



Islamic Coin

# Islam in the Beginning and its Impact on the World

- The word Islam means "submission", signifying obedience to the rule and will of Allah.
- Allah is the only God of the Islamic religion.
- An individual who accepts the Islamic faith is a Muslim, meaning "One who has submitted."
- During its first century, Islam reached far beyond the Arabian peninsula where it began, bringing Persia and parts of the Byzantine empire into its orbit.
- By the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Islamic countries stood beside the Byzantine empire as a political and economic anchor of the postclassical world.

- For a time Islamic society reflected the nomadic and mercantile Arabian society where it began, but eventually Muslims were inspired by other societies as well.
- After they conquered Persia, Muslims adopted Persian techniques of government and finance to administer their lands. Muslims also adopted Persian literature, science, and religious values.
- In later centuries, Muslims were inspired by Greek and Indian traditions.

- Although it adopted values and customs from other societies, the Islamic faith transformed the cultural traditions that it absorbed.
- Islamic empires provided a political framework for trade and diplomacy over a vast portion of the eastern hemisphere, from west Africa to the islands of Southeast Asia.

- Many lands of varied cultural background became part of a larger society called dar al-Islam, an Arab term that means “house of Islam” , referring to lands under Islamic rule.
- Islam had its beginnings in the Arabian Peninsula.
- Despite its arid conditions, human communities have occupied Arabia for thousands of years.
- Nomadic peoples known as Bedouin migrated through the deserts to find grass and water for their herds.

- The Bedouin organized themselves into family and clan groups.
- In the harsh environment of the Arabian desert, cooperation with kin often made the difference between life and death.
- Bedouin peoples developed a strong sense of loyalty to their clans and these clan loyalties survived for centuries after Islam appeared.

- Arabs held an important place in the long distance trade networks of the postclassical era.
- Commodities arrived on the Persian Gulf near modern Bahrain, the Arabian Sea near modern Aden and the Red Sea near Mecca and then traveled overland by camel caravan to Palmyra or Damascus which offered access to the Mediterranean basin.
- After the third century, Arabia became an increasingly important link in long distance trade networks.

- As classical empires weakened, trade routes across central Asia became more insecure. Responding to this, merchants abandoned the overland routes in favor of sea lanes connecting with land routes in the Arabian peninsula.
- The prophet Muhammad was born into a world of nomadic Bedouin herders and merchants in 570. He came from a family of merchants in Mecca. Muhammad Ibu Abdullah lost both of his parents when he was a young child, and his grandfather and uncle raised and educated him.

- As a young man, he married a wealthy widow named Khadja, about the year 595 and his marriage gained him a prominent position in Meccan society. She was the first of his four wives.
- By the time he was 30, Muhammad had established himself as a merchant and had made a comfortable life in Arabian society.
- His was a society where peoples of different religious and cultural traditions interacted with each other.
- Most Arabs believed in many deities and natural spirits and sought their favor through prayers and sacrifices.

- Large communities of Jewish merchants also worked throughout Arabia, and many Arabs had converted to Christianity by Muhammad's time.
- About 610 as he approached age 40, Muhammad experienced a spiritual conversion that changed his life and left a deep mark on world history.
- After his conversion, Muhammad believed that there was only one true God, Allah, and that he ruled the universe.
- He believed that idolatry and recognizing other gods was wicked.

- He thought that Allah would soon bring his judgment on the world.
- Muhammad saw visions that he believed were messages from Allah.
- In Muhammad's visions, the archangel Gabriel, also recognized by Jews and Christians as God's special messenger, told Muhammad to explain his faith to others.
- Muhammad followed Gabriel's instructions and began to share his faith with his family and close friends.

- His faith gradually spread and by about 620 many citizens of Mecca had joined his circle.
- As the Islamic faith grew, the followers of Muhammad prepared texts of his teachings which they issued as the Quran (recitation), the holy book of Islam.
- The Quran is the definitive authority for Islamic religious doctrine and social organization.
- After the Quran are traditions known as the hadith, which includes sayings of Muhammad and accounts of his deeds.

- The growing popularity of Muhammad's preaching clashed with the ruling elites at Mecca. His doctrine of one god offended many of the polytheistic Arabs and challenged traditions.
- Muhammad also presented an economic threat to the people who owned and profited from the many shrines and deities attracting pilgrims and deities to Mecca when he attacked idolatry.
- The pressure on Muhammad and his followers became so great that they fled Mecca in 622 and established themselves in Medina.

- Muhammad and his follower's flight to Medina called the hijra or migration is the starting point of the official Islamic calendar.
- Muhammad organized his followers into a cohesive community called the umma or the community of the faithful and provided it with a comprehensive legal and social code.
- Muhammad led his followers in daily prayers to Allah and in battle with enemies at Medina, Mecca, and other places.

- Muhammad also provided relief for widows, orphans, and the poor and he made almsgiving a prime and moral virtue.
- During his years at Medina, Muhammad began to refer to himself as the prophet, the final prophet that Allah would use to reveal his message to mankind.
- Muhammad accepted the authority of earlier Jewish and Christian prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and he held the Hebrew scriptures and Christian New Testament in high esteem.

- Muhammad also believed that Allah was the same as the Jews' Yahweh and the Christians' God.
- But Muhammad taught that the message that Allah entrusted to him was a more complete revelation of Allah and his will than Jewish and Christian faiths had formulated.
- Muhammad came to regard himself as the messenger who communicated Allah's wishes and his plan for the world to all humankind.
- He was regarded as the last prophet, or "the seal of the prophets."

- All through the years in exile at Medina, Muhammad and his followers planned to return home to Mecca.
- In 630 they attacked Mecca and conquered the city. They forced the authorities to adopt Islam and they imposed a government dedicated to Allah.
- They destroyed the shrines and replaced them with mosques.
- In 632 Muhammad led the Islamic pilgrimage to the Kaba, a large black rock considered to be the dwelling place of a deity.

- He preserved the Kaba and its housing as a symbol of Mecca's greatness and established the pilgrimage of hajj as an example of all devout Muslims.
- By the time Muhammad died in 632, shortly after his hajj, Muslims had brought most of Arabia under their control.
- Muhammad's faith and leadership decisively shaped the values and development of the Islamic community.

- The foundations of the Islamic faith are known as the Five Pillars of Islam. They are:
  1. Muslims must acknowledge Allah as the only god and Muhammad as his prophet.
  2. They must pray to Allah daily while facing Mecca.
  3. They must observe a fast during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan.
  4. They must contribute alms for the relief of the weak and the poor.
  5. Those who are physically and financially able must undertake the hajj and make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca.

- In the centuries since its appearance, Islam has generated many schools and sects, but the Five Pillars of Islam make a powerful foundation that has bound the umma as a whole into a cohesive community of faith.
- Some Muslims have added jihad as an additional obligation of Islam.
- Jihad has many definitions. The term literally means “struggle.” In one sense jihad obligates Muslims to combat vice and evil. In another sense jihad calls on Muslims to struggle against unbelief by spreading the word and sword of Islam.

- Islamic holy law, known as the sharia, emerged during the centuries after Muhammad and offered detailed guidance on proper behavior in almost every aspect of life.
- Through the sharia, Islam became more than a religious doctrine it developed into a way of life.
- Muhammad did not provide for a successor and after his death, the umma disagreed about choosing a new leader.
- Muslims eventually united and embarked on a program of military expansion that extended its political and cultural influence far beyond the boundaries of Arabia.

- Muhammad's successors chose Abu Bakr, one of his closest friends, as his successor or caliph (deputy),
- Bakr forced the people to recognize the faith of Islam and the rule of the caliph.
- During the century after Muhammad's death, Islamic armies carried their religion and authority throughout Arabia into Byzantine and Sasanid territories and beyond.
- Between 633 and 637, Muslim forces seized Byzantine Syria and Palestine and took most of Mesopotamia from the Sasanids.

- During the 640s they conquered Byzantine Egypt and North Africa.
- In 651 they conquered the Sasanid dynasty and incorporated Persia into their empire.
- In 711 they conquered the Hindu kingdom of Sind into northwestern India.
- Between 711 and 718 they extended their authority into northwest Africa and crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, conquering most of the Iberian peninsula and threatening the Frankish kingdom in Gaul.

- By the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century an immense Islamic empire ruled lands from India and the central Asian steppe lands in the east to northwest Africa and Iberia in the west.
- The Shia sect originated in disagreements over succession. It originated as a party supporting the appointment of Ali-a cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad and his descendants as caliphs.
- The Sunnis or traditionalists were the majority of Muslims.
- The Umayyad dynasty ranked among the most prominent of the Meccan merchant clans.

- The Umayyad reputation and network of alliances helped them bring stability to the Islamic community.
- The Umayyad established their capital at Damascus in Syria.
- They ruled dar al-Islam (the realm of Islam) as conquerors and their policies favored the Arab military aristocracy.
- Arabs mostly allowed conquered peoples to observe their own religions, but they levied a special head tax on those who did not convert to Islam.

- Rebellion in Persia brought the Umayyad dynasty to an end during the 740s.
- The chief leader of the rebellion was Abu al Abbas, a Sunni Arab and a descendant of Muhammad's uncle.
- The Abbasid dynasty was the principal source of authority in the dar-al Islam until the Mongols toppled it in 1258.
- The Abbasid rulers did not show special favor to the Arab military aristocracy. Arabs played a major role in government, but Persians, Egyptians, Mesopotamians and others also arose to positions of power.

- The Abbasid dynasty was also not a conquering dynasty.
- The Abbasids defeated a Chinese army at Talas River which ended the expansion of the Tang dynasty into central Asia and opened the door to the spread of Islam among Turkish peoples, but they did not often have armies on the march.
- The Islamic empire continued to grow during the Abbasid dynasty, but this was the force of autonomous Islamic forces rather than the policies of the caliphs.

- The Abbasids contented themselves with administration which was a considerable challenge because the empire was a diverse mixture of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural groups.
- The Mongols extinguished the Abbasid dynasty in 1258.
- In the early Islamic world peasants tilled the land and manufacturers and merchants supported a thriving urban economy.
- The Umayyad and Abbasid empires created a zone of trade, exchange, and communication stretching from India to Iberia.

- Travelers throughout the regions of Islam spread plants, animals, and agricultural techniques between peoples and regions. From India they brought sugarcane, rice, new varieties of sorghum and wheat, spinach and artichokes, oranges, bananas, coconuts and mangoes. They brought industrial crops like cotton, indigo, and henna.
- Increased agricultural production contributed to the rapid growth of cities in all parts of the Islamic world from India to Spain.

- There were flourishing markets supporting thousands of artisans, craftsmen, and merchants.
- The cities were almost important centers of industrial production, especially of textiles, pottery, glassware, leather, iron and steel.
- Improved transportation, expanded banking services, and refined techniques of business organization resulted in a surge of long distance trade in the Islamic world. Muslim merchants dealt in silk and ceramics from China, spices and aromatics from India and southeast Asia and jewelry and fine textiles from the Byzantine empire.

- There had been a patriarchal society in Arabia long before Muhammad, but Arab women did enjoy some rights. They could legally inherit property, divorce husbands on their own, and engage in business ventures.
- The Quran outlawed female infanticide, and it provided that dowries go directly to brides rather than to their husbands and male guardians.
- It portrayed women as honorable individuals and not the property of men and equal to men before Allah with their own rights and needs.

- Muhammad set an example by being kind and generous to his wives.
- But for the most part the Quran and the sharia reinforced male dominance.
- The Quran and Islamic holy law recognized descent through the male line, and to guarantee proper inheritance, they placed a high premium on genealogical purity.
- They subjected the social and sexual lives of women to the strict control of their male guardians.

- The Quran and the sharia permitted men to take up to four wives, but women could have only one husband.
- The Quran and the sharia provided a religious and legal foundation for a patriarchal society.
- The practice of veiling for women dates to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., and long before Muhammad it had spread of Persia and the rest of the eastern Mediterranean.

- Formal educational institutions helped promote Islamic values. Many mosques maintained schools that provided an elementary education and religious instruction.
- By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, institution of higher education known as madrasas began to appear and by the 12<sup>th</sup> century they had become established in the major cities of the Islamic world.
- The Sufis were mystic Islamic missionaries.

- In lands ruled by the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, large numbers of conquered peoples converted to Islam and they brought elements of their inherited cultural traditions into Islamic society.