

# **ISLAM CHALLENGES THE WORLD**

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Riding the crest of a cultural and religious renaissance, Islam today is the world's fastest-growing religious force. Why?

America's Christians are a pathetic minority compared with the billions of awakened Muslims zealous for world reformation. Adherents of the crescent are urging the world to recognize Alla has Supreme Ruler through submission to His sharia, or law.

Humbled by centuries of military, social, and economic sub-servience, Islamic peoples in over 70 countries are today riding the crest of a cultural and religious resurgence. Oil, Middle East politics, and 9-11 terrorism have catapulted Islam into world prominence. America's decades-long support of Israel has also helped to recast Arabs in a heroic David-challenging-Goliath stance. Westerners seem fascinated by the mystique of a renascent Islam on the world stage.

Islam's present zeal in propagating itself rivals Christianity's traditionally aggressive evangelism.

In countries where it is indigenous, the faith of Allah is enjoying a rebirth of militancy. In lands that have always been considered safely Christian, Islam is busy rearing mosques and minarets with a zeal like that of nineteenth century missionaries building churches in heathen lands.

Islam has become the second largest religion in Europe, the continent that was once the cultural center of world Christianity. It claims millions of adherents in conservative Britain. And Americans, long accustomed to the superior feeling of sending missionaries to benighted lands, now are experiencing the strange sensation of being recipients of mission zeal by a foreign faith. The framers of the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution hardly dreamed it would become the umbrella under which Mohammed's followers would flourish, but protected by its guarantee of religious freedom Islam dreams of an America-to-be someday bowing toward Mecca.

## **Where Islam is reaping huge gains**

In animistic Africa south of the Sahara, many Africans see Islam as making more sense than Christianity. Thoroughly devoted to the worship of one God (Allah), Islam seems to satisfy the human yearning for a worship that is free of idolatry, yet it also accommodates itself to the polygamous culture of Africa. A Muslim African husband can, without stigma, have as many as four wives. And Islam has the further advantage of not being identified with Europeans. Islamic missionaries claim their religion and way of life is perfectly (even divinely) suited to Third World social needs.

What is the secret of Islam's strange appeal to modern man, whether in Africa or in sophisticated Western cities? In particular, why is it making such an appeal to Britons, whose grand cathedrals so often sit nearly empty on Sunday mornings? The answer lies in a seldom-understood ancient confrontation between early Christianity and Mohammed himself.

In the first century the pure faith of Christ, as proclaimed by His apostles, was so perfectly adapted to the universal needs of human nature that it made phenomenal world progress. A built-in, almost irresistible appeal made its propagation so effective that rival religions paled before it. The vast network of organized, institutionalized paganism that for millennia had enthralled world empires, including Rome, collapsed before the gospel of Jesus Christ. Had the simple fidelity to Christ and His teachings that marked first-century Christians continued, Islam could never have prospered, for it would have found no fertile soil for its roots.

The early church was clearly the conqueror, but to a great extent it succumbed to a sinister temptation that turned it into the conquered. After vanquishing the superstitions of past ages, Christianity began to absorb many ideas that the apostles had decidedly abhorred. Pagan doctrines and practices, given a Christian veneer, began to infiltrate the church—the worship of images, the idea of natural immortality, penance, a human

priesthood in place of the all-sufficient priesthood of Christ, the free use of wine, and the adoption of pagan festivals such as the first day of the week dedicated to the sun in place of the Bible seventh-day Sabbath. Islam arose essentially as a protest against pagan corruption more than as a protest against pure Christianity itself.

Probably illiterate, but possessed of tremendous natural ability and shrewd perception, Mohammed was outraged by the decadent church as he saw it in his day. Judaism, he felt, had already failed to meet the needs of people; now it seemed that established Christianity, with an infusion of paganism into its very soul, did little better. As Many Muslims today stigmatize America as the “Great Satan,” so Mohammed felt he was facing the “Great Satan” of his day manifested in idolatry, arrogance, intemperance, and dissipation posing as religion.

Little did he realize that he was witnessing the fulfillment of heaven-inspired prophecies made in the biblical book of Daniel six centuries before

Christ. In prophetic vision Daniel was shown the rise of a professedly Christian power which in fact would be a masterpiece of deception and apostasy. The vision he saw symbolized this power as a “little horn” that should “speak great words against the most High, and ... wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws” (Dan. 7:25). Describing this power, Daniel said it “magnified himself even to the prince of the host” and “practised, and prospered” (Dan. 8:11, 12). This cosmic development was a tragic scene in the drama of the great conflict of the ages between Christ and Satan. What better way could Christ’s enemy attempt to stamp out the pure faith of Jesus than to corrupt it from within the church itself? And it gave Islam its opportunity!

### **The New Testament foretold the falling away**

Paul warned the true believers of his day that “after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, ... speaking perverse things” (Acts 20:29, 30). There [shall] come a falling away ... and that man of sin be revealed [the same power

that Daniel had seen in vision], the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:3, 4). John the revelator saw the same religious-political power achieving such success that “all the world wondered,” and “it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations” (Rev. 13:3, 7).

This little-known series of Bible predictions discloses the otherwise inexplicable mystery of why so much that professes to be Christianity differs markedly from the simple, pure teachings of the Bible. Mohammed could not understand the prophetic secret; nothing in the Koran reveals that he had any insight into the real reason for the depravity he saw masquerading as Christianity. The Arab prophet found a religious vacuum and rushed in to fill it with his strange, authoritarian teachings. Islam was born, and its roots fed on the decay of a vitiated Mediterranean Christianity.

One of the great phenomena of history is the improbable, but lightning-like military success of early Islam. Within a few years of the Prophet's death, both the Byzantine Roman and Persian empires fell like overripe fruit into Muslim hands. Allah's untutored horsemen routed these proud rulers of the world in daring campaigns like nothing the world had seen since Alexander the Great. The raw sons of the desert found themselves suddenly possessing undreamed of wealth and power, heirs to an advanced culture beyond their understanding. One Bedouin sold a rich man's daughter for a thousand dirhems only because he had never dreamed a greater number existed.

Thousands of Christians in North Africa and the Middle East became Muslims almost overnight, and the once-orthodox land of Augustine mysteriously and disgracefully surrendered its Christian identity so completely, that the richest Roman province of Christ became fanatically devoted to the star and crescent. In North Africa, home of many of the church fathers, hardly a

vestige remains of its once-brilliant Christian history. One wonders if the Bishop of Hippo's doctrines somehow programmed his followers to capitulate so ingloriously.

## **Islam frightened Europe for centuries**

By A.D. 712 Islam had stormed the Pillars of Hercules and established a presence in Spain that was to last for 700 years. The Arabs reached even as far as the Alps, maintaining a foothold at Valais in Switzerland until the tenth century. Europe, shaken by the specter of a Muslim conquest, feared Islam in those days almost as we fear Muslim terrorists today.

The noontide of the medieval church proved to be the midnight of the world. Ignorance and superstition settled over Europe like a pall. But a light shone in the lands of Islam. Education was widespread, with libraries in many cities. (The library at Cairo was tremendous.) The Arabs gave us our numeral system, inventing the cifr for zero. Six centuries before Copernicus they knew that the

earth revolves around the sun. In medicine they practiced both asepsis and anesthesia, and as early as the fourteenth century an Arab doctor demonstrated the circulation of the blood.

Many Christian scholars equate the Allah of Islam with the God of the Bible. Islam's holy book, the Koran, recognized Old Testament prophets as His messengers and Jesus as the true Messiah, born of Mary the virgin. Although it appears not to concede Jesus' divinity, it does accord Him unique status as the Word of God. The Koran teaches high ethical and moral principles in an epic poetic style that is music to Arab ears. The Koran has done for Arabic what the King James Bible has done for English.

### **Why is Islam so aggressive?**

The secret of Islam's missionary success is its appeal to spiritual law, to a firm discipline embodied in a highly detailed program of "submission" to God. (The word Islam literally means "submission to Allah.") It capitalizes on

modern man's idolatrous, lawless confusion, offering a sharply defined focus of worship. This is what appeals to many people in lands once considered bastions of Christianity. Many great churches in Europe stand nearly empty because they offer no clear challenge to man's inner yearning for devotion and submission. Islam arose as a protest against an apostate church, and it flourishes today because our professedly Christian Western culture flouts the New Testament's demand that one who follows Christ must also take up His cross. However, Islam cannot deliver what it promises because it lacks an all-important nutrient of truth.

Profound practical differences exist between Islam and the New Testament gospel. In the words of Paul, Islam can be characterized as "a form of godliness" without the "the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5). It is virtually a religion of salvation by works. This can be illustrated in Islam's attitude toward women and sex.

Women are regarded in Islam as temptresses

whose irresistible attractiveness rivals even Allah's power to secure the allegiance of men. "The Muslim order faces two threats: the infidel without and the woman within" (Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 12). "The whole Muslim structure can be seen as an attack on, and a defense against, the disruptive power of female sexuality." It is a "whole system ... based on the assumption that the woman is a powerful and dangerous being" (pages 14, xvi). This is the reason why in Islam women must be veiled and hidden from public eyes. If a man and a woman are thrown together alone, the automatic assumption is that they cannot resist temptation. Muslim men are titillated by the open ingenuousness of Western women, which they readily interpret as an invitation, only to be perplexed by indignant refusal.

### **The root of Islam's difficulty**

Islam knows no motivation imparted by the Holy Spirit operating from within the soul that enables one to deny illicit desires and realize genuinely motivated submission to God. It knows

no way to say “No” to temptation as does New Testament righteousness by faith. If temptation presents itself, Islam assumes automatic indulgence—hence the necessity for physically removing the temptation itself. The faith of Islam remains as barren of gospel “good news” as are the Sahara sand dunes of flowers. It is a stranger to the motivation that transcends both fear of hell and hope of reward, “the love of Christ [which] constraineth us” (2 Cor. 5:14).

Islam and the New Testament gospel remain locked in combat. But Christ foretold a worldwide penetration of His good news: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14). Educated Muslims have confessed that many people in Arab society feel a spiritual emptiness in their lives.

That Arab emptiness must be met with a bread from heaven that satisfies the deepest longings of the human soul, a message that not only demands utter submission to God but makes clear the only

way such submission can ever take place. The good news that God's Son submitted Himself to the cross for the world's redemption must be told in all its magnificent dimensions of reality. When the believer in Christ can say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20), the sincere Muslim will sit up and listen.

This is the true submission to God for which his hungry heart longs.

### **Is The Rise of Islam Portrayed in Bible Prophecy?**

For over a thousand years, thoughtful readers of the Bible have believed that its prophecies pinpoint Islam's phenomenal career.

But enlightened understanding was rare in the Dark Ages. Martin Luther in the early sixteenth century led the vanguard of Reformers who first clearly recognized Islam in the lineup of terrestrial upheavals symbolized by the seven "trumpets" of

Revelation 8 and 9. John Foxe (1516-1587), author of the famous Book of Martyrs, said it is clearer than light itself that the sixth trumpet describes the Muslims and their military and political triumphs that for centuries kept Europe teetering on the brink of horror. Well into the nineteenth century a chorus of Protestant prophetic scholars identified Islam's niche in prophecy as being those fifth and sixth trumpets.

The prophecy concerning Islam is described as three woes. "And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!" (Rev. 8:13)

The inspired prophet saw "a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit [abyssos, a Greek term that denotes a desolate wilderness or desert]" (Rev. 9:1). Modern Muslim writers use that same word to describe the Arabian society from which Islam

sprang: “Arabia—the abyss of darkness. In that benighted era, there was a territory where darkness lay heavier and thicker. ... Arabia ... stood isolated, cut off by vast oceans of sand” (Abul Ala Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam*. Nairobi: The Islamic Foundation, Qur’an House, pp. 41, 42).

Doubtless these Muslim publishers had no idea they were repeating the vivid word used in John’s revelation to describe the political and social milieu which spawned the meteoric career of Mohammed, the “fallen” star.

The phenomenal Islamic conquest of the Christian Eastern Empire is symbolized by the statement, “The sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit” (Rev. 9:2). The hordes of Arabic Muslims on the warpath are depicted thus: “There came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth” (verse 3). Islam’s paradoxical policy of scourging arrogant apostasy while befriending humble, self-denying followers of Christ is revealed in the prophecy: “It was

commanded them that they should ... hurt ... only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads” (verse 4).

For many centuries it has been recognized that the “five months” (verse 5) during which the “locusts” should “torment” the corrupt Eastern Roman Empire are to be understood by the accepted year-day principle of prophetic interpretation. Thus this time period constitutes the 150 years from 1299 when Osman first invaded Nicodemia to 1449 when the Muslims had become so powerful that the new emperor dared not ascend his throne without the Sultan’s approval. The fall of Constantinople followed quickly, in 1453.

Methodist Josiah Litch in 1838 built upon this long-held understanding of the 150 years by tying to them (on the year-day principle) the succeeding prophetic symbols of “an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men” (verse 15). On this basis he boldly predicted well in advance that on or about the eleventh of August, 1840, the Muslim Ottoman Empire would

surrender its independence as dramatically as the Byzantine Emperor had surrendered his to the Muslims in 1449.

To the surprise of thousands of deists and infidels, the predicted event did take place exactly on August 11, 1840. Many were convinced that Bible prophecy is indeed inspired by an omniscient God.

With the fulfilment of this prophecy the first two woes came to an end. “The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.” (Rev. 11:14) The modern resurgence of Islam fits the pattern of the previous two woes. Prophecy is fast fulfilling as Islam rises again against apostate Christianity.