
History of Islam

The history of Islam centers around one person, **Muhammad** (also spelled Muhammed or Mohammed). He was born around 570 A.D and died in 632. He was raised by his extended family after the death of his parents. As he grew up, it is said that he became unhappy with the polytheism religions among his fellow Arabs and came to believe in one God, **Allah**. He began to have religious visions around age 40, during which he received "messages" or "revelations" from Allah. He taught them to his followers. These visions were recorded by his followers in the **Qur'an** (or Koran)

The Expansion of Islam

Muhammad's new faith was not widely accepted in his hometown of **Mecca** so he and his followers moved to Medina which means "City of the Prophet". This movement marks the turning point in Islam and serves as the beginning date on Islamic calendars.

At first, Muhammad was sympathetic to both Christians and Jews and there is little doubt that all three religions have common roots and have some of the same prophets. However, after rejection of his teaching by Christians and Jews, Muhammad turned from **Jerusalem** as the center of worship for Islam back to Mecca which he and his followers took over. When he died, he did not appoint anyone to lead so different groups competed for control. An early believer was appointed, but died within two years.

Eventually, a power struggle developed as different groups of Muslims believed their method of choosing a successor were the best. The largest argument was over whether the successor should be elected or chosen through **heredity**. This controversy produced the main body of Islam known as the **Sunnis** (followers of the prophet's way) and other **sects** including the **Shi'a**. The Shi'a are the group of Muslims who believe that the new leader of the faith should remain within Muhammad's family, and that leaders are spiritually chosen, not politically chosen. Today, the Shi'a is the largest group in Iran and the largest group of Islamic people in Iraq. However, Sunnis are the majority elsewhere.

Islam is a rapidly growing religion, partly because of its cultural and political appeal and its universal message of peace and brotherhood of man and partly because Islamic countries are growing very quickly. It is the dominant religion in North Africa, the Middle East and South Western Asia and Malaysia and Indonesia.

Basic Beliefs of Islam

The basis for Islamic faith is found in the Qur'an (Koran). Muslims believe the Qur'an is the word of God, spoken by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad, who is considered the last prophet among many prophets that also include Abraham and Jesus. It alone is considered without error. For Muslims, Muhammad was the last and most perfect of God's seven prophets or messengers to mankind. All Muslims must believe in the Six Articles of Faith and practice the Five Pillars of Faith.

Six Articles of Faith

The **Six articles of Faith** are the main doctrines (teachings) of Islam. All Muslims share beliefs in the following:

1. **Allah**. (The Arabic translation of the word God). Allah alone is the creator of all of the universe.
2. **Angels**. Angels exist and interact with human lives. They are comprised of light, and each have different purposes or messages to bring to earth. Each man or woman has two angels who record his actions; one records good deeds, the other bad deeds.