

# Historical Theology

## An Introduction to Mohammed and Islam

Don White

January 2, 2022

### Muhammed and the Rise of Islam

“Muhammed was born in the city of Mecca, an important religious and trading center near the south-western coast of central Arabia, in 570 or 571. He belonged to the powerful Quraish tribe. His father, however, died before Muhammad’s birth, and his mother died when he was only six, so the young Muhammad’s uncle, Abu Talib, brought him up; Abu Talib belonged to a poor branch of the family, and Muhammad worked for him as a lowly shepherd. But the hardships of childhood gave way to prosperity in adulthood: Muhammad became a very successful merchant, working for a wealthy widow named Khadijah. Their relationship blossomed and deepened, and despite the fact that Khadijah was 40 years old and Muhammed only 25, they married in the year 595. The marriage produced two boys and four girls; the youngest of the girls, Fatima, became Muhammad’s favorite in later years, and married Muhammad’s cousin, Ali, who was to be Islam’s fourth *caliph* (“leader” – literally, *caliph* means “successor”).” (Needham, 17-18)

“In 610 came the central experience of Muhammad’s life, which was to divert the entire river of human history into a fresh and revolutionary channel; for in that year, Muhammad received what he believed to be the first of many personal revelations from God, launching him into his amazing career as the prophet of Allah (“Allah” is simply the name for “God”). According to Muhammad, the angel Gabriel appeared to him while he was meditating in the Mount Hira cave. Muhammad was at first terrified. He did not know whether it was really the angel Gabriel or some demonic deception which appeared to him. He rushed back home and told his wife what had happened. Khadijah believed in the divine origin of Muhammad’s experience, on the basis that God would not allow such a good man as Muhammad to be deceived. Slowly, quietly at first, Muhammad became the center of a new religious movement in Mecca, as he began criticizing Paganism and idolatry, and calling people to worship Allah alone. The number of his converts grew; the most important of these earliest Muslims were Muhammad’s young cousin Ali, his friend Abu Bakr (who would become Islam’s first caliph), his one-time deadly enemy Omar (who would become Islam’s second caliph) and his son-in-law Othman (the third Caliph).” (Ibid. 18-19)

The new faith, *Islam* (which means “submission”), had its roots in Muhammad’s overpowering conviction of the unity or oneness of God. Muhammad interpreted Allah’s oneness to mean that He, the Creator and Lord of the universe, was a single individual person, separated by an infinite distance from His creation by His unique possession of divine attributes – there could be no other gods. The divine attribute Muhammad emphasized most was power: Allah alone had power, and therefore He alone was the cause of all things, both good and evil. Idolatry, or violating Allah’s oneness by acknowledging any other god, was the supreme sin. Muhammad’s concept of God’s oneness (that God is one single person) ruled out any belief in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which Muhammad felt was no better than a Pagan idolatry of many gods. He regarded Jesus as his own forerunner, sinless and virgin-born, a miracle-worker, the

greatest of God's prophets apart from Muhammad himself, but not the divine or eternal Son of God who became flesh. Muhammad also refused to accept that Jesus had been crucified; God would not allow His prophets to be treated so shamefully." (Ibid. 19-20)

"The source of divine revelation for the Islamic faith was the Qur'an, a series of 114 messages (or *suras*) dictated to Muhammad (as he claimed) by the angel Gabriel. After Muhammad's death, Islam's third caliph, Othman (644-56), collected these suras into a single authoritative edition. The Qur'an is so gloriously majestic and beautiful in its original Arabic that Muhammad pointed to it as the one sure proof that he was inspired by God; the only "miracle" he ever performed was the writing of the Qur'an." (Ibid. 21)

"Also crucial for Islam was the *hadith* – traditions about what Muhammad had said and done; these were important, because Muslims accept Muhammad as the perfect example of how a man should live, and try to model their lives on him. The hadith collectively form the *sunna* or "Path". The Qur'an and the hadith, together with the *ijma* (the consensus of the Muslim community – or, according to some, of Islamic legal scholars), make up the threefold authority which Muslims must follow." (Ibid.)

"Muhammad's religious movement encountered increasing levels of opposition and persecution in Mecca from the majority of the city's inhabitants, especially the chiefs of the Quraish, the most important tribe. Muhammad's condemnation of idolatry threatened the economic power which the Quraish leaders derived from Pagan ceremonies and pilgrimages connected with the *ka'ba*, an ancient Arab shrine in Mecca. Pagans ridiculed Muhammad, accused him of being demon-possessed, and beat up, tortured, and killed his followers. Muhammad was protected by his uncle Abu Talib, but when Abu Talib died Muhammad and his pioneer Muslims were forced to flee from Mecca to the more northerly city of Yathrib, or Medina (as it was later renamed). This happened in the year 622, the year of *hejira* ("emigration"). The Islamic calendar starts from this event." (Ibid. 21-22) "The year 622 in the Christian calendar is the year 1 in the Muslim calendar. Islam's calendar is also based on lunar years which are slightly shorter than solar years." (Ibid. 22, n. 15)

"The *hejira* marked the turning point in Muhammad's fortunes. His preaching met with almost total success in Medina. In fact he became the political and religious leader of the city. Medina was thus the first independent Muslim community; it attracted more and more converts from the surrounding areas, even from Mecca. After several bloody battles between the Muslim forces of Medina and the Pagan Meccans, in 630 Muhammad was able to return to Mecca with an army of 10,000 warriors, a triumphant military conqueror. He won over most of the Pagan population by sparing their lives with a general amnesty, destroyed the images of Mecca's Pagan gods, and made the ancient Meccan shrine, the *ka'ba*, into the most holy place of Islamic worship." (Ibid. 22)

"Before the rise of Islam, Arabia had enjoyed no political unity. It was mostly a patchwork of independent nomadic tribes. By the time of Muhammad's death in 632, he had unified the region both politically and spiritually under his own leadership. This came about partly by the fire of spiritual enthusiasm which Muhammad and his closest followers radiated, winning many sincere converts to Islam, especially in Arabia. However it also came about partly by military conquest. From the very outset, Islam was a faith which spread its territory by the sword." (Ibid.)

Core Belief on...	Christianity	Islam
<b>God</b>	One God (in essence), in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.	One God in one person: Allah.
<b>Scripture</b>	The Bible is inspired by the Spirit through the agency of prophets and apostles over many centuries.	The Bible has been corrupted, but is acceptable where it agrees with the Koran, dictated directly to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel. The hadith is also regarded as authoritative.
<b>Humanity</b>	Created in God's image, yet guilty and corrupt in Adam's fall (original sin).	Human beings are not created in God's image. There is no inherent sinfulness; sin is simply a matter of personal choice.
<b>Christ</b>	Eternally God, incarnate from the Virgin Mary: divine and human natures united inseparably in one person; was crucified, buried, and raised on the third day.	A great prophet who prepared the way for Mohammed. Misunderstands Christianity as implying that God had intercourse with Mary. "God has no son." Jesus is only human, but a great prophet who performed miracles. It seemed he was crucified, but a disciple took his place and Jesus ascended into heaven.
<b>Salvation</b>	By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Good works are the fruit of salvation, not its basis.	A record of good deeds and bad deeds is kept in Paradise; salvation is hoped for on the basis of good deeds outweighing the bad.
<b>The Holy Spirit</b>	Third person of the Trinity. "Lord and giver of life."	Given the denial of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is identified with the non-divine angel Gabriel.
<b>Return of Christ</b>	Jesus will return as judge of the world, raising all people: the justified to everlasting life, and those who do not believe in Christ to everlasting death.	Jesus will return (with Mohammed) to lead his followers to Allah, repenting of their blasphemies and embracing Islam.
<b>Heaven &amp; Hell</b>	The future hope is 'the resurrection of the body and life everlasting' in the renewed creation. There will be unending fellowship and joy in the presence of the Triune God and one another, without sin, sorrow, or death.	All will be raised, and non-Muslims will be consigned to hell along with Muslims whose bad deeds outweigh the good. In Paradise, the faithful indulge every desire (including sexual intercourse with virgins).

(Modern Reformation, 57)

### Religious Duties Required of All Muslims

“Every Muslim must practice at least five fundamental religious duties. These are known as the Pillars of Islam. They are considered required observances, upon which the Muslim faith rests. These are so central to the practice of Islam that if you do not do these, then as many good works as you do, they cannot earn you heaven. All of these must be done.” (The Facts on Islam, 17)

“**The first pillar** is reciting the creed of Islam—“There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet.”

“**The second pillar** involves prayer. The Muslim must recite prescribed prayers five times each day. Each time he must adopt a set of physical postures such as standing, kneeling, and then hands and face to the ground. The call to prayer is sounded by a Muslim **muezzin** (crier) from a tower called a **minaret**. This part of the Muslim church or public place of worship called the **mosque**.

“**The third pillar** is the religious duty to observe the month of fasting called **Ramadan**. The fast commemorates the first revelation of the Qur’an that Mohammed received in the year 610. Although eating is permitted at night, for an entire month Muslims must fast during daylight hours.

“**The fourth pillar** of Islamic duty is to give alms to the poor. Muslims are required to give 2.5 percent of their earnings plus other forms of wealth, as determined by a complicated system.

“**The fifth and last pillar** is that of the **haji**, a pilgrimage to Mecca, Muhammed’s place of birth. This is required at least once during the lifetime of every Muslim who is physically and financially able to make the trip (unless he is a slave).

“A sixth religious duty is often associated with the above five pillars, although it is considered optional by some. This is obedience to the call of **jihad**. Jihad may be interpreted as internal (spiritual struggle) or external “defending” Islam) or both. Though the term has evolved over the ages and modern Muslim apologists often assert its softer side, throughout most of history and today, jihad primarily connotes that warfare has spiritual significance.” (Ibid. 17-18)

### Resources:

John Ankerberg, Weldon Weldon & Dillon Burroughs. *The Facts on Islam*. Harvest House Publishers, 2008.

Modern Reformation Magazine, Vol. 21, No. 4, July - August 2012, *The Cross and the Crescent*, pp. 8-11 & 57.

Needham, Nick. *2000 Years of Christ’s Power, Vol. 2*. Christian Focus Publications, 2016.