

# THE FOUNDATIONS OF ISLAM

When Muhammad, the **apostle** of God, reached the age of forty, God sent him in compassion to humankind, "as an **evangelist** to all men" (Qur'ân XXXIV: 27). Now God made a **covenant** with every prophet whom he had sent before him that he should believe in him, testify to his truth and help him against his adversaries, and he required of them that they should transmit to everyone who believed in them, and they carried out their obligations in that respect. God said to Muhammad: "Do you accept this and take up my burden?"



**I**slam was revealed to the **prophet** Muhammad in the seventh century.

Muhammad was born in Mecca, a great trading city, around 570 C.E. His relatives were business people and traders, and

persecute Muslims, who fled to the city of Medina. Muslims call this migration the *Hijrah*. It marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Later, the two cities fought, and the Muslims defeated the forces of Mecca.

## THE QUR'ÂN: TRADITION AND LAW

Muslims accept the Qur'ân as the word of God as given to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Because it is believed to contain God's actual words, in Arabic, the Qur'ân cannot be changed. Every letter is sacred. The Qur'ân has 114 chapters, 6236 verses, and 77 934 words. In addition to its description of a powerful and merciful God, it includes commandments and **parables**. In many ways, it is similar to the Old and New Testaments of Judaism and Christianity. Moses and Jesus are accepted as prophets by Muslims.

In addition to the Qur'ân, Muslims turn to other sources for spiritual and social guidance. One such guide, the *hadith*, is based on what Muhammad said and did during his lifetime. Since Muhammad lived a model life, his sayings and deeds were recorded as the hadith. The hadith shows believers how a proper servant of God should live and behave (although not all of the hadith is accepted by all Muslims). Islamic law, called the *sharia*, is based on the Qur'ân and the hadith. Muslim scholars taught that religious beliefs, religious duties, and good works were the important elements of Islam.

- apostle:** a person sent on a special mission
- evangelist:** a bearer of news, a messenger
- convert:** one who changes from one religious belief to another
- prophet:** a person who speaks with divine inspiration
- covenant:** bargain
- revelation:** what is revealed
- parable:** a story that has a moral lesson

members of an important clan. He was orphaned by the time he was six, and cared for by his grandfather and uncle. The family was poor. As a young man, Muhammad married the widow Khadijah and joined her in business. He became a skilled trader and manager.

In the year 610, Muhammad retreated to a cave near Mecca where he could meditate and pray. As he meditated, he received a powerful **revelation** from God through the angel Gabriel. Muhammad received many important revelations from God, which give guidance in many areas. These are recorded in the Qur'ân (Koran), the Muslim Holy Book. They describe God's powers and expectations, the Day of Judgment, and other matters.

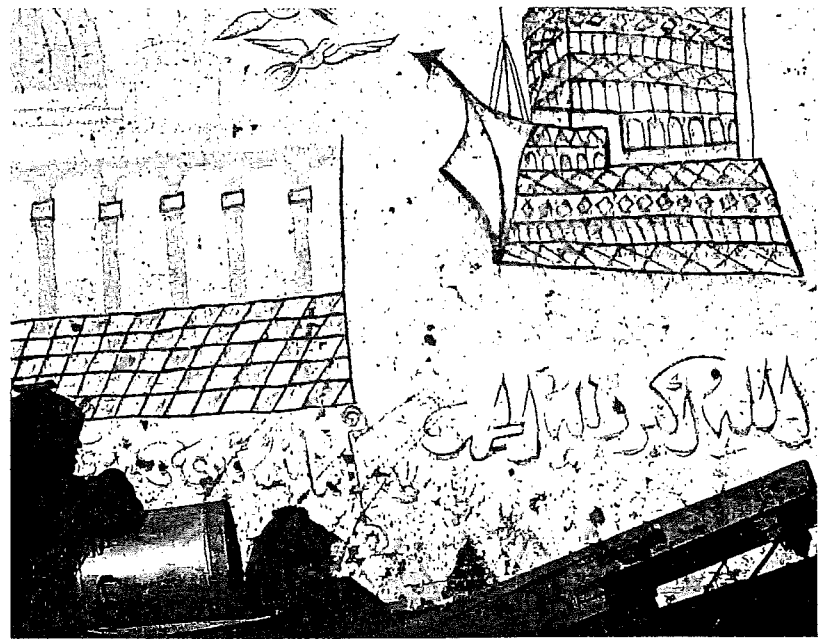
The new religion revealed to Muhammad was called Islam, meaning "submission to the will of God." The followers of Islam were known as Muslims, meaning "they who submit." Muhammad knew that the idea of one God, Allah, would not be popular in the pagan city of Mecca, where many gods were worshipped. Although he made some **converts**, city leaders and others soon began to

# THE FIVE PILLARS

Islam has Five Pillars of faith. These are the duties that Muslims must follow. The first Pillar requires that a person openly declare his or her faith by repeating the phrase "There is no God but God and he has no partners." Uttering this statement sincerely makes a person a Muslim.

The second Pillar requires that Muslims pray often to Allah, or God. Customarily, this includes five periods of prayer each day, preferably with other Muslims. Those at prayer always face the holy city of Mecca. Prayers take place at dawn, noon, the middle of the afternoon, sunset, and nightfall. Before prayer, Muslims purify themselves—by washing their hands, face, and feet, and by clearing the mind of impure thoughts.

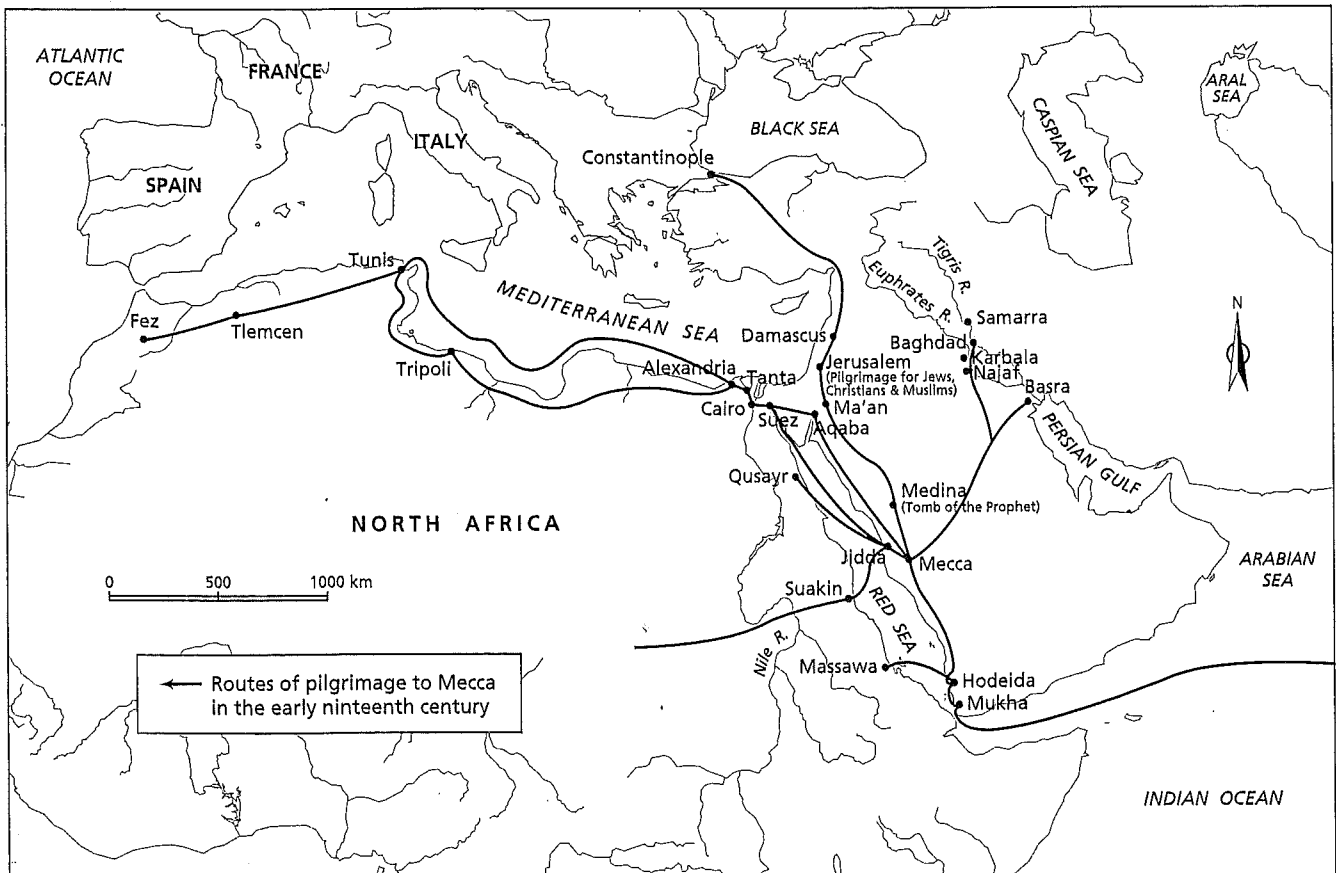
The third Pillar of Islam is charity. Muslims are required to give



to the poor. To this day, Muslims consider charity to be good for a person's soul.

The fourth Pillar is fasting. Muslims must fast during the daylight hours of the month of

**Figure 4-11** This wall painting of the Kaaba indicates that the occupant of the house has made a journey to Mecca. The Kaaba is one of the holiest places in Islam. Muslims believe that Abraham built the Kaaba.



**Figure 4-12** Muslim pilgrims, like those of other religions, travelled to important Islamic shrines. The most important pilgrimage was the *hadj* to Mecca, one of the requirements of Islam and the fifth of the Five Pillars. Locate Mecca on this map.

**fasting:** refusing food for spiritual or religious reasons

**pilgrimage:** a journey to a sacred place as an act of devotion

**ritual:** a practice that is performed many times in an established manner

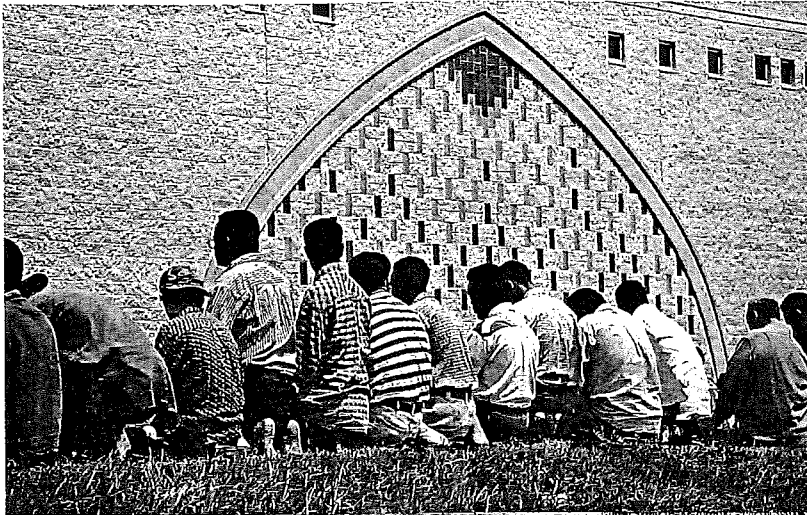
**mosque:** a Muslim place of worship

**to prostrate:** to lie face-down

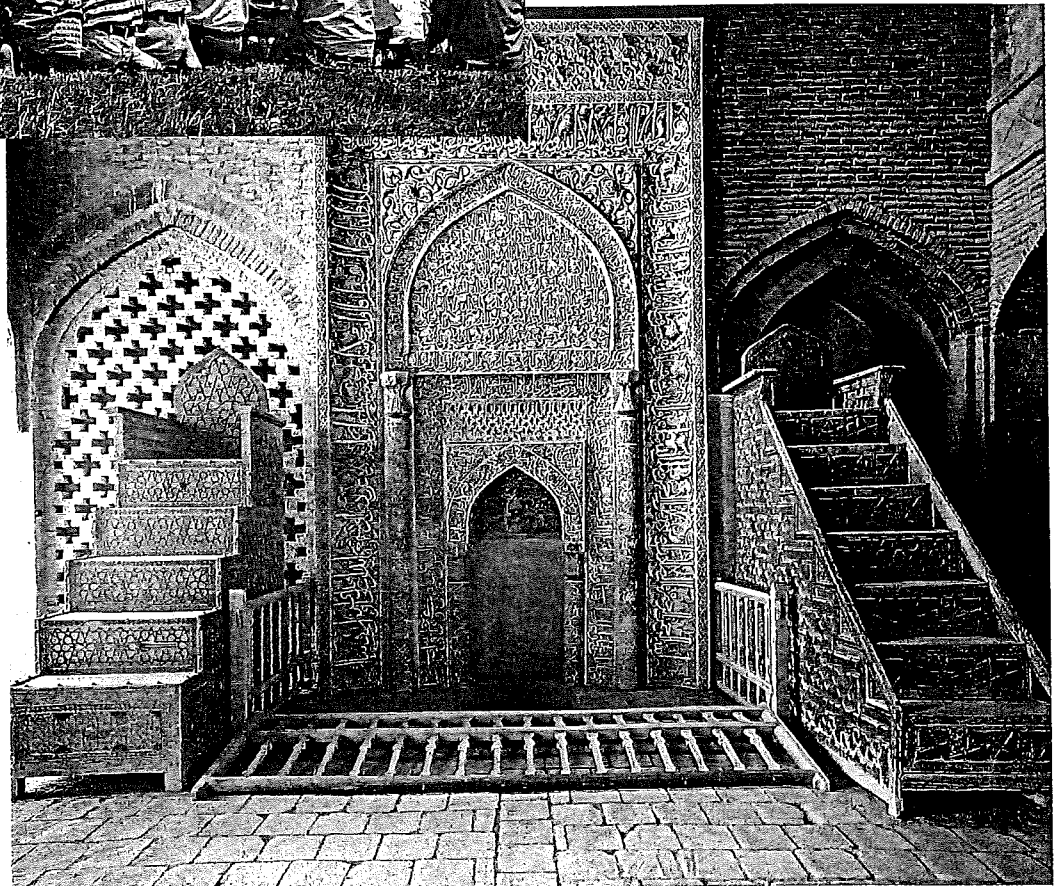
Ramadan (the ninth lunar month)—in other words, from the first light of dawn until nightfall.

Finally, Muslims are expected to undertake a **pilgrimage** to Mecca, known as the *hadj*, at least once in their lifetime. Some Muslims try to make the pilgrimage every year. During the *hadj*, all Muslims dress alike, eat the same foods, and perform the same **rituals**.

The five Pillars of Islam are considered important for the soul but they also serve other purposes. The public prayer held on Friday at noon brings the Muslim community together, and is an occasion for sermons on religion, society, and politics. The third Pillar, charity, makes Muslims aware of the importance of looking after everyone, no matter what their circumstances. The *hadj* helps Muslims feel that they belong to a single world religion, and reminds all Muslims that they are equal in the sight of God. Over the centuries, the commitment to practise the five Pillars has made Muslims strong.



**Figure 4-13** Daily prayer is important to Muslims, and is the requirement of the second Pillar of Islam. These Canadian Muslims pray in unison, facing Mecca, as tradition requires.



**Figure 4-14** The **mosque** is a place for prayer. Because many mosques are built to house large numbers of people, the central prayer hall is spacious and uncluttered. There are no pews or chairs because the faithful bow and **prostrate** themselves in the sight of God. One wall has a mark to show the direction of Mecca. The mosque also has minarets—tall, slender towers. Muslims are called to prayer from these minarets.

## ACTIVITIES

1. Describe the main events in the life of Muhammad in **chronological order**. You can make a series of point-form statements, or you can create a paragraph.
2. Compare the lives of Jesus and Muhammad using an organizer with headings of your choice. Some possibilities:
  - ◆ early life
  - ◆ main messageAdd at least two more headings.
3. Choose one of the five Pillars of Islam and explain in a paragraph how it helps bring the Muslim community together.
4. Find out more information about the holy days of Ramadan, Yom Kippur, and Lent. To which religious faiths do these days belong? Why are these days holy? Compare the rituals observed during these days. How are they similar? How are they different?

## THE SPREAD OF ISLAM

Many Arabs were inspired by Muhammad and believed that spreading the new religion was a sacred duty. Arabs who converted and became Muslims were treated well. Those who resisted were destroyed or enslaved. Christians and Jews were allowed to practise their respective religions because they were "peoples of the Book" (the "book" includes the Torah and the New Testament). However, they were not allowed to spread their faith and they paid special taxes.

Muhammad died in 632 and was succeeded by Abu Bakr, one of his first converts. The new **caliph** continued to spread the Islamic faith across Arabia. The campaign was continued by caliphs who came after Abu Bakr. With skilled commanders and devoted troops, Islamic armies swept all opponents before them. By 647, they had conquered Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Iran. Two years later, they reached what is now Pakistan.

The wealth of the empire accumulated with each conquest.

When the armies seized Ctesiphon, the capital city of what was then known as Persia, every soldier received 12 000 pieces of silver. In addition, thousands of slaves—residents of the conquered cities—were captured and sold in the marketplace. Slavery was not a Muslim tradition but an Arab one.

## DIVISION AND RIVALRY

Because the armies were so successful, and because the Arab Empire grew so quickly, Islamic leaders soon faced the enormous task of administration. There was also the question of leadership. The caliph was considered to be the Head of the Faith, but also commander of the army and the chief lawmaker and judge. Because Muhammad did not have a son to succeed him, many Muslims could not agree on who should have this important position. Many thought that Ali, the husband of Muhammad's daughter Fatimah,

**chronological order:**  
arranged from oldest to most recent

**caliph:** an Arab word meaning "successor"