

The Roots of Islam

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Arabia is mostly a desert land, where two ways of life, nomadic and sedentary, developed.
2. A new religion called Islam, founded by Muhammad, spread throughout Arabia in the 600s.

The Big Idea

In the harsh desert climate of Arabia, Muhammad, a merchant from Mecca, introduced a major world religion called Islam.

Key Terms

oasis, p. 354
 caravan, p. 355
 Muhammad, p. 356
 Islam, p. 356
 Muslim, p. 356
 Qur'an, p. 356
 pilgrimage, p. 356
 mosque, p. 357



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TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on key places, people, and events in the origins of Islam.

If YOU were there...

You live in a town in Arabia, in a large merchant family. Your family has grown rich from selling goods brought by traders crossing the desert. Your house is larger than most others in town, and you have servants to wait on you. Although many townspeople are poor, you have always taken such differences for granted. Now you hear that some people are saying the rich should give money to the poor.

How might your family react to this idea?

BUILDING BACKGROUND For thousands of years, traders have crossed the deserts of Arabia to bring goods to market. Scorching temperatures and lack of water have made the journey difficult. But Arabia not only developed into a thriving trade center, it also became the birthplace of a new religion that challenged old ideas.

Life in a Desert Land

The Arabian Peninsula, or Arabia, is located in the southwest corner of Asia. It lies near the intersection of Africa, Europe, and Asia. For thousands of years Arabia's location, physical features, and climate have shaped life in the region.

Physical Features and Climate

Arabia lies in a region with hot and dry air. With a blazing sun and clear skies, summer temperatures in the interior reach 100°F daily. This climate has created a band of deserts across Arabia and northern Africa. Sand dunes, or hills of sand shaped by the wind, can rise to 800 feet high and stretch for hundreds of miles!

Arabia's deserts have a very limited amount of water. What water there is exists mainly in scattered oases. An **oasis is a wet, fertile area in a desert**. Oases have long been key stops along Arabia's overland trade routes.

Two Ways of Life

To live in Arabia's difficult desert environment, people developed two main ways of life. Nomads lived in tents and raised herds of sheep, goats, and camels. The animals provided milk,

A New Religion

In early times, Arabs worshipped many gods. That changed, however, when a man named **Muhammad** brought a new religion to Arabia. Historians know little about Muhammad. What they do know comes from religious writings.

Muhammad, Prophet of Islam

Muhammad was born into an important family in the city of Mecca around 570. As a child, he traveled with his uncle's caravans. Once he was grown, he managed a caravan business owned by a wealthy woman named Khadijah (ka-DEE-jah). At age 25, Muhammad married Khadijah.

The caravan trade made Mecca a rich city. But most of the wealth belonged to just a few people. Traditionally, wealthy people in Mecca had helped the poor. But as Muhammad was growing up, many rich merchants began to ignore the needy.

Concerned about these changes, Muhammad often went to the hills to pray and meditate. One day, when he was about 40 years old, he went to meditate in a cave. According to religious writings, an angel spoke to Muhammad, telling him to "Recite! Recite!" Muhammad asked what he should recite. The angel answered:

"Recite in the name of your Lord who created,
created man from clots of blood!
Recite! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One,
Who by the pen taught man what he did
not know."

—From *The Koran*, translated by N. J. Dawood

Muslims believe that God had spoken to Muhammad through the angel and had made him a prophet, a person who tells of messages from God. **The messages Muhammad believed he received form the basis of the religion Islam.** In Arabic, *Islam* means "to submit to God." **A follower of Islam is called a Muslim.** Muslims believe

that Muhammad continued receiving messages from God for the rest of his life. These messages were collected in the **Qur'an (kuh-RAN)**, the holy book of Islam.

Muhammad's Teachings

In 613 Muhammad began to talk about his messages. He taught that there was only one God, Allah, which means "the God" in Arabic. Islam is monotheistic, a religion based on the belief in one God, like Judaism and Christianity. Although people of all three religions believe in one God, their beliefs about God are not the same.

Muhammad's teachings were new to Arabs, most of whom practiced polytheism. They had many shrines, or special places where they worshipped their gods. A very important shrine, the Kaaba (KAH-bah), was in Mecca. People traveled there every year on a **pilgrimage, a journey to a sacred place.**

Muhammad's teachings upset many Arabs. First, they didn't like being told to stop worshipping their gods. Second, Muhammad's new religion seemed like a threat to people who made money from the yearly pilgrimages to the Kaaba.

Mecca's wealthy merchants didn't like another of Muhammad's teachings: that everyone who believed in Allah would become part of a community in which rich and poor would be equal. Rich merchants also disliked Muhammad's idea that people should give money to help the poor. The merchants wanted to keep all of their money and remain more powerful than the poor.

Islam Spreads in Arabia

At first Muhammad had few followers. Slowly, more people began to listen to his ideas. As Islam began to **influence** people, Mecca's rulers became worried. They threatened Muhammad and even planned to kill him.

A group of people living north of Mecca invited Muhammad to move to their city.

FOCUS ON READING

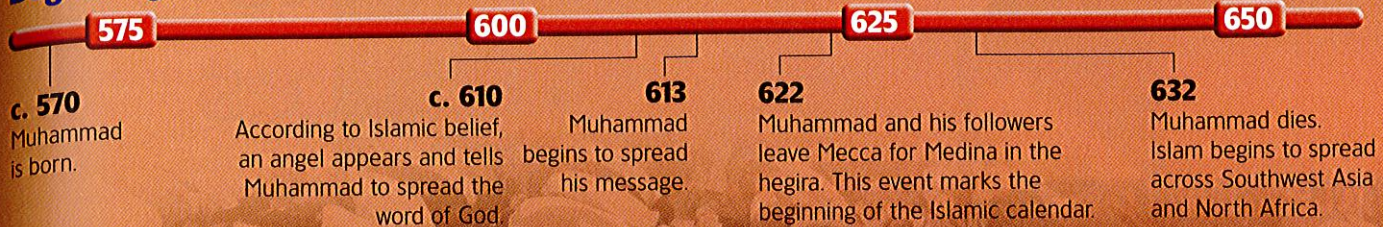
Write a question you could use to analyze the text in this paragraph. Then answer it.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

influence
change, or have an effect on

Time Line

Beginnings of Islam



ANALYSIS
SKILL

READING TIME LINES

How many years did Muhammad spend spreading his message before he died?

So in 622 Muhammad and many followers went to Medina (muh-DEE-nuh). *Medina* means “the Prophet’s city” in Arabic. Muhammad’s departure from Mecca is known as the hejira (hi-JY-ruh), or journey.

Muhammad became a spiritual and political leader in Medina. His house became the first **mosque** (mahsk), or **building for Muslim prayer**.

As the Muslim community in Medina grew stronger, other Arab tribes began to accept Islam. But conflict with the Meccans increased. In 630, after several years of fighting, the people of Mecca gave in. They accepted Islam as their religion.

Soon most of the Arabian tribes accepted Muhammad as their spiritual and political leader and became Muslims. Muhammad died in 632, but the religion he taught would soon spread far beyond Arabia.

READING CHECK Summarizing How did Islam spread in Arabia?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW The geography of Arabia encouraged trade and influenced the development of nomadic and sedentary lifestyles. In the early 600s

Muhammad introduced a new religion to Arabia. Many people in Arabia became Muslims. In the next section, you will learn more about the main Islamic teachings and beliefs.

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ANIMATED HISTORY

Muslim Army: Spread of Islam, AD 661

Section 1 Assessment

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ONLINE QUIZ

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. Define** What is an oasis?

b. Make Generalizations Why did towns often develop near oases?

c. Predict Do you think life would have been better for nomads or townspeople in early Arabia? Explain your answer.
- a. Identify** What is a key Islamic belief about God?

b. Explain According to Islamic belief, how did **Muhammad** get the ideas that started **Islam**?

c. Evaluate In what ways was Muhammad’s time in Medina important to the growth of Islam?

Critical Thinking

- Sequencing** Draw a time line like the one below. Using your notes on Muhammad, identify the key dates in his life.



FOCUS ON WRITING

- Writing about Muhammad** Review your notes to answer the question, “Who was Muhammad?” It may help to think of Muhammad’s life in three parts: “Early Life,” “Muhammad Becomes a Prophet,” and “Muhammad’s Teachings.”