

## Islam

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- We left the Mediterranean world with the fall of the western Roman empire
  - the last nominal emperor of the Western Roman empire, the 14-year-old “Augustulus”
  - was captured and killed in 476 by the “barbarian” Odovacer
  - the Eastern Roman empire survived in Greece, Anatolia, and the Levant
    - with its capital at Constantinople
    - now known as the Byzantine empire, but at the time still considered the Roman empire
  - engaged in frequent wars with the Sasanid empire of Persia and Mesopotamia
- Chronological context for other religions
  - Judaism
    - early roots, maybe 1200 BCE
    - Hebrew kingdoms 1000-930 BCE
    - an ethnic group (a “people”) with the Jewish religion
  - Christianity: ~ 30 CE – present
    - a religion of personal salvation
    - spread among lower and middle classes in and beyond the Roman empire
    - officially adopted by Constantine near the end of the unified Roman empire (313 CE)
    - the official religion of the Eastern Roman empire (the Byzantine empire)
  - Buddhism; 200s BCE to present
  - Hinduism: 500 BCE? to present
- Early Islam and the Sunni/Shiite split
- Muhammad = "The Prophet" was born around 570 CE
  - born into the merchant class in Mecca
  - orphaned by age 6, raised by relatives
  - married Khadija, a wealthy widow
- Muhammad (~570-632 CE) received the word of God in visions from 610-632 CE
  - memorized by many followers
  - written slightly later as the Koran (Qur'an, Quran, etc.): God's teaching
  - other source of knowledge: the *sunna*, or the exemplary life and doings of Muhammad
    - also translated as “custom”, meaning the customary way that Muhammad and his followers did things at that time
      - which, since God approved of Muhammad, is an indication of what God wants, beyond what he actually told Muhammad in words
  - the *sunna* is documented in the *hadith*, or collections of sayings of Muhammad and stories about his life
    - other historical documents of the time also offer clues to Muslims about *sunna*
- Muhammad accepted Jewish and Christian prophets before him,
  - but said that he was the final prophet (the “seal of the prophets”)
  - and that his version of God’s will was the most complete

- Muhammad’s beliefs: the Five Pillars of Islam
  - 1. There is no god but Allah (same as the Jewish and Christian God)
    - and Muhammad is his prophet
  - 2. Pray daily to Allah, facing Mecca
  - 3. Fast during the day in the month of Ramadan
  - 4. Donate to the needy
  - 5. If you are able, make the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) at least once
- Muhammad accumulated followers in Mecca
  - starting with his wife Khadija
  - and an orphaned child he was supporting, Ali
  - but soon many more
  - this community of believers was called the *umma*
- Muhammad developed enemies in Mecca
  - he said that recognizing the many popular gods of polytheists would be punished by God
    - in particular, he objected to pilgrimages to the Ka’bah (Ka’ba), a cubical black building containing a black stone block said to have been given to Adam when he left Paradise
    - but it had long been a pilgrimage site for polytheists
    - pilgrimages to it were a source of profit for Meccans
  - he also denounced greed and encouraged giving to the poor – seen as threatening to the rich merchant class
- 622: the *hegira*: Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina
  - Muhammad learned of a plot to kill him
  - He arranged to have Ali sleep in his cot that night, while escaping with Khadija to Medina
  - the assassins discovered Ali and did not harm him
  - Ali soon joined Muhammad in Medina
  - many others followed
- Muhammad led the community of exiles in Medina
  - set up laws and trading ventures
  - gave his daughter Fatima to Ali in marriage
    - so Ali was not only Muhammad’s right-hand man, but also his son-in-law
  - assigned Ali as one of several scribes who would write down portions of the Qur’an
  - starting 624, led raids on caravans from Mecca
  - 630: threatened Mecca, which submitted without a fight
    - put Ali in charge of taking Mecca without bloodshed
    - and preventing any revenge being taken
      - many Meccans converted to Islam... voluntarily or less so
    - Ali was also responsible for destroying pagan shrines and replacing them with mosques
      - including clearing the Ka’ba of almost everything except the black building and the black stone, and building a huge mosque around it
  - so by 630, Muhammad was head of a growing state
- 632: Muhammad died without leaving clear instructions about succession

- the history that followed is usually divided into 3 broad periods
- 632-661: The four “rightly-guided” caliphs
  - as we will see, these were selected from associates of Muhammad, by consultation and committee
  - they greatly expanded the Arab empire
- 661-750: The Umayyad Dynasty
  - capital in Damascus, Syria
  - military imperial rule, privilege for Arabs only
  - further expanded the empire to include most of Iberia (Spain) and east to the Indus river
  - the elite grew addicted to luxury and neglected Islam
- 750-1258: the Abbasid Dynasty
  - capital in Baghdad, Iraq
  - accepted non-Arab Muslims
  - fostered a Golden Age of voluminous renewed long-distance trade, exchange and growth of scholarship, technology, medicine, arts, introduced crops from one region to another, etc.
  - peaked early in the 800s, then gradually declined
  - 945: taken over by Persians, who ruled through the Abbasid Caliph as a figurehead
  - by 1050, taken over in turn by Seljuk (Saljuk) Turks, who also left the Abbasid Caliphs in place as figurehead religious leaders, but put their own *sultans* in political control
  - the Mongols finally toppled the last of the Abbasids in 1258
- In more detail, in part to explain the rift between Sunnis and Shi’ites
- again: 632: Muhammad died without leaving clear instructions about succession
  - one minority group thought he had designated Ali
    - these became the “partisans of Ali”, or Shi’ites
  - the large majority group thought those comments were just a statement of family relations and friendship
    - these became the Sunnis
  - the leaders of both groups decided to negotiate to pick a successor (the first "caliph", or “deputy”)
  - they considered Ali
  - but picked Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, already an old man
- 633: many of the recently converted Bedouins (Arabic camel nomads) renounced Islam, in a rebellion called the *ridda*
  - Abu Bakr responded with military force, winning several battles with them, gaining control of most of the Arabian peninsula
- 634: Abu Bakr died, designating the second caliph
  - Umar I
- Umar I expanded Islam greatly, in part by conquest
  - took Syria, including Jerusalem, from the Byzantine empire
  - was lenient towards the conquered people

- allowed them to continue practicing their own religions, as long as they paid a tax to do so (!)
- took Egypt from the Byzantine empire, too
- and conquered the Sasanid empire, taking much of Persia
- 644: Umar I died; successor picked by a group of leaders
  - Ali was again passed over, angering his partisans
  - Uthman ibn Affan, Muhammad's son-in-law, was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Caliph
  - seemed to favor leaders in Mecca, not Medina
  - placed his Meccan “Umayyad” relatives in important positions
    - including making his cousin, Mu’awiya, governor of Syria
  - issued an "official" Koran, ordered others destroyed
    - at the time, many saw this as meddling with God’s word
- 656: Uthman assassinated
- 656: Ali finally declared himself the 4<sup>th</sup> Caliph
  - with support from the Medina faction
  - called "Shi’ites", or "partisans" (of Ali)
    - believe the caliphate should be held only by descendents of Muhammad, through Fatima and Ali
  - But Mu’awiya, governor of Syria, cousin of murdered Uthman, did not recognize Ali
    - leading the faction now called "Sunni"
      - may mean “followers of the sunna”
        - implying that the partisans of Ali were violating the sunna by condoning the killing of Uthman
        - may mean “middle-of-the-road”
          - casting the Shi’ites as extremists
          - does this tactic sound familiar?
      - refused to recognize Ali until the killers of his cousin Uthman were brought to justice
      - wanting the Caliphate for himself
    - several other factions also opposed him
    - civil war broke out among Muslims, fighting to seize the Caliphate
    - battles were inconclusive and bloody
  - 657: Shi’ites and Sunnis agreed to arbitrate succession
    - the committee decided that neither Ali nor Mu’awiya should be Caliph
    - Ali rejected their decision, and civil war resumed
    - some partisans of Ali were so insulted that he would negotiate his God-given title that they split off into a separate group
      - that then fought battles with the Shi’ites
  - 661: the rebel group tried to kill both Ali and Mu’awiya
    - but only succeeded in killing Ali
    - leaving Mu’awiya as the sole claimant to the Caliphate
    - Ali's elder son Hasan declined to demand the caliphate

- he accepted a lifetime pension instead
- Ali's younger son Hussein agreed to wait for Muawiyah's death to demand the caliphate
- Mu'awiya moved the Islamic capital to Damascus, in Syria
  - even though his faction originally came from Mecca
  - Syria was more central to the empire for political and economic control
- 680: Mu'awiya died, but designated his son as successor
  - Hussein was outraged, and led the outnumbered Shiites to battle at Karbala
  - they were slaughtered, including Hussein
  - Hussein's son Ali survived
    - the line of descent continues to the present
    - descendants of Muhammad through Hussein are the Sayids
  - but Sunnis have outnumbered and overpowered Shiites ever since
    - developed a contrasting ideology
    - Caliphs after Ali were not legitimate
    - disdain for Sunnis as worldly, not properly Muslim
    - great reverence for Ali, Hussein, holidays for big battles like Karbala
  - Mu'awiya's descendants ruled the Islamic world (*dar al-Islam*) as the Umayyad Dynasty until 750 CE
    - passing the Caliphate more or less smoothly from father to son
- 700s: the Umayyads became increasingly secular
  - ruled as military conquerors of a large and diverse empire
  - doling out top positions and tribute wealth only to Arabs
    - especially their own family
  - even Arab Muslims became dissatisfied with them as they got lax about following Islamic practices and lived excessively luxurious lives
- 740s: Abu al-Abbas, a Sunni, but open to compromises and alliances
  - led rebels to take Persia and Mesopotamia from the Umayyads
- 750: al-Abbas won a large battle with the Umayyads
  - invited them to a reconciliatory banquet
    - and slaughtered them there
  - establishing the Abbasid Dynasty that ruled the *dar al-Islam* until 1258 CE
    - fostered a Golden Age of voluminous renewed long-distance trade, exchange and growth of scholarship, technology, medicine, arts, architecture, introduced crops from one region to another, etc.
    - refined urban civilization
    - peaked early in the 800s, then gradually declined
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