

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ROLE OF ISLAM

INTRODUCTION

Because of the spectacular rise of the West in the last 400 years, the importance of Islam and its contribution to history have often been overlooked. With the help of The Principle and the study of its operation in history, we can see that Islam came into existence for particular providential reasons and played a definite role in the development of God's plan for the last 2,000-year period of preparation for the third Adam.

In the previous chapter we showed how the Christian history of preparation for the third Adam has paralleled the 2,000-year Jewish history of preparation for the second Adam, Jesus. In this chapter we will try to show how Islam has contributed to providential history as we have outlined it so far.

Muslims, like Christians, face a greater challenge today than they have faced at any other time. We are now in the age of the fulfillment of God's will on earth, when our understanding of His providence is essential for us to serve Him effectively. If Muslims, Christians, Jews, and all other religious people can see their common role in God's providence, God can lead them to unity with Him.

I. BACKGROUND OF ISLAM

As we discussed in Chapter Eight, Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. The first son, Ishmael, was born to Abraham's servant, Hagar. He was followed by Isaac, who was born to Abraham's wife, Sarah. These two sons were in the Cain and Abel positions, but because of Abraham's failure in making the animal sacrifice they were not able to make a Foundation of Substance. This meant that Ishmael was not able to participate in God's central providence and God was unable to give him the full blessing He had planned.

Because Isaac, in the Abel position, showed complete faith in his father even as he was about to be sacrificed (see footnote on page 139), God was able to transfer Abraham's mission to him. Isaac's son, Jacob, restored the position of Abel by overcoming his brother, Esau, with love, and enabled his family to qualify as the ancestors of God's chosen people. Proof of this is that God worked with his descendants, the children of Israel, to prepare for the perfected Adam.

In the meantime, the descendants of Ishmael multiplied with God's blessing to become the Arab peoples. If Jesus had not been rejected, he would have been able to set up the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. In that case, God's full blessing would have been restored to Ishmael's descendants through the descendant of Isaac, Jesus.

Because of the failure of the Jewish people, God's providence was shifted to the gentiles. However, for the descendants of Ishmael, the position of Moses, who established the national foundation for the perfected Adam, had not yet been fulfilled. To fulfill this role, in preparation for the third Adam, Muhammad was sent as a prophet to Arabia.

During the 2,000 years since Jesus, the Jews have been scattered and persecuted in many countries of the world. At the same time, the foundation of Islam was laid and rapidly expanded to as far as China and Spain. In this way, Islam realized many of the hopes and ideals of Israel. However, the ideal of God's Kingdom on earth has yet to be realized through the third Adam.

Against this background let us look at Islam from the point of view of its providential role.

II. MUHAMMAD

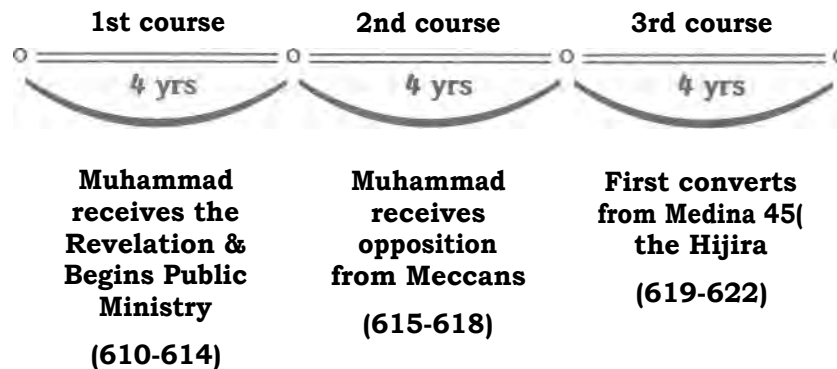
In the third chapter we discussed the relationship of Muhammad to the fulfillment of the perfected Adam's mission. We will now try to add the perspective of God's timetable to that understanding.

Like Moses in Egypt, Muhammad had a 40-year period of preparation in the satanic world of Mecca and Arabia before God called him to his mission. Born in 570, Muhammad's public mission began in 610, six hundred years after the advent of Christianity.

Mecca was the center of Arabian trade and the Arabian religions of the time. The Arabs, however, had primitive religious ideas and worshipped idols like the Egyptians of Moses' time. Muhammad's mission was to release them from the slavery of their own ignorance and establish a God-centered nation in their midst.

At the end of the 40-year period, Muhammad received a revelation from the angel Gabriel (XCVI 1-5). This marked the beginning of the revelations that make up the Koran. His obedience to the command to pass on what he had received marked the beginning of his public mission. Because of his belief and obedience, he was qualified to be the central figure of God's providence for the Arabs.

Paralleling Moses' three 40-year courses to establish a Foundation for the perfected Adam by uniting the Israelites and bringing them into the promised land of Canaan, Muhammad went through three 4-year courses in Mecca to lay the foundation to claim Medina as the base of a new nation.



A. The First Course

Muhammad laid a Foundation of Faith in the first course by demonstrating complete faith in the Word of God in spite of persecution by the Meccans.

To lay the Foundation of Substance, the Meccans would have had to believe and follow him. However, they mocked him and his belief in the One Almighty God. In spite of the acceptance by some Meccans of Muhammad's words, the persecution intensified to the point that Muhammad had to send many of his followers to Abyssinia. Thus, the first course was not completed.

B. The Second Course

The second 4-year course proved more difficult than the first. The Meccans opposed to Muhammad (led by Abu-Jahi) organized a boycott of his clan — the Banu-Hashim. This period climaxed with the death of his faithful wife, Khadijah, and long time protector, Abu Talib, head of the clan. By remaining faithful through this period, Muhammad laid the Foundation of Faith for his second course.

His rejection by his own tribe, and the boycott of his clan by most of the rest of Mecca, made it impossible to lay the Foundation of Substance. The second course to make a national foundation in Arabia failed because the Foundation of Substance was not realized.

C. The Third Course

Muhammad could continue as God's central figure because his personal faith was unshaken. After being in exile from his own people for three years, he began to preach again in Mecca, but met with little success. After being rejected at Ta'if, he prayed deeply to God. His prayer was answered at the next Meccan pilgrimage and fair time. He met several Jews from Yathrib (later called Medina) who believed that Muhammad might be the prophet they expected, and saw in him a possible solution to the tribal conflicts disturbing their city.

When, two years later, 70 Muslims from Yathrib pledged themselves to obey Muhammad at the second treaty of Al-'Agabah, he had the foundation he needed to move to Medina.¹ These men were in the position of the 70 people of the family of Jacob who joined Joseph in Egypt, the 70 men appointed by Moses over the Israelites, and the 70 apostles appointed by Jesus to establish his church.

The Islamic Canaan was now Medina. Muhammad sent his followers ahead and then himself followed. As Moses had traveled three days before reaching safety on the other side of the Sea of Reeds, Muhammad hid for three days before he could safely travel to Medina.

¹ The exact number of Muslims who pledged themselves varies from 70 to 75 in different sources.

Again Muhammad was faithful to God throughout this 4-year period and thereby laid the Foundation of Faith.

The Foundation of Substance was made by the Muslims from Mecca and Medina who united with each other and were obedient to Muhammad. They proved themselves through their willingness to die for him, first at the battle of Badr, and later on other occasions.

Once this Foundation of Substance was laid, Islam could be blessed. As Joshua had conquered the various tribes of Canaan after 120 years, now Muhammad, step by step, brought the Arabian tribes under his control.

After three battles with Mecca (Badr, Uhud and the Trench), that city finally gave in to the victorious Muslims. The Kaaba, which was in the same position to the Arabs as the tabernacle and temple had been to the Jews, was cleansed of idols and consecrated to the worship of the One True God.

In ten short years, by the time of his death in 632, Muhammad had united the whole of Arabia under his leadership. Although many tribes accepted Islam for political reasons, the condition could be accepted by God to represent a united nation on His side. Because of this national unity, the Arabs were able to expand and establish a world-wide empire.

The Principle shows us that Muhammad made conditions to restore the important symbolic numbers: 12 — the period of persecution in Mecca (610-622); 4 — the three 4-year courses in Mecca, preparing for emigration to Medina; 21 — the period (610-631) of Muhammad's public mission including exile from and return to Mecca; 40 — the period of Muhammad's personal preparation for his mission (570-610). His course then followed the similar patterns of the chief central figures that preceded him: Jacob, Moses, and Jesus. The strength of early Islam was founded on Muhammad's fulfillment of these central conditions.

III. EXPANSION OF ISLAM

Islam was to be a body of people united in their faith in one God. Through obedience to God's Word as expressed in the Koran, they were to develop a God-centered life and prepare themselves for the advent of perfected man, the third Adam.

As Christendom united around the central figure of the Pope, Islam was to unite around the central figure of the Caliph. The Pope and Caliph were responsible to obey God and to constantly strive to realize unity among their followers.

As was described in the previous chapter, the purity of the original church was lost amidst conflict and, later, gross materialism on the part of the leaders. Because of this, the Christian providence was extended to 2,000, years and indemnity had to be paid by numerous saints, monks, and nuns, as well as through the suffering engendered by frequent, bloody wars.

In Islam, a rather similar course developed. During the early period of the orthodox caliphate, especially under Abu-Bakr and Umar, the development of the Islamic state was conducted with the firm intention of obeying the Koran and continuing the traditions of Muhammad.

The death of Umar signalled the beginning of deep conflict and division among the Muslims. Uthman was not strong enough to overcome the forces of disunity and, like Umar, fell victim to assassination.

In the history of Israel, after Joshua's death, those who inherited his position failed to carry out his work of freeing Canaan of idolatry. Thus, instead of establishing a kingdom and building the temple, the Jews passed through the 400-year period of the Judges. Only at the end of this period was a king chosen and the temple built. If Solomon, the third king, had not failed at the end of his reign, his powerful kingdom would have been expanded into an empire through the providence of the King of Kings, perfected Adam. Instead, it was divided into Cain-like and Abel-like nations. Abu-Bakr reversed the failure of the early judges who followed Joshua by actively enforcing the union of the tribes that Muhammad had effected. Instead of the nation reverting to paganism, it was strengthened in its new religion. Umar, the second caliph, carried on this tradition and saw that it was applied on a larger scale, as Islam expanded. Therefore, the extension of the providence of the Judges was not repeated in the history of Islam.

The role of the caliph was similar to that of the Judge, combining the functions of prophet, chief priest and king. Perfected Adam has a multiple role that likewise embraces the multiple responsibilities of religion and state.

Because Uthman, the third caliph, failed to maintain the unity of the Islamic state, the forces of division that had been gaining strength led to the division in the following generation of leadership between Ali's faction and the Umayyads.

The 40 years, beginning in 622 when Muhammad went to Medina, should have restored the 400 years of the Judges and the 40 years of Saul's reign. Instead, by the failure and schism at the end, this was not accomplished — much as Solomon's 40-year reign had also failed to restore the same periods.

Ali, because of his dedication to Muhammad, was qualified to be the leader of Islam, but the Umayyad house proved stronger and succeeded in establishing the caliphate in Damascus under their name.

The Umayyad caliphs were not, however, truly religious, using the title and position to expand the empire and control Muslim peoples. They represented a Cain-type nation, patterned after the northern kingdom of Israel that was established when the United Kingdom of Solomon was divided.

Because of the materialism of the Umayyad caliphs, God could not allow them to remain in their position as leaders of Islam. After 100 years, more Abel-like factions of Islam, including followers of Ali, combined forces to topple the Umayyads and to take control of the empire under the name of the leading faction — the Abbasids.

In this third stage of development, Islam rose to its greatest heights of achievement and made some of its greatest contributions to civilization.

Under the patronage of enlightened caliphs, like Harun al-Rashid, the various branches of human knowledge and culture were encouraged to develop. Great interest was shown in the works of classical Greece, which were translated and studied by Islamic scholars.

At a time we call the "Dark Ages" in Europe (because of the stagnation of civilization there), the Islamic world was making discoveries in medicine, geography, mathematics and other fields. No city in Europe could compare with Baghdad in either architectural achievement or civic organization.

When Islamic civilization itself later became stagnant, and Europe started to come alive, it was Arabic translations and commentaries of Aristotle, Plato and other Greek philosophers that fueled the new-born intellectual fires. In this way, Islam played a crucial, providential role in stimulating the great changes in Europe which paved the way for the 400-year period of final preparation for the third Adam.

The providence for Ishmael's descendants could have reached its fulfillment when the "new Israel", Christianity (inheritor's of Isaac's lineage), was finally in the position to restore the failure of Israel by preparing for and receiving the perfected Adam. Charlemagne's coronation as king over the United Christian Kingdom (800 A.D.) was to begin the providence of uniting all Christendom to this end.

At the same time, the Islamic state had reached its greatest strength as a unified empire. Although its leader at the time, Harun al-Rashid, made contact with Charlemagne, even exchanging embassies and presents with him, no real unity was achieved between the two empires. Christendom, inheriting the Abel (Isaac) position, was to serve Islam, which inherited the Cain (Ishmael) position. This was not done, and so no spiritual union was achieved between them.

By being impure and disunited, Christendom failed to qualify as a true Abel. No heavenly model of society was manifest by it to attract Islam. Instead of Abel and Cain working together to build the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, they have been fighting each other — Christendom received the punishment of the Crusades, and both sides have suffered since through frequent conflicts.

The 200 years of Islamic history, roughly from 610 to 810 A.D., represented the 2,000 years of history preparing the nation of Israel to receive the Messiah. As the failure discussed above prevented the third Adam from coming at that time (at the conclusion of the 200 years), the providence of Islam, like that of Christianity, had to be extended. From the time of Harun al-Rashid, Islam has reflected and complemented Christendom's providential course.

As the United Christian Kingdom was divided into East and West Franks, so also was the unity of the Islamic state divided. As we have seen throughout the providential history, peoples, nations, or empires that fail to fulfill their roles have to be divided, in order to separate the Cain-like elements from the Abel-like elements, enabling God to have a new object with which to work. This occurred in

Christendom (through division into East and West Franks) and in Islam (through the break-up of the empire into smaller domains).

The serious disintegration and decline of united Islam became pronounced in the 10th century and continued till the death blow was dealt by the Mongol hordes overrunning the very heart of the former Islamic Empire and finally sacking Baghdad itself in 1258.

Although the Mongols themselves had converted by the end of the 13th century, Islam had in effect been taken captive by outside force. Thus, while Christendom was passing through the period of Papal exile and return, Islam was also trying to recover. The Sufi movement developed rapidly at this time and played an important part in converting new peoples to Islam. With its emphasis on actual spiritual contact with God, we can judge its development to be providential in preparing for the unification of all peoples under the Parenthood of the One God.

IV. PREPARATION FOR THE THIRD ADAM

At the very time (1517) that the Protestant Reformation was getting under way (at the beginning of the final 400 years of preparation for the third Adam), Islam was also going through some great changes that set its course for the next 400 years. In Persia, Isma'il crowned himself Shah in 1500 and led religiously inspired troops in a storm of conquests that rapidly expanded his domains. This continued until 1514. At the same time, the Ottomans were gathering strength, and, with their conquests in 1517 of Syria and Egypt, began domination of much of the Muslim world that lasted 400 years — until the First World War.

The rise of the Shi'a sect of Islam, centered in Persia, was providential since Shi'a belief includes the important focus of the Mandi, or "Rightly-guided One." Since the 400 years beginning in the early 1500s has been the time of preparation for the third Adam, the knowledge that such a figure is to come to establish a true world has, of course, been of great importance.

With the help of The Principle, Muslims will be able to recognize more clearly the necessity of a new central figure who will come to realize God's ideal on earth. The two sects will be united with each other (as all religions will be united) by the third Adam.

The fall of Baghdad was by no means the end of Islamic growth. The empire that had once stretched from Spain to China was no more, but most of the countries conquered for Islam remained Muslim or at least maintained a large Muslim community.

The Ottoman empire that expanded rapidly at the beginning of the sixteenth century was not particularly significant in spreading the faith of Islam. Much more effective were the activities of Muslim traders who settled ever further from their Islamic homelands, and the Sufi movement within Islam that proved successful in converting many peoples, especially among the central Asian tribes.

As European navigators were discovering new parts of the world and opening the way for the Christian missionary movement, Islam was steadily making headway through largely overland expansion. Large sections of Africa and Southeast Asia were added to its domain.

The providence behind the expansion of monotheism into formerly pagan areas of the world was the preparation of people all over the world to receive the third Adam. Without knowledge of God and His providence, it is impossible for man to appreciate the need for a perfected man and the importance of living one's life in accordance with divine will.

The 400 years of preparation were not a particularly good time for Islam. The Ottomans, who were more conservative than progressive, dominated a substantial portion of the Islamic world. Their admiration of the glorious past and the imitation of it dominated Islamic institutions.

As European power grew and her armies began to make inroads into the Islamic world, Muslims were confronted with the fruits of Western progress. The Ottoman empire received its death blow in the First World War. Most of the other Islamic countries were by this time under Western control.

The role of Islam has been transformed through the forces generated by the flow of history. God has His timetable, and the many parts of His scheme must fit into place according to His will. Let us now then try to assess the role of Islam today.

V. ISLAM TODAY

The strength of Islam lies in its belief and faith in the power of One God. To meet the challenge of the 20th century, Islam must continue in this belief but seek, in particular, the will of God for man today.

It is not so important for us to gaze at the past with unreal imaginings of previous glories that have no special relevance to our present situation today. It is clear that God's providence has included the rise of Western science, technology and new political and economic systems, just as His providence did for Islam in the ninth and tenth centuries. What does this imply for Islam?

Most Islamic nations have adopted Western political systems and are eager to partake of Western science and technology. To put on a jacket made in the West is not to become a modern Western man, however. Many Muslim intellectuals are ambivalent regarding the West. They want the products of progress, but at the same time want to keep their Islamic orthodoxy. This situation has built up a tension that cries to be relieved.

The West has suffered from its overemphasis on material progress. Western development was encouraged by the separation of Christian orthodox thinking from the fields of science and economics. However, it now lacks internal direction and motivation. For the Islamic world to avoid the same trap, it must stand firmly on the spiritual essence of its faith and, at the same time, free itself of some of its non-essential dogmas.

For today's Muslim, the most important responsibility is to open his heart to God's providence for modern man. This, of course, centers on the third Adam. It is, therefore, our responsibility to prepare ourselves to receive the third Adam and his message of truth.

This truth will bridge the gap between science and religion and, thereby, show the way for Islam to find its place in the world today.

The solution for Islam originates in the same truth as the solution for Christianity, Judaism and all other faiths. Members of each religion must recognize that their holy books, though they contain essential truths, do not represent the unlimited truth and knowledge of God. There is no limit to what God can reveal to us. The revelation that the third Adam brings will not contradict the major religions,

but will enhance them and will clarify ambiguities which have kept the faiths apart.

For Islam to fulfill its providential role, it must unite with the third Adam and God's providence for this time in history.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have attempted to show the background for Islam, the providential reasons for its emergence, and the general course of its expansion and development. We have also tried to show the importance of Islam in the overall development of God's providence in the past 2,000 years.

After 1400 years of existence, Islam is confronted with an unprecedented challenge. The challenge is not to compete with the West in terms of material abundance, but to free itself of extraneous concepts and, working from its essential spiritual base, prepare itself for the new age to be initiated by the third Adam.

The final chapter of this book will examine the providential significance of the prominent events of the twentieth century and their relationship to the coming of the third Adam.