

Moses Jesus and Muhammad; Struggles of Creating Religious Communities and Liberating Them from Oppression

History has shown many great leaders who strived for the liberation of their people; Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are three such leaders. These three figures have represented many things to many people. One example to be focused on here is the figure of the leader of the oppressed, striving to separate their people from oppression in order to create a new community, a specifically religious community. In this paper I will explore the approaches that these three leaders used on their missions to liberate their people and create a new religious community. By examining the context surrounding the individual we will be able to understand what each approach meant for their specific situation. This in turn will grant us a new way to understand these incredibly important figures of history, as well as, in many ways, the figures of today.

Liberation was a major factor in the stories of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Specifically, Moses was credited with liberating the Hebrews from the bondage of the Pharaoh. For Judaism, however, liberation from Egypt is not the main point of the religion. The liberation of the Hebrews was important only in that it created a community for God's covenant, and Moses was the most notably important Hebrew, as he delivered the Law (the Torah) to the community. Liberating the people, although incredibly important, was only a means to an end, however. Moses as the embodiment of the means is not important at all. There is no holiday to commemorate him, nor is he an important aspect of Passover celebrations.

Jesus was also a liberator. He befriended the untouchables of his society, healed the sick and ostracized, and thumbed his nose at authority. In the end he died as a martyr at the hands of an empire from whom he was unsuccessful in freeing his people from. For Christians, liberation from the empire is not really the point; rather, it is the sacrifice Jesus made in a larger liberation struggle.¹ The sacrifice brings salvation, an extreme form of liberation. In Moses' case the liberation was necessary for delivering the message, whereas for Jesus liberation was the message.

Muhammad, the last figure we will be examining, is another example of a liberator. The oppression Muhammad and the early Muslims faced was to a lesser degree than what Moses and Jesus faced. Moses freed his people from a particularly cruel form of slavery, and Jesus was trapped in the midst of an empire that showed no signs of relinquishing its grip on the Jews. Muhammad, however, came from a situation of relative equality with no oppressive structure forced onto the people. As will be discussed later, the persecution Muhammad felt was only brought on after he had acquired enough power to confront opposing forces. The situation Muhammad found himself in was one in which he could actively fight oppression; more importantly for our comparison, he had the freedom to leave the oppression to form his new community. Moses could not form a community without liberating his people from slavery. Jesus tried to form a community while under an oppressive structure and was executed for doing so. Muhammad simply left town when it became too dangerous for his new community. For Muhammad, unlike for Moses and Jesus respectively, liberation is neither the message nor a means to the message.

Before turning our attention to the context of the struggles, however, we must first define our key tool of analysis, i.e., we must define liberation. I have identified and constructed for our purposes four categories of liberation: political, economic, religious, and spiritual. Political liberation is accomplished when a group of people (a community) are freed from control by another group of people and an oppressive political structure. Economic liberation could be individually based or communal; slaves and the poor are more likely to need economic liberation. Religious liberation is communal; it could be liberation from an old religion to a new religion or from idolatry to monotheism. Spiritual liberation is distinct from religious, for our purposes, in that spirituality is individual; it can be liberation from the world, from suffering, or it can be mystical. These four categories are for the most part arbitrary, and they can be easily complicated as they overlap and blur into each other. They will help us, however, in clarifying differences in the struggles led by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. These categories of liberation will inform our discussion throughout this paper.

Now that our notion of liberation is defined we must create a context for the stories we are to examine. The context for Moses is very debatable. Consider, for example, the biblical explanation for the events and times of Moses life. The context is that of the slavery of the Hebrews under an Pharaoh who was unjust, and the story tells of the Hebrew Moses rising against Pharaoh with the help of the god Yahweh to free the Hebrew people. This story explains how the Hebrew people were united under one God and one law (the Torah), and justified their later claims to rule in Israel.

There is another version of the story which archeologists have unearthed which is interesting to compare to the Biblical account. Rather than one man and God taking on Pharaoh, there is some archeological evidence supporting that there was actually a large-scale battle. According to ancient Egyptian records, the Hyksos (Pharaoh's people) were attacked by invaders from Thebes (who are believed by modern archaeologists to be the Midianites) at roughly the same historical period as the Moses story would have been. Many Hyksos were dissatisfied with the Pharaohs rule and turned to Taa II, the leader of Thebes, for help in attacking and overthrowing the Pharaoh. Taa's son Kamosis attacked the Hyksos. He died in battle but his brother Ahmosis defeated the Pharaoh and chased other Hyksos rulers all the way into Palestine. There are eerie similarities in the two stories that have made some scholars question if the biblical narrative is derived from this battle. The biblical account has Moses flee to Midian after learning of his Jewish heritage. There he marries a daughter of a Midianite. Could the Midianite father be Taa II? If so, then Moses would be the son in law of Taa II and thus could mean that Moses and Kamosis were the same person. If this is the case then Moses' brother Aaron could actually be Ahmosis. Although Kamosis died in battle while Moses survived, Moses did die before reaching Israel and Aaron lead the people into what could have been Palestine.²

This could in fact be the true story of Moses, but then a question must be asked; why is the biblical version so different? I cannot answer this question, but I can examine what the difference does for Moses. There are many implications to the differences between the Biblical and archeological narratives. We have already discussed that the story of Moses is not about Moses, it is about God, Torah, and the new community of Israelites. The biblical version of the story underscores these themes through demonstrating the lack of power by Moses and the

Israelites. In the archeological account, however, Moses is not even Jewish³ and an outside army attacks Pharaoh. In both accounts the Israelites are passive, having no or little control of their fate. In the biblical version the Pharaoh is attacked by Yahweh; thus, when the Israelites are set free homage is due to Yahweh. If an outside army defeats the Pharaoh, however, then the Israelites will not have learned a religious lesson or worse they owe allegiance to these other people.

Scot Aaron draws a connection between Muhammad and Moses in their reasons for forming new communities. He argues that "in the same vein as Moses was commanded to unite the people in the true worship of God, so Muhammad would understand his calling as a prophet."⁴ The story of Muhammad can be seen as a civil conflict; one man, his family, and other followers were driven out of a small trading town in the middle of the Arabian desert. Muhammad flees his home town and establishes his community in another small town 200 miles away. There are then a series of battles over the years until Muhammad finally wins the right to return to his home town.⁵ We can look at the struggle on an even smaller scale; the main persecutor of Muhammad was Abu Lahab, his uncle. When Muhammad delivers his first sermon Abu Lahab heckled him. In response to this Muhammad's other uncle, Abu Talib, vowed to protect him from Abu Lahab. This is therefore a story of one man standing between two uncles.⁶ This portrayal of the events, however, oversimplifies their significance. If we put this story into a larger context by considering the events and political happenings around these small towns, then we can begin to understand the importance of the Muhammad story. With this context we can also begin to understand how Muhammad can be seen as a liberator in the political sense. Montgomery Watt notes that

Mecca was a little town in the deserts or steppes near the West coast of Arabia, but was by no means isolated from the great empires of the day. A casual reading of the sources might suggest that Islam grew out of the petty bickerings in this little town; but a more careful reading shows that the whole of Arabia had become entangled in the meshes of the politics of the great powers of the day.⁷

There were two empires that had been fighting over the Middle East in the years leading up to Muhammad; the Byzantine Empire out of Constantinople from the northwest and the Persian Empire from the northeast. Both of these empires were encroaching into the Arabian

Peninsula, a fact that would have been well known to the various tribes and to Muhammad. First Persia sent an invading force to Yemen and established trade routes from there to Iraq. The Byzantine emperor tried to counteract the Persian power by sending Christian bishops to Yemen to spread Christianity.⁸ This effectively created a triangle between Persia, Byzantine, and Yemen, with Muhammad's town Mecca situated at the center.

In approximately 521 BCE the Byzantine Emperor authorized and in fact encouraged Abyssinia to sail from Africa and occupy Yemen. The Byzantines and Abyssinians had many religious and political differences, but they were both Orthodox Christian cultures, which was enough to unite them against the Persians. The Abyssinians thus began to spread their power and religion around Yemen and toward Mecca.⁹ In the so-called Year of the Elephant (roughly 570 CE), the Negus of Abyssinia tried to occupy Mecca by force, but nature pushed the army back before they had the opportunity to attack the town. The story being that the war elephants refused to attack or even enter the city.¹⁰ Of great importance to note in these occurrences is that neither the Byzantines nor the Persians tried to control the people directly; rather they were looking for economic gains first and maybe religious control second.

This form of interest in the Arabian Peninsula gave the impression that religion was political and economic. Mecca had been profiting from religion for many years. Their Ka'bah was a site of religious pilgrimage for the various indigenous, non-monotheistic religions of the peninsula; and these pilgrimages in turn brought trade into Mecca. The idea of one religious view being intolerant of another, or of one religion desiring a religious and economic monopoly was, however, an outsider view brought into the Arabian world by the Persians, Byzantines and Abyssinians. The Persians were not as concerned with dominance as the Byzantines and Abyssinians, and instead sought to profit by opening up trade throughout the peninsula and even further East. Due to the different approaches to control the Arabs tended to side with Persia rather than Byzantine, East rather than West.¹¹ The trade with Persia made Mecca strong and united the citizens' economic concerns, even though it was a very diverse town composed of many tribes. As a child Muhammad would have witnessed Mecca unite to fend off occupying forces from the West in two battles.¹² Thus, for Muhammad to follow in the lineage of the Hebrews and to preach monotheism like the Byzantines and Abyssinians was to side with the

West rather than the East. This would have been a very dramatic break and could explain why Muhammad and his early followers became so hated by the other residents. Muhammad's actions also raised economic concerns as his intolerance of visiting idolaters (i.e., people of the non-monotheistic indigenous religions) to the Ka'bah was seen as bad business. Muhammad's elimination of free labor through the empowering and even freeing of slaves also threatened the town's economic stability.

By participating in the history of the West Muhammad had more in common with the Jews (who also sided with the Byzantines), which may explain why it was easy for Muhammad to flee Mecca to the predominantly Jewish town of Medina. Subsequently, we must examine why Medina was a better choice than Abyssinia for fostering the new community of Muslims. Abyssinia, just across the Red Sea from Mecca in North Eastern Africa, was the first place Muhammad sent emigrants. They established a small community with the help of the Negus, who apparently converted. The general population of Abyssinia, however, was not very receptive to the Muslims. They were a fairly united society, brought about by both their new Orthodox religion and by competition from the Romans and Persians. Muhammad's early emigrants stayed in Abyssinia until they were called upon to join Muhammad in Medina. Thus, the question remains as to why they decided on Medina when there was already a settlement in Abyssinia.

A practical answer is that the large-scale emigration Muhammad led would have had to struggle and perhaps war against the Abyssinian people, something the Muslims were not ready for. Muhammad had to separate his people from the larger community of Mecca so that they could come together as a new force in the area before they would be ready to fight another force (the Abyssinians). Medina provided the place for Muhammad and his people to come together. Medina was fertile ground for a budding new community. Medina had been suffering from internal struggles for years prior to the arrival of Muhammad's emigrants.¹³ While the Arab tribes were fighting among themselves the Jewish community was reaping the benefits in terms of political and economic power. Muhammad's emigrants could have been seen as just another wandering Arab tribe. Watt tells us that "circumstances of time and place favored Muhammad."¹⁴ The different factors of social unrest in Mecca and Medina, general movements towards monotheism, reactions against Hellenism in Syria and Egypt, declining power of the

Persian and Byzantine Empires, and a growing realization amongst Arab tribes of the opportunity for plunder in the settled lands were all ingredients that together provided the perfect atmosphere for the development of a new religious community. Watt argues that Muhammad's revelations provided a framework of ideas within which the resolution of their social tensions became possible.¹⁵ Crone and Cook tell us that the early religion was probably not Islam but rather *hijra*. The term *islam* literally refers to submission to Allah, while *hijra* translates to "exodus." The new religious community found the base of their identity as an exodus, i.e.: as a physical liberation and departure from oppression, rather than in relation to God. This is a political identification. Herein "... lies the earliest identity of the faith that was in the fullness of time to become Islam,"¹⁶ the earliest identity being one of political liberation.

Jesus presents an interesting and complicated example to work with. There are many factors that must be acknowledged when recreating the context from within which Jesus was acting. Among these factors are: the history of Jewish persecution and oppression by numerous forces leading up to Jesus' time, the specific history of Galilee (the area of Northern Judah where Jesus' family lived), the story of Rome's motivations for occupation and its results, and the oppression placed on the downtrodden masses as a result of each. These disjointed people are those whom Jesus was drawn too: the sickly, prostitutes, outcastes, homeless, and of course the poor.

In approximately 587 BCE the Temple was destroyed and Jews were exiled into the wilderness. For the remaining years leading up to Jesus' time the Jews wandered the wilderness, tossed from one occupying power to another. Around 546 BCE Cyrus the Great of the Persian Empire ruled over the land. Around 334 BCE the Greeks took a turn with Alexander the Great. 305 BCE Alexander had passed and Ptolemies took over Egypt. This actually made Egypt more attractive and Jews moved there from all over the Middle East. In the 200s BCE Seleucids ruled the Jews.¹⁷ By the time Jesus became a thorn in the side of Rome, the Jews were used to living under hostile conditions, and they were used to thorns like Jesus being plucked before they could affect real change. Yet they were not hopeless. The Old Testament books of the prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Maccabees – and the Dead Sea Scrolls, show a religious context of

hope: hope for the future, and hope for a new Jewish state. Daniel, for example, was very optimistic for a time when the Jews would return out of exile to the Promised Land.

Finally the Maccabees, one of many Jewish groups, managed to take over Jerusalem and rededicate the Temple. It looked like the Jews had hope after all. They were worried about losing the power they had just gained and so decided to send a request to Rome for help from the Greeks, who were "reducing Israel to slavery."¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Jewish Pharisees were not in favor of the Maccabean revolt; civil wars broke out and the Pharisees called on the help of the Seleucids from the North. By the time of Jesus Rome had thoroughly established its influence. The Jews were in a precarious position. They had finally started to regain some level of self-rule in their homeland, yet if they pushed too hard they risked retaliation from Rome, or perhaps worse, Rome would leave and the Jews would be powerless against any force that wished to occupy Jerusalem. Even though most people thought that Herod the Great was corrupt, the Jews had gotten to a point where they felt they "...needed to maintain a particular status quo to exercise any degree of self-rule."¹⁹

The history of Galilee differs from that of the larger Jewish history. After the fall of Solomon's Temple in the sixth century BCE, Galilean history began to diverge from Judean history. While the majority of Jews roamed the Middle East, the Jews of Galilee stayed put. "Both Hebrew biblical traditions and later Jewish literature represent the people of the Galilee as fiercely independent. They needed to be, for one outside ruler after another took control of the area and determined its life and landscape."²⁰ The Assyrian conquest sent many officials and skilled laborers into exile. Most of the Jews, however, were not of these classes. After the Assyrians came the Babylonian, Persian, Ptolemaic, and Seleucid empires. They all took turns oppressing the Jews of Galilee. With each of these occupiers the split between the situation of Jews in Galilee and Jews in exile grew wider. Thus when Persia restored a "native aristocracy" to rebuild the Temple the Jews of Galilee felt no allegiance to this aristocracy, or priestly royalty. They understood it as another form of outside control, as Jewish outsiders.²¹ The brothers of Judah of Macabee took over control of Galilee. The Galileans submitted that this was not an occupation; but it was not reclaiming of power either.

In 63 BCE, Rome swept through Galilee on its way to Jerusalem. The Macabean factions revolted but they were no match for the Roman army, which in turn was less than kind in their dealings with the Galileans. The Romans appointed Herod as the Jewish "King." When Herod died in 4 BCE the people saw another opportunity to revolt, and "large groups of peasants in every major district of his realm asserted their independence."²² They were not content with a simple revolt; they were ready to take the next step toward asserting their own rule. Horsley posits

that the popular insurrection took the same social form of popular messianic movements that were focused on a leader acclaimed as 'King' by his followers like Saul or David of old suggests that after experiencing the oppressive kingship of Herod, the people were more than ready to have a king from their own ranks who would act in the interests of the people.²³

Alas the Romans suppressed the popular insurrections and appointed Antipas to rule. With Antipas came renewed interest in Galilee, and a royal capitol was formed bringing high culture, politics, and economics. Then the troublemakers came on the scene. When John the Baptist began baptizing the masses, this was a clear sign that people were rejecting the authority of the Temple. When John spoke out against Antipas he was executed in response; this was another clear sign that the Temple did not want its authority questioned. There were many other Jewish rebels who, like Jesus, sought a freedom for the Jews that their leaders were afraid of. There were many instances of these freedom fighters suffering cruel demises at the hands of the Romans and attaining no help from the Jewish authorities.²⁴ Jesus was just another poor Jew who had a vision for a better life and was put to death for seeking it. There is a twist, however, in the Jesus narrative that makes his struggle different and changes the tone of hopelessness...the resurrection.

The Jews weren't hopeless. They could have been, in fact many probably were, but they continued setting their sights high. They had been dominated for 600 years, but were reaching for a way out. The messiah concept had become popular. Isaiah called for a messiah in his prophetic book. Daniel called on the messiah to come forth to reject foreign oppression and to reestablish proper temple worship, and the Dead Sea Scrolls portrayed a similar need for a

messiah.²⁵ And yet Jesus could not be the messiah, as he was killed before re-establishing Jewish rule. If we think about the context from which Jesus was struggling, however, we can argue that this was in fact an ingenious maneuver in terms of the story of Jesus.

Now that the context of each situation these leaders encountered in their stories has been brought to light, from here we move to examining what these leaders did in response to their context. There are a lot of similarities in their situations, and there are probably even more similarities in their goals. However, due to slight differences in the styles and tones of their oppressions, the options for each leader turned out to be significantly different. Each figure was trying to form a new religious community, and in each case there were forces opposed to both the religious aspects and the forming in general of these communities. Thus Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad had to find ways to accomplish their goals while facing oppressive forces. Applying the context that I have previously outlined with the life of these three leaders can illuminate where these leaders were coming from in the decisions they made.

Moses was working under extreme oppression. His people were slaves in one of the worst expressions of slavery. They had been under the bondage of an unjust Pharaoh for long enough to accept their lot and adopt a slave mentality. Moses, who was not raised as a Hebrew but rather grew up in the royal house, perhaps could fathom liberation from bondage. The people, however, were not receptive to this. They were unhappy under Pharaoh's rule, yet they feared that any insurrection would be useless and only provide an excuse for even worse treatment. These people had given up on hope. They were already united by ethnicity and by a form of oppression that took their personal identification for granted. Unlike the situation of the early Muslims or Jesus' followers, the Hebrews could not simply decide who to side with, or to not be a Hebrew; the Pharaoh decided their membership to that club. Moses was lucky in that regard; he did not have to worry about forming a separate community; he just had to worry about separating the community at hand. So how does one free a hopeless people with no political, economic, or even spiritual might? By turning to religion and God.

Moses' only solution as a leader was to rely on God to step in on behalf of the Hebrews. Unlike Muhammad, he could not emigrate elsewhere to rally together as a force and then return

to challenge the Pharaoh. And unlike Jesus, he could not sacrifice himself in the name of his people, hoping that they would someday find hope in this and become inspired enough to rise up. The Hebrews had seen too many outrageous deaths, including the murders their newborn sons²⁶ for the death of a pampered, rebellious youth to inspire hope. No, the only solution for Moses was to turn to God. The strong sense of unity forced on them by Pharaoh made it easy for Moses to rely on the ancient deity of these people; after all God only needed reminding of their existence to see that they needed him in their corner.²⁷ When we examine the context of the Israelites' position we can understand why Moses had to rely on God to bring the people to a place where they could have the freedom to hear the religious message. The freedom had to come first, then the religion.

Jesus had a different context. There were many similarities: the Jews were under oppressive forces as before, they were not allowed to have much political or economic power, and many of them would rather put up with the situation they had rather than revolt and face a stern backlash. Nonetheless, there were some crucial differences. The people were not slaves, they were most certainly oppressed, and every time it seemed there was hope a new power came in to establish its dominance. But they were not hopeless. This may be the most crucial difference, along with the disunified character of Jesus' revolutionary cotemporaries.

The oppression of the Pharaoh unified Moses' people. The oppression of the empires in the Middle East of Jesus' time, however, exiled the people. They were united by a like religion and spirituality, the politics of freedom for self-rule in one land, and the economics of the lower classes. They were not, however, unified in vision or place. As we have seen in our history of Galilee when compared to the larger history of the Jews, many of the same people living under the same empire had very different historical perspectives. Unlike Moses, Jesus would have to bring people together to form a new community, and unlike Muhammad, Jesus did not have the option of taking the people out from under the umbrella of empire to form his community. Jesus relied on a mutual religion and experience of oppression as his connection to the people:

persecution... is a well-known theme which already figures in the lives of quite a few biblical prophets, who are presented as suffering all kinds of torment for the noble cause of God. The story of persecution almost always presents the prophet as supported only by a small minority of devoted believers who are oppressed by a majority of non-believers. This applies especially to Jesus.²⁸

Jesus united them through religion and politics at the same time rather than one before the other. Horsley argues that "Jesus and his initial followers, who formed a movement rooted in villages, were from a generation struggling to adjust to and/or resist the dramatic changes that had so suddenly come upon their communities."²⁹ Jesus formed his community through wandering, like the Jews in the history we examined concerning their exile. His religious message was formed through this wandering, through the people's experiences, collecting converts along the way, until it culminated in Jerusalem by confronting the oppressor head on.

This is actually an interesting metaphor to work with. The nature of empire is disembodied; rather than one central location of power seen by all the subjects, it is spread throughout the occupied territories. There is no god of the Pharaoh to battle with Yahweh, and there is no country to flee. Jesus faced his disembodied oppressor with an equally disembodied approach; through wandering, collecting disciples and leaving prophesy. There was no attempt to acquire wealth or political power, and no creation of an army. The oppressors attempted to embody Jesus by attaching his body to a cross on a hilltop for all to see. This was in fact the greatest victory for Jesus' movement, as it completely disembodied Jesus. Through the death of his body, he was free to rise again as the spirit of liberation. The death of Jesus ended nothing but instead released hope into the air, empowering those looking for a way to live *their* lives on *their* land without empires holding them down. Horsley tells us that "both Jesus and his movement...(could be) illustrations of the ways in which subject peoples reacted and adjusted to the pressures of imperial rule and urbanization."³⁰ This is true up to Jesus' death. Through religious liberation he became a political and economic liberator, through his death he also became a spiritual liberator. It became more than communal liberation, and it was also a personal liberation from suffering and from the world of empire rule. Jesus' death released him from the

world and through this his followers could find a way to liberate them from the world they found themselves in.

Muhammad was in the same boat as Moses and Jesus, but his experience was greatly different. Unlike Moses and Jesus, Muhammad's activities did not emerge from a pre-existing oppression. There were encroaching empires that perhaps sent an air of inevitability across the peninsula, but within the community of Mecca Muhammad was a respected citizen with the money, power, and free time to form a new religion with relative ease. Mecca was by nature very tolerant of other religions, as they were its main source of income. It wasn't until Muhammad started publicly attacking idol worship that Mecca had a problem. Slowly the oppressive force grew against the Muslims until Muhammad decided it was time for them to emigrate. Thus for the Muslims, religion came first and politics came second. Unlike Moses, who was handed a religion and formed it new after liberation, and unlike Jesus who worked on both simultaneously, the oppression against Muhammad was different in that it was reactionary oppression. There was no community to oppress until Muhammad started preaching and created the community. Even after, the nature of oppression itself was different. The people put a political and economic squeeze on the Muslims but there was also an oppression of isolation. Because the public of Mecca was perturbed by Muhammad's anti-idol rhetoric, he became isolated within his community. Then the public persecuted the followers to try to steer them away from Muhammad.³¹ This did not work, however, as the Muslims were extremely unified under Muhammad. This is another difference between our three leaders. Moses was dealing with a unified mass in a hopeless situation, Jesus was the opposite, and Muhammad was unified and not hopeless. Even though the Muslims came from very diverse backgrounds – Arabs, Bedouins, Jews, Christians, men and women, old and young, rich and poor – they were all unified in a common goal: religious/spiritual and political/economic liberation and freedom, which would be accomplished by submission to Allah and return to Mecca.

Rubin tells us that "persecution is brought to an end by salvation through emigration."³² This is slightly short-sighted, however. The Muslims in Medina had the freedom to create their own community, but they were still living under a constant threat from Mecca and they were completely unable to return to their hometown. Here Muhammad faced something that Moses

and Jesus did not even dream of. Muhammad had left the oppressors and was able to gather strength, turn back around, and face the oppressors as an equal force. In fact, the Muslims had capitalized on their ability to amass wealth and military power. This is in stark contrast to the Hebrews that Moses lead, who were completely powerless and literally ran away from their tormentor, and also to Jesus' activities. Jesus knew that the type of approach that Muhammad later took would mean certain doom, and so he opted for a more ascetic approach. Additionally, Muhammad was the only one of the three leaders to make it to the "promised land." Moses died in the wilderness after he made sure that his people would make it, and in life Jesus did not make it the "promised land" nor secure it for his followers. It could be argued that Jesus did, however, accomplish this through death, in the kingdom of heaven he secured a "promised land" for his followers and himself.

After examining the events of our leaders in their context we can now understand their correlative struggles toward the four categories of liberation that were outlined previously. All three of the leaders seemed to accomplish all four categories of liberation: political, economic, religious and spiritual. The differences in their situations are so complex, however, that it is almost hard to recognize that each leader was accomplishing the same types of liberation. They had such unique approaches to their challenges and came from such varying contexts that their stories are completely different. Historically, scholars have avoided these sorts of comparisons, perhaps due to the differences described. By exploring the stories of the three leaders side by side, however, it becomes clear how comparable they are, and also reveals aspects of their struggles that otherwise may have been misunderstood, or (worse) not understood at all. The result is that we are now able to see how all three of our leaders were striving for liberation in all of the four categories. Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, to some degree as understood by their followers, had succeeded in forming their new religious communities and liberating their people from religious, political, economic, and spiritual oppression.

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NOTES

(1) There are, of course, exceptions depending on which Christian community one wishes to look at.

(2) Aaron, Scot. *Love Your Neighbors? Discover the Real World Religions*. Salt Lake City: Psalm Publishing, 2002, (p. 94).

(3) Could this be taken seriously? Could Moses be royalty while the story of his sister leaving him in the hands of the princess was invented to validate Jewish authority over the situation?

(4) Aaron, (p. 93).

(5) Lings, Martin. *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1983, (p. 19).

(6) Rubin, Uri. *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims*. Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1995, (p. 145).

(7) Watt, Montgomery W. *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961, (p. 3).

(8) Ibid, (p. 5).

(9) Watt, (p. 5).

(10) Lings, (p. 19-22).

(11) Watt, (p. 7).

(12) Ibid, (p. 10).

(13) Ibid.

(14) Ibid, (p. 236).

(15) Ibid.

(16) Cook, Michael and Patricia Crone. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, (p. 9).

(17) Aaron, (p. 167).

(18) 1 Maccabees 8:18-19, 21. (As quoted in Aaron, p. 170).

(19) Aaron, (p. 177).

(20) Horsley, Richard. *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis*. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996, (p. 15).

(21) Ibid, (p. 23).

(22) Ibid, (p. 32).

(23) Ibid.

(24) Winkler, Gershon. *The Way of the Boundary Crosser: An Introduction to Jewish Flexodoxy*. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998.

(25) Aaron, (p. 174).

(26) Exodus 1:22. *The Oxford Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992

(27) Ibid. 2:23-4 – "The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered..."

(28) Rubin, (p. 127).

(29) Horsley, (p. 178).

(30) Ibid, (p. 176).

(31) Rubin, (p. 158).

(32) Ibid, (p. 169).