

# Reading Essentials and Study Guide



## Islam and the Arab Empire, 600–1000

### Lesson 1 The First Muslims

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

*How can religion influence the development of an empire? How might religious beliefs affect society, culture, and politics?*

#### Reading HELPDESK

##### Academic Vocabulary

**revelation** a divine truth

**submission** the act of submitting to the control or authority of another

##### Content Vocabulary

**sheikh** the ruler of an Arabic tribe, chosen from one of the leading families by a council of elders

**Allah** Arabic for God; the supreme god of Islam

**Islam** monotheistic religion that emerged in the Arabian Peninsula during the seventh century

**Quran** the holy scriptures of the religion of Islam

**Muslim** a person who believes in Islam

**Hijrah** the journey of Muhammad and his followers to Madinah in 622, which became year 1 of the official calendar of Islam

**bedouin** a nomadic Arab who lives in the Arabian, Syrian, or North African deserts

**hajj** a pilgrimage to Makkah, one of the requirements of the Five Pillars of Islam

**Five Pillars of Islam** acts of worship every Muslim must perform; these include belief, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage

**shari'ah** a law code drawn up by Muslim scholars after Muhammad's death; it provided believers with a set of laws to regulate their daily lives

#### TAKING NOTES: *Contrasting*

**ACTIVITY** As you read, use a table like the one below to contrast the beliefs of early Arabs with the religion of Islam.

Early Arabic beliefs	Islam

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## Islam and the Arab Empire, 600–1000

### Lesson 1 The First Muslims, *continued*

#### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Early Arabs were nomads, or people who moved from place to place. They believed in many gods. In the seventh century, Muhammad founded the Islamic religion on the Arabian Peninsula. Over 1,000 years after Islam began, the cultural, artistic, and scientific contributions of Muslims continue to make our daily lives richer.

#### The Arabs

**Guiding Question** *Why did communities on the Arabian Peninsula prosper economically?*

Some of the most powerful civilizations in history have called Western Asia home. These included the Sumerians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and the short-lived civilization that resulted from the conquests of Alexander the Great. In the seventh century, the Arabs arose in the Arabian Peninsula. They spread their influence throughout Western Asia and beyond.

The Arabs were a Semitic-speaking people, like the Israelites and the Assyrians. They lived in the Arabian Peninsula, a desert land with few rivers or lakes. The hostile surroundings of the Arabian Peninsula caused the Arabs to be nomads. They moved frequently to find water and food for their animals.

Survival in such a harsh environment was not easy. As a result, the Arabs organized into tribes to help one another. Each tribe was ruled by a leader called a **sheikh** (SHAYK). A council of elders chose the sheikh from one of the leading families. Each tribe was independent, but all the tribes were loosely connected to one another.

The Arabs lived on the Arabian Peninsula as farmers and shepherders on the oases, or places in the desert with trees and water, and in areas that received rain. The camel was domesticated, or trained to live with and work for humans, in the first millennium B.C. After that, the Arabs lived in more areas of the desert. They also expanded the caravan trade into these regions. Towns developed along the routes as the Arabs became major carriers of goods on the Silk Road. This trade route extended from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea.

Most early Arabs were polytheistic—they believed in many gods. The Arabs recognized a supreme god named **Allah**. *Allah* is Arabic for “God.” They also believed in other tribal gods. Allah was represented by a sacred stone, and each tribe had its own stone. All tribes, however, worshiped a massive black meteorite, which was called the Black Stone. It had been placed in a central shrine called the Kaaba (KAW•buh). This shrine is in the city of Makkah (Mecca), which is located on the Arabian Peninsula.

Political unrest in Mesopotamia and Egypt made the usual trade routes in Southwest Asia too dangerous to travel. As a result, the Arabian Peninsula took on a new importance. A safer route through Makkah to present-day Yemen and then by ship across the Indian Ocean became popular. Camel caravans carried highly prized frankincense and myrrh along this route. The journey was long, and camels had to stop more than 60 times.

Communities along this route prospered from the increased trade. Tension and conflict arose, however, as increasingly wealthy merchants showed little concern for the welfare of poorer people and slaves.

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**networks**

## Islam and the Arab Empire, 600–1000

### Lesson 1 The First Muslims, *continued*



#### Reading Progress Check

**Summarizing** Why was it necessary for previously nomadic Arab tribes to organize?

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## The Life of Muhammad

**Guiding Question** *What was the significance of Gabriel's messages to Muhammad according to Islamic teachings?*

A man named Muhammad lived during the time of tension in Southwest Asia. He was born in Makkah to a merchant family, but he was orphaned at five. He grew up and became a caravan manager, and he married a rich widow named Khadija. Over time, Muhammad became troubled by the growing gap between the generosity of most Makkans and the greediness of the wealthy elite. He began to visit the hills to meditate, or spend time in quiet thought. Muslims believe that during one of these visits Muhammad received revelations, or messages from God. According to Islamic teachings, the messages were given by the angel Gabriel. Gabriel told Muhammad to recite, or repeat from memory, what he heard. Muhammad had a knowledge of the Jewish and Christian thought. He came to believe that Allah had already revealed himself through Moses and Jesus and therefore through the Jewish and Christian teachings. However, he believed that the final **revelations** of Allah were now being given to him.

Out of these revelations developed the religion of **Islam**. The revelations were eventually written down and became the holy book of Islam, called the **Quran**. The word *Islam* means “peace through **submission** to the will of Allah.” The Quran contains the ethical guidelines and laws by which the followers of Allah are to live. Those who practice the religion of Islam are called **Muslims**. According to Islam, there is only one God, Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.

Muhammad returned home after receiving the revelations, and he thought about his experience. His wife urged him to follow Gabriel's message, and she became the first convert to Islam. Muhammad then set out to convince the people of Makkah of the truth of the revelations. Many were surprised at Muhammad's claims to be a prophet. The wealthy feared his attacks on corrupt society. They thought his attacks would upset the existing social and political order. After three years of preaching, or teaching about his religion, Muhammad had only 30 followers.

Muhammad became discouraged by the persecution of his followers, or the cruel and unfair treatment given to them. The Makkans' failure to accept his message was also discouraging to him. In 622 he and some of his closest supporters left Makkah. They moved north to the city of Yathrib. It was later renamed Madinah (Medina, or “city of the prophet”). The journey of Muhammad and his followers to Madinah is known as the **Hijrah** (HIJ•rah). The year the journey occurred became year 1 in the official calendar of Islam, which is still in use today.

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## Islam and the Arab Empire, 600–1000

### Lesson 1 The First Muslims, *continued*

Muhammad had been invited to Madinah by a number of prominent, or well-known and respected, residents. Soon he began to win support from people in the city. He also won support from Arabs in the desert, known as **bedouin**. From these groups, he formed the first community of practicing Muslims.

Muslims saw no separation between political and religious authority. Submission, or obedience, to the will of Allah meant submission to his prophet, Muhammad. As a result, Muhammad soon became both a religious and a political leader. His political and military skills allowed him to put together a reliable military force to defend himself and his followers.

In 630 Muhammad returned to Makkah with 10,000 men. The city quickly surrendered, and most of the townspeople converted to Islam. During a visit to the Kaaba, Muhammad declared it a sacred shrine of Islam. Two years after his triumphal return to Makkah, just as Islam was spreading through the Arabian Peninsula, Muhammad died. All Muslims, even today, are encouraged to make a pilgrimage, or journey, to Makkah if possible. The pilgrimage is known as the **hajj** (HAJ).



#### Reading Progress Check

*Identifying* What is the significance of the city of Makkah to early Islam?

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## The Teachings of Muhammad

**Guiding Question** *What beliefs and ways of life shape the religious traditions of Islam?*

Like Christianity and Judaism, Islam is a monotheistic religion, or a religion with a belief in one god. In Islam, Allah is the one all-powerful being who created the universe and everything in it. Islamic teaching emphasizes salvation and offers the hope of an afterlife. Those who desire to achieve life after death must obey Allah's will.

Unlike Christianity, Islam does not believe that its first preacher was divine. Muhammad is considered a prophet, similar to Moses, but he was also a man like other men. Muslims believe that humans rejected Allah's earlier messengers. As a result, Allah sent his final revelation through Muhammad. The Quran is at the center of Islam. The Quran is the sacred book of Islam and consists of 114 chapters. It is a guidebook for ethics and a code of law combined.

Muslims see Islam as a direct and straightforward faith. This means practicing the acts of worship known as the **Five Pillars of Islam**. These Five Pillars are belief, prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. Muslims believe there is no deity but the One God, and that Muhammad is his messenger (*belief pillar*). Muslims perform prescribed prayers five times a day (*prayer pillar*). They give part of their wealth to the poor (*charity pillar*). During Ramadan, Muslims who are physically able refrain from food and drink from dawn to sunset (*fasting pillar*). Finally, believers who are financially able are expected to make a pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in their lifetime (*pilgrimage pillar*). The faithful who follow the law go to an eternal, or ever-lasting, paradise after they die.

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## Islam and the Arab Empire, 600–1000

### Lesson 1 The First Muslims, *continued*

Islam is not just a set of religious beliefs. It is also a way of life. After Muhammad's death, Muslim scholars developed a law code known as the **shari'ah** (shuh • REE • uh). It provides believers with a set of laws to rule their daily lives. The shari'ah is based on scholars' interpretations of the Quran and the example set by Muhammad in his life. It addresses all aspects of Muslim life, including family, business, government, and moral conduct. The *shari'ah* does not separate religious matters from civil or political law.

Believers are expected to follow sound principles for behavior. In addition to the acts of worship called the Five Pillars, Muslims must practice traditions of honesty and justice in dealing with others. Muslims are forbidden to gamble, eat pork, drink alcoholic beverages, or engage in dishonest behavior. Family life is based on marriage.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Comparing and Contrasting** What similarities and differences exist between the belief systems of Islam and Christianity?

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