



"The timid civilized world has found nothing with which to oppose the onslaught of a sudden revival of barefaced barbarity, other than concessions and smiles."

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

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## *Dark Beginnings*

The landscape of religion is shifting. While Christendom—in the broadest sense of the word—has claimed the largest number of adherents for centuries, present trends strongly indicate that we are living in a religious axial period, a time when the old order and powers decay and are replaced by new powers. Barring a radical course correction, adherents of Islam will outnumber professing Christians very shortly—perhaps in as few as twenty years. According to David Pawson, author of *The Challenge of Islam to Christians*, Islam is growing at a rate *four times* faster than nominal Christianity. This growth trend is not just in the Third World, though. In the U.S., Islam is growing at a rate of 4-8% annually. Perhaps most startling, over 80% of the American converts to Islam were raised in "Christian" churches. According to one estimate, as many as 60,000 Americans raised in nominally Christian homes convert to Islam annually.

In keeping up with this growth, English translations of the Koran are now being found on American bestseller lists. But relatively few in the Western world know the origin of the Koran, and fewer still understand the implications thereof. Just as the Word of [God](#) is the written source of Christianity, so the Koran is the fount from which the religion, culture, and government of Islam flows. But what is the source of this spring? What is its fundamental nature—fresh or bitter ([James 3:11](#))?

Muslims believe that Muhammad was the solitary human recipient of the words of the

Koran, and he received them directly—word-for-word—from Allah while sleeping in the Cave of Hira. But first, Muhammad needed to be prepared to receive these words, so Allah sent a supernatural being, claiming the name of Gabriel, to facilitate Muhammad's receptiveness. Karen Armstrong, a popular writer and apologist for Islam, gives this account of what happened between Islam's prophet and "Gabriel":

Muhammad was torn from his sleep in his mountain cave and felt himself overwhelmed by a devastating ... presence. Later he explained this ineffable experience by saying that an angel had enveloped him in a terrifying embrace so that it felt as though the breath was being forced from his body. The angel gave him the curt command: "Recite!" Muhammad protested that he could not recite; he was not a *kahin*, one of the ecstatic prophets of Arabia. But, he said, the angel simply embraced him again until, just as he thought he had reached the end of his endurance, he found the divinely inspired words of a new scripture pouring forth from his mouth.

As disturbing as this narrative is, one thing has been left out: it was actually not until the *third* time that the "angel" had strangled Muhammad that he finally began to recite the words being forced into his mind.

The alarming encounter with the spirit so terrified Muhammad that he believed that he had been possessed—and rightly so. Apparently he became so distraught that he was ready to commit suicide. One biography records it this way:

So I (Muhammad) read it, and he ("Gabriel") departed from me. And I awoke from my sleep, and it was as though these words were written on my heart.... Now none of God's creatures was more hateful to me than an (ecstatic [mystic]) poet or a man possessed: I could not even look at them. I thought, "Woe is me poet or possessed—never shall Quaraysh (a tribe) say this of me! I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest." So I went forth to do so, and when I was midway on the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying "O Muhammad! Thou are the apostle of God and I am Gabriel."

This dark beginning to the "holy book" of Islam stands in stark contrast to the revelation of the Bible to mankind. The "Gabriel" in these accounts bears no resemblance to the Gabriel of the Bible (see Daniel 8-9; Luke 1), nor to any other angel—at least not an angel *of God*. When the Bible shows angels giving a message to men, they typically

begin their interacting with "Do not be afraid"—not with enveloping, squeezing, suffocating, or strangling. Furthermore, none of the biblical prophets were ever in doubt about the source of the message they were given—they could all say confidently, "The word of the Lord came to me...", or something similar. While some of the prophets certainly were afraid as a result of their encounters with God or God's messengers, there was no fear that they had been possessed by a demon. They were afraid because of their own sinfulness, profaneness, and unworthiness.

To further confirm the words given to the prophets of the Old Testament, God sent His own Son in human flesh. [Jesus Christ](#) is the scripture Personified, as shown by this explosive beginning to the book of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. ([John 1:1-3](#), 14)

The author of Hebrews starts his treatise with this bombshell:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels [including Gabriel], as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. ([Hebrews 1:1-4](#))

The God-breathed Scripture reveals Jesus Christ to be the savior of mankind, and the Son of the Supreme God of the universe. The book of Hebrews tells of His superiority to angels, His superiority to Moses, His superiority to any human priesthood, His superiority to the system of worship through the Tabernacle and Temple, the superiority of His sacrifice, and the superiority of His New Covenant. Islam, however, sees Jesus Christ as *merely* a prophet, subservient to Muhammad and lower than its "Gabriel." Further, Islamic teaching states that when the Mahdi—Islamic messiah—arises, "Jesus" will be his prophet, and will "clarify" all the "misunderstandings" about himself, and point

[the world](#) to the Mahdi.

This counterfeit belief system is growing rapidly, and the clash of cultures taking place between Islam and West demonstrates the bitterness of this spring. What began darkly has continued in like manner, and subjugation and strangling will likely continue until God intervenes. But Jesus Christ will come again, not as a subservient to another leader, as some believe, but as [King of kings](#), and Lord of lords ([Revelation 17:14; 19:16](#)). A day will come when loud voices from heaven will proclaim, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" ([Revelation 11:15](#)) Until that time, though the world will continue to reel and shake, we do not have to fear that darkness:

Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that *in Me you may have [peace](#)*. In the world you will have tribulation; but *be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" ([John 16:32-33](#))

He Himself has said, "I will *never* leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" ([Hebrews 13:5-6](#))

- David C. Grabbe

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## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Satan \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh explains the origins of our foremost adversary, Satan the Devil, and his host of fallen angels or demons (Revelation 12:3-12; Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-19). In our precarious situation of sharing a prison cell with these formidable wicked spirits, we need to take heart in: 1) the tremendous numerical advantage of the good over the evil angels; 2) the hopeless division in the demon world, preventing them from "getting their act together"; 3) as with Job, God has set limits on Satan's ability to harass us (Job 2:6); and 4) God has provided us with adequate spiritual armor to withstand the wiles of the Devil (Ephesians 6:10-12). Even though with our own limited strength, we could be easily annihilated, God has promised us protection if we yield to Him and keep His commandments.

## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [Clash of Cultures](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Immigration is not just a problem in America. The nations of Europe have seen millions of migrants, mostly Muslims, stream into their nations over the past decade—to the point that it has become a primary topic politically. What will Europe do? Richard Ritenbaugh suggests this migration dilemma may presage the fateful "push" from the King of the South.

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