

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

History 135 Islam

It would be helpful at this point in our walk-through world History to look at a brief summary of the history of Islam. Islam is the religion of Muslims; the word means follower of Islam. Currently close to 22% of the world's population are Muslims around 1.6 billion people claim to follow Islam.

Muhammad is believed to have been born in 570 and was orphaned at the age of 5 he was raised by his grandfather for a few years then an uncle. He then became a merchant, married a wealthy widow and had about 6 children. It was in 610 that he claims to have had his vision from the angel Gabriel after some time of fasting and meditation in a cave outside the town of Mecca. From 613 to 622 he developed a small group of followers but they were not received well in Mecca so they moved to Yatrib later called Medina. For the next few years his power and influence grew to the point that the people of Mecca noticed. This led to a few battles which led to a treaty that the Meccans broke in a year but they were later conquered in a bloodless coup. In a few years, Mohammad and the Muslims had united most of the Arabian Peninsula.

Unlike most other world religions which at some level separate religious and civil matters, causing the church and the state to struggle for power and influence throughout history. From the beginning this relatively young 1400 year old religion was both a religious and a civil system. This can be seen in what is called Sharia law which is the legal system that developed within Islam. This can also be seen in tracking the history of Muslim kingdoms and empires known as Caliphates. The first began after Mohammad's death in 632 the Rashidun Caliphate (632-661), The Umayyad Caliphate (661-750), the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) The Fatimid Caliphate (909-1171), The Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1260), The Mamluk Caliphate (1250-1517), The Ottoman Caliphate (1299-1923). The maximum extent of these empires covered north Africa, most of Spain, as far east as India and north into Turkey and Pakistan. Many western lands were also controlled on and off by the Muslim kingdoms. The reason there are overlapping dates is because these Caliphates, Kingdoms and dynasties ruled different areas over different times and often were at odds with each other. The only thing they always seem to unite around and work together in were struggles against the west. We see this play out in the 9 crusades which we will discuss in another lesson.

Unlike divisions between Christians, Jews and the things that separate most of the eastern mystic religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, the things that separate Muslim groups is not mainly doctrinal. The doctrine of most Muslims is very much the same, 5 pillars; 1. Declaration of Faith 2. Obligatory Prayer 3. Compulsory Alms, 2.5% 4. Fasting in the month of Ramadan 5. Pilgrimage to Mecca. No pork, and many of the cultural norms are the same as well. There are some doctrinal differences but none are sufficient to cause any real division.

What separates these groups is Central Authority....who is in charge? The 1.6 billion Muslims fall into 3 groups 1. Sunni 1.2 billion 85-90% of all Muslims for them the authority is with the Caliphate seen as a successor to the prophet. This position has been empty since 1920 until ISIS claimed to fill it and started trying to conquer the world. 2. Shia 150 to 200 Million 10-12% of Muslims for them authority is with the Imamate; a religious body headed by the Imam – He must be a descendant of Mohammad, chosen by God and sinless. The remaining 5 to 8% are 3. Ibadi Primarily in Oman Iraq started in the 8th century and teaches that Islam needs no earthly leader. There are other strains of Islam but most function within the three above or are very small sects relatively speaking; Sufism, Quranism, Ahmadiyya (founded in British India in the late 1800's) Black Muslim movements such as the Nation of Islam run by Louis Farrakhan since 1981 and there are even Muslims who identify as Nondenominational.

Till next month
In Christ Pastor Portier