

Activity Introduction

Hey there (Name) here. And today we're going to be looking at Islam.

We'll get to trace the early historical origins in Southwest Asia...

There's a lot to this very rich culture. We'll find out about Muhammad, the hajj, the Qur'an, and much much more so let's get going.

Video 1

Helloooo there! I'm Professor Miriam Higginbotham with you once again and today I'll be accompanying you on a journey as we explore the religion of Islam, the beginnings of Islam to be precise. Let's start by turning back the clock and taking a look at the early origins of Islam....

The story of Islam began on the Arabian Peninsula in Southwest Asia, in a city called Mecca near the Red Sea. Mecca was a bustling center for trade and home to a great many Arab people in the Sixth century C.E. The Arabs were a polytheistic people and the city of Mecca was already a place of religious significance to them. In Five-Seventy-One C.E., though, a major event occurred that would later change the Arab world forever!!! Five-Seventy One C.E. was the year of the birth of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad.

Muhammad was born into a poor Arab family in Mecca. His family, however, was part of a very prominent Arab tribe called the Quraysh tribe. Sadly, Muhammad's father died

before he was born and his mother passed away when Muhammad was just a young boy. After her death, Muhammad was raised by his father's brother, a merchant, and educated by his grandfather. As an adult he went to work as a merchant for a rich widow named Khadijah, whom he would eventually marry.

His travels as a merchant took him all over the Arabian peninsula and beyond. It was on these trips that he learned about many different peoples and cultures. Most likely he was introduced to different ways of living and to the monotheistic religions of Judaism and Christianity. His travelling also allowed for him to step outside the Arab world and see it from a different angle. He began to notice the rivalries and tensions between various clans and tribes.

Over time Muhammad became increasingly disinterested in his business and the pleasures that wealth brought. He began to escape to the nearby hills of Mecca and meditate for long periods of time. Then in Six-Ten C.E. he began to speak of the revelations that the God, Allah, had communicated to him during his meditation through the Angel Gabriel. The revelations were eventually written down in the Qur'an, the Islamic holy book.

These revelations were at the center of Muhammad's teachings and formed the basis of a new monotheistic religion known as Islam. The word Islam literally means "submission—or, surrender to Allah".

Video 2

Initially Muhammad started out with a small group of followers that included his wife, a few desert clans, some servants and slaves. His followers were called Muslims, which meant "those who surrendered to Allah". Over time though, Muhammad attracted more and more people from Mecca to the religion of Islam. This, however, began to cause

trouble with the wealthy Umayyad clan. They believed that Muhammad's new religion was putting their trading empire at risk, because many people who purchased goods in Mecca did so because they were coming to visit shrines of the gods of the Ka'ba. As far as the Umayyads were concerned, Muhammad's new religion was bad for business, and soon they began to plot his murder!

So Muhammad decided to flee Mecca. Fortunately for Muhammad, his reputation as a fair and just man was known in many places. One of these places was a city north of Mecca called Medina.

There were a number of political problems in Medina at this time; fighting between tribes was becoming unbearable and the leaders were running out of answers. Finally, the leaders in Medina called on Muhammad to help negotiate.

So it was that in Six-Twenty-Two Muhammad fled Mecca for Medina. The flight to Medina became known as the hijra and it marks the first year of the Islamic calendar.

Muhammad was welcomed with open arms in Medina, and he quickly got to work settling the quarrels between the clans. In the process, he converted a great number of people to his new religion. However, Muhammad's success in Medina only threatened the Umayyad in Mecca even more. It wasn't long until his very own tribe, the Quraysh tribe, began to launch a series of attacks on Muhammad and his followers. However, Muhammad and his followers fought back and eventually won the battle against the Quraysh tribe, and a treaty was signed in Six-Twenty-Eight.

Muhammad was allowed to return to Mecca in Six-Twenty-Nine, where he smashed the idols at the Ka'ba and officially made it an Islamic shrine that Muslims would be instructed to visit annually. These pilgrimages to the Ka'ba would become known as the *hajj*.

Ultimately Muhammad won over the Umayyads and began uniting the politically divided Arab tribes and clans in Mecca under the monotheistic religion of Islam, which began to spread throughout the Arabian peninsula.

In Six-Thirty-Two, however, Muhammad suddenly and unexpectedly died without an heir or a successor to lead the religion. This would create a crisis in the religion that affects Islam to this very day!

But it doesn't end there. Oh no, there's more. Much more to come. I'll see you shortly.

Reading Passage Introduction

O.K. so now that you know a bit about the beginnings of Islam, let's find out about the message of Islam.

I know. Studying any religion's never an easy thing. There are usually tons of questions. But don't worry. I've already pulled some information for ya and wrapped it up in a nice, neat little package. This should give you a pretty good understanding of what the message was in the new monotheistic faith of the Seventh century C.E.

Take a look.

Video 3

Hello again! So you're back for the rest of the story on Islam. Well then let's continue shall we.

If you remember, in Six-Thirty-Two C.E. Muhammad died. Even more troublesome was the fact that he died without leaving a male heir or without so much as naming a successor for the religion and political organization he'd formed.

Many of Muhammad's followers came together to choose a successor. There was a discussion that his son-in-law, Ali, married to Muhammad's daughter Fatima, should succeed Muhammad, but many perceived him to be too young. In the end, the followers decided on a fellow by the name of Abu Bakr to succeed Muhammad as the first Caliph.

The religious and political successor to Muhammad, Abu Bakr was the first of the "rightly guided caliphs". The following three caliphs, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, are also considered members of this group of "rightly guided caliphs."

Under the leadership of Abu Bakar and his military commanders, the unified Arab state that Muhammad created expanded into northern Arabia, present-day Iraq, and Syria, as well as into Egypt.

Abu Bakr died only two years after succeeding Muhammad and was replaced by Umar, who continued the campaigns to spread Arab-Islamic influence. These successful military campaigns of the empire distracted people from the divisions within the Islamic community. These divisions became particularly bad in Six-Fifty-Six when the caliph, Uthman, was assassinated.

Many believed that Ali would succeed Uthman. However, Uthman had originally been from the Umayyad clan, which—if you recall—were the early *enemies* of Muhammad. The Umayyads believed that Uthman had been assassinated because of this, and therefore they refused to recognize Ali as his successor, especially since Ali refused to punish Uthman's assassins.

A war between Ali's forces and the Umayyad forces broke out, with each side vying for power and domination over the other. Those who backed Ali became known as Shi'a....and those who backed the Umayyad became known as Sunni.

The war raged on between the two sides without compromise. The Umayyad made the claim that Mu'awiya was the rightful successor to Uthman. This claim only served to further anger the supporters of Ali. However, in Six-Sixty-One, Ali was assassinated.

Ali's son was forced by the Umayyads to refuse his claims to the caliphate and it was this moment that would mark the beginning of the deep rift between the Shi'a and Sunni Muslims that exists to this very day.

Video 4

Six-Sixty-One was a very exciting time in Southwest Asia. Not only was it the year when Ali, the potential successor to caliph Uthman, was assassinated, but it was also the year that marked the beginning of the Umayyad caliphate.

Under the Umayyad rule the capital of the empire moved from Mecca to Damascus in Syria, although Mecca remained Islam's holy city. It was also under the Umayyads that Arab conquests spread toward the end of the Seventh century. Arabs made their way into central Asia and ignited tensions between Buddhists and Muslims that still exist.

The Umayyads also expanded farther south into India... and into the West, spreading through northern Africa, across the Straits of Gibraltar, and into Spain. The Muslim presence would remain in Spain from the Eighth century until Fourteen-Ninety-Two.

As the Umayyad empire made its way into various parts of the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, it became increasingly apparent that the Persian Empire was far weaker than it first appeared.

Muslim troops easily conquered many territories of the Persians as they expanded. The Byzantine empire, however, was far more resistant to the Arab armies. Over time

though, many of the Christian groups inside the Byzantine empire began to realize that they would be taxed less by the Arabs than their own empire. So, many began to take the side of the Arabs. Although the Arab army didn't manage to overtake the Byzantine empire, they did manage to inflict the kind of damages that the empire would continue to struggle with for centuries to come.

The Umayyad caliphate would last from Six-Sixty-One to Seven-Fifty. The Umayyads were then replaced by the Abbasid caliphate. The Abbasid caliphate disliked the rampant secularism of the Umayyad empire and tried to change the Arab Empire of the Umayyads to an Islamic empire. The Abbasid revolution, therefore, was less an *Arab* revolution so much as it was an Islamic one. In truth, the Abbasid takeover of the caliphate was largely backed by the mawali, or *non-Arab* Muslims.

The Abbasids were even successful in moving the capital of the Arab empire from Damascus to Baghdad. It was also during the Abbasid caliphate that the Islamic world experienced the Crusades, a series of holy wars instigated by Christians from Western Europe in Ten-Ninety-Five.

In part due to deep divisions in the Islamic World over conflicts between Arab and non-Arab Muslims, Sunni and Shi'a, and religious groups and more secular-minded groups, and in part due to the effects of the Crusades, the Abbasid caliphate seriously declined by the Twelfth century, until finally, Mongol emperor Hulagu Khan invaded and sacked Baghdad in Twelve-Fifty-Eight and brought the caliphate to an end. The Abbasid line would be re-established in Egypt under the Mamluks in Twelve-Sixty-One; however, it too would be conquered by the Ottoman empire in Fifteen-Seventeen.

I'm Professor Higganbotham wishing you all the very best in your travels....wherever they may take you.