

Beginnings

It was in Mecca that a citizen named Muhammad from a lower clan began to preach a new religion. In 610 AD, Muhammad revealed to his closest relatives that he had been asked by the voice of God to recite a new message to the world. He initially kept this message private among his closest relatives; three years later, however, they would persuade him to spread it. These recitations would form the heart and the soul of the Islamic faith: the **Qur'an or Koran**, or "Recitation." Muhammad considered himself a "Messenger of God" or **rasul Allah**—a messenger of God in Islam does more than just carry a message to God's people, a messenger carries an entirely new and revivifying message to humanity.

Muhammad became a servant and at the age of twenty-five married a wealthy widow, Khadija. The social tensions in Mecca with the bitter divisions resulting from the unequal distribution of wealth among the clans became significant aspects of the message of Islam. The message that Muhammad delivered was meant for very specific circumstances and many of the revelations would address specific concerns addressed to Muhammad. As far as the division of wealth and Muhammad's poverty, one of the fundamental messages of the *Qur'an* is the emphasis on material welfare and the entire community's responsibility for the material welfare of all its members.

1. Who is Muhammad?
2. Define Qur'an and rasul Allah.

Mecca 610-622

While Muhammad gained several followers in Mecca, the wealthiest and most powerful clans bitterly opposed the new religion. The revelations recited by Muhammad were often specifically directed against the most powerful clans, particularly to redistribute wealth. Because of this opposition to the wealthy clans, Muhammad's new religion largely appealed to the unfortunate peoples of Mecca.

As the religion gained followers, the wealthiest clans tried to appropriate Muhammad for themselves, offering him a wealthy marriage and entrance into the most powerful merchant clans if he would stop preaching his new religion. When that didn't work, the wealthy clans brought pressure on Muhammad's clan, to force him to stop his recitations. But they would not help. The wealthy clans then boycotted and tried to force them economically to give over this new religion. Muhammad attempted to make some peace with these clans in the first decade, but the wealthy would not budge.

The opening came with the death of Abu Talib in 619; the Hashimite clan fell under the leadership of Abu Lahab who dismissed Muhammad from the protection of the clan. What this meant was that anyone could do anything to Muhammad and the clan would not seek revenge—for all effects and purposes, Muhammad had fallen outside the protection of any law. Muhammad desperately sought for protection under other clans, but they all refused. Then one day in 620, Muhammad met with six men from Yathrib. These men were so impressed that they would later lead a larger delegation to meet with Muhammad and discuss both his revelations and the possibility of his moving to Yathrib.

1. Who opposed Muhammad in Mecca?
2. What happened after the death of Abu Talib?

Medina 622-628

Yathrib was torn apart by clan violence and the city consisted of a majority of Arabic clans and a minority of Jewish clans. It was largely through blood feuds that the violence in Yathrib slowly spread—by 618; these blood feuds erupted into all-out war involving almost every clan. These circumstances in part explain the readiness of the inhabitants of Yathrib to accept a new religion. Men from Yathrib began to come to see Muhammad in Mecca and vow allegiance to him and the religion.

Muhammad now had protection and he called for the emigration of his followers from Mecca to Yathrib, which he renamed **Medina**. Muhammad had his followers gradually left the city while he remained behind with his father-in-law, Abu Bakr, and his son-in-law, Ali. Once he left the city, Muhammad knew that the Meccans would track him down quickly. He hid out until the Meccans stopped searching the roadways for him—after three days he set out to Medina. This journey to Medina was the **Hijra** and it is from this year that the Muslim calendar begins. While normally translated "pilgrimage," *Hijra* means something like "severing relational ties."

In Medina, Muhammad was in part called on to mediate disputes between rival clans. In Mecca, Muhammad was at prayer, suddenly he had a verse revealed to him that believers should not pray to Jerusalem but to Mecca. He then ordered his congregation to turn completely around (Mecca is 180 degrees in the opposite direction from Jerusalem when you're in Medina); symbolically, the gesture signified that Islam had broken completely from Judaism.

1. Why is the journey to Medina significant?
2. How did Islam break away from Judaism?

The last years 628-632

Muhammad was the son of a poor clan, had received messages from God and established a new religion. He fled to Medina and now he had returned to Mecca as the head of a growing political unit, in fact, an empire. He turned his attention to dealing with other Arabian tribes. His goal was in part to protect his community and most importantly his goal was to unify the Arabian tribes.

As Muhammad brought various tribes and cities into alliance, he demanded that the people acknowledge Islam and his role as the messenger of God. These were not normal political alliances, but *tribal* alliances. As Islam expanded, this tribal character would not admit non-Arabs into the same structure—non-Arabs allied themselves to Islam by being a **mawali**, or "client" of a tribe.

But the Islamic peace in Arabia was only a peace at the surface. There was still much opposition among the tribes; along the Persian Gulf, for instance, most of the tribes and clans were non-Islamic and towards Syria the tribes allied themselves with the Byzantine Empire. The last two years of Muhammad's life were largely spent dealing with these internal threats to the Islamic peace. In his last year of life, Muhammad led a great pilgrimage or **Hajj** to the Ka'aba in Mecca. This final gesture gave to Islam the last of its fundamental obligations. Three months later he died.

Although he had founded a religion, he left no political mechanism in place for either political or religious succession. Who would rule in his place? Who could keep the alliances together? Most importantly, what would happen to the religion he founded? This would occupy the Islamic mind for the first decades after Muhammad's death. Two things result from this: an Islamic empire stretching across Africa to Europe itself and, the greatest of all Islamic achievements, the Qur'an.

1. What were Muhammad's goals?
2. How did Islam expand?

The **Qur'an** is a book containing the literal Word of Allah. It was transmitted from Allah to an angel of His (Gabriel), and from the angel to the Messenger of Allah who delivered it to us. The Qur'an covers a wide variety of topics, including evidence to support its claim of being the Word of the Creator, stories of earlier generations, rules which humanity is asked to obey, and information about the Hereafter. The Qur'an claims that it is protected from change by other than Allah, and this is confirmed by its 1400 year history.

Directions: Read the following quotes from Islamic Sources and bullet the key beliefs in the chart based on the quote. Then answer the questions below:

Quotes :	Main ideas/ belief of the quote
112:1-4] Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the One on whom all depend; He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none comparable to Him.	
[33:35] For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for truthful men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.	
4:3] If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.	
17:33] Nor take life - which Allah has made sacred - except for just cause. And if anyone is slain wrongfully, we have given his heir authority (to demand retaliation or to forgive): but let him not exceed bounds in the matter of taking life, for he is helped (by the Law)	
124] If any do deeds of righteousness - be they male or female - and have faith, they will enter Paradise, and not the least injustice will be done to them.	

1. Why are both men and women equal in the eyes of Allah?
2. What is the Islamic view of marriage?
3. Why is Islam considered a monotheistic religion?
4. Based on verse ([33:35] Document 2), what are some of the qualities that Islam preaches?