

MUHAMMAD

Handout for Lesson 25 of *Thought Provoking Questions*

WHY STUDY ABOUT MUHAMMAD?

Islam is the fastest-growing religion in Europe. Driven by immigration and high birthrates, the number of Muslims on the continent has tripled in the last 30 years. Most demographers forecast a similar or even higher rate of growth in the coming decades.

According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the World Christian Database as of 2007 estimated the fastest growing religion of the world to be Islam. High birth rates were cited as the reason for the growth.

According to a CNN report, "Islam (with well over a billion people) is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity. Islam is also the fastest-growing religion. In the United States, for example, nearly 80 percent of the more than 1,200 mosques have been built in the past 12 years."

"Once confined to the nation's biggest cities, mosques, Islamic houses of worship, are rapidly becoming a familiar site on Main Streets across the country. There are some 3,000 mosques in the U.S. Fueled by immigration and conversions, Islam is the fastest growing religion in America. (It is also the fastest growing faith in the world.) It is on the verge of surpassing Judaism as the largest non-Christian faith in the country."

WHO WAS MUHAMMAD?

The religion of Islam is centered upon the person of Muhammad. One cannot fully understand either Islam or the Koran without considering the life and history of Muhammad.

To the Muslim mind, Muhammad is the most important person in all of human history. Although the Muslims do not believe that Muhammad was divine or that he is to be worshipped, they do believe that he was the ultimate example and model of human experience.

The traditional date and place of Muhammad's birth is AD 570 in Mecca, a city located in western Saudi Arabia near the coast of the Red Sea.

Before Muhammad was born, his father, Abd Allah, died while on a trading trip. His mother, Amina, died when Muhammad was six.

From age nine, Muhammad accompanied his uncle on trading trips to Syria and beyond. These excursions would have brought Muhammad into contact with Jewish and Christian influences.

When he was 40, Muhammad allegedly received his first revelation. The messenger of Allah who brought the revelation was the angel Gabriel, who told him he would bring additional revelations over the next 23 years. The utterances received by Muhammad in these alleged revelations were recorded in Al-Quran, which means "the reading" or "the recitation."

The next major event in his life involved a purported trip to Heaven. One night he was awakened by Gabriel, who showed him a white heavenly steed with wings. The steed first took him to Jerusalem where he met with Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. He was then taken into Heaven itself. It is this event that led to the construction of the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem on the site of the Jewish temple that was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, making that site the third most holy site in Islam.

In 620, six men from a tribe 200 miles north of Mecca met Muhammad and became convinced that he was a prophet. These six converts went home and made additional converts. Muhammad and his followers in Mecca made plans to move to this other tribe to avoid the persecution at home, which they did after Muhammad miraculously escaped an assassination plot. His escape in 622, called the Hijrah or "flight," is so important to Muslims that it serves as the starting point of the Islamic calendar. The city to which he fled was Medina.

Soon the religion of Islam became dominant in Arabia. In the eighth year after the flight, Muhammad and his forces reentered the city of Mecca. Muhammad rode his camel to the mosque, where he touched the black stone with his staff and said "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar" (Allah is Great).

During the last 10 years of his life, Muhammad personally led 27 military campaigns, and he planned and sent others on 38 other campaigns. During his final years he claimed to have

received a revelation denying the divinity of Christ and a revelation that another prophet would reign for seven years just prior to the return of Christ.

Muhammad became ill and died in 632 at the age of 63 leaving behind nine widows. As he wished, Muhammad was buried where he died, and that site is now at the center of the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina.

DO MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS WORSHIP THE SAME GOD?

No. They do not. Muslims worship a false god; Christians worship the one true God.

John tells us that in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God, and he tells us that the word is Christ who became flesh and dwelled among men. Muslims deny that Jesus is God, and 1 John 2:23 tells us that you cannot have the Father without the Son. Muslims reject the triune nature of God that is revealed in the Bible. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not Allah — and neither is the God of Ishmael.

WHAT ARE THE SO-CALLED SATANIC VERSES?

"Satanic Verses" is an expression coined by the historian Sir William Muir in reference to several verses allegedly delivered by Muhammad as part of the Koran and later retracted.

IS MUHAMMAD MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE?

Yes and no — The answer is yes in that the Bible has much to say about false prophets, and Muhammad was most certainly that. The answer is also yes to the extent that the Bible describes Ishmael and his descendants.

But it is not true that Muhammad is directly mentioned in the Bible. Muslims, however, claim that he is mentioned in at least two places: Isaiah 29:12 and Deuteronomy 18:18.

THE CONTRAST WITH CHRIST

- » The Cross
- » The Resurrection