

# Islamic Civilizations

*Introduction to Islamic  
Civilizations*



## Introduction to Islamic Civilizations

## Islamic Civilization Achievements

### Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

### Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.





# Timeline





# Where is Arabia?



Arabia is a **peninsula** in western Asia. There are seven countries within the Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

Much of the peninsula is made up of desert. It is very hot and dry, and the average daily temperature in the summer is around 100°F.



There are few water sources and little rainfall. Most of the water in the desert is found at the **oases**.

However, the peninsula is not only made up of desert. There are also mountain ranges and a long stretch of coastline.





There were two main ways of life in Ancient Arabia.

Some people chose to settle around the few fertile areas, such as oases. Farming could take place here and settlements could grow into trading towns for internal and external goods. **Caravan traders** would visit these settlements.



Others chose to live **nomadic** lifestyles. This means that they were often on the move, travelling from place to place in the search of food and water for their animals.

Why do you think these two types of lifestyle developed?



Muslims believe that the Islamic faith was revealed to **Muhammad**, a man from Mecca, as he meditated in a cave in around 610 AD. It is claimed that he was visited by the angel Gabriel, who told him to recite the word of Allah (God).

It is believed that Muhammad was a **prophet** – a person who speaks the messages of Allah.

Muhammad began to preach the word of Allah. These teachings were written down and became the **Qur'an** – the holy book of the Islamic faith.



What do you know about the teachings of Islam?



Before Muhammad, Arabs were **polytheistic**. Islam teaches that there is only one God – **Allah**.

**How do you think the people of Mecca reacted to Muhammad's teachings?**

The political leaders of Mecca felt threatened by Islam, which was spreading throughout the city.

Muhammad led his followers on a journey from Mecca to Medina, known as the **hegira**, in 622. It was not until 630 that Islam was accepted in Mecca and Muhammad could return.



**Why do you think this was?**



The word “Islam” means to submit to the will of God.

The Muslim holy book is the Qur’an. This is said to contain the exact words of God as they were said to Muhammad. The Qur’an also provides guidelines for behavior.

The teachings of the Qur’an were revealed to Muhammad during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. This month is known as **Ramadan** and Muslims will fast during daylight hours in this month.

Muslims are expected to follow the example of Muhammad. His actions are referred to as the **Sunnah** and were collected together in the **hadith**.

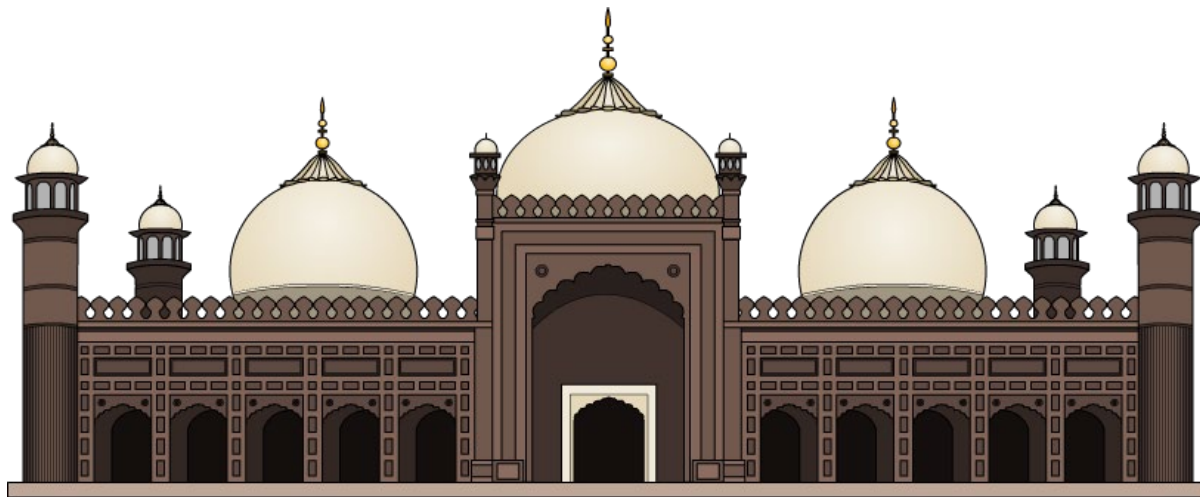
Can you name any other beliefs or practices?

# The Five Pillars of Islam



Islamic law is called **Shariah**. It is drawn from the Qur'an, the actions of Muhammad and the opinions of Islamic scholars. Shariah governs religious, public and private actions.

A **mosque** is an Islamic place of worship. Here Muslims gather together for prayer, education, information and to celebrate religious festivals. The very first mosque was Muhammad's home in Medina.





When Muhammad died in 632, he left no clear instructions about who should be his successor. This led to conflict between different Muslim groups over who should become the **caliph** (highest leader in Islam).

Abu Bakr, a companion of Muhammad, was elected to the position. However, some Muslims believed that leadership should have been given to Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law.

This conflict caused a split between **Shia** Muslims, who believed that the caliph had to be a member of Muhammad's family, and **Sunni** Muslims, who did not. While the two groups can and do live peacefully together, this split is still in place today.





# The first Islamic empire

After subduing several tribes who claimed they supported Muhammad, not Islam, Abu Bakr and his successors spent the next few hundred years spreading Islam and expanding the Islamic empire.

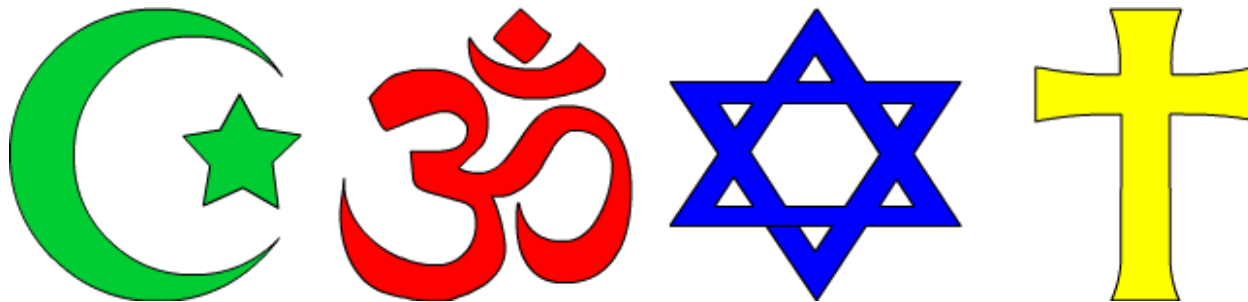
Through both trade and conquest, the first Islamic Empire expanded into western Asia, northern Africa and Europe. Muslims called **Moors** ruled parts of Spain until the conquest of Granada by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492!

Trade and expansion brought new products into Arabia and provided a global marketplace for the sale of Arabian goods.



While Islam did spread through the conquest of other lands, in general the Muslim empires practiced religious tolerance. This was particularly true of **Christianity** and **Judaism** which share some beliefs with Islam. However, there were some restrictions.

For example, in Islamic Spain, Jews and Christians did not have to convert and were judged according to their own laws. However, they had to follow certain rules, were not allowed to attempt to convert Muslims and had to pay a special tax.





Beyond Arabia, there were three major Islamic empires: the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires.

During the early 1300s, a Muslim military society developed in Turkey under the leadership of Osman, a tribal chief. His followers were called Ottomans and his state would later become the **Ottoman Empire**.

Osman's grandson, Murad I, was the first to proclaim himself **sultan** of the Ottoman Empire. He expanded the empire, helped by the **janissary** corps. This was a force of infantrymen made up of young Christian slaves who were converted to Islam and trained to fight.





In 1453, the forces of **Mehmed II** captured Constantinople in 1453, ending the Byzantine Empire.

Mehmed became known as “the Conqueror” and Constantinople was renamed Istanbul. It became a great trade center.

The **Hagia Sophia**, which was originally a Christian church, was converted into a mosque.

Did this show religious tolerance?







# Ottoman Empire





One of the most famous Ottoman sultans is **Suleyman I**. During his reign (1520–1566), the Ottoman Empire was at the height of its power and size, gaining him the name Suleyman “the Magnificent” among Westerners.



He practiced religious tolerance through the **millet** system – people lived in groups called millets according to their faith and were governed by their own religious laws.

However, he was concerned that his sons were plotting to overthrow him and had some of them killed. This left only one son, Selim II, to take power upon his death.

What might be the impact of this?



The second major Muslim empire, the **Safavid Empire**, was established in the 1500s following a conflict between a group of Persian Muslims and the Ottoman Empire over Shia and Sunni law.

By 1501, the Safavid army had conquered Persia (modern-day Iran). Their leader, Esma'il, was pronounced **shah** (king) and made Shiism the official religion.

Although the Safavids were originally a religious order, they successfully formed a strong government. Their position along trade routes enabled the empire to gain wealth.





However, the two empires continued to clash and met at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, a conflict that ended in victory for the Ottomans. When **Abbas** came to power in 1587, the Safavid Empire was weak.



Abbas successfully strengthened both government and the army, allowing him to recapture lands that had been lost.

However, like Suleyman I of the Ottoman Empire, he killed some of his sons, once again weakening government and the dynasty ended during the 1700s.

**Why did he do this?**



The third major Muslim empire, the **Mughal Empire**, was founded by Babur in 1526, after he defeated the sultan of Delhi.

Emperor **Akbar** (ruled 1556–1605) is widely considered one of the greatest rulers, both of the Mughal Empire and more generally.

He expanded the empire, ruled over a strong government and practiced religious tolerance. Akbar appointed officials based on merit, encouraged trade and stopped the taxation of non-Muslims.

What impact would these policies have?

The **Taj Mahal** was commissioned by Shah Jahan in 1632, after the death of his favorite wife Mumtaz Mahal.

It took 20 years to build and is one of the major architectural achievements of the empire. It showcases the Mughal style, which combined Islamic, Indian and Persian influences.



In 1658, Shah Jahan's son, Aurangzheb, seized power and imprisoned his father. Despite this, upon his death in 1666, Shah Jahan was buried alongside his wife.

Today the Taj Maha is a world heritage site, with millions of visitors each year.





Earlier policies encouraged religious tolerance. However, as the 1600s progressed, this tolerance began to decline amongst Mughal emperors.

This was particularly evident during the reign of **Aurangzheb** (1658–1707).



Although Aurangzheb continued to expand the empire, he enforced strict laws on non-Muslims and destroyed Hindu temples. Those who opposed him were punished severely.

Upon Aurangzheb's death, the empire split over the question of who should be the next ruler and began to decline.



# Keywords

