

What is Islam?

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What are the various beliefs of the five major world religions?
2. How does geography play a role in the development and spread of religion?
3. What effect does religion have on economic, political, and social institutions?
4. What effect does religion have on art, language, and literature?

TERMS, PLACES, PEOPLE

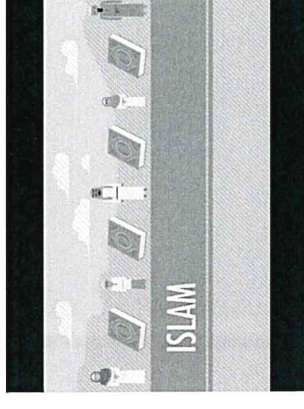
Islam
 Muhammad
 Qur'an
 Hajj
 Caliph
 Ottoman Empire
 Ramadan

With over 1 billion followers, **Islam** is the second largest religion in the world. Islam is a monotheistic faith. The Arabic word Islam means submission. This definition reflects the faith's central belief in submitting to the will of God. Followers of Islam are called Muslims, or those who submit. The religion began about 600 years after Christianity with a man named Muhammad who was born in 570 CE. The Muslim faith tracks its start all the way with the "beginning." "In the beginning was God..." according to the book of Genesis, found in both the Torah and Christian Bible. The **Qur'an** agrees, and in this we can see a connection with Abraham of the Jewish and Christian faiths.

Origins

According to the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths, God created the world and all humans. According to the holy books of all three, the first human was Adam. All three also refer to a great flood which was survived by Noah and his three sons. One of those sons, Shem settled and repopulated the region we now refer to as the Middle East, the region where all three of the major monotheistic religions would develop. According to these beliefs held in common, one of the

Interactive 5.4 Crash Course - Islam



descendants of Shem many generations later, Abraham, would have two sons, leading to the people from which Judaism and Islam would develop.

Abraham is called Ibrahim by Muslims. There's no difference here

other than the sacred texts being written in different languages. He is believed to be the father of the Arab people as well as the Jewish people.

Abraham is promised that God will make a great nation through his lineage. The first divergence between the people from whom the two faiths would spring happens when Abraham banishes his son Ishmael in favor of another son, Isaac. According to the Qur'an, Ishmael

settled in the place where Mecca would rise. His descendants

flourished in the Arabian Peninsula where Mecca is located, the area where Islam would be born many hundreds of years later. Abraham's son Isaac, would remain in the region of Canaan and his descendants would become the Jewish people.

Development of Islam

“The tradition of God testing Abraham’s devotion to him by sacrificing his son is at the heart of the Abrahamic tradition that all three faiths are built on. This test showed submission to God. Since the time of Abraham, Muslims believe, there have been many prophets and messengers. Abraham was the first Prophet, being asked for the ultimate sacrifice to show submission to God. Moses and Jesus are others to be designated as well. Finally, it is the Prophet **Muhammad** through whom Muslims believe Islam reached its final and definitive form. He is seen as the culmination of all prophets prior to him, because of this he is referred to as “The ‘Seal of the Prophets’, meaning no valid prophets will follow him.” (Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions*).



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham#/media/File:Moin%C3%A11_%C3%81brah%C3%A1m_kik%C3%B6it%C3%B6z%C3%A9se_1850.jpg

History

Muhammad was born into the leading tribe of Mecca in approximately 570 CE. During his childhood years, he experienced a number of tragedies. His father died just before he was born, his mother passed away when he was six and his grandfather, who cared for him after his mother passed away when he was eight. At this point in his life, Muhammad was adopted into his uncle's home, where he spent much of his time as a pastoralist, tending the family's flocks.

Eventually, Muhammad would take up the caravan business, and around the age of 25, he began working in the service of a wealthy widow named Khadija. As time passed, the two would become more than business associates, eventually marrying. Muhammad was a deeply spiritual man, and he often spent time meditating in the outskirts of Mecca in an area known as Mount Hira. During this time he would investigate the mysteries of good and evil. According to the Qur'an, Muhammad was meditating in his cave when visited by an angel in 610 CE,



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_Ali_of_Egypt#/media/File:ModernEgypt_-_Muhammad_Ali_by_Auguste_Couder_-_BAP_-_1799_6.jpg

instructing him to recite, or proclaim. Over time, Muhammad would receive further revelations, which would eventually be written down to form the Qur'an. The key message was one of monotheism: there was only one God and Muhammad was his prophet.

At this time, polytheism was practiced in much of the region. Religion was not focused on morality, rather on earthly life. Blood feuds, violence, and general immorality abounded during Muhammad's life. He would return to Mecca and begin sharing his experience with others, his wife becoming his first convert. The voice of God returned repeatedly to Muhammad and each time the command was always the same, proclaim. Muhammad never claimed to be anything more than a "preacher of God's words", the one to deliver God's message to mankind. From this time on, he would preach with unwavering purpose in the face of relentless persecution, insult, and outrage by the people of the region for the next twenty-three years.

The reaction to his message by the people of Mecca was hostile. The people were deeply entrenched in polytheistic beliefs, but Muhammad's moral teachings demanded an end to the immoral actions of the day and challenged the social hierarchy of the day.

Over time, the leaders of Mecca became more determined to destroy this message that went against the current society. Gradually, some people began to follow the message, and by the end of a decade, converts numbered several hundred. Finally, in 622 CE, a group from the nearby city of Medina approached Muhammad. His teachings had won over many in that city. The city was in need of a strong leader from outside and they hoped that Muhammad would be the man. The group pledged that they would all worship one God, referred to by the Arabic word for God, Allah, and would observe Muhammad's teachings. Muhammad saw this as a sign from God to accept the position and left for Medina. This event is seen as a turning point in world history by Muslims and marks the date that begins their calendar. (Huston Smith, World Religions.)

Over the next ten years, Muhammad would take on a different role, one more of an administrator. "According to Muslim Tradition, his administrations was an ideal blend of justice and mercy" (Huston Smith, World Religions). Eventually he would gain so many followers that he was able to return and conquer Mecca. Muhammad continued to lead his followers, both spiritually and politically, until his death in 632 CE.

Expansion of Islam

Under Muhammad's leadership, the Islamic world spread through the Arabian Peninsula. When the Prophet died, he left behind the religion of Islam as well as a community of over one hundred

thousand Muslims who were unified religiously and politically. The question of who should succeed the Prophet and lead created a large divide. The new leader would not only lead the faith, but be the controlling head of state.

To make matters worse, the Prophet had not left a clear plan as to who should lead or how to choose a leader.

This created a divide within the Islamic faith. The larger group of Muslims chose Abu Bakr, a close companion of Muhammad's, to be the political and social leader. Known as a **Caliph**, he would be the new political leader, but not the spiritual leader. A smaller group believed that the Prophet's son-in-law, Ali, should be Caliph. They believed that he had been appointed by Muhammad prior to death to succeed him in both political and spiritual terms. In the end, Abu Bakr was appointed First Caliph. This separation would create a division in the Islamic faith that developed further and still exists today.

Over the next century, the followers of Muhammad would conquer areas in Armenia, Persia, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, North Africa and Spain. Islamic Spain (711-1492) was a multicultural mix of the three monotheistic religions. The three groups managed to get along well, and to some extent benefit from one another. The

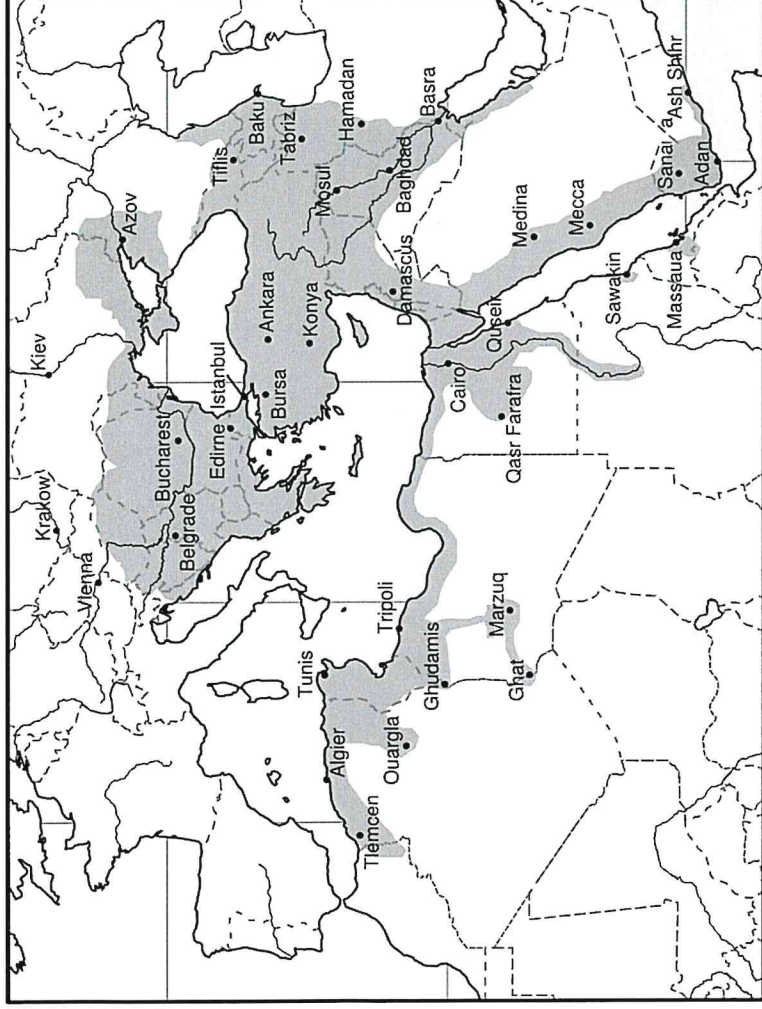
Interactive 5.5 The Expansion of Islam



Learn more in this teacher created video.

Muslim period is often described as a “golden age” of learning and of religious/ethnic tolerance in Spain for the age.

groups of fanatical fighters, known as the Janissaries. This specialized fighting force was made up of slaves and converts to Islam. Soon the Ottomans were able to inflict a series of defeats on the declining Byzantine Empire and quickly expanded west.



<https://pixabay.com/en/ottoman-empire-map-42644/>

In 1453 Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II overthrew the city of Constantinople making it the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Mehmet renamed the city Istanbul, the “City of Islam,” and soon it would be the political, cultural and economic capital of the Ottoman Empire. The empire reached its peak of power during the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent and his grandson Selim II (1520-1574). At this time, the empire included so much of the territory where Islam was practiced and so many of the Islamic holy places, that the sultans were seen as both political and religious leaders. The power of the empire began to decline in 1683 with the failed conquest of Europe. The empire officially came to an end on November 1st 1922 when Turkey was declared a republic.

Central Teachings

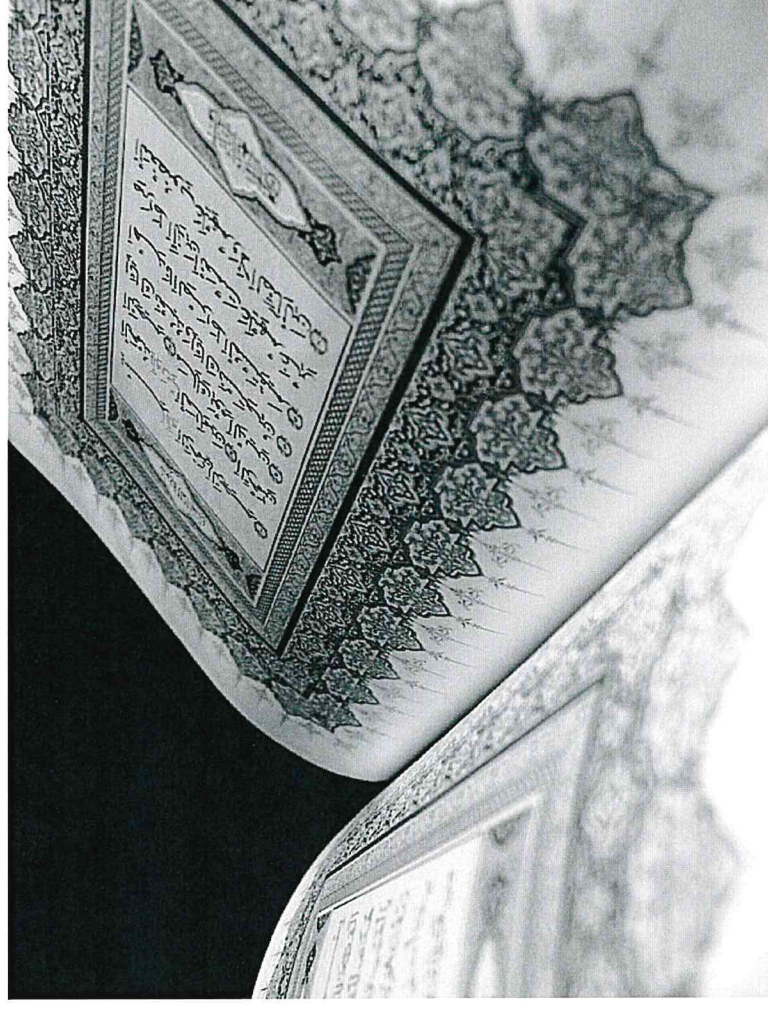
The **Ottoman Empire** (1301-1922) is one of the largest empires in world history. The empire was inspired and built on the Islamic faith and Islamic institutions. In 1301, Uthman, leader of the Ottoman clan, proclaimed himself Sultan. At the beginning, the rule of the Sultans was insecure. To help bring the empire together, the Sultans consolidated their fighting force and created

Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam teaches that there is one God, making it a monotheistic religion. Islam has a number of standard beliefs about God, the universe, and humanity. The Qur’an is the sacred text of Islam. It is believed to be the spoken word of God to Muhammad. Muslims have a few main beliefs. Most importantly, there is one God (referred to with the Arabic

word, Allah). Muslims also believe in prophets, or people who are messengers of God. They believe that a number of prophets have come, including Ibrahim (Abraham), Moses, and Jesus. Muhammad is the Final Prophet. Muhammad is not divine in any way. He is seen as “the Seal of the Prophets”, making him the last and greatest of the messengers of God. Other main beliefs include the existence of the soul and a physical existence after death in an afterlife. Beyond the core belief in one God and Muhammad being his Prophet, Muslim **doctrine** is summarized in Five Pillars of Islam; many believe that you must follow these articles to considered a Muslim.

The Qur’an

The Qur’an is used to teach the Islamic beliefs, values, and practices. It is also an important historical document, telling the story of the origins of the Islamic Faith. The Qur’an is the most sacred text and is believed to be the literal word of God. This word was revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. The text is made up of 114 chapters and is written in Arabic. The Qur’an has been translated into various languages; however, most Muslims are taught to read and recited it in Arabic even if it is not their native language.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quran,_Tunisia.JPG

Five Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars are the most important practices in the Muslim faith. They are five obligations, or tasks that every Muslim must do in order to live a good, responsible life according to their belief. The Five Pillars are:

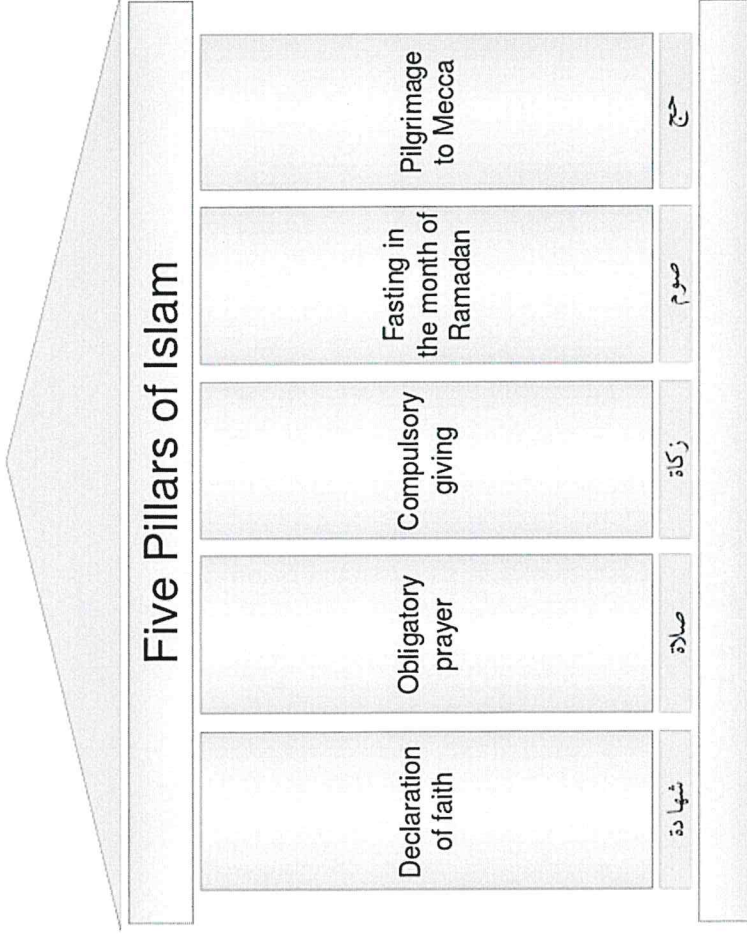
- Shahadah: sincerely reciting the Muslim profession of faith
- Salat: performing ritual prayers in the proper way five times each day

- **Zakat:** paying an alms (or charity) tax to benefit the poor and the needy

- **Sawm:** fasting during the month of **Ramadan**

- **Hajj:** pilgrimage to Mecca

These practices provide a framework for Muslims to carry out their daily lives, in combination with their religious beliefs, creating a continuous form of religious devotion. Followers of Islam see it



as essential to put faith into action and practice. Carrying out the Five Pillars demonstrates that believers are putting their faith first and are not trying to just fit it in around everything else.

Holidays

When compared to other major religions, Islam has fewer holidays. This makes the few holidays and festivals that they have very important to Muslims. When holidays are observed, it is not uncommon for daily routines, such as work and other events, to stop temporarily in order to show respect for the person or event that is being remembered. Traditionally, there are two major festivals, the Eid Ul Fitr (festival of breaking the fast) and the Eid ul Adha (festival of Sacrifice) celebrated by all Muslims.

Muslims also celebrate the month of Ramadan and the popular festival of Milad an-Nabi, which commemorates the birth of Muhammad. Islamic holidays do not always fall in the same season. They follow the Islamic calendar, which, like the Jewish calendar, is lunar and has no way to correctly align with the more traditional solar (western) calendar.

Ramadan is not a holy day but a full month long celebration. In the ninth month of the Muslim year Muslims fast during daylight hours. Ramadan is considered important because it was when the Qur'an was first revealed to Muhammad. Fasting, going without food for a period of time, is seen as a way to:

- Obey God

- Learn self-discipline
- Become spiritually stronger
- Appreciate God's gifts
- Share in the sufferings of the poor

Muslims who are physically or mentally unwell may be excused, as well as those who are pregnant, very old, and under the age of twelve. Fasting is only done during the daylight hours, so many Muslims will eat a large meal just before dawn and then will enjoy evening meals after dark. The evening meal is a time for family and the community to get together and celebrate throughout the month.

Eid ul Fitr marks the close of Ramadan. It is one of the two major festivals in Islam. Muslims not only celebrate the end of fasting, but take this time to thank Allah (God) for the strength he gave them throughout the month. The celebration is marked by special services at mosques, a special meal eaten during daytime, and various other forms of celebrations. This is also seen as a time for forgiveness and making amends.

Eid ul Adha is also known as the Festival of the Sacrifice. This is the second of the major festivals in the Islamic faith. This festival takes place at the end of the Hajj. The Hajj is annual pilgrimage to Mecca, as well as one of the five pillars of Islam. Once a year,

Muslims from every ethnic group, social status and culture gather together in Mecca and stand before the Kaaba to praise God together. Eid Ul Adha is celebrated during the final four days of the Hajj, not only in Mecca but around the world. The festival remembers the prophet Ibrahim's (Abraham) willingness to sacrifice his son when God ordered him to. This obedience to the will of God is celebrated by Muslims reminding themselves of their own submission to God and their willingness to sacrifice everything to God.

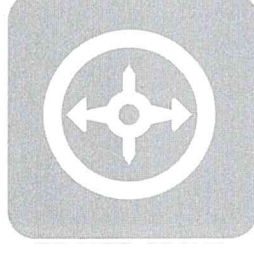
Another important date in the Muslim calendar is Milad un Nabi, the Birthday of the Prophet. This holiday marks the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. On this day, Muslim parents will tell stories of Muhammad's life to their children. Not all Muslims commemorate the birth of the Prophet, but those who do celebrate joyfully.

Islamic Sects

The religion of Islam is divided into two main sects. This division between the two groups, the Sunni and Shia, is deeply rooted in Islamic history. The division revolves around a key historical figure and important core beliefs which have a significant effect on the way Muslims live in the world today. As a Muslim, religion is a part of every aspect of life, and understanding the difference between Sunni and Shia helps to understand the modern Muslim world.

Both groups agree on the fundamentals of Islam and both agree that the Qur'an is the holy book. The differences come from their historical, political and, social differences. The differences began with the death of the Prophet Muhammad. At this time there was no chosen person to lead the Muslim community. At this point in history, the religion of Islam was also a Muslim state of more than one hundred thousand people. Both groups have evidence to support their claim to who should succeed the Prophet. Sunnis argue that Muhammad chose Abu Bakr as the next leader. The Shia claim that on his return from his last hajj, Muhammad stood in front of his companions and proclaimed that Ali would be his successor. It is important to note that neither group believed the successor would be Prophet, as all Muslims believe that Muhammad was the final prophet. This is the beginning of the widening of the two groups. Over time, other social and political events would create the divide we see today. These two major sects are not an equal division at all. Today almost 90% of Muslims are Sunnis, allowing the division to have a smaller effect when compared to the denominational differences of all other religions. You can read more about those differences [here](#).

Interactive 5.6 Sunni and Shia Differences



Learn more in this article from the New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/04/world/middleeast/q-and-a-how-do-sunni-and-shia-islam-differ.html>

