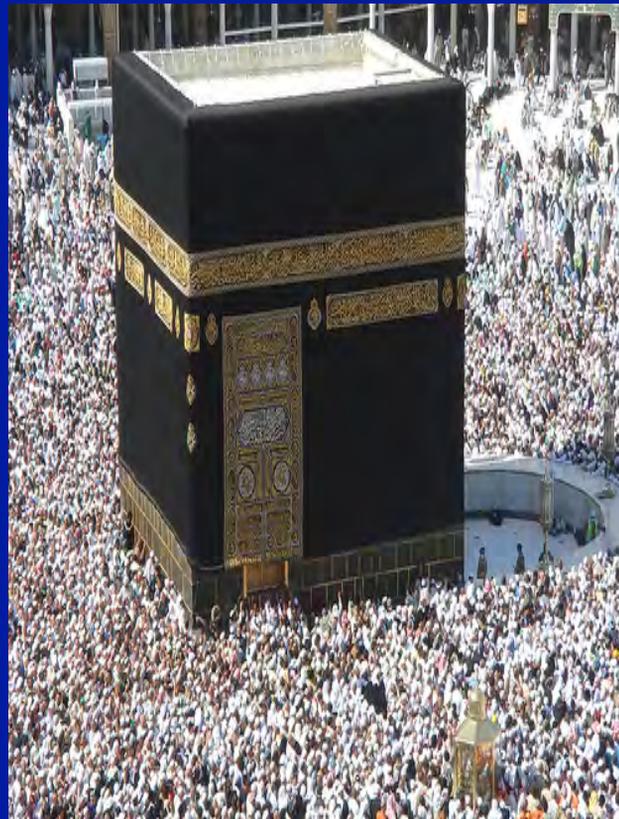
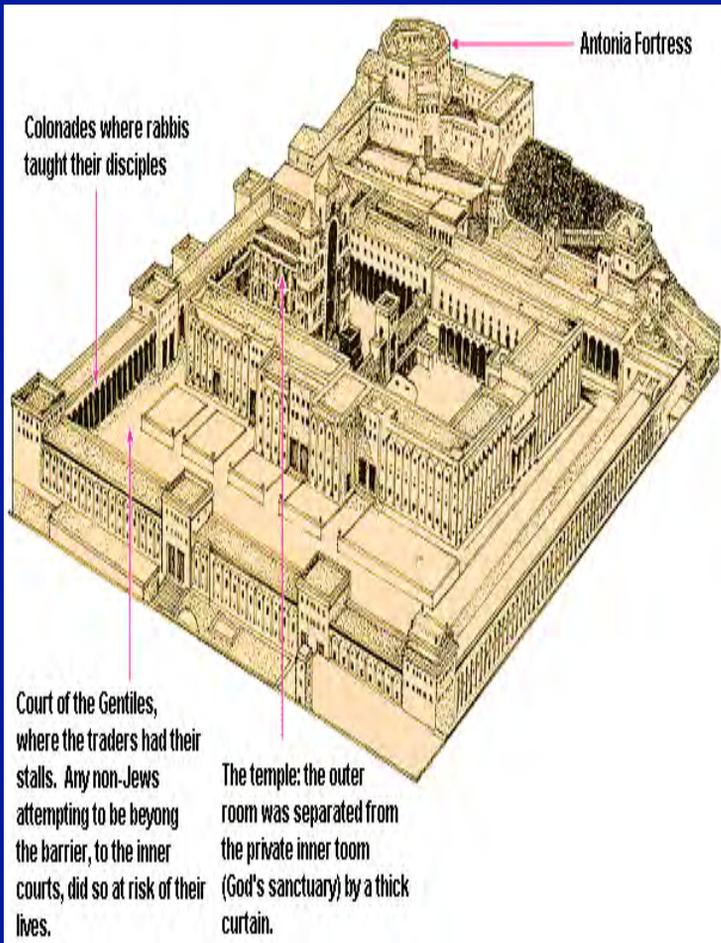




# The Jews, Arabs and Islam



# Dentwater Bible Church

## Israel; The Arabs and Islam

### LIFE FOR THE JEWS UNDER THE CALIPHATES

April 18, 2011

Daniel E. Woodhead



The Gentile Controlled Pre Islamic World  
Maps by Department of Geography University of Calgary

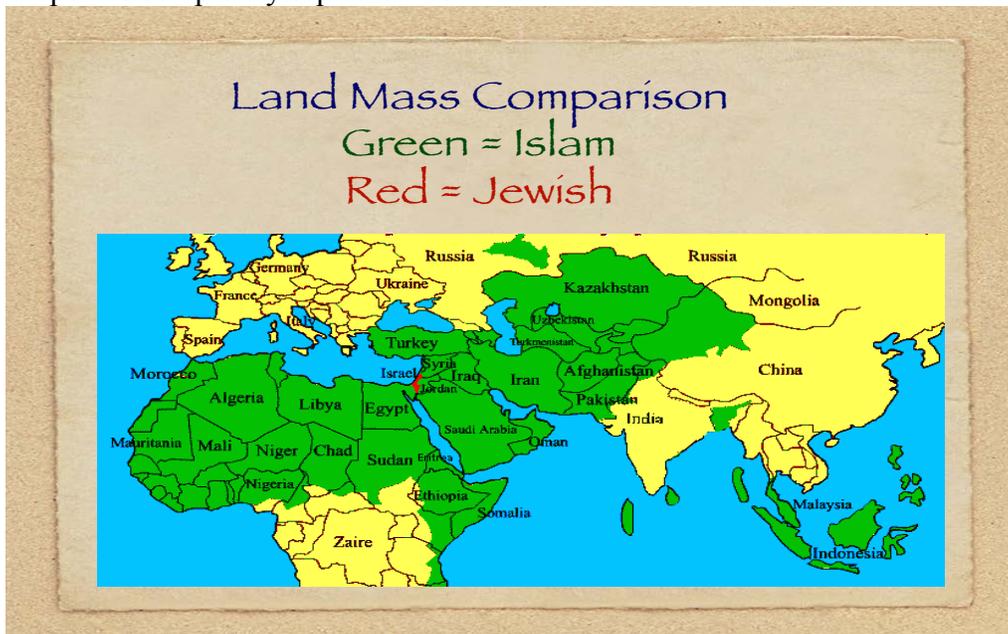
About 224 AD, the Parthian governor of the province of Fars (which still exists as a province in present-day Iran), brought down the central government in Ctesiphon and established the Sassanid Empire, taking the throne as Ardashir I. The Sassanid Empire would last over 400 years, and would be the last Persian Empire before the Islamic conquest of Persia in the 7th century brought the region under Islamic rule. For this reason the Sassanid Empire is important to our understanding of Islamic history, because it was instrumental in promoting Persian nationalism, and creating a Persian identity that remained strong even after the Islamic conquest and attempted Arabization of the region.

The Sassanid Empire was almost constantly at war with the neighboring Roman Empire to the west; Ardashir's son, Shapur I, even captured the Roman Emperor, Valerian, for a time in 260 AD. The animosity between the two empires worsened in the 4th century, when the Roman Emperor, Constantine I, converted to Christianity (Cir 330 AD), and later, Theodosius I made Christianity the official state religion (Cir 388 AD). After that, relations between the two empires took on an increased religious aspect, as the Roman Empire sought to protect all Christians outside its borders, including those under Sassanid rule. The Christians in the Sassanid Empire had not previously faced persecution for their religion, since they were mostly Nestorian Christians (which

believes that teaches the disunion between the human and divine natures of Jesus), a different branch of Christianity than that practiced in the Roman Empire. For that reason the Sassanids viewed their Christians not as following the religion of the enemy, but rather another Persian religion. Still, the Sassanid Christians were the first to be suspected of political disloyalty whenever the empire came into conflict with the Romans after Constantine's time.

Christianity was the state religion of Rome and, Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the Sassanids since the beginning of their empire in the 3rd century AD. The Zoroastrian church became very powerful, and its head, the mobadan mobad (or chief priest) , joined the military and bureaucratic leaders as one of the most important men in the empire. Zoroastrianism has similarities to Judeo-Christian theology. They believe in the disparity between good and evil, or light and darkness; the belief in angels and archangels; Satan as the epitome of evil and the adversary of God; the idea of paradise and hell; the idea of the continued existence of the soul past that of the body; reward and punishment by divine justice; the resurrection of the dead; the Last Judgment; beliefs in millennial periods and the end of the world; and the coming of a Saviour at the end of the world. Many of these ideas would also appear in Islamic theology. Zoroastrianism, which itself might have absorbed some of these ideas from Buddhism and Hinduism, was thus an important influence on several religions that followed it.

The Byzantium Empire is basically the eastern branch of the Roman Empire. While we can't pick just one certain date of separation; it is clear that Roman was divided into western and eastern halves in 285 by Emperor Diocletian and reunited by Emperor Constantine 1st (312 AD). He made the decision in 324 to transfer the capital from Nicomedia (in Asia Minor) to Byzantium on the Bosphorus, which became Constantinople, "City of Constantine" (alternatively "New Rome"). It is now Istanbul. The Roman Empire was finally divided in 364 AD during the reign of Valentinian. So this date is also very important if the Byzantine Empire (or Eastern Roman Empire) is looked upon as completely separated from the West.



Countries Predominantly Muslim 2012 - Map by Author

## JEWISH ISLAMIC RELATIONS BEGIN

Starting with the previously mentioned slaughter of the Qurayza Jews Muhammad set the stage for future generations of Muslims in each of the Caliphates to view the Jews as undesirable. They were to become an object of Islamic focused persecution.

In A.D. 627 Muhammad the founder of Islam while fleeing a Meccan tribe decided to attack the Jewish tribe of the Qurayza, which had refused to convert to Islam. He had trenches dug in the marketplace of Medina and according to Muslim sources beheaded between six and nine hundred Jewish men. One was reported to have converted to Islam and his life was spared. The women, children and property were divided among the Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

By 628 AD Muhammad's follower's had grown to number about seven hundred. In that year he reached an agreement with the remaining Qurayza Jews with a ten-year truce. He allowed them to worship but for only three days each year and considered this a major step on the road to total Jewish subjugation. His next efforts were directed toward the Jewish community of Khaibar.<sup>2</sup>

This was a fertile oasis desert region with an irrigation system, which allowed the Jews to live off the produce. Muhammad's forces came in a surprise attack and routed the farmers who came out of the city to tend their fields. They burned the Jews date palm groves, which was their main crop then they laid siege to the oasis. All the Jews were forced to surrender over the month long seven sieges. He allowed some Jews to remain and tend to the paltry remains of their date palms and garden. They were also granted permission to practice their faith. In return for this the Jews were required to give fifty percent of their harvest to the Muslims. The land itself would belong to the Muslims though. Muhammad took another wife from this group. Her name was Safiya. This event was significant in establishing a precedent for future Islamic relations with the Jews. Muhammad immortalized it with a Sura in the Quran.

“Whatever Allah has bestowed on His Messenger as spoils from the people of the townships is for Allah and for the Messenger and for the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, that it may not circulate only among those of you who are rich” (Sura 59: 7).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians Under Islam*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1985. 44, 46

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert, Martin, *In Ishmael's House, A history of Jews in Muslim Lands*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2010 pg20

<sup>3</sup> Sher ali, Maulvi (English Translator) *Quran*: Chapter 59: Al Hashr English translation Internet version accessed on April 11, 2012 <http://www.alislam.org/quran/search2/showChapter.php?ch=59>

As a result of these terms, Islam demands an equitable distribution of the spoils of war but only for Muslims. The terms imposed upon the Khaibar's Jews would set the precedent for all Islamic case law which they call Sharia on future conquered nations. The people the Muslims conquered are referred to as *dhimmis* and the tax they extracted from this if they were permitted to live is called the *jizya* pole tax. As Muhammad's followers continued their conquest millions of dhimmis would be affected by these terms forced upon the Khaibar Jews. Bat Ye'or, first coined dhimmitude as an historical concept, in 1983 to describe the legal and social conditions of Jews and Christians subjected to Islamic rule.<sup>4</sup> The word dhimmitude comes from dhimmi, an Arabic word meaning, "protected." The historical evidence of the subjugated treatment of Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims under Sharia in the wake of Islamic Jihad over conquered lands makes it quite plain the so called "protection" is actually subjugation. Interestingly in the fourteen centuries since Mohammed's death, Jews in Muslim lands have been faced with both protection and persecution. It all depended upon the whims of the Caliph's in charge. They typically humiliated the Jews in order to remind them of their place in Muslim society. The precedent however had been set and instituted into Islamic Law by Muhammad to persecute them. The term Islam means submission.

#### RASHIDUN CALIPHS (632-661 AD)

The first Caliph after Muhammad was Abu Bakr who was a trusted advisor to Muhammad. He participated in the battles against the Qurayza and the Khaibar's. His emphasis on furthering the Islamic empire was to deal with the nomadic Arabs (bedouins). He declared a jihad against the Byzantine Christians, but died before he was able to carry it out.

In 637 The Siege of Jerusalem took place between the Byzantine Empire and the Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Muhammad's second father-in-law. It began when the Rashidun army, under the command of Abu Ubaidah, besieged Jerusalem in November 636. After six months, Jerusalem surrendered, on condition that they submit only to the Rashidun caliph. In April 637, Caliph Umar traveled to Jerusalem in person to receive the submission of the city.

The Muslim conquest of the city solidified Islamic control over Palestine, a control which would not again be threatened until the First Crusade in the late 11th century. It was at this time it came to be regarded as a holy site by Islam, as well as by Christianity and Judaism. In 613 the Jewish revolt against the Byzantine Heraclius culminated with the conquest of Jerusalem in 614 by Persian and Jewish forces and establishment of Jewish autonomy. The revolt ended with departure of the Persians and an eventual massacre of the Jews in 629 by the Byzantines ending 15 years of Jewish autonomy. By the time Islam arrived, the Persians had become a fiercely nationalistic people. They had their own national religion, Zoroastrianism, and considered the invading Arab Muslims inferior. A Persian Christian assassinated Caliph Umar, Commander of the Faithful, in 644. But by the time of Umar's death, the Muslim Empire was second only to the Chinese Empire in size.

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<sup>4</sup> Ye'or, Bat, *Islam and Dhimmitude, Where Civilizations Collide*, Farleigh Dickenson University Press Lancaster, UK 2002 pg. 21

Following the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem, Jews were once again allowed to live and practice their religion with more freedom in Jerusalem. This occurred eight years after their massacre by the Byzantines and nearly 500 years after their expulsion from the Judea by the Roman Empire (70 AD under Titus Vespasian). It also resulted in the Covenant of Umar I in 637 AD, that outlines the rights and the restrictions of Christians and Jews under Muslim rule conferring on them status of dhimmis. Subsequent chapters will expand on the Muslim-Jewish relationship in Jerusalem throughout the ages from 637 AD to the 21st century.

Uthman, a member of the influential Umayyad family, was chosen as Umar's successor. Uthman served as the third caliph from 644 to 656. In 645, he defeated a Byzantine attempt to recover Alexandria, and in 647 he began expanding the Muslim Empire west of Egypt. He conquered Cyprus in 649 and his forces reached the easternmost boundary of Persia in 653.

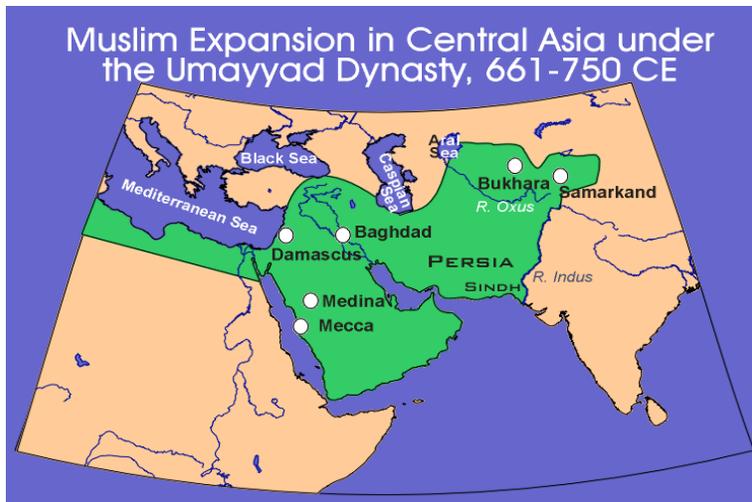
Some of Uthman's other accomplishments were controversial. He sought to create a single, definitive text of the Qur'an. He succeeded in accomplishing his goal, and thereby significantly reduced doctrinal disagreements, but not without criticism from those who suspected Uthman of tampering with the sacred texts.

Discontent abounded in the new empire. In 656 Uthman was assassinated in his home by a group of Egyptians, and civil war immediately erupted.

The Muslims during his reign adopted a policy of tolerance towards other religions, resulting in a positive effect on the newly subjected people, especially the Nestorian and Jacobite Christians and Jews who had been previously persecuted under Byzantine rule. The loyalty of his new subjects was paramount to the success of Muslim rule in the region; therefore excessive taxation or oppression was avoided. The taxes instituted were the kharaj – a tax that landowners and peasants paid according to the productivity of their fields – as well as the jizya – paid by non-Muslims in return for protection under the Muslim state and exemption from military service.

During the periods of the Caliphates there was a conflicting approach to the treatment of Jews within the Umma, which is the worldwide community of Muslim believers. Some persecuted them following Islam and Sharia while others used them to their benefit. While Jews largely held dirty or unclean occupations below the status of their rulers, such as cleaning cesspools, tanning leather, and performing executions as hangmen, some Jews rose high in trades of finance, medicine, and diplomacy. An old Arab saying stated, “the Jew rises to greatness with either the medicine bottle or the moneybag in his hand.” Both modes of employment had specific advantages. As doctors, dhimmi physicians with great skill earned the gratefulness and support of many noble Muslims.

UMAYYADS CALIPHS (661-750 AD)



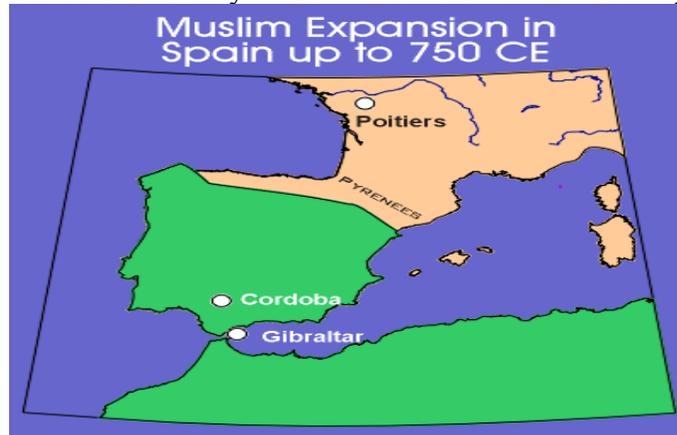
Maps by Department of Geography University of Calgary

One Caliph for example continued persecutions of the Jews during this period. He was the eighth Caliph Umar II Abd al-Azziz who formally codified the rules for the dhimmi status. He was a devout Muslim and shunned luxury. He wanted to clearly set the Muslim and non-Muslim communities apart. Interestingly he set some new rules following those that the Christians in Byzantium made for the Jews there.<sup>5</sup> The ideology of the separation is still in existence today regarding Islam and those who they call the infidel. When Islamic literature attacked both “inferior” religions, it labeled Jews apes and Christians pigs.

1. No building of any new synagogues or churches
2. Dhimmis could not ride horses only donkeys without saddles
3. Non-Muslims could not employ any Muslim
4. Jews and Christians had to wear identifying clothes
5. They could not wear any clothing that was like the Muslim’s wore
6. Green clothing was forbidden
7. They could not serve in a Muslim court as a witness involving a Muslim
8. Because they are infidels their word must not be trusted
9. They could not have a Muslim name
10. They could not prevent anyone from converting to Islam
11. Their tombstones could not be higher than those of the Muslims
12. Men could only enter public bathhouses only if they wore a sign around their necks identifying them as non-Muslims
13. Non-Muslim women could not bathe with Muslim women
14. Sexual relations between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman are forbidden
15. Cursing the Prophet in public is punishable by death
16. The estate of a dhimmi who died went to the Muslim authorities unless the dhimmi’s heirs could prove it belonged to them under Sharia law

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert, Martin, *In Ishmael’s House, A history of Jews in Muslim Lands*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2010 pgs. 36-38

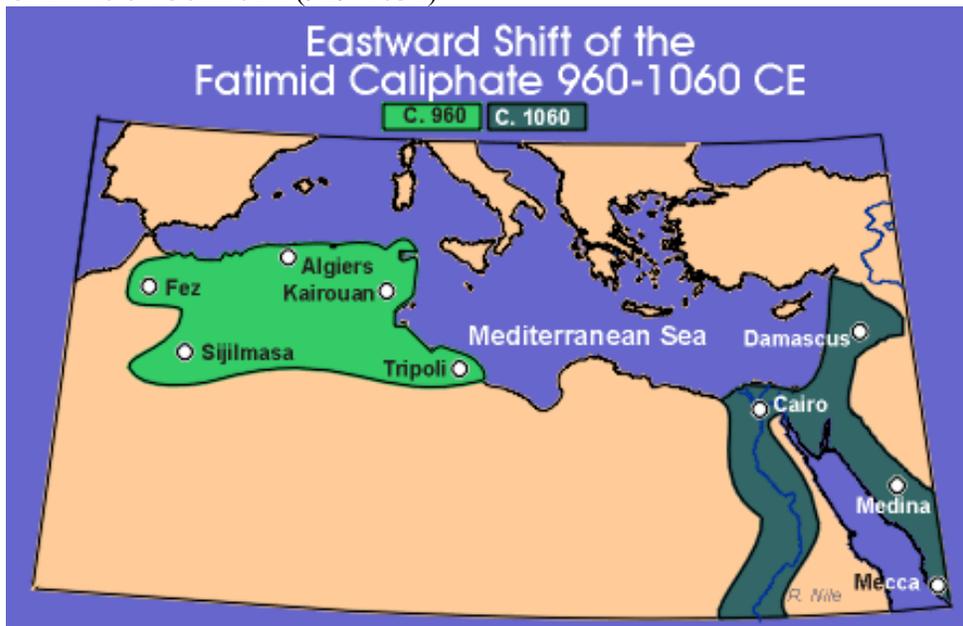
17. No non-Muslim could carry a gun (after 12<sup>th</sup> century)
18. Non-Muslim cannot inherit anything from a Muslim
19. Non-Muslim could not marry a Muslim woman but a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman who must convert to Islam
20. Conversion of any Muslim to Judaism or Christianity was strictly forbidden



Map by Department of Geography University of Calgary

EMIRS OF CORDOBA (756-929)

CALIPHS OF CORDOBA (929-1031)



Map by Department of Geography University of Calgary

ABBASID CALIPHS (750-1517)

OTTOMAN EMPIRE (1451-1922)

NEXT SESSION: THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR & JERUSALEM UNDER ISLAM.