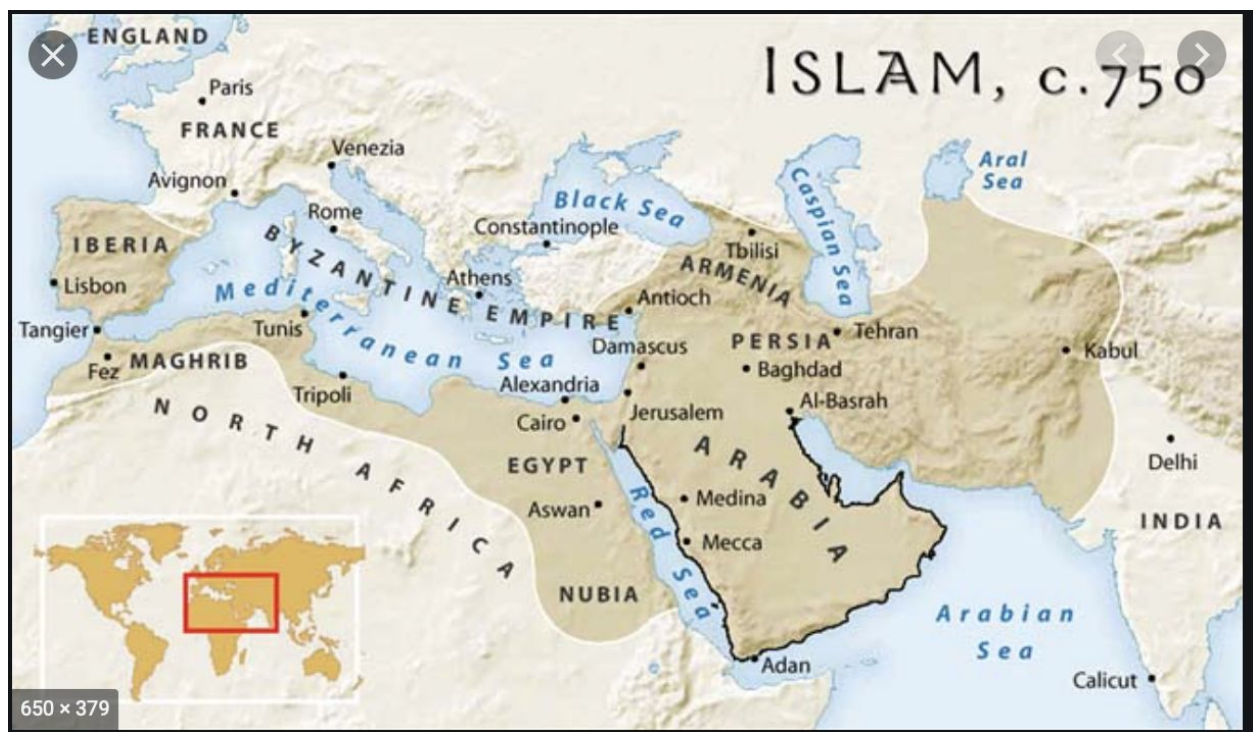


The Origins and Spread of Islam

Take a few minutes to process the video you just watched, and respond to this question: What does it mean to be Muslim?



Map: The Nasher Museum of Art - Duke University

Muhammad was born around 570 CE in the city of Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula. His father died two months before he was born, and his grandfather gave him the name Muhammad, which means “praiseworthy.” (Find Mecca on the map and highlight it.)

At the time of Muhammad’s birth, Mecca was a religious center. According to the Qur’an, Abraham had built a cube-shaped shrine there, called the Ka’bah, to honor god. Mecca in Muhammad’s time was polytheistic, and the Ka’bah contained hundreds of statues of different gods. Pilgrims from all over Arabia came to Mecca to worship their gods.

This is a photograph of the Ka'bah today. Muslims today visit Makkah as part of a holy pilgrimage called the hajj. **What questions do you have about the Ka'bah?**

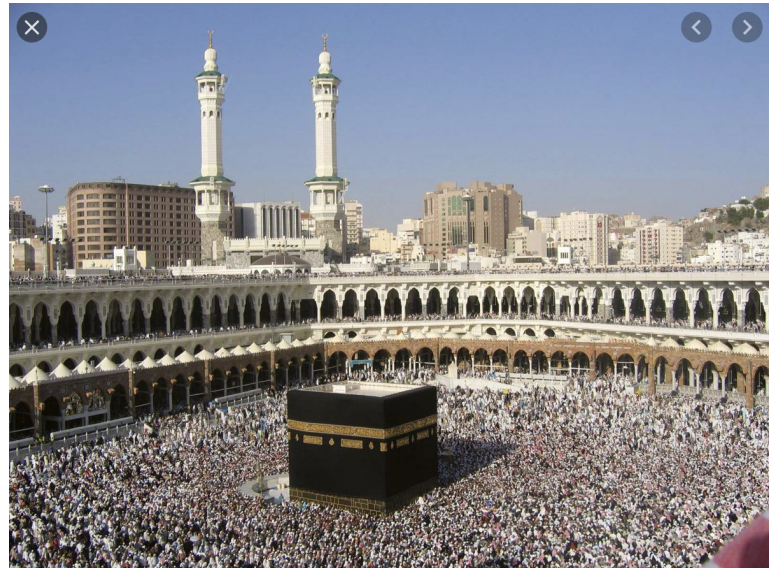


Photo: Britannica

This is a painting of the Prophet Muhammad at the Ka'bah, painted in approximately 1595. (The original is in the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul.) Muhammad is the figure in green in the top row, near the right edge. He is shown without a face. **Why might the artist have chosen to paint him in this way?**



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

In keeping with Meccan custom of the time, Muhammad's mother sent her baby to live with a family of nomads in the desert. It was believed that living in the open air would help a child become strong and healthy. Muhammad learned to help the desert shepherds tend their flocks of goats and sheep. He had no formal schooling and could neither read nor write.

(What advantages do you see to spending the first several years of your life in the desert? What are disadvantages?)

When Muhammad was around six years old, he returned to Mecca to live with his mother. Unfortunately, she soon died, and Muhammad was taken in by his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, who was a highly respected leader of the Hashim tribe of Mecca. When Muhammad was eight, Abdul Muttalib died, and Muhammad's uncle, Abu Talib, took charge of him. Abu Talib was a merchant, and Muhammad made many trading journeys with his uncle, meeting new people, hearing new ideas, and seeing new places. (Stop and think about the people Muhammad has lived with and the experiences he has had. What types of things might he have learned?)

As Muhammad grew older, he took on more duties and eventually became a merchant. He was known throughout Mecca for his fairness and honesty in conducting business. People called him *al-Amin*, which means "the trustworthy."

In his early twenties, Muhammad began working for wealthy Meccan widow named Khadijah, who ran a trading business. Khadijah was so impressed by Muhammad's character that she eventually asked him to marry her. Muhammad was twenty-five; Khadijah was nearly forty. The two had two sons, both of whom died in infancy, and four daughters.

For the next fifteen years, Muhammad worked as a merchant. Although he was successful in business, he was bothered by his city's focus on wealth and its traditional worship of idols. He often went to a cave in the mountains outside Mecca to meditate and pray.

One night in the year 610 CE, according to Islamic teachings, the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad as he was meditating and called upon him to be a messenger of Allah. (*Allah* is the

Arabic word for God. The same word is used by Arab Jews and Arab Christians.) At first, Muhammad was frightened that he might be going mad, but Khadijah soothed him and expressed her belief that God had chosen him as a prophet, to spread God's words to the people. Khadijah is considered to be Muhammad's first convert to the religion of Islam.

Islam is based on the belief in a single god. Muhammad taught that this God was the same as the God of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muhammad preached the importance of compassion, honesty, and equality for all people.



According to Islamic tradition, the angel Gabriel continued to reveal the messages of God to Muhammad for the next twenty-two years. Muhammad said that the messages from Gabriel were imprinted on his mind and heart, making him able to recite God's words to his family and a small group of followers. Later, scribes wrote down these words, and the collected verses became known as the Qu'ran. Muhammad could neither read nor write, but the great poetic beauty of the Qu'ran is proof to followers that it contains the holy word of God.

This is an image from the picture book Muhammad by Demi, published in 2003. The image shows Gabriel appearing to Muhammad. In keeping with Islamic tradition, Demi has presented Muhammad in silhouette, rather than showing the details of his person.

Around 613 CE, Muhammad began to preach to fellow Meccans, sharing the words of the Qu'ran. He taught that people must worship only one God and that all people, men and women, black and white, rich and poor, are equal and should be treated with respect. He also taught that the rich should share their wealth. Although some Meccans became Muslims, most rejected Muhammad's teachings. In fact, Muhammad and his followers were mocked and even physically attacked for not following Mecca's traditional ways. In 619, both Abu Talib and Khadijah died.

Shortly after Khadijah's death, according to Muslim tradition, a miraculous event called the Night Journey took place. Muhammad mounted a winged creature called the Buraq and rode from Mecca to Jerusalem, where he met and prayed with earlier prophets, including Abraham,

Moses, and Jesus. Then the Buraq led Muhammad through the seven layers of heaven, and Muhammad met God, who instructed Muhammad to have his followers pray five times daily. Muhammad then returned to Mecca, where he shared his incredible story to his followers.



Above is a photo of the sacred stone inside Dome of the Rock (from Islamiclandmarks.com).

Refer to your Sacred Sites of Jerusalem notes. **What do Muslims believe happened at this rock?**
What do Jews and Christians believe happened here?

- *Muslims*

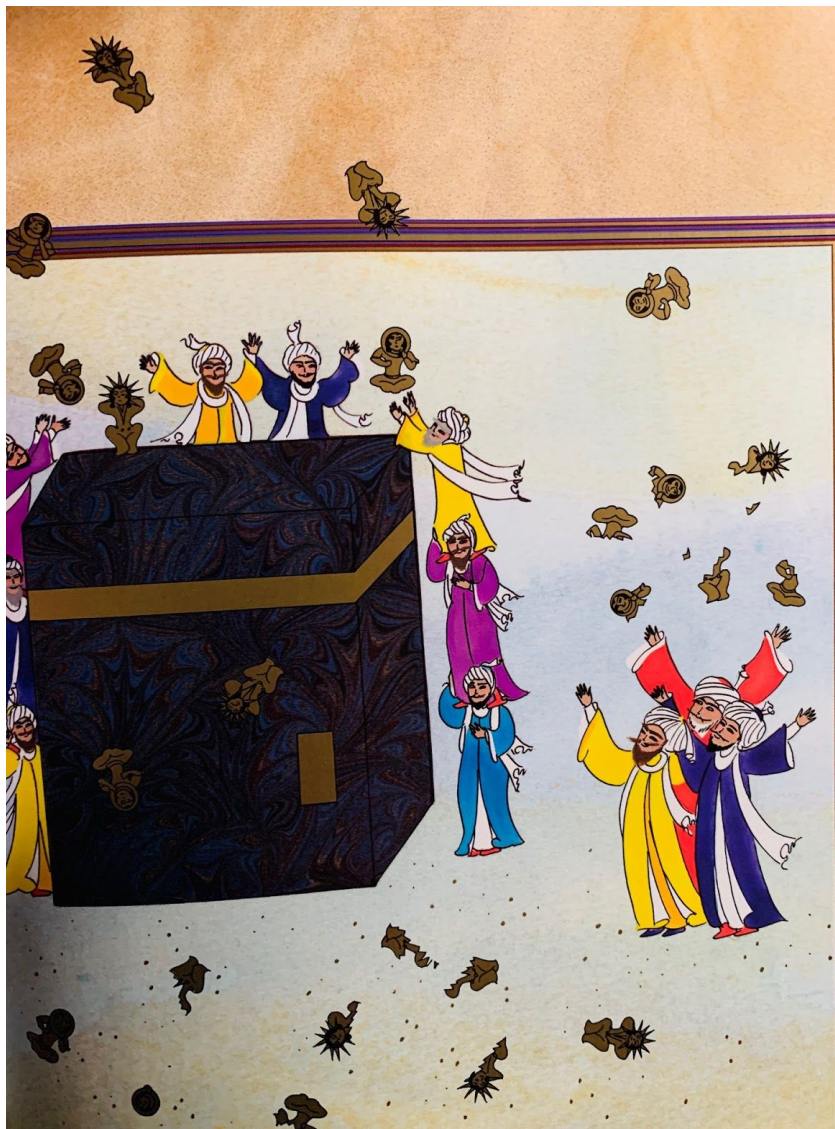
- *Jews & Christians*

Mecca continued to become more unsafe for Muhammad and his few hundred Muslim followers. In 622, they traveled north to Yathrib, where they would be welcome. Yathrib was

renamed Medina, which means “City of the Prophet.” (Find Medina on the map and highlight it.) In Medina, Muhammad built the first Muslim community and gathered more and more followers.

Conflict between the Meccans and Muslims continued, but as Islam spread across Arabia, the Meccans finally agreed to a truce that would allow the Muslims to travel throughout Arabia. In 630, Meccans broke the truce. In response, Muhammad and his followers marched to Mecca. Along the way, they were joined by tribe after tribe. When they arrived in Mecca, Meccan leaders surrendered without a battle.

Upon arriving in Mecca, Muhammad and his followers destroyed the idols (statues of gods) in the Ka’bah and rededicated the shrine to one God. Muhammad forgave his former enemies.



This is another image from the picture book Muhammad by Demi, published in 2003. The image shows Muhammad's followers throwing idols out of the Ka'bah.

Muhammad returned to live in Medina and died in 632. *Al Haram*, The Prophet's Mosque, where he is buried, is considered the second most sacred site in Islam. (The Ka'bah in Mecca is the most sacred site.) By the time

of Muhammad's death, Muslims controlled most of central and southern Arabia. The rulers who followed Muhammad continued to expand his empire. By 750, Islam and Muslim rule had spread across the entire Middle East, west across North Africa, and north into Spain. (You can trace its path on the map on page 1 of this reading. Note that Spain was called Iberia at the time.)

Here's an interesting video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvFI6UBZLv4> (Animated map shows how religion spread around the world)

Reread this biography, this time marking important events Muhammad's life. On a separate sheet of paper, create a timeline. You won't have dates for all of the events.

Sources:

Demi. *Muhammad*. McElderry Books, 2004.

"Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet . Life of Muhammad: HTML Timeline." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, www.pbs.org/muhammad/timeline_html.shtml.

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