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**Discuss the emergence of Islam in its historical context. How might this be different to the traditional narrative?**

**ISLAM: Its Emergence and History**

Some argue that spread of Islam is linked with the trade of Mecca (Crone, 1987). Since many Qurashi's were traders hence according to them one cause of huge spread of Islam was the trade. However it is also mentioned that since Meccans traded in humble products and not in any luxury items the spread of Islam cannot be just linked with trade. Even if we associate Islam with trade still one question cannot be answered that how Arabs all of a sudden came up with an idea of new religion, to discover what happened, let's move through the history.

**Abraham and his Sons (Ishmael and Isaac)**

According to the book of Genesis (Ibn Ishaq, 1955), Abraham had no child and then after praying and asking God again and again. Abraham and Sarah were blessed with a child, at that time Abraham was 85 years old and Sarah was 76 years old. A son was born and he was named Ishmael which means, "God shall hear". Then after thirteen years Isaac was born to them at that time Sarah was 90 years old. Abraham prayed to God, "*0 that Ishmael might live before Thee!*" he was worried that his elder son might lose favors by God. The response was, "*As for Ishmael, I have heard thee. Behold, I have blessed him. .... I will make him a great nation*". Eventually two great nations were formed by both sons. Hence Abraham was the fountain head of two branches that developed later on and Islam was spread.

Years later when Abraham again prayed his prayers were answered and many pilgrims started visiting Mecca and hence gifts were bought in. The pilgrimage was made once a year by Muslims. Descendants of Isaac also respected Kabah which was initially formed by Abraham.

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At that time Kabah was totally associated with pilgrimage but then years passed by and worship started deviating from the core (Ibn Ishaq, 1955). Then descendants of Ishmael started worshipping idols and started putting them in Kabah. According to idolaters idols were considered as a connection between people and God, they used idols to form a connection with God and hence Kabah was filled with these idols.

### **Quraysh: A tribe**

One tribe named Quraysh was most powerful and was descendent of Abraham. They were more respected and had high dignity compared to other Arabs. Abd-al-Muttalib was a man who was respected by Quraysh for his wisdom and generosity. Zamzam was also restored by his efforts. He always prayed Allah however at this time majority of Quraysh was praying idols in Kabah, but Abd-al-Muttalib always asked God. About 360 idols were placed in Kabah and people used to worship them, additionally each house had its own idol as well.

### **Muhammad (Prophet of God):**

Muhammad, God's prophet was born in tribe of Quraysh. He was son of Abdullah, and his mother was Amna, it is mentioned in various stories that when Amna was pregnant a voiced said to her "You are pregnant with the lord of this people" (Ibn Ishaq, 1955). As mentioned above Quraysh were worshipping idols, Muhammad was raised in this situation, first his mother died then father and grandfather, after which he was raised by his uncle Abu Talib. He (Pbuh) used to merchant and Khadijah was impressed by his honesty hence she asked him for marriage.

Although he was raised as others but his honesty was famous and people used to trust him and gave his examples to others. At the age of forty first revelations was sent, and now Prophet had a mission that was given by God (Ibn Ishaq, 1955).

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The first revelation came and then the formal process started in Mount Hira, he used to spare time and started worshipping Allah. He told his wife about this and she trusted him later on slowly family members also started believing in Islam. Although huge resistance was also faced; and idol worshippers were annoyed still Islam kept on spreading. At that time no summons was made publicly still Islam was spreading and people started becoming Muslims. Since huge resistance was faced Muslims worshipped in isolation and away from cities (Guillaume, 1954).

God said to Muhammad, “When God made a covenant with the prophets (He said) this is the scripture and wisdom which I have given you, afterwards an apostle will come confirming what you know that you may believe in him and help him”. He said, “Do you accept this and take up my burden?” i.e. the burden of my agreement which I have laid upon you.

They said, “We accept it”.

Afterwards preaching started in Mecca and Khadija was the first one to accept, later prophet was asked to pray and so he started praying. Abu bakar, Ali and many more close relatives accepted Islam and started preaching too, since Abu bakar was also respected people listened to him and accepted Islam. In this one Islam started from one person started spreading and many people became Muslims (Silverstein, 2010).

According to Guillaume, Islam is a complex religion and he explained origin of Islam through Muhammad, Quran and Islamic law. He published his book in 1950s still the modern principles are clearly mentioned and Islam struggled hard. He provides a very nice idea that the principles that people follow today were not preached initially and were not part of life of Prophet (Guillaume, 1954).

## Islam: Emergence

According to Cook (2004) Islam spread suddenly and it emerged as a religion that spread instantaneously. Remarkable development was made in initial years and he further explained how Max Weber's law explained Islam.

According to Muslims the spread of Islam started in 613 CE when prophet started preaching revelations which were sent by God. During his life he focused on forming caliphs so that spread of Islam does not stop spreading. When Ottoman Empire was conquered Islam started spreading outside of Arab.

However there is another approach as mentioned above where spread of Islam is linked with trade and business. The only question then is how come Arabs came of idea of starting and preaching a new religion altogether.

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