

1. Introduction

A few years ago, terrible news reports from the Middle East and North Africa dominated the Western media. Shocking images of beheadings and heart wrenching stories of Christians and others, who were forced at gunpoint to choose between becoming a Muslim or be killed, cut deep into the hearts of many. Even al-Qaeda leaders distanced themselves from the Sunni group who proclaimed the Islamic State in the Middle East and at its height controlled vast areas in Syria and Iraq. The call of I.S. to leave one's home land and help them expand the Islamic state, was answered by hundreds of youth in the West who joined them. They seemed to have no lack of funds to finance their fighters and provided them with weapons and ammunition, indicating the likelihood of big donors behind the scenes.

What motivates groups like the Islamic State and Boko Haram to what most people call extremist actions and where will this end? What does the Bible have to say about this? These are the questions addressed in this article. In order to gain a better understanding of what is happening, we first look at what motivates people like the I.S. fighters.

2. Motivation

a) Mission

At the forefront stands the mission and desire to establish Islam as the one and only religion in the world. The mission comes from Qur'anic verses and *Hadith*¹, such as the following:

"O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely [and perfectly] and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy."²

"And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful."³

"It is He Who has sent His Messenger with Guidance and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the Pagans may detest (it)."⁴

"Allah's Apostle said, "By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, son of Mary (Jesus) will shortly descend amongst you people (Muslims) as a just ruler and will break the Cross and kill the pig and abolish the Jizya (a tax taken from the non-Muslims, who are in the protection, of the Muslim government) ..." ⁵

¹ A large compilation of the sayings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad

² Translation of Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:208 <http://ukim.org/ukim-struggle>

³ Translation of Surah Al'Imran, 3:104 <http://ukim.org/ukim-struggle>

⁴ Surah 9:33 Yusuf Ali translation. See also Surah 48:28

⁵ Bukhari Volume 3 Book 34, #425. Source: <http://www.quranexplorer.com>. See also Bukhari Vol. 3 Book 43, #425 and Bukhari Vol.4, Book 55, #657

"The Prophet (peacebe_upon_him) said: There is no prophet between me and him, that is, Jesus (peace_be_upon_him). He will descent (to the earth). When you see him, recognise him: a man of medium height, reddish fair, wearing two light yellow garments, looking as if drops were falling down from his head though it will not be wet. He will fight the people for the cause of Islam. He will break the cross, kill swine, and abolish jizyah. Allah will perish all religions except Islam. He will destroy the Antichrist and will live on the earth for forty years and then he will die. The Muslims will pray over him."⁶

b) Desire

The desire comes from much frustration over the current situation. The following issues are difficult for Muslims who take their faith seriously:

- 1) The decline in morality, fed through the media and internet, leads to the breakdown of families and society as a whole. Promiscuous behavior and dress are promoted freely, as well as a materialistic lifestyle, while respect and honor for others and for God are often ridiculed.
- 2) The presence and influence of foreign powers in Islamic lands indicates a failure by the Muslims to rule even themselves. The experience of military dominance and political pressure from America and other Western nations triggers deep shame and powerlessness. This stands in complete contrast with the mission of Islam. See also the article "Muslims feel rejected" at www.godlovesishmael.com/rejected.
- 3) The tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in Western nations, with the some times perceived and at other times real discrimination of Muslims, demands a solution. The democratic governments have been unable to provide it, making it easy to believe that the pure Islam of groups like the Islamic State offer the perfect solution.

3. Radical Islamic groups and the history of Islam

The activities of the leaders and adherents of the I.S. and other groups must be viewed in the historic context in which they operate. In order to gain more understanding, a brief history of Islam follows.

a) Astounding growth

In the year 610 AD the founder of Islam, Mohammed, claimed to have received his first revelation from God, by mediation of the angel Gabriel. Mohammed became a preacher of the revelations and gathered a small group of followers in Mecca.

When the opposition against him rose too high, Muhammad fled to the city of Medina, where he continued preaching the new teachings. There he gained a significant group of followers,

⁶ Dawud Book 37, Hadith 4310. Source: <http://www.quranexplorer.com>

who were willing to defend their faith in word and deed. They did not shrink from the use of violence and gained victories over other tribes. Muhammad gained more and more power and became a political leader, besides being the religious head. They saw the victories as great blessings of God and Muhammad increasingly sanctioned tactics in the spread of Islam that caused his enemies to be frightened. He also claimed to receive wonderful promises for his followers, such as the free use of booty and captured women. The pinnacle of promises was the guarantee that those who died in the struggle for God would immediately enter paradise. After Muhammad's death, the first four rulers functioned as political, military and religious heads of Islam like him. They were able to expand the influence of Islam across a vast region and established Islamic rule and law wherever they were victorious. Despite internal struggles, such as between the Umayyad and Abbasids in the 8th century, by the 15th century the Islamic rule was firmly established from Morocco to Indonesia. With the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 the Ottoman empire rose to a new height and Islam's influence reached into Europe as far as the Balkan countries.

b) A reversal of power

The Islamic rule continued largely unthreatened until the beginning of the 19th century when European nations began to colonize countries with a majority Muslim population in Asia and North Africa.⁷ The Muslims' first reaction was to unify the tribes by imposing Sharia law and call for jihad against the invader.⁸ Despite some successes, these initiatives didn't survive and a new reaction could be observed. Muslim rulers took over Western style of politics, and the Muslim elite adopted Western technological, social and cultural ways. However, many religious leaders were unhappy with the increased influence of the political leaders and the decreased role for the Islamic scholars. Memories of Islamic rule intensified the resistance against Western colonialism and its worldly influence over Islamic nations.

When the Ottoman Caliphate dissolved in 1924, the ground was ready for a new initiative to turn back to the original values and rule of Islam. In 1928, the Islamic scholar Hassan al-Banna established the Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt with the motto "Believers are but Brothers." Later they became known as the Muslim Brotherhood and expanded their motto to "Allah is our objective; the Qur'an is the Constitution; the Prophet is our leader; jihad is our way; death for the sake of Allah is our wish."⁹

The Western oriented governments in the Middle East suppressed all initiatives of Islamization, which only fueled the determination by the Brotherhood and others to re-establish the Sharia and create an Islamic State.

⁷ In the 19th century, European encroachment on the Muslim world came with the retreat of the Ottoman Empire, the French conquest of Algeria (1830), the disappearance of the Moghul Empire in India (1857), the Russian incursions into the Caucasus (1828) and Central Asia.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_aspects_of_Islam

⁸ Examples include Abd al-Qadir in Algeria, the Mahdi in Sudan, Shamil in the Caucasus, the Senussi in Libya and in Chad, Mullah-i Lang in Afghanistan, the Akhund of Swat in India, and later, Abd al-Karim in Morocco. All these movements eventually failed "despite spectacular victories such as the destruction of the British army in Afghanistan in 1842 and the taking of Khartoum in 1885. Source: *ibid*.

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_Brotherhood

In 1958, Egypt and Syria initiated the establishment of a pan-Arabic state across the Middle East, called the United Arab Republic, which lasted until a coup in Syria in 1961. Two years later, in 1963, a new agreement was signed between Egypt, Syria and Iraq.¹⁰

c) The State of Israel

The establishment of the State of Israel was a major shameful development for many Muslims. The fact that they couldn't overcome the Israeli army in 1948 was already bad enough, but the defeat during the 6-day war in 1967 with the subsequent loss of land to Israel, was absolutely unacceptable. Perhaps worst of all was the fall of Islam's third holiest city, Jerusalem,¹¹ into the hands of their hated enemy.

In 1973 the Arab nations of Egypt and Syria attempted to recover the land they had lost 6 years earlier, but they were again defeated by Israel. It was clear to all the Arabs that Israel had succeeded because of the continual military support from the United States.¹² Thus the Americans began to be seen increasingly as enemy as well.

d) Islamic Revival

Following the 1973 war, the oil producing Arab nations united in the OPEC, decided to decrease their export, which led to the energy crisis.¹³ Subsequently, self-confidence grew among Muslims that they were not powerless. In 1979 the Islamists overthrew the Western oriented government of the Shah of Iran and established a purist Islamic state, with one religious and political head, similar to the founder of their religion. The call back to Islam spread from Iran throughout the Muslim world, visible in the increased veiling of women.

During that time, immigration of Muslim laborers into Western Europe led to an increased awareness among them of the differences between Islamic and non-Islamic culture and values. This in turn brought a deeper conviction to many Muslims in both the West as well as in their countries of origin that Islam is the only answer to all the problems in the world. Additionally, the secular Arab governments had failed as well, so only a return to the original values of their religion could bring the desired lasting change. With the teaching of jihad being an integral part of the Islamic faith, Muslim preachers began to call their listeners to obedience, both in a

¹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan-Arabism>

¹¹ The fact that Jerusalem is the first holy city for the Jews, receives no consideration by those who are convinced that the whole world must be submitted to Islam.

¹² It is remarkable that for the last decades the United States have been the greatest superpower in the world, while the Arab world has been struggling in many ways. Apart from the oil wealth, the Arabs have little to consider blessings of God. This fits with the words God put in the mouth of the pagan prophet Balaam, "Blessed are those who bless you [Israel], and cursed are those who curse you." Numbers 24:9, *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles

¹³ In response to U.S. support of Israel, the Arab members of OPEC, led by Saudi Arabia, decided to reduce oil production by 5% per month on October 17. On October 19, President Nixon authorized a major allocation of arms supplies and \$2.2 billion in appropriations for Israel. In response, Saudi Arabia declared an embargo against the United States, later joined by other oil exporters and extended against the Netherlands and other states, causing the 1973 energy crisis. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur_War

personal struggle to live a moral life as well as a community to return to Islamic rule in their countries by all means possible, including violence.

The last few decades have seen an increase in violent Islamic groups who are answering that call in the way they believe the Qur'an teaches them. The Taliban, Boko Haram, al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda all want to establish a pure form of Islamic rule in the regions where they operate. Still, they have not been very successful during the years they've been active. Yes, they have gained ground here and there, but it's nothing in comparison to the rapid expansion of Islam at the beginning. And yet that is their model!

e) The emergence of I.S.

It seems that the absence of success by other Islamist groups is behind the establishment of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. All these groups claim to be implementing the religious tenets of Sharia law, but their results aren't showing the desired outcome.

The adherents of the Islamic State have gone further than anyone before them in purifying the Arab lands. During the period of their rule in Syria and Iraq, they defied Western and Arab governments and made their demands known, using the most modern means available. They aggressively recruited followers, regionally and worldwide, to join their cause through slick online magazines. These were filled with appealing Islamic teaching, seeking to convince people that this is the way to really follow in the footsteps of their prophet.

Finally, they have not shied away from shedding blood and are ready to radically kill anyone who doesn't comply with their theology or follow their orders.

4. The concern

It is the complete lack of respect for the lives of men, women and children, which makes them such a scary radical group. The question that comes up is: will they succeed in conquering the Middle East and radicalizing the rest of the Muslim population, including those living in the West? For Christians the additional question arises: are they perhaps the Antichrist or his forerunner?

a) Will I.S. or other radical groups succeed?

In evaluating the methods and successes of I.S. the following can be observed:

Killing was also part of Mohammed's life and example, from the time he was in Medina and became a powerful ruler. According to Islamic sources, Mohammed led dozens of campaigns and ordered the execution of a number of opponents.¹⁴ Though exact figures of killings under his leadership are not available, the numbers as recorded in the most authoritative sources already add up to over a thousand, and several times it simply says there were many or very many casualties.¹⁵ Among the victims were many people whose sole crime was that they didn't want to accept him as prophet from God, such as the Jews. Only those who became Muslims or

¹⁴ http://wikiislam.net/wiki/List_of_Killings_Ordered_or_Supported_by_Muhammad

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_expeditions_of_Muhammad

who fled away saved their lives. The same is true under the leadership of the first successors of Muhammad, who followed in his footsteps and forcibly subjected many nations to Islam.

Though the Islamic empire grew very rapidly and stood for many centuries, it didn't last forever. God allowed other nations to become more powerful, so that the Islamic dominance was broken.

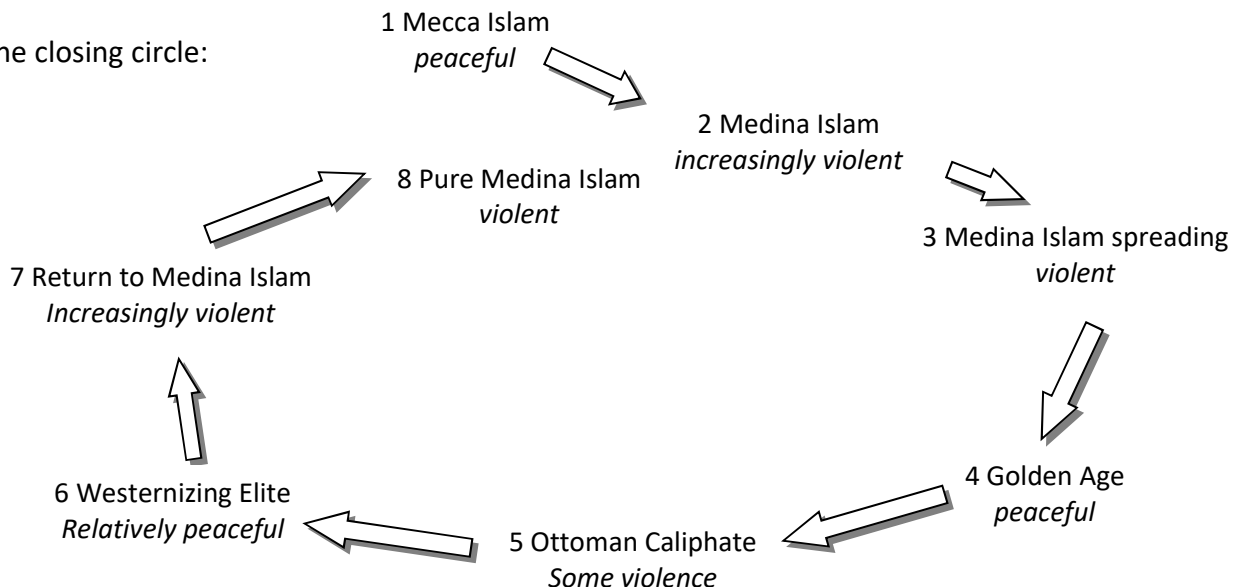
During the last century, all attempts to reunite the Arabs into one Islamic State have failed.

There were always disagreements and at times even fighting among themselves. The same is true today, where even al-Qaeda has renounced the ways of the adherents of I.S..

The current methods by which the I.S. adherents are trying to establish an Islamic State, remind us of the way Islam began. It seems they are applying the example of their prophet in the purest ways. This exposes to the world, the large extent in which violence was part of Islam becoming a world religion.

A pattern emerges of a closing circle: At the peaceful start in Mecca, the Islamic faith made very little impact. After the killing of opponents was added to the preaching in Medina, Islam began to spread. As the aggression against opponents or neutral tribes increased, the Islamic religion expanded faster and wider. In those areas where the Muslims had the upper hand, the need for violence decreased and paved the way for the Islamic Golden Age. Over the last century, as the influence of Muslims decreased, radical groups sprung up who increasingly used violence to reach their goals. The extreme violence of I.S. points to a last attempt to win, but it looks like the battle is already lost.

The closing circle:



1. 610-622 AD: Mecca Islam – peaceful, oppressed
2. 622-632 AD: Medina Islam – increasingly violent and oppressive
3. 632-750 AD: Caliphs / Abbasids / Islam colonizes – very violent and oppressive¹⁶

¹⁶ See Overview of Violence in Early Islam at www.godlovesishmael.com/site/en/articles-and-studies-us/

4. 750 AD – 16th century "Golden Age" of Islam – peaceful period, thanks to the oppressed enemy and a liberal interpretation of the Qur'an
5. 16th-beginning 19th century: Ottoman Caliphate - Islam colonizes – spread through emigration, trade and violence
6. Beginning 19th - mid 20th century: Islam colonized – Westernization of elite Muslims
7. Second half 20th century: Islam in contact with West – Revival of Medina Islam
8. Beginning 21st century: Islam in conflict – Medina Islam¹⁷ as literal as possible (I.S., Boko Haram, al-Shabab, ...). violent and oppressive

The I.S. adherents are showing the world the reality of Medina Islam¹⁸ and many Muslims are embarrassed about it. Some are seeking answers through interpretations of the Qur'an that would lessen or eliminate the element of aggression in Islam, even though it is vividly promoted in many Qur'an verses.¹⁹ Others completely turn their back to Islam and to God, while again others have the courage to seek answers in the Bible.

b) Where is God in all this?

It is God's desire that all men should come to forgiveness and eternal salvation, which He freely offers through faith in the substitute death of Jesus the Messiah. During the first Islamic millennium there was very little interaction between Christians in the West and Muslims. Apart from a few people, like Raymond Lull and Francis of Assisi, no-one bothered telling the Muslims about God's love for them. The last two centuries saw a remarkable increase in Christians reaching out to Muslims. However, their efforts were greatly hampered by the lack of freedom to share in the Muslim majority nations.

It seems that God, out of His love for the physical and spiritual descendants of Ishmael, orchestrated the immigration of many Muslims into Europe and America, so that the followers of Jesus could more easily love them and share about the hope that is in them. Sadly, many Christians in the West feel threatened by the increased Islamic expressions around them and

¹⁷ Besides this expression of Islam, there is also: Post-Islam (Ex-Muslim atheists), Mecca Islam (moderate Muslims) and Pan-Islam (believers who know through a personal revelation from God that they have received forgiveness of sins and have eternal life)

¹⁸ The following Qur'anic verses, which the I.S. adherents faithfully obey, are all from the Medina period.

Killing Christians and other non-Muslims: Sura 9:5 "fight and slay the Pagans wherever you find them"; Sura 47:4a "Therefore, when you meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks"; Sura 8:12; 4:74; 47:4b-7

Fighting Muslims who disobey the command to fight in jihad: Sura 47:8-9 "But those who reject (Allah), - for them is destruction, and (Allah) will render their deeds astray (from their mark). That is because they hate the Revelation of Allah; so He has made their deeds fruitless."; Sura 9:38-39

Having sex with captured women: Sura 33:50b "We know what We have appointed for them as to their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess"; Sura 33:52; 4:24; Hadith Malik Muwatta 28.38A "The Christian and Jewish slave-girl are halal [to have intercourse with] for their master by right of possession"

Many Islamic scholars argue that the I.S. adherents interpret the Qur'an wrongly by applying verses like these literally. At the same time the I.S. adherents argue that these scholars interpret the Qur'an wrongly, by explaining away the true literal meaning

¹⁹ See article "Is Islam a religion of peace?" at www.godlovesishmael.com/site/en/articles-and-studies-us/

avoid befriending the immigrants. The lack of positive interaction becomes the cause for some Muslims to radicalize and believe that organizations like I.S. are the only solution.

With relatively few Christians loving the Muslims wholeheartedly, it seems God is allowing all the suffering caused by the I.S. fighters to open the eyes of the masses, so that they will realize that Medina Islam isn't the answer.

As for those Muslims who hold on to Meccan Islam and want to live peacefully and respectfully, they are invited to follow the advice in the Qur'an about the things that are hard to understand, and search the Scriptures.²⁰

This may well be the way in which God is accomplishing His purposes for the physical and spiritual descendants of Ishmael. Many of them live in nations about whom the prophets foretold they will come to Jerusalem to worship God among His people Israel.²¹ God's desire for them is to return to the solution He has been offering us since the first coming of Jesus the Messiah.

5. Radical Islam and the Antichrist

Throughout the history of the church, people have been asking who the antichrist might be and when he will appear. After the Reformation, a number of Protestant scholars were of the opinion that the Pope in Rome fulfilled all the criteria. Others believed that the antichrist would come forth from Islam. Still others see the possibility of Islam being the forerunner of the antichrist.

There are good arguments to expect the antichrist to be an adherent of Islam. At the same time there are clear prophecies about Islamic nations turning to Jesus the Messiah.

Here are three proposals as to what God's plan may be:

- i. In line with Old Testament prophecies about Jesus the Messiah, we know that seemingly contradictory statements turned out to be completely accurate. The suffering servant of God is really the same as the King of kings, who will reign forever. That means it is possible that the antichrist will be an Islamist, and that at a later stage many Muslims will worship Jesus as Lord.
- ii. Possibly both will happen at the same time: Islamic extremism will increase and the antichrist will appear from among the Muslim radicals. At the same time, many Muslims will turn away from the violence and hatred and surrender their lives to the Jesus, the Prince of Peace.
- iii. A third option is that the antichrist will not be a Muslim, but will come forth from a movement that claims to be Christian or have Christian roots and yet denies Jesus as Lord. In that case, the promises concerning the nations surrounding Israel in the Middle East indicate that perhaps whole tribes and people groups will embrace the truths about Jesus the Messiah in the Bible.

²⁰ See Surah 10:94 and <http://www.answering-islam.org/Green/onbible.htm>

²¹ See Study Prophecies Nations at www.godlovesishmael.com/prophecies

Of these three possibilities, the last one seems to fit most with other teachings in the Bible. According to Romans 11:25-26, a fullness of non-Jewish believers will be reached before the Jews will be saved. We can only speak of a fullness if there has been a harvest among the 1.9 billion Muslims worldwide. We also think about how Israel will become jealous because of the salvation of the non-Jews. The conversion of the descendants of their half-brother Ishmael will cause the greatest jealousy.²²

We also consider the promise that the desert will blossom and that justice will take place. This is a beautiful picture of spiritual growth of and bearing the fruits of righteousness by the peoples living in and around the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula, most of whom are currently Muslims.²³

All of this is contained in God's very first promise concerning Ishmael and his physical and spiritual descendants. He would be a wild donkey man – a free man, released from physical and spiritual slavery.²⁴

6. Conclusion

Based on history, it is unlikely that the I.S. adherents will succeed in establishing one unified Islamic State. Their extreme violence is a reminder of how the founder of Islam and his followers established Islam as a world religion.

God is sovereign over the world and He is orchestrating events so that many may come to salvation. It seems He is using the evil, committed by certain Islamists, to bring many to repentance and to a deep personal relationship with Jesus our Savior.

This fits the prophetic plan, according to which God wants to use the Arabs to make Israel jealous so that they will come to faith as well.

Let us pray as Jesus the Messiah taught us:²⁵

Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us [our brothers and sisters in the Middle East] this day our [their] daily bread,
and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us [them] not into temptation, but deliver us [them] from evil.

²² See Romans 10:19-20

²³ See the study at www.godlovesishmael.com/desert

²⁴ See the two animation films on the home page of www.godlovesishmael.com

²⁵ Matthew 6:9-13, *ESV*