad and earlier Messengers of God. (Aramco World Magazine, January-February 1999; photo Peter Sanders).

3.5 The Qur'an

"If Christ is God incarnate, then the Qur'an is God in libiate."

3.5.1 Structure

- A series of "sermons" or recitations, 2/3 the length of the NT
- More doctrinal than narrative, so harder to read than the Gospels or Epistles
- Suras
 - Suras, or chapters are longest to shortest, not chronological
 - Names are taken from a word, not necessarily the key word, in the chapter
 - 114 Chapters

3.5.2 Language

- Written in poetic Arabic; said to be the most beautiful poetry in the world
- Very difficult to understand and translate into other languages, like English

3.5.3 Chronology

- **Abrogation**: when one passage seems to contradict another, one has priority
- An example of how chronology and abrogation play out:

- Muhammad attempts to get Jews and Christians under him in Medina:

Surah 2:62

*Those who believe in the Qur'an
 And those who follow the Jewish scriptures
 And the Christians,
 Any who believe in Allah
 And the Last Day
 And work righteousness,
 Shall have their reward with their Lord;
 on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve*

- Muhammad has a new revelation when the Jews, thought not the Christians, abandon him:

Surah 5:82

*Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou
Find the Jews and the Pagans,
And nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou
Find those who say "We are Christians"
Because among these are men devoted to learning
And men who have renounced the world;
They are not arrogant.*

- Later, he has a third revelation after both Jews and Christians abandon him:

Surah 9:28-29

*O ye who believe! Truly the Pagans are unclean;
So let them not after this year of theirs approach the Sacred Mosque
And if ye fear poverty, soon will Allah enrich you
If he wills, out of His bounty, and Allah is all knowing, all wise*

*Fight those who believe not in Allah or the Last Day,
Do not acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among
The People of the Book, until they pay the Jizyah, with willing submission
And feel themselves subdued.*

- Chronological order of the Qur'an:

610-614 AD Early Meccan	615-617 AD Mid Meccan	618-622 AD Late Meccan	623-625 AD Early Medinan	626-630 AD Late Medinan	631-632 AD Final Suras
1	15	6	2	4	5
68	19	7	3	22	9
73-74	20	10-14	8	24	49
80-82	23	16-18	47	33	
85-87	26	21	57	48	
90-99	37-38	25	61-62	58-59	
101-109	43-44	27-32	64	60	
111-114	50-56	34-35	98	63	
	67	39-42		65-66	
	69-72	45-46		110	
	76-79				
	83-84				
	88-89				
	100				

3.5.4 Doctrine

- Read: "Allah, Most Gracious": *Grace in the Qur'an*"
- Does the following quotation misrepresent the Qur'an's teaching on predestination?

"If God allows you to win, there will be no defeat; if he chooses that you will be defeated nothing will allow you to win. Therefore, depend on God. Your brother in Islam, (signed) Osama bin Muhammed bin-Laden." (<http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/09/24/ret.binladen.message/>)

Week 4: SALVATION AND THE QUR'AN

- Salvation seems straightforward in the Qur'an
 - Do good and follow Allah, and you will live
 - Do evil and ignore Allah, and you will perish forever
- But how good is good?
- Can one follow Allah of one's own accord?

4.1 Intercession

1 Timothy 2:5-6: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.”

4.1.1 The Meccan Suras

- An intercessor will be provided by Allah
- Certain ones will be permitted to intercede

Sura 19:85-89

*The day We shall gather
The righteous to (Allah)
Most Gracious, like a band
Presented before a king for honors*

*And We shall drive
The sinners to hell,
Like thirsty cattle
Driven down to water*

*None shall have the power
Of intercession, but such a one
As has received permission/promise
From (Allah) Most Gracious.*

*They say: “Allah Most Gracious
Has begotten a son!”*

*Indeed ye have put forth
A thing most monstrous!*

Sura 20:109

*On that Day shall no
Intercession avail
Except for those for whom
Permission has been granted
By (Allah) Most Gracious
And whose word is
Acceptable to Him.*

Sura 43:86

*And those whom they invoke
Besides Allah have no power
Of intercession – only he
Who bears witness to the Truth,
And they know (him).*

4.1.2 The Medina Suras

- No intercession will be permitted

Sura 2:254

*O ye who believe!
Spend out of the bounties
We have provided for you,
Before the Day comes
When no bargaining
(Will avail), nor friendship
Nor intercession.
Those who reject Faith – they
Are the wrongdoers*

Sura 2:48

*Guard yourselves (Israel) against a day
When one soul shall not avail another
Nor shall intercession be accepted for her,
Nor shall compensation be taken from her,
Nor shall anyone be helped (from outside).*

4.2 Predestination

Romans 9:14-20: “What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?” But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’”

- The Qur’an stresses the almighty power of Allah
- Yet most Muslims stress the importance of personal responsibility in Islam
- Which is the case? Can man choose the “Straight Path”, or must he be put on it?

Sura 74:31

*Thus doth Allah leave to stray
Whom He pleaseth, and guide
Whom He pleaseth, and none
Can know the forces
Of thy Lord, except He.
And this is no other than
A warning to mankind.*

*The same is it to them
Whether thou admonish them
Or thou do not admonish
Them: they will not believe.*

Sura 36:8-10

*We have put yokes
Round their necks
Right up to their chins
So that their heads are
Forced up (and they cannot see)*

Sura 76:29-31
*This is an admonition:
Whoever will, let him
Take a (straight) Path
To his Lord.*

*But ye will not,
Except as Allah wills:
For Allah is full of
Knowledge and Wisdom.*

*And we have put
A bar in front of them
And a bar behind them,
And further, We have
Covered them up, so that
They cannot see*

*He will admit
To His Mercy Whom He will;
But the wrongdoers-
For them He has prepared
A grievous penalty.*

4.3 Further Aspects of Grace

- Discussion of paper handed out

Week 5: GLOSSARY

Abrogation: A later teaching of the Qur'an that overrides an earlier teaching.

Al-Dajjal: A figure who is like the Anti-Christ, who will be killed by the *Al-Mahdi*.

Allah: Arabic from Al Ilah, meaning literally “The God”, like the Hebrew *elohim* but singular.

Al-Mahdi: The Appointed One, who at the end of time will fight the *Al-Dajjal*.

Al-Masih: Jesus, who will make everyone Muslim, will then die and be buried in Medina.

Ayat: Arabic for “sign”. Every verse of the Koran is a *sign* from Allah. This is also a title Muslims give to Jesus, who is the Ayat Allah. The Supreme Islamic leader of Iran also calls himself by this name, the Ayat Allah, or Ayatollah.

Bi ismi Allah(i) Ar-Rahmani Ar-Rahimi: The Bismillah, the Muslim equivalent of “the sign of the cross” for Christians or the shema for Jews. Arabic for “In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful”.

Dar Al-Harb: That which is of the world of the *Kafir*, non-Islamic. It is the opposite of the *Dar Al-Islam*, and is related to it only by *jihad*.

Dar al-Islam: That which is of the world of those who submit to God. It is the opposite of the *Dar Al-Harb*, and is related to it only by *jihad*.

Door to ijihad: Arabic for “the door to innovation”. Muslims “closed” this door in 1111 AD, but many liberal Muslims would like it to be “reopened”.

Fatwa: A legal declaration or ruling made by one or more Muslim clerics.

Five Pillars of Islam: The five tasks of every Muslim, their “holiness code”. See *Shahada* (creed), *Salat* (prayer), *Sawm* (fasting), *Zakat* (alms), *Hajj* (pilgrimage), and *Jihad* (holy war).

Hadith: The traditions and the teaching of Muhammad. These are distinct from the Qur'an.

Hajj: A once in a lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca, required of all Muslims if they have the means to do so. An animal is sacrificed on the 10th day, reminiscent of the journey of Abraham and Sarah, and the (almost) sacrifice of Isaac. One of the *Five Pillars of Islam*.

Halal: That what is permitted, similar to the Hebrew term “kosher”.

Hanif: Those Arabs in Muhammad's time who worshipped the over-God, *Al-Ilah – Allah*.

Haram: That which is forbidden.

Hijra: “Flight”, especially those Muslims who fled Mecca for Medina in the year 622 AD.

Iblis: The personal name in the Qur'an for Satan.

Ijma: A consensus ruling made among Muslim judges on a religious matter.

Imam: Literally, “leader of prayer.” Every mosque has an Imam who preaches on Friday at noon, called the “Friday Imam”. An “arch-Imam” may exist in a country, a Muslim particularly studied and learned in the Qur'an.

Injil: The Gospels of Jesus Christ, speaking of the prophet Jesus, which are considered to have been corrupted by the Christians and are no longer pure revelation.

Islam: Comes from the same three-letter root word as “Shalom”. Means “peace”, “submission” or “surrender”. Could be translated “the peace that comes from surrendering one's self to God.”

Jihad: “Holy War” or “war in the cause of Allah”. *Jihad* almost became the 6th pillar of Islam. The idea only began to appear in the later chapters of the Qur’an.

Jinn: Arabic for “spirit”, from which we get our word “genie”. The Jinn need salvation the same as us. They are good and bad, invisible, and live in dark forests, toilets, and especially the deep desert.

Kafir: A label attached to unbelievers in general and to Christians specifically by Muslims. It means “ungrateful”.

Khalifa: A “caliph”, or Islamic ruler.

Quadi: A Muslim judge who is authorized to issue a *fatwa*.

Quran: The final, perfect, and pure revelation of the will of Allah.

Salat: Liturgical prayer, 5 times a day each day, begins with washing. One of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Sawm: Fasting done during the month of Ramadan, from sunrise to sunset, including abstaining from sexual activity. One of the *Five Pillars of Islam*.

Shahada: The confession or creed that “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet”. One of the *Five Pillars of Islam*.

Sharia: The Straight Way, meaning God’s rules for mankind. The body of law that all Muslims should live by. It is comprised of what is *haram* (forbidden), and what is *halal* (permitted).

Shaytan: Arabic for Satan or devil in general.

Shia: Muslims who look to an imam descended from or teaching according to a direct descendant of Muhammad for leadership. They look more to the spirit rather than the strict letter of the Qur’an for their doctrine. They form a minority (10%) of all Muslims, although Iran and Iraq are predominantly Shi’ite.

Shirk: to associate anyone or anything with God; idolatry.

Sijjih: The holding cell where souls of the wicked are kept prior to judgment.

Sunna: The example of the prophet, six books of *Haddith* that are believed to contain the teachings and deeds of Muhammad. Sunni Muslims follow the rulings of one of four legal traditions, who believe in governance by consensus under the guidance of a “caliph”. They stick closer to the letter of the Qur’an than do the *Shi’ite* Muslims. Afghanistan’s ruling Taleban claim to be Sunni Muslims. Sunnis represent the majority of all Muslims.

Sura: The Arabic name for a chapter of the Qur’an, of which there are 114.

Tawrat: Written by Moses, includes the first five books of the Old Testament, but are now considered to be “corrupted” by the Jews.

Umm-Al-Kitab: “The Mother of the Book”, the source of all sacred revelations. Books that derive from the *Umm Al-Kitab* include the *Tawrat* (Torah), *Zabur* (Psalms), *Injil* (Gospels), and the Qur’an.

Zabur: Written by David, and includes all the Book of Psalms, but are now considered to be “corrupted” by the Jews.

Zakat: Alms-giving required of Muslims, almost a “tax” in some countries. It is to be 2 ¼% of income + a certain percentage of produce. One of the *Five Pillars of Islam*.