

Exploring Islam in the Light of Scripture (5)

A rabbi told the story about a man who complained that when he and his wife get into an argument his "wife gets historical." "No, no," the rabbi said, "You mean she gets hysterical." "No, no " the man answered. "She gets historical. The minute we get into an argument, she starts to recite all the bad things I have done for the last twenty years." This is the way it is with the Muslims and the Israelis. Every time they sit down to discuss their differences and work for a peace settlement, they recite their familiar grievances and claims. So to come to some understanding of the issues it is necessary to delve into history.

Israel: a Licensed Grievance

In the early stages of Islamic development some Muslims were tolerant of Jews. Caliph Muawiya (661-680) even considered them to be his "faithful allies." Jewish bankers were influential in Muslim Baghdad (c. 880-930). But why then are there clashes between these two faith communities in our time? In his book, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, Bernard Lewis points to the existence of Israel as the key to the conflict between the Israelis and the Muslims. He calls it "the licensed grievance - the only one that can be freely and safely expressed in those Muslim countries where the media are either wholly owned or strictly overseen by the government." And he notes that Israel serves as a useful stand-in for complaints about the economic privation and political repression under which most Muslims live, and a way of deflecting the resulting anger.

Today Jerusalem serves as a potent weapon in rallying the support of Muslims in non-Arab countries from Sub-Saharan Africa to Southeast Asia. It contains the third most holy site of Islam – the al-Aqsa Mosque. The second caliph of Islam built the mosque and it has been in continuous use since. After the 1967 war with Israel and the Israeli conquest of the holy Islamic shrines in Jerusalem, Islamic annual conferences repeatedly proclaim the sacred duty of Muslims to liberate Jerusalem from Zionist control. The only acceptable solution for them is the elimination of present-day Israel. They argue it does not belong to any group of people – it belongs to Islam. They see Israel as a cancer planted by the Western countries and the United States. Wherever you see Islamic terrorism, you will hear of hatred toward the Jews and those who support Israel, in particular, the United States. In the videotaped murder of journalist Daniel Pearl, his killers forced him to begin with a brief, factually correct description of his roots, "My father is Jewish. My mother is Jewish. I am Jewish."

The Koran and Anti-Semitism

Ex-Muslim Dr. Mark A. Gabriel writes in *Islam and the Jews*, "It was natural for me to grow up with a great hatred toward the Jews because that is the true attitude of Islam." He remarked that his family said, "Allah never lies. He told us through the Koran that we

would never have peace with Jews until Resurrection Day." But the Koran has contradictory messages about the Jews. On the one hand, the Koran says that the Jews are the greatest enemies of Islam. It condemns Jews and Christians for saying they are children of God. It is blasphemy to say, "I am a child of God." Sura 5:18 says "And (both) the Jews and Christians say: 'We are the children of Allah and His loved ones.' Say: 'Why then does He punish you for your sins?' Nay, you are but human beings of those He has created..." An insulting text in the Koran is Sura 62:5: "The likeness of those who are entrusted with the Law of Moses, yet apply it not, is as the likeness of the ass carrying books. Wretched is the likeness of folk who deny the revelations of Allah. And Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk."

On the other hand, when he became "the apostle of Allah," Muhammad believed that converting the Jewish people to Islam would provide powerful assets to support his "revelations." Koranic revelations in Medina presented at first a positive attitude toward the Jews. The Koran called the Jews Allah's only chosen people (Sura 2:47). Allah honoured Jewish people and chose all his prophets from them and made them kings and gave them riches. In deference to the Jews, Muhammad also commanded his followers to turn toward Jerusalem when they prayed. He recognized the benefits of the finances of the Jews and their theology. He also expected that Jewish converts would be effective missionaries for Islam. He also hoped that Jewish converts would use their skills to convince the idol worshippers to follow Islam. But his hopes were dashed. After about a year in Medina, Muhammad had converted only a few Jews to Islam. The great majority rejected him completely. In Medina, the majority of the Jews dissociated themselves from Muhammad's message and tried to resist his growth in power. In the end, two of the three Jewish tribes were expelled and the third was punished with execution and enslavement. In fact, Muhammad annihilated the Bani Qurayzah Jews to the last man because of the harm he believed they were causing Muslim society, his government, and all his people. Consequently, the Koran came to express a sense of radical discontinuity between the prophet of Islam and the People of the Book. The Koran comments: "Allah has cursed them for their disbelief, so they believe not except a few" (Sura 4:46). In January 624, Muhammad instructed his followers to face Mecca. Pilgrimage sites became Mecca and Medina. Within a short time Islam became a predominantly Arab-focussed faith. By AD 627, the Jews were banished from all of the Arabian Peninsula.

The Present Day Struggle

For many years Muslims had an ambivalent attitude towards the Jews. There were times of severe persecution, there were also times they were tolerated as dhimmis, second-class citizens. But no series of events changed the course of history in the Middle East as much as the rise of Hitler and the horrors of the Holocaust. After World War II, Israel became a state, a haven for Jews from around the world. But many Israeli Jews are still haunted by the fact that Hitler clearly laid out all of his plans for the Jews in *Mein Kampf* and other publications long before he came to power, but no one paid attention. Now they fear Iran and its revolutionary anti-Semitic government.

Khomeini

What was once regarded, as an Arab cause became a sacred cause with the Ayatollah Khomeini's endorsement of the Palestinian struggle against Israel. Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary takeover of Iran in 1979 posed a radical Islamic threat to the very existence of Israel. For Khomeini, Israel represents all that is anti-Islamic. In his *Islamic Government* he describes his agenda for Israel and the non-Islamic world. Tellingly, the cover of the English translation calls the book "*Ayatollah Khomeinis' Mein Kampf*." According to Khomeini, Israel is in a state of war with the Muslims. Therefore, whoever helps and supports it, is in turn in a state of war with the Muslims. He accuses the Jews of tampering with the Koran and distorting its phrases in new editions, which they have published in the occupied territories and other parts. And he writes, "We must expose this treachery and must shout at the top of our voices so that we may make the people realize that the Jews and their foreign masters seek to snare Islam and pave the way for Jews to dominate the entire world."

Hamas and Hezbollah

The two groups engaged in direct struggle against Israel today, with the support of Iran, are Hamas and Hezbollah. Hamas (an acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement), in its covenant of August 18, 1988, called for an uncompromising Jihad against Israel. Its motto is "Allah is the goal, the Prophet its model, the Koran is the constitution, Jihad is the path, and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of all wishes." The preamble to the covenant of Hamas clearly states its goal: "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it." On September 11, 2001, Hamas rejoiced in the destruction of the twin towers in New York. Its most dramatic – and explicit – response to this act of terrorism was reported in their weekly, *Al-Risala*, in its September 13 issue: "Allah has answered our prayers."

The other movement dedicated to combatting Israelis is Lebanon's Hezbollah (Party of God). Emboldened by Khomeini's support, they aimed for the establishment of an Iranian-style Islamic republic. The party was founded in 1982 in Baalbek, in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. Its members belong to the Shiites who are the country's perpetual underclass. It quickly became an effective fighting force thanks to training and weaponry provided by Iranian Revolutionary Guard, who were dispatched to Baalbek apparently to fight Israel. The Revolutionary Guards, in turn, received their orders, finances, and logistical support from Tehran via the Iranian embassy in Damascus.

(To be continued)

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