

Islam is a monotheistic religion based on the teachings of the Islamic prophet Muhammed who lived during the 7th century. There are 1-2 billion Muslims worldwide, making it the second-largest religion in the world, behind Christianity. Islam includes numerous religious practices, the most notable of which are the Five Pillars. The Five Pillars are five duties required of all Muslims and they are Profession of Faith, Prayers, Alms, Fasting, and Pilgrimage.

TERMS, WRITINGS, AND HOLY SITES

Qu'ran

literally means "the reading" and is the sacred text of the religion of Islam. Muslims believe the Qu'ran was revealed to Muhammed beginning in 610 AD all the way up to his death. The book is considered a book of "guidance" and does not recount many historical events.

Sura

chapters in the Qu'ran. There are 114 chapters of various lengths in the Qu'ran. The title of each sura is taken from a name or concept inside the chapter.

Hadith

literally means "the narrative" and is the traditions about Muhammed that were passed on from generation to generation.

Muslim

literally means "one who submits." The term comes from the same Arabic word as "Islam."

Islam

literally means "submission" and stands for the religion of total submission and surrender of oneself to Allah.

Ka'abah

cubic building at Mecca is the most holy site in Islam. Muslims visit this site as part of their Hajj, or pilgrimage.

Medina

burial place of Mohammed is the second most holy site in Islam. It was also the place Muhammed lived in after his migration.

Mecca

city in Saudi Arabia where the Ka'abah is located which attracts two to three million pilgrims each year. The current city is modern and cosmopolitan.

Dome of the Rock

built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in 691 AD making it the oldest extant Islamic structure in the world.

SECTS AND DIVISIONS

Like Christianity, Islam has been split by various divisions and sects. The two main divisions of Islam are the **Sunnis** and **Shiites**. Sunnis comprise 85% of the Muslim population in the world, while Shiites round out the total with the last 15%.

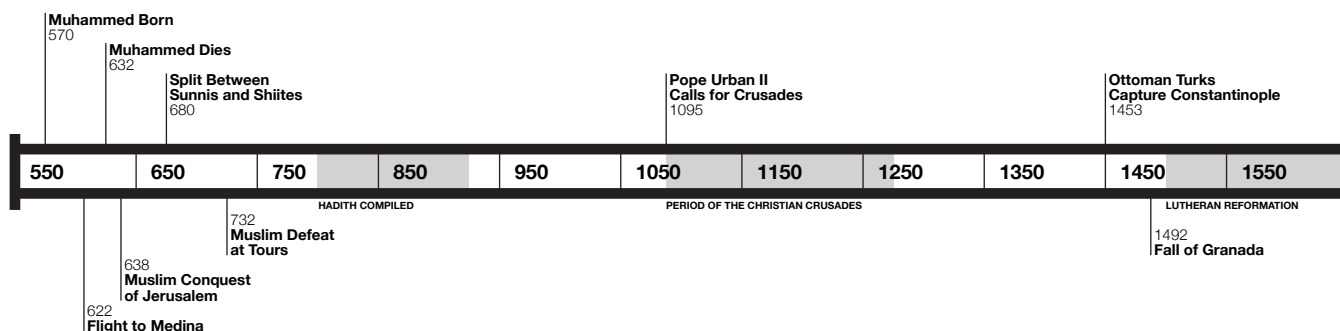
Although Shiites are less numerous, they hold majorities in countries like Iran, Iraq, and Yemen. The Sunnis assert that they follow the traditions of Muhammed while the Sunnis also follow Ali, the closest relative of Muhammed. It essentially boils down to this: Did Muhammed appoint a successor whom Muslims should follow? Sunnis say no. Shiites say yes. This argument has far reaching effects since the entire leadership structure of Islam since the time of Muhammed is in dispute.

Whabi Muslims are a small sect of the Sunni family of Islam. More fundamentalist than most Muslims they have the strictest interpretation of the Qu'ran which leads to their practices of stoning, amputation, restrictive dress for women, and violence.

The **Nation of Islam** is not truly Islam. It is a cult that formed in the United States which uses Islamic terms without actually following the religion.

BASIC TENETS AND BELIEFS

Muslims are strongly monotheistic, professing that Allah is one in essence and demands complete and total submission in all areas of life. For most Muslims the primary relationship between the adherent and Allah is one of fear of punishment. This results in a fervent desire to please Allah. Thus the emphasis is on good works. This does not lead to a confidence in the future eternity. Muslims simply hope they've done enough to earn Allah's favor. There is no gospel.



FIVE BASIC BELIEFS

1. Belief in Allah: one God
2. Belief in the Last Day: final judgement, heaven and hell
3. Belief in angels: Gabriel, Michael, Satan, jinn
4. Belief in Qur'an: The last Word of God
5. Belief in the prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jesus, Muhammed

FIVE BASIC BELIEFS

1. The Creed: there is no God but Allah and Muhammed is his prophet
2. Ritual Prayer: fives times per day, facing Mecca
3. Almsgiving: 2.5% of all wealth, annually
4. Fasting: Month long daytime fast during the month of Ramadan
5. Pilgrimage: Every Muslim is to make the hajj to Mecca one time

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is the history of Islam vital for understanding Islam today?
2. Islam spread rapidly across the world in the 100 years following Muhammed's death. What were some of the contributing factors?
3. Compare the rapid spread of Islam with the rapid spread of the Church in the book of Acts.
4. Analyze the growth of Islam today. How have the factors changed?
5. What impact does oil have on Islamic revival today?
6. Relate a recent article you read regarding Islam.
7. Islam claims to honor Jesus. Evaluate that honor in the light of John 5:22-23.
8. What appeal does Islam have for people today?
9. In what ways to the Five Pillars express the natural inclination of human beings to want to perform religious functions?
10. In what ways are the Five Pillars similar to Christian practices? How are they different?
11. To what religion in Jesus' day could you compare Islam?
12. Contrast the place of law in Islam and Christianity.

NOTES AND COMMENTS