

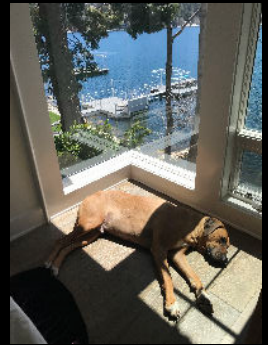
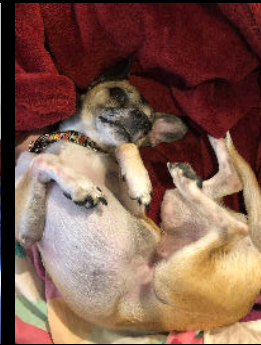
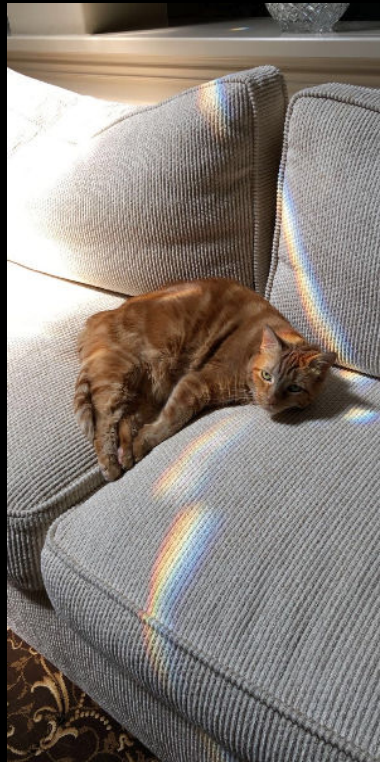
# Week 15: Islam

Topics: Early Islamic History and Key Islamic Beliefs

# Weekly Objectives

- This week, we'll start our study of Islam. As we'll see, Islam has a lot of fascinating overlap with Judaism and the Christianities.
- Please complete the reading assignment *before* you read through the lecture slides. This week, you should read pgs. 377-391 in the *Living Religions* textbook, available on Brightspace.
- Also, you will have seen that I posted the prompt for our Final Essay assignment, due **Thursday May 7**. This should be a fun assignment, to help you tie the course materials together. This essay replaces our prior research/fieldwork paper assignment. I've posted it in plenty of time, so go ahead and start planning!
- We will also have two more journal entries, both of which will be posted this week. Entries 7-9 are due **Thursday April 30**.
  - We will also have a take-home Abrahamic Religions Exam, which will consist of reflective-style questions. The exam will be posted this Friday and is due one week later, **Friday May 1**.
- As always, I'm available on email and Skype for any questions or discussions!

Here's what a few of our THST1080 class pets have been up to this past week: *lots of napping!!*



# Introducing Islam

- Islam is the third Abrahamic religion we'll cover in this course. The other two were Judaism and Christianity. As we'll see today, Islam, too, will trace its lineage to the patriarch Abraham.
- The word 'Islam' means submission, and implies a complete and trusting surrender to God. Most of the texts are written in the Arabic language. Arabic is important for Islam because it is the language in which the revelations from God were received. The Arabic term for God is Allah.
- Islam is currently the world's fastest growing organized religion. Today, over 20% of the world identifies as Muslim, and this figure has been growing consistently in the modern era.
- While it is the youngest of the three Abrahamic religions, Islam does not necessarily view itself as creating anything new, when compared to the other two traditions. Its focus is monotheism and Islamic theologians teach that Islam restores the original path of monotheism, which also formed the basis for Judaism and Christianity. Accordingly, Islam centers around worship of God, the same divine character we find in Judaism and Christianity.
- As we will see, a major human figure in Islam is the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims do not worship Muhammad, nor do they view him as divine, in the way that Christians view Jesus as divine. Instead, Muslims teach that Muhammad was the *last* of a continuing chain of prophets (which includes Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and many other recognizable figures), all of whom attempted to restore God's divine will: true monotheism.

# Abrahamic Origins

- Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam traces its ancestry to Abraham (whom Muslims know as Ibrahim).
- As you should recall, he had two sons: Ishmael (whom Muslims know as Isma'il) and Isaac.
  - Isma'il was Abraham's oldest son, but was mothered by Hagar, an Egyptian slave. Abraham reportedly took Isma'il and Hagar to the desert of Mecca (located in the Arabian peninsula), to spare them of Sarah's jealousy. According to the Holy Qur'an, while in Mecca, Abraham and Isma'il built a worship site for God, known as the Ka'bah. It is said that this was the same site as Adam's *original* place of worship of God, and since these traditions teach that Adam is the world's first created human, this would make this the same location as the world's OG monotheistic worship site. According to Islamic historians, after Adam, the site had been forgotten by monotheists, so Abraham built something for God and returned the location to its originally intended use: monotheistic worship. God told Abraham that the Ka'bah should forever be a place of pilgrimage for monotheists.
  - The Ka'bah is the holiest sanctuary in Islam and is still visited regularly on Islamic pilgrimages.
- However, according to Islamic tradition, after Abraham's death, the region sank back into darkness as it turned away from monotheism and embraced polytheism. By the time the Prophet Muhammad was born, the Arabian peninsula was a hotbed for polytheistic worship. Even worse, the Ka'bah (originally built for God) was the center of the region's polytheistic practice. It is thought that, by the time of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, the Ka'bah contained 360 idols of different Arabian tribal deities. People would flock there to perform polytheistic worship.

# Pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula

- Before the advent of Islam, the Arabian peninsula was populated by various nomadic tribes or clans, bound together by bloodline.
  - The most powerful of the tribes were the Quraysh, who worked as merchants and lived in Mecca.
  - For financial success, they set up various market stalls around the Ka'bah. Since people would make pilgrimages to the site for polytheistic worship retreats, it was a high traffic area. Thus, the Quraysh profited off the site's role in polytheism.
- Like other clans, the Quraysh themselves were polytheistic. So, in addition from creating businesses to profit off the site, they also worshipped there. Thus, it's economically and religiously close to them.

# The Prophet Muhammad

- It was in this polytheistic setting (in Islam, called 'the age of ignorance') that Muhammad was born in 570 CE. He was a member of the Quraysh tribe. Interestingly, his grandfather was the caretaker of the Ka'bah and helped facilitate polytheistic worship there.
- The stories of Muhammad's life and his sayings are preserved in literature called the Hadith. The Hadith are the sayings and actions that are attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. They were written by followers after his death and are our window into his life since, by reading the Hadith, we can learn about the behavior of the Prophet. We can sketch a model of his life, known as the Sunnah.
  - That life model (Sunnah) will later become the basis of many Islamic laws, as people use it to predict what Muhammad, inspired by God, would/would not approve.

# The Prophet Muhammad

- His father died before he was born, and Muhammad grew up in poverty. His mother died when he was six, with his grandfather dying shortly afterwards. His childhood was clearly not easy or characterized by privilege.
- After he became the responsibility of his uncle, as a young man Muhammad went to work as a shepherd before taking a job managing caravans for a business owned by an intelligent and wealthy woman, named Khadijah.
- Muhammad and Khadijah fell in love and married when Muhammad was 25.
  - Khadijah was older than Muhammad. She was highly intelligent and independently successful and wealthy. She became his biggest supporter and his confidant later in life, and is considered by some to be the world's first Muslim, since she is the first to respond favorably to the revelations he shared and convert. She is an inspiration for many Islamic feminists today.



# The Revelations

- When Muhammad was 40 years old, around year 610 CE, he made a spiritual retreat during the month called Ramadan. While alone on his retreat, an angel named Gabriel appeared to him in human-like form and began to reveal to him messages from God.
- The revelations continued to happen for several years, with the angel Gabriel repeatedly appearing to the Prophet Muhammad with messages from Allah. Initially, Muhammad shared them with the few people who believed him: Khadijah; his cousin, Ali; his friend, Abu Bakr; and a freed slave, Zayd.
- After the third year, though, the revelations instructed Muhammad to preach publicly (i.e., beyond his close circle) and share the teachings with all of Mecca's society.
- The language of the revelations was Arabic. Muhammad was illiterate but it is believed that he retained them perfectly - word-for-word and without error or changes - and that he shared them in this unaltered form with his followers, who recorded them without change. The written record of the revelations is known as the Holy Qur'an. Again: it is believed that the Qur'an contains the revelations (unaltered, perfectly remembered) given directly from God to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. So, for Muslims, reading the Qur'an in Arabic (the language of the revelations) is to read the direct word of God.
- Major themes of the revelations were monotheism and social justice.

# The *Hijrah* and the City of Medina

- The powerful members of the Quraysh tribe reacted hostilely to Muhammad. Since they were merchants who managed the polytheistic industry that had been built around the Ka'bah, the message of monotheism threatened their wealth and power. They also weren't too keen on the messages of social justice and equality.
- He was ridiculed and defamed by the Quraysh. Muhammad and his followers found themselves facing violent persecution, as people tried to silence him.
- Around 620 CE, pilgrims to Mecca from Yathrib, a city in the north, recognized Muhammad as a prophet. They invited him to come to their city to help solve its social and political problems. In 622 CE, he accepted their offer and fled to Yathrib.
- Once there, he was widely welcomed. He transformed Yathrib into a center for monotheism. He renamed the city al-Medina (meaning the 'City of the Prophet').
  - This movement of Muslims from Mecca to Yathrib is known as the hijrah (migration). The Muslim era is calculated from the beginning of the year in which this event took place, since it marked the change from persecution to appreciation of the Prophet's message.

# The Later Years of the Prophet Muhammad's Life

- In Medina, Muhammad drew up a constitution, which would later serve as a model for Islamic social administration.
  - We'll look more closely at this Islamic social structure next week! It includes the Five Pillars of Islam.
- But the Meccans were concerned that Muhammad was growing his following in Medina. Worried he may later return to Mecca with these followers to attack Mecca, the Meccans declared war on Medina.
  - Even though the Meccans gathered a large and powerful army, the small group of Muslims in Medina were victorious. How? Because God sent thousands of angels to help them! The Meccans retreated and Muhammad negotiated a peace truce.
- In 630 CE, Muhammad, indeed, returned to Mecca with his followers. Reportedly, his band of followers had become so large that the Meccans did not resist, and Muhammad assumed leadership of Mecca. Many Meccans converted to Islam.
- The Ka'bah was purged of its polytheistic idols and re-converted into a monotheistic worship site for God. Since this time, it has served as the center of Muslim piety.

# After the Death of the Prophet Muhammad

- The Prophet Muhammad died just two years later, in 632 CE.
- His friend and an early convert to Islam, Abu Bakr, was elected the first caliph (successor to the Prophet). Many felt he was the most devout follower of the Prophet and therefore was the best to continue the movement driven by the revelations from God.
  - However, some other followers felt that Ali, Muhammad's cousin and the husband of Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, should have become caliph. The supporters of Ali argued that there was now something special about Muhammad's bloodline and that the leadership position of Islam was an inherited post.
- This debate (choosing a leader based on consensus vs. bloodline) will continue within Islam until the present day. In fact, it is the very source of the conflict between Sunni and Shi'a Islam.

# The Role of the Prophet Muhammad for Islam

- As stated previously, Muslims do not worship Muhammad, nor do they view him as divine. To Muslims, he is a **Prophet**, a human who was selected by God to be the recipient of divine communications. His humanity is never forgotten, since Muslims believe only God is worthy of worship.
- Nevertheless, his life is precious to Muslims, who try to emulate his qualities in their own lives. The qualities include kindness, humility, and compassion.
- The Prophet Muhammad never claimed to have superhuman powers, and the Qur'an makes clear he is a human, just like us. The only miracle he ever claimed was that, though illiterate, he received, remembered, and repeated (without alteration) the Qur'anic revelations in extraordinarily eloquent Arabic.

# The Revelations and the Holy Qur'an

- While Muhammad is important to Muslims, the heart of Islam is not the Prophet but the revelations he received. These are considered the Word of God, recorded word-for-word as they were received over a period of 23 years.
- Collectively, they are called the Qur'an.
- The text is divided into 114 suras (chapters), all recorded in Arabic, which was the language of God's revelations. It is felt that their meanings do not survive translation into other languages, so it is vital for believers to read them in Arabic.
- The revelations assert monotheism. They also address social inequalities and promote social justice, universal love, and a religious organizational structure for the Muslim community.

# The Holy Qur'an

- Before reciting the Qu'ran, one must be in a ritually clean and purified state.
- Reciting the Qur'an is said to have a healing, soothing effect. It can also bring protection and guidance.
- The Qu'ran makes frequent mention of figures and stories from Jewish and Christian sacred history. Muslims believe that the Jewish prophets (Abraham, Isaac, Isaiah, Elijah, etc.) and Jesus all brought the same messages from God. For Islam, the most basic and true teaching of all these historical figures is: belief in one God and in humanity's personal more accountability before God on the Day of Judgment.
- However, the Qur'an teaches that God's original messages have been added to and/or distorted by humans after these prophets taught.
  - So, for Islam, these figures are all recognized as prophets who exist on the same prophetic lineage as Muhammad. They all attempted to reveal the same message (see above), but later humans distorted the message, so God had to try again. This includes Jesus, who Muslims view as a prophet – but not as divine. For Muslims, Muhammad is the *final* prophet on this lineage and the record of the revelations (the Holy Qur'an) is God's *final* attempt at getting the message to us.

# Monotheism and Allah

- It should be clear by now that the central teaching of Islam is monotheism.
- **Allah** (or God) is the Absolute Reality, the Creator, and the Redeemer.
- Allah is all-knowing, omnipresent, and all powerful.
- Allah is also ineffable. In the Qur'an, we learn that Allah has **100 names**, but only 99 are revealed. The 100<sup>th</sup> name will always remain a mystery to us. This is a reminder that God is mysterious and beyond human comprehension.
- In Islam, since monotheism is so important, the two major human sins involve one's relationship to God. These are:
  - **Shirk**: idolatry, or associating anything else with divinity except the one God.
  - **Kufr**: unbelief, atheism, or ungratefulness to God.



# Other 'Beings'

- The Qur'an makes mention of angels of God and archangels.
  - The angels of God are nonphysical beings of light who serve God day and night.
  - Archangels (including Gabriel) are beings whose main responsibility is to bring the revelations to the prophets from God.
    - The angel Gabriel is the highest archangel because it was through him that God revealed the teachings to Muhammad.
  - Nevertheless, neither Gabriel, nor any angel or archangel is to be worshipped.
- There also exist jinn, immaterial beings of fire whose nature is between that of humans and angels.
  - An example is Iblis, who transformed into the non-submissive being called Satan after refusing to bow before Adam, God's first human creation. As punishment, Iblis was cursed to live by tempting all Adam's descendants (i.e., all of humanity) to follow him and not God.
  - According to the Qur'an, those who fall prey to Satan's devices will go to hell.

# The Prophethood of Muhammad

- Also important to Islam is the Prophethood of Muhammad.
- Islam honors all prior prophets as messengers from the one God, but believes that Muhammad is the 'Seal of this Prophets', meaning he is the last of this prophetic lineage. For Muslims, since he was the final prophet, this also makes him the most recent and up-to-date, giving his message ultimate authority in the prophetic lineage.
- Muslims feel that the world's original religion was monotheism, but that God sent prophets from time to time as religions decayed into polytheism. For Muslims, each prophet (including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, etc.) came to renew the message in a way specifically designed for his culture and time.
  - Scriptures from Judaism and Christianity are honored, but Muslims feel that only the Qur'an is fully authentic, since, for them, it is the direct, unchanged, untranslated Word of God.

# The Last Judgment

- We've already noted that in Islam there is a belief in the existence of hell, run by Satan. There is also a conception of afterlife in Islam that includes heaven and reunion with God.
- Unique to Islam, though, is the belief that, upon death, humans enter a period of repose in the grave. This is akin to a state of posthumous sleep. All previously deceased humans remain in this state until a time known as the Final Judgment Day, when the world will end, and all dead humans will be awoken and bodily resurrected. They will then be assembled for a final judgment based on their lives' deeds.
  - For the faithful and purified believers, closeness to God awaits. This is essentially a notion of heaven.
  - At the Final Judgment, those who rejected God during their lives will be condemned to hell. However, Muslims do not believe that hell is permanent for believers; for those who come to believe, God will lift them to paradise. For those who remain nonbelievers, though, their place in hell becomes eternal.
- So, while Islam may share with Christianity a Heaven/Hell theological binary, it is somewhat distinct in its belief that all judgment will take place at once. Until then, the dead remain in this state of sleep, awaiting their resurrection at the Final Judgment, where the world will end, and all will be judged together.