

# Islam



Islam is the second most practiced religion in the world, with approximately 1.6 billion practitioners making up nearly a quarter of the world's population. Though they live all over the world, practitioners of the Islamic faith (known as Muslims) are most commonly found in northern Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Only Christianity, with its 2.1 billion believers, outranks Islam in terms of sheer numbers. Both Islam and Christianity, like Judaism, are monotheistic religions, which means they teach faith in one god. Actually, all three religions believe in the same God, who made a covenant with Abraham; thus, they are called the "Abrahamic religions." Much in the same way Jesus Christ established Christianity by adding new teachings to the Jewish canon, Muhammad founded Islam by sharing his personal revelations from God. Though Jesus is the son of God according to Christian tradition, in the Islamic faith, both he and Muhammad are referred to as prophets.

Muhammad was born during the late sixth century, around the year 570 CE, in the Arabian city of Mecca. He died on June 8, 632, but not before leaving his mark on history and humanity. Muhammad was a man of deep faith, and upon returning home from a prayer retreat in his fortieth year, he told his family that he had received a revelation — a message from God. One of the messages he relayed to the people who began to follow him was that "God is one." This has been interpreted as meaning that there is only one unique and universal God in existence. The Arabic word *Allah* literally means "the God." Muhammad taught that Allah commands the creation of all things in the universe. He is so great that humans cannot truly comprehend him or his reach of influence. In addition, Muhammad preached that everyone's mission in life must be to worship Allah and live virtuously. People who follow Muhammad's teachings and act according to the will of God can reach *Jannah*, the Islamic paradise. In *Jannah*, during the afterlife, all of a person's worldly desires will be fulfilled.

After Muhammad had gained some popularity, the wealthy and elite members of his community began to treat him with hostility. Many rejected his teachings in favor of the traditional polytheistic religion. In 622 CE, he led those who chose to follow him on a migration to a neighboring city, which Muhammad renamed Medina. This event became known as the Hijra and marked the beginning of the Islamic calendar. The Hijra sparked a tremendous growth in the Islamic religion, as Muhammad's number of followers grew to nearly 10,000 in the eight years following; after settling down in Medina Muhammad invited numerous other tribes to join him.

In spite of the peaceful manner with which Muhammad solicited the neighboring Jewish tribes, he could not achieve peace so easily with those in his homeland. There were numerous skirmishes between Muslims and Meccans, some going remarkably well for the Muslim forces. But not always—during the Battle of Uhud, Muhammad's own uncle, Hamza, was slaughtered. He had been a champion of Islam and a strong fighter in previous battles. The fact that he died bravely defending his beliefs made him a martyr. Though they lost the Battle of Uhud, the Muslims rallied around their fallen comrades and survived to continue spreading the word of the Prophet.

In 628 CE, the Muslims and the Meccans wrote a peace treaty so that Muslims could make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca for religious purposes. To back up the treaty, neighboring tribes were asked to choose sides and support their allies in the event of a treaty violation. Eventually, one of the allied tribes broke the agreement, and Muhammad decided to support his own ally, who had been attacked. By this time his forces outnumbered the Meccans, so he planned a surprise attack on the city of Mecca itself. Because the Meccans were unprepared for battle, they chose to surrender peacefully. Thus, in 630 CE Muhammad won back control of Mecca without shedding a drop of blood. Also, in spite of the many years of persecution suffered by Muslims, he refrained from exacting vengeance or forcing conversion to Islam. Those who let the Muslims peacefully inhabit the city were allowed, in turn, to go about their own business. Many of the inhabitants of the city were so impressed by this generosity, as well as by the popularity of the new religion, that they converted to Islam willingly.

Having successfully entered Mecca, Muhammad and his followers were able to complete the holy pilgrimage to the Ka'aba. The Ka'aba was originally the site where the angel Gabriel created a spring to save the life of Abraham's son Ishmael around 2000 BCE, but in the following millennia it had become a holy destination for pagan as well as Christian Arabs. However, when Muhammad led the Muslims on the pilgrimage in 630 CE, they tore down the pagan symbols and re-consecrated it as the main shrine of Islam. To this day, the pilgrimage to Mecca, called the Hajj, is one of a Muslim's most sacred duties.

In spite of the great victory at Mecca, the fighting was not over. As Muhammad continued to send out envoys and missionaries to the neighboring tribes, threats continued to

come from across the Arabian Peninsula. However, Muhammad soon succeeded in uniting the entire peninsula under Islam.

Finally, in the year 631 CE, nine years after his first migration into Medina and soon after the local civil wars had ended, Muhammad led his followers on the farewell pilgrimage. At his Farewell Sermon, Muhammad instructed his people to end violence for revenge or profit. In pre-Islamic days, violence was always met with violence. In the new Islamic community, there would be peaceful justice. He also spoke in favor of equality and respect for all fellow Muslims. Muhammad would die in Medina just a few months later, after falling ill.

The Islamic religious core quickly began compiling all of the teachings of Muhammad into one book. They tracked down all known writings and oral recollections of Muhammad's speeches, sermons, and lessons. The book became known as The Qur'an (pronounced: kor-AHN), a word that translates as "the read." Muslims believe that the words in the Qur'an are the teachings of God as told to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel, messages that were transmitted over the course of about twenty-three years, beginning during that important prayer retreat in 609 CE. Because of this and its poetic style, Muslims stand firm that the Qur'an is a one-of-a-kind manuscript, the final and most holy of God's revelations. The second most important holy text in Islam is the Sunnah, a guide for how to interpret the Qur'an and live a perfect life in accordance with God's will, as exemplified by how Muhammad lived his life. The word *Sunnah* means "a clear and well-trodden path." Muslims look to the Qur'an and Sunnah not only for spiritual guidance, but also for solutions to all the problems of mankind.

Today there are many different sects of Islam, whose interpretations of the holy texts vary widely. In the same way that different Christian and Jewish denominations teach similar values with different practical emphases, Muslims are divided by their definitions of scriptural truth. However, they all respect the Qur'an as the ultimate statement of God's will. The message received from Muhammad hundreds of years ago remains impressively intact as the guiding ethic for the world's second most popular religion.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What happened when Muhammad was approximately 40 years old?

- A He informed others that he had received a revelation from God.
- B He led those who chose to follow him to Medina.
- C The number of his followers grew to 10,000.
- D He fell ill and died.

2. The author describes the sequence of events in Muhammad's life. Which of the following events occurred before the Battle of Uhud, in which Muhammad's uncle was slaughtered?

- A Muhammad died in Medina after falling ill.
- B Muhammad led his followers on a pilgrimage and delivered his Farewell Sermon, instructing his people to end violence for revenge or profit.
- C Muhammad led his followers to Medina.
- D Muhammad won control of Mecca and succeeded in uniting the Arabian Peninsula.

3. The Islamic religious core quickly began compiling all of the teachings of Muhammad into one book after Muhammad died. They tracked down all known writings and oral recollections of his speeches, sermons, and lessons to create The Qur'an. Muslims look to The Qur'an for spiritual guidance and the solutions for the problems of mankind.

What can be concluded about Islam based on this information?

- A Islam spread only after The Qur'an was created.
- B Islam became a religion after Muhammad died.
- C Islam is deeply rooted in the teachings of Muhammad.
- D Islam is based on different interpretations of Muhammad's teachings.

4. Which of the following words best describes the early beginnings of Islam?

- A tumultuous
- B peaceful
- C surprising
- D mysterious

5. What is this passage mainly about?

- A the differences of the three "Abrahamic Religions"
- B religious conflicts in Mecca and Medina
- C Muhammad and Islam
- D wars among different religions

6. Read the sentence: "Because the Meccans were unprepared for battle, they chose to surrender peacefully. Thus, in 630 CE Muhammad won back control of Mecca **without shedding a drop of blood.**"

What does the author mean by saying, "**without shedding a drop of blood**"?

- A The Muslims killed many Meccans without suffering any losses themselves.
- B No one was killed during battle to take control of Mecca.
- C Many people were bruised, but they did not bleed.
- D Muhammad himself was not injured during the takeover of Mecca.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

\_\_\_\_\_ Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have differences, they are all rooted in the covenant God made with Abraham.

- A Since
- B Because
- C Although
- D However

8. List at least two similarities that Islam shares with Christianity and Judaism.

---

---

---

9. In 628 CE, the Muslims and the Meccans wrote a peace treaty so that Muslims could make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca for religious purposes. What did Muhammad decide to do after one of the allied tribes broke the treaty?

---

---

---

---

---

10. Explain an important characteristic Muhammad had that made him a strong leader. Use information from the passage to support your answer.

---

---

---

---

---

## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1190

1. What happened when Muhammad was approximately 40 years old?

- A **He informed others that he had received a revelation from God.**
- B He led those who chose to follow him to Medina.
- C The number of his followers grew to 10,000.
- D He fell ill and died.

2. The author describes the sequence of events in Muhammad's life. Which of the following events occurred before the Battle of Uhud, in which Muhammad's uncle was slaughtered?

- A Muhammad died in Medina after falling ill.
- B Muhammad led his followers on a pilgrimage and delivered his Farewell Sermon, instructing his people to end violence for revenge or profit.
- C **Muhammad led his followers to Medina.**
- D Muhammad won control of Mecca and succeeded in uniting the Arabian Peninsula.

3. The Islamic religious core quickly began compiling all of the teachings of Muhammad into one book after Muhammad died. They tracked down all known writings and oral recollections of his speeches, sermons, and lessons to create The Qur'an. Muslims look to The Qur'an for spiritual guidance and the solutions for the problems of mankind.

What can be concluded about Islam based on this information?

- A Islam spread only after The Qur'an was created.
- B Islam became a religion after Muhammad died.
- C **Islam is deeply rooted in the teachings of Muhammad.**
- D Islam is based on different interpretations of Muhammad's teachings.

4. Which of the following words best describes the early beginnings of Islam?

- A **tumultuous**
- B peaceful
- C surprising
- D mysterious

5. What is this passage mainly about?

- A the differences of the three "Abrahamic Religions"
- B religious conflicts in Mecca and Medina
- C **Muhammad and Islam**
- D wars among different religions

6. Read the sentence: "Because the Meccans were unprepared for battle, they chose to surrender peacefully. Thus, in 630 CE Muhammad won back control of Mecca **without shedding a drop of blood.**"

What does the author mean by saying, "**without shedding a drop of blood**"?

- A The Muslims killed many Meccans without suffering any losses themselves.
- B No one was killed during battle to take control of Mecca.**
- C Many people were bruised, but they did not bleed.
- D Muhammad himself was not injured during the takeover of Mecca.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

\_\_\_\_\_ Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have differences, they are all rooted in the covenant God made with Abraham.

- A Since
- B Because
- C Although**
- D However

8. List at least two similarities that Islam shares with Christianity and Judaism.

**Suggested answers:** Answers should include any of the relevant information presented in the passage. For example, students may note that all three religions believe in one God, and they are all rooted in the covenant God made with Abraham. Also, they all have different sects which teach similar values with different practical emphases.

9. In 628 CE, the Muslims and the Meccans wrote a peace treaty so that Muslims could make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca for religious purposes. What did Muhammad decide to do after one of the allied tribes broke the treaty?

**Suggested answer:** Muhammad decided to rally his superior forces against Mecca in order to take over the city and establish the Ka'aba as a holy shrine of Islam.

10. Explain an important characteristic Muhammad had that made him a strong leader. Use information from the passage to support your answer.

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary and should be supported by the passage. For example, students may explain that Muhammad was forgiving, enabling him to attract followers and inspire their devotion. His decision to pardon the Meccans' aggressions against him and his people ultimately inspired many of the Meccans to willingly convert to Islam. He was able to promote a system of peaceful justice through this act of forgiveness, as opposed to escalating acts of violent revenge.