

[MUSIC PLAYING]

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STRAVER:**

Chapter Nine will help you understand Islam. History is full of surprises. And the emergence of an expansive and innovative Islamic world from what had been the relative backwater of the Arabian peninsula, was one of the most unexpected developments of the Third Wave era in world history.

This significance of the Islamic world can hardly be overstated. It gave rise to an attractive new religion that took root in Asia, Africa, and Europe. It generated an immense Arab empire that stretched from Spain and Morocco in the west to India in the east, all in about a century after the death of Muhammad in 632. And it spawned a new and cosmopolitan civilization that encompassed much of the eastern hemisphere. Islam was clearly the most important of the new civilizations that marked the history of the Third Wave era.

In several ways that history provides a helpful context for understanding the Islamic world in the 21st century-- in our own time. It reminds us, for example, that for 1,000 years from roughly 600 to 1600, the Islamic world was a proud, prosperous, powerful, and highly creative civilization. Modern Muslims remember that history. And many of them, after several centuries of Western imperialism, seek to regain something of that independence and prominence in the world.

The early centuries of Islamic history also remind us that this civilization was always one of great diversity, debate, and struggle. Conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims, disagreement about the usefulness of foreign ideas, variations in the restrictions and freedom accorded to women, debates about law and spirituality, all of this and much more divided the Islamic world and divide it still. It was never possible to tag all Muslims with a single label. And it is not possible now.

In its encounter with other civilizations and cultures, the spread of Islam sometimes spawned violence and conflict. But on other occasions Muslims and non-Muslims live together in relative freedom, tranquility, and tolerance. This mixed record undercuts any suggestion about the eternal hostility of Islam and the West or of the inevitable clash of civilizations. The future is as open and unpredictable as the past has always been.