

## Chapter 9



# ISLAM—SPREAD BY THE SWORD? YOU BET.

**V**irtually all Westerners have learned to apologize for the Crusades, but less noted is the fact that the Crusades have an Islamic counterpart for which no one is apologizing and of which few are even aware. The first large-scale contact of Muslims with the Western world came not with the Crusades, but 450 years before them. When the forces of Islam united the scattered tribes of Arabia into a single community, the newly Islamic Arabia was surrounded by predominantly Christian lands—notably the Byzantine imperial holdings of Syria and Egypt, as well as the venerable Christian lands of North Africa. Four of Christendom's five principal cities—Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem—lay within striking distance of Arabia. The Byzantine Empire's great rival, Persia, also had a significant Christian population.

But for centuries now, the Middle East, North Africa, and Persia (Iran) have been regarded as the heart of the Islamic world. Did this transformation take place through preaching and the conversion of hearts and minds? Not at all: The sword spread Islam. Under Islamic rule, the non-Muslim majorities of those regions were gradually whittled down to the tiny minorities they are today, through repression, discrimination, and harassment that made conversion to Islam the only path to a better life.

## Guess what?

- ◆ What is known today as the "Islamic world" was created by a series of brutal conquests of non-Muslim lands.
- ◆ These were wars of religious imperialism, not self-defense.
- ◆ The early spread of Islam and that of Christianity sharply contrast in that Islam spread by force and Christianity didn't.

***PC Myth: Early Muslims had no bellicose designs on neighboring lands***

Toward the end of Muhammad's life, after his successful expedition against the pagan Hawazin and the Thaqif tribes, whom he defeated at Hunayn (a valley near Mecca), he attempted to move beyond Arabia, beginning an expedition against the Byzantines in Tabuk. He also contacted the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, and other rulers in the region, by letter: "the Prophet of Allah wrote to Chosroes (King of Persia), Caesar (Emperor of Rome) [that is, Heraclius], Negus (King of Abyssinia) and every (other) despot inviting them to Allah, the Exalted."<sup>1</sup> He exhorted them to "embrace Islam and you will be safe."<sup>2</sup>

None did, and Muhammad's warning proved accurate: None of them were safe. Not long after Muhammad's death, the Muslims invaded the Byzantine Empire—fired up by Muhammad's promise that "the first army amongst my followers who will invade Caesar's city [Constantinople] will be forgiven their sins."<sup>3</sup>

In 635, just three years after Muhammad died, Damascus, the city where Saint Paul was heading when he experienced his dramatic conversion to Christianity, fell to the invading Muslims. In 636, the caliph Umar, who ruled and expanded the empire of Islam from 634 to 644, took al-Basrah in Iraq. Umar gave instructions to his lieutenant 'Utbah ibn Ghazwan in words that echoed the Prophet Muhammad's triple choice for unbelievers: "Summon the people to God; those who respond to your call, accept it from them, but those who refuse must pay the poll tax out of humiliation and lowliness. If they refuse this, it is the sword without leniency. Fear God with regard to what you have been entrusted."<sup>4</sup>

Antioch, where the disciples of Jesus were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:26), fell the next year. It was Jerusalem's turn two years later, in 638. Like Damascus and Antioch, Jerusalem was a Christian city at that

time. It was the unhappy task of Sophronius, the patriarch of Jerusalem, to hand over the city to the conquering Umar. The caliph stood happily on the site of Solomon's Temple, from which he may have believed that the Prophet Muhammad, his old master, once ascended into Paradise (cf. Qur'an 17:1, a verse that has inspired centuries of debate as to its precise meaning). Sophronius, watching in deep sorrow nearby, recalled a Bible verse: "Behold the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet."<sup>5</sup>

***PC Myth: The native Christians of the Middle East and North Africa welcomed Muslims as liberators***

Many modern analysts of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim relations in general seem to think that Sophronius said, "Welcome, liberator!" According to conventional wisdom, Byzantine rule was so oppressive on the Christians in the Middle East and North Africa, and Egyptians in particular, that they couldn't wait to give them the bum's rush and open their arms to the Muslims who liberated them from this oppression. But, in fact, the Muslims conquered and held Egypt only in the face of great resistance. In December 639, the general 'Amr began the invasion of Egypt; in November 642, Alexandria fell and virtually all of Egypt was in Muslim hands. But this swift conquest was not uncontested, and the Muslims met resistance with brutality. In one Egyptian town they set a pattern of behavior that they followed all over the country. According to a contemporary observer:

Then the Muslims arrived in Nikiou. There was not one single soldier to resist them. They seized the town and slaughtered everyone they met in the street and in the churches—men, women and children, sparing nobody. Then they went to other places, pillaged and killed all the inhabitants they found. . . . But let us now say no more, for it is impossible to describe the

horrors the Muslims committed when they occupied the island of Nikiou.

Not only were many native Christians killed—others were enslaved:

Amr oppressed Egypt. . . . He took considerable booty from this country and a large number of prisoners. . . . The Muslims returned to their country with booty and captives. The patriarch Cyrus felt deep grief at the calamities in Egypt, because Amr, who was of barbarian origin, showed no mercy in his treatment of the Egyptians and did not fulfill the covenants which had been agreed with him.<sup>6</sup>

Christian Armenia also fell to the Muslims amid similar butcheries: “The enemy’s army rushed in and butchered the inhabitants of the town by the sword. . . . After a few days’ rest, the Ismaelites [Arabs] went back whence they had come, dragging after them a host of captives, numbering thirty-five thousand.”<sup>7</sup>

The same pattern prevailed when the Muslims reached Cilicia and Caesarea of Cappadocia in 650. According to a Medieval account:

They [the Taiyaye, or Muslim Arabs] moved into Cilicia and took prisoners . . . and when Mu’awiya arrived he ordered all the inhabitants to be put to the sword; he placed guards so that no one escaped. After gathering up all the wealth of the town, they set to torturing the leaders to make them show them things [treasures] that had been hidden. The Taiyaye led everyone into slavery—men and women, boys and girls—and they committed much debauchery in that unfortunate town; they wickedly committed immoralities inside churches.<sup>8</sup>

Caliph Umar made a telling admission in a message to an underling: “Do you think,” he asked, “that these vast countries, Syria, Mesopotamia,

Kufa, Basra, Misr [Egypt] do not have to be covered with troops who must be well paid?”<sup>9</sup>

Why did these areas have to be “covered with” troops, if the inhabitants welcomed the invaders and lived with them in friendship?

***PC Myth: Early jihad warriors were merely defending Muslim lands from their non-Muslim neighbors***

The Muslim armies swept quickly over huge regions that had never threatened them—and probably hadn’t even heard of them until the invaders arrived. Around the same time Egypt, the Middle East, and Armenia were falling to the Muslims, Europe was not exempt: Other Muslim forces carried out raids on Cyprus, Rhodes, Crete, and Sicily. They carried off booty and thousands of slaves. These were but preludes to the first great Muslim sieges of what was then the grandest city of Eastern Christendom and one of the greatest in the world: Constantinople. Muslim armies laid siege in 668 (and for several years thereafter) and 717. Both sieges failed, but they made it abundantly clear that the House of Islam was continuing its policy of bloody imperialism toward Christendom.

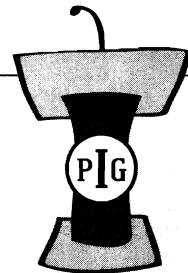
Muslim warriors did all this in obedience to the commands of their god and his prophet. One Muslim leader of that era put it this way: “The Great God says in the Koran: ‘O true believers, when you encounter the unbelievers, strike off their heads.’ The above command of the Great God is a great command and must be respected and followed.”<sup>11</sup> He was referring, of course, to the Qur’an: “When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield, strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly” (47:4).

**Muhammad  
vs. Jesus**

“All who take the sword will  
perish by the sword.”

**Jesus (Matthew 26:52)**

“Know that Paradise is under the shades of  
swords (*jihad* in Allah’s cause).”<sup>10</sup>



French president Jacques Chirac has remarked, “Europe owes as much to Islam as it does to Christianity.”<sup>12</sup> But this is like saying that the hen owes as much to the fox as it does to Farmer John. For Europe in the eighth century would soon know just how seriously the Muslims took the commands of Allah about meeting the unbelievers on the battlefield. The Muslims swept rapidly through Christian North Africa, and by 711 they were in a position to invade Spain. Christian Europe was beset from both the East and the West. The campaign went well—so well, in fact, that the Muslim commander, Tarik, exceeded his orders and pressed his victorious army forward. When he was upbraided by the North African emir, Musa, and asked why he had kept going so far into Christian Spain in defiance of orders, Tarik replied simply, “To serve Islam.”<sup>13</sup>

He served it so well that by 715 the Muslims were close to conquering all of Spain (which they held, of course, for over seven hundred years), and began to press into France. Charles Martel, “the Hammer,” stopped them in 732 at the city of Tours.

Despite this defeat, the Muslims didn’t give up. In 792, the ruler of Muslim Spain, Hisham, called for a new expedition into France. Muslims around the world enthusiastically responded to his call to jihad, and the army that gathered was able to do a good deal of damage—but ultimately did not prevail.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that Hisham’s call was religiously based—and that it antedates the Crusades, which are supposed to mark the beginning of Christian-Muslim hostility, by just over three hundred years. Some fifty years later, in 848, another Muslim army invaded France and wreaked considerable havoc. But over time, their fervor faded. In the course of the Muslim occupation, many of the occupiers were converted to Christianity, and the force dissipated.

Somewhat earlier, in 827, the warriors of jihad set their sights on Sicily and Italy. The commander of the invading force was a noted scholar of the Qur’an who forthrightly cast the expedition as a religious war. They

pillaged and looted Christian churches, all through these lands, terrorizing monks and violating nuns. By 846, they had reached Rome, where they exacted a promise of tribute from the pope. While their hold on Italy was never strong, they held Sicily until 1091—when the Normans drove them out.

In Spain, of course, the *reconquista* began to slowly chip away at Muslim domains, until 1492, when the Christians had entirely recaptured the nation. However, as battles raged in Spain, the Muslims continued to press Christendom's eastern flank. The Seljuk Turks decisively defeated the forces of the Byzantine Empire at the Armenian town of Manzikert in 1071, paving the way for the Muslim occupation of virtually all of Asia Minor—some of the central and most well-known lands of Christendom. Henceforth Christians would suffer second-class dhimmi status in the great Christian cities to which Paul addressed many of his canonical epistles. It is against the backdrop of all this, as we shall see, that Pope Urban II called the first Crusade in 1095.

## Not only West, but East

Muslim forces pressed eastward as well as westward, mounting a sea invasion of India as early as 634. Land invaders pressed into what are now Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India beginning in the eighth century, making slow but steady progress. Historian Sita Ram Goel observes that by 1206, the Muslim invaders had conquered “the Punjab, Sindh, Delhi,



### Just Like Today: Islam must be spread by force

Some of the modern-day Islamic thinkers who are most revered today by jihad terrorists taught (in no uncertain terms) that Islam must impose itself by force upon non-Muslims—not as a religion, for that would violate the Qur'an's dictum that “there is no compulsion in religion” (Qur'an 2:256)—but as a system of laws and societal norms. They taught that Muslims must fight to impose Islamic law on non-Muslim states, relegating its citizens to dhimmi status or worse.

and the Doab up to Kanauj.”<sup>14</sup> Later waves expanded these holdings to the Ganges and beyond.

Because Muslims considered the Hindus pagans who weren’t even entitled to the “protections” of dhimmi status, they treated them with particular brutality. Sita Ram Goel observes that the Muslim invaders of India paid no respect to codes of warfare that had prevailed there for centuries:

Islamic imperialism came with a different code—the Sunnah [tradition] of the Prophet. It required its warriors to fall upon the helpless civil population after a decisive victory had been won on the battlefield. It required them to sack and burn down villages and towns after the defenders had died fighting or had fled. The cows, the Brahmins, and the Bhikshus invited their special attention in mass murders of non-combatants. The temples and monasteries were their special targets in an orgy of pillage and arson. Those whom they did not kill, they captured and sold as slaves. The magnitude of the booty looted even from the bodies of the dead, was a measure of the success of the military mission. And they did all this as *mujahids* (holy warriors) and *ghazis* (*kafir* [unbeliever]-killers) in the service of Allah and his Last Prophet.<sup>15</sup>

## What did the Muslims want?

What was the ultimate goal of this seemingly endless warfare? It is clear from the commands of the Qur’an and the Prophet, who told his followers that Allah had commanded him, “to fight against the people until they testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.”<sup>16</sup> No Islamic sect has ever renounced the proposition that Islamic law must reign supreme over the entire world, and that Muslims must, under certain circumstances, take



up arms to this end. They stopped waging large-scale jihads after 1683 not because they had reformed or rejected the doctrines that motivated them, but because the Islamic world had grown too weak to continue—a situation that began to change in recent times with the discovery of oil in the Middle East.

The Egyptian Qur'an commentator and Muslim Brotherhood theorist Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) emphasized this clearly:

It is not the function of Islam to compromise with the concepts of Jahiliyya [the society of unbelievers] which are current in the world or to co-exist in the same land together with a jahili system. . . . Islam cannot accept any mixing with Jahiliyyah. Either Islam will remain, or Jahiliyyah; no half-half situation is possible. Command belongs to Allah, or otherwise to Jahiliyyah; Allah's Shari'ah [law] will prevail, or else people's desires: "And if they do not respond to you, then know that they only follow their own lusts. And who is more astray than one who follows his own lusts, without guidance from Allah? Verily! Allah guides not the people who are disobedient." [Qur'an 28:50] . . . *The foremost duty of Islam is to depose Jahiliyyah from the leadership of man*, with the intention of raising human beings to that high position which Allah has chosen for him.<sup>17</sup> (Emphasis added)

Likewise, Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi (1903–1979), founder of the Pakistani political party Jamaat-e-Islami, declared that non-Muslims have "absolutely no right to seize the reins of power in any part of God's earth



## A Book You're Not Supposed to Read

*Jihad In the West: Muslim Conquests from the 7th to the 21st Centuries* by Paul Fregosi; New York: Prometheus Books, 1998, is a popular, highly readable account of the depredations of jihad in the Western world and a vivid illustration of the posture of war that the Islamic world has maintained toward Christendom and the post-Christian West since its earliest days.

nor to direct the collective affairs of human beings according to their own misconceived doctrines.” If they do, “the believers would be under an obligation to do their utmost to dislodge them from political power and to make them live in subservience to the Islamic way of life.”<sup>18</sup>

Do their utmost, even to the point of strapping on bombs and blowing themselves up in crowded buses or restaurants, or hijacking airplanes and flying them into office towers.

***PC Myth: Christianity and Islam  
spread in pretty much the same way***

This is one of many moral equivalence arguments made today—they’re so common that it seems as if some people cannot bring themselves to acknowledge that there could be anything negative about Islam unless they take pains to point out that the same negative thing exists in Christianity. And it’s certainly true that no group, religious or unreligious, has a monopoly on either misdeeds or virtue—but it doesn’t follow that all religious traditions are equal either in the nature of their teachings or in the capacity of those teachings to inspire violence.

For nearly the first three centuries of its existence, Christianity was outlawed and subject to sporadic persecution by Roman authorities. Not only was the religion *not* spread by violence, but the lists of Christian martyrs are filled with the names of people subjected to violence *because* they became Christians. In contrast, by the time of Muhammad’s death, the Muslims faced no organized or sustained opposition, and yet continued to take up the sword for their faith.

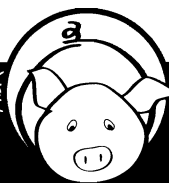
In the early days of Christianity, the Church sent missionaries to preach to non-believers and convince them of the truth of their faith. The ancient Christian nations of Europe all remember the Christian missionaries who brought the faith to them: Saint Patrick in Ireland; Saint Augustine of Canterbury in England; Saints Cyril and Methodius in Central and Eastern Europe; and others like them. They were priests and monks—not

military men. Muslims, by contrast, put armies in the field that faced non-Muslim forces and offered them Muhammad's triple choice of conversion, subjugation, or death. They drew their largest numbers of converts from among conquered dhimmi populations that saw the embrace of Islam as their only path to a livable existence. Given all the depredations of dhimmitude, it is hardly surprising that many dhimmis ultimately chose Islam.

Today, many Muslims hotly deny that Islam spread by force, and point out that forced conversion is forbidden in Islam. That is absolutely true: What spread by force was the political and social hegemony of the Islamic system. Conversions to Islam followed the imposition of that system as the dhimmis began to feel their misery.

"May Allah rip out his spine from his back and split his brains in two, and then put them both back, and then do it over and over again. Amen."

—"praise" for the author on [RevivingIslam.com](http://RevivingIslam.com)



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- ❁ The much-ballyhooed “Golden Age” of Islamic culture was largely inspired by non-Muslims
- ❁ What is known today as the “Islamic world” was created by a series of brutal conquests of non-Muslim lands
- ❁ The Crusades were not acts of unprovoked aggression by Europe against the Islamic world, but a delayed response to centuries of Muslim aggression
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