

3. You speak to a Shintoist. What questions would you ask him or her? How might the Shintoist answer your questions?
4. Imagine that you are visiting Japan. What differences do you see between a Shinto shrine and a Buddhist temple? Explain.
5. How does Hinduism differ from Buddhism and Shintoism? Do you see any similarities? Mention them.

8. The Prophet Teaches His People

The Arabian peninsula is situated between the fertile areas of the Mediterranean coast and Mesopotamia. Much of the Arabian land is mountainous or barren desert. For thousands of years, Arabia has been the home of many different groups of people. Nomadic groups kept flocks of animals. Farmers lived in the fertile southern region at the mouth of the Red Sea, closest to Africa. Traders and merchants grew rich because of Arabia's strategic location between the civilizations of Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Muhammad, the founder of the religion called Islam, was born in the prosperous Arabian city of Mecca around the year 571. At the time, the Arabian people worshiped many gods. Mecca contained the religious shrine known as the Kaaba, which was dedicated to the many gods of the desert people. Many of the Arabian people traveled vast distances to worship at the Kaaba.

Muhammad studied the Biblical writings of the Jewish prophets and the books of the Christian apostles. Like the Jews and Christians, Muhammad believed in one all-powerful god. Muhammad called his god Allah. He favored strict codes of diet, cleanliness, and worship. He preached the coming of judgment day, when the world would end. All the members of humankind who had ever lived would either be rewarded for their right actions or punished for their bad deeds.

Muhammad believed that Allah had chosen him as his prophet to teach these truths to all the people. Muhammad believed that Allah was the same as the God of the Jews and Christians, and that Moses and Jesus

were early prophets of Allah. Muhammad at first thought that the Jews and Christians would accept Islam. But this was not to be. Opposition from other Arabs forced Muhammad and his followers to flee Mecca in 622. This journey is called the *hegira* in Islamic history. For some years, Muhammad and his followers lived in exile in the city of Medina, where the people accepted his teachings. There, he declared that he was the representative, or messenger, of the true religion, which he called Islam. In 630 Muhammad assembled a strong army of believers and returned to Mecca in triumph.

Muhammad's teachings and Islamic law are recorded in a book known as the Qur'an, or Koran, which was compiled about 20 years after his death. To this day, it remains the prime source of Islamic faith and religious practice.

Muhammad is not regarded as a god by the followers of Islam. Rather, he is respected and honored as the messenger who brought the truth to the people. In our story, Muhammad and his wife, Aishah, discuss the history and the future of Islam.

Mecca 630

"Congratulations, Muhammad! Your armies have conquered Mecca for Islam," said his wife, Aishah. "Now you can rest."

"Thank you," said Muhammad, "but I cannot rest. There is so much more to be done. We must bring the message of Islam to all the Arabian people, not just those in the cities. Everyone must be taught that there is no god but Allah, and that I, Muhammad, am his prophet."

"Many have believed in you and Islam from the moment they met you and heard you speak, Muhammad. But can you be sure that all others will join you?"

"I can only try to convince them that our faith is the true one," said Muhammad. "If they believe in a god, I will teach them that Allah is the same as the god they worship. If they have holy books, I will accept them as divinely inspired. If they have their own wise men and women, I will accept them as people who have been touched by the divine hand of Allah."

Aishah said, "I shudder when I remember how the merchants of Mecca treated you! You preached that the angel Gabriel



Muhammad, on horseback, during the hegira from Mecca to Medina.

had ordered you to bring the word of God to the people of Arabia."

Muhammad replied, "At a time when our people believed in many gods, I taught them that there was but one. People came to Mecca from everywhere to worship the pagan gods. The merchants of the city feared for their profits if pilgrims stopped coming to worship at the Kaaba."

Aishah continued, "And so they threatened you and your followers until you were forced to flee for your lives."

"Allah watched over our *hegira* (journey) and brought me many more followers. This year, with a mighty army, we returned to Mecca in triumph. Those people who had mocked me and my beliefs have seen the wonders of Allah. Now they believe in him!

"But soon, we will go beyond the borders of Arabia. We will teach the truths of our religion to the infidel (unbeliever). Our God, Allah, and our right way of living can do so much more for them than their pagan gods."

Aishah added, "We must tell the women of the wonderful life that awaits them under Islam. They will be able to own and inherit property. A husband may still divorce his wife, but if he does, he must return the possessions she brought into the marriage."

"True, Aishah, but we will also instruct the pagans that a wife's duties have not changed. She is still bound to obey her husband, care for their children, and manage the home."

"The pagans may like the things you tell them, but I wonder how they will react when you tell them of their obligations if they accept the new faith," said Aishah.

Muhammad answered, "Whatever their reaction, I must tell them that Muslims must purify both their spirits and their bodies so that they can prepare to stand before almighty Allah on judgment day. Thus, they are required to pray five times a day. They must be honest in business. They are forbidden to gamble. They must look upon all Muslims as their brothers and sisters. During the holy month of Ramadan, no one may eat or drink from sunrise to sunset. All must refrain from drinking wine, which will take their thoughts away from Allah, and from eating unclean foods, which will contaminate their bodies."

"Suppose that, after hearing about the requirements, the pagans decide not to accept Allah?"

"Then," Muhammad said, "I will speak of that which frightens all people: death. I will tell them that for everyone there will come a day of judgment. On that day, the dead will rise and stand before Allah to be judged. Those who believe in him and have obeyed his teachings shall find peace and happiness in a heaven beyond anyone's imagination."

"And what will you tell them about those who have led wicked lives and have denied Allah?" asked Aishah.

"I will tell them the truth. Those who deny almighty Allah will be chained and dragged into hell where they will suffer through eternity."

"And if they still refuse to listen?"

Muhammad thought for a moment. "I must do all in my power to work the will of Allah. If necessary, I will wage a holy war—a *jihad*—in order to help the infidels find the truth."

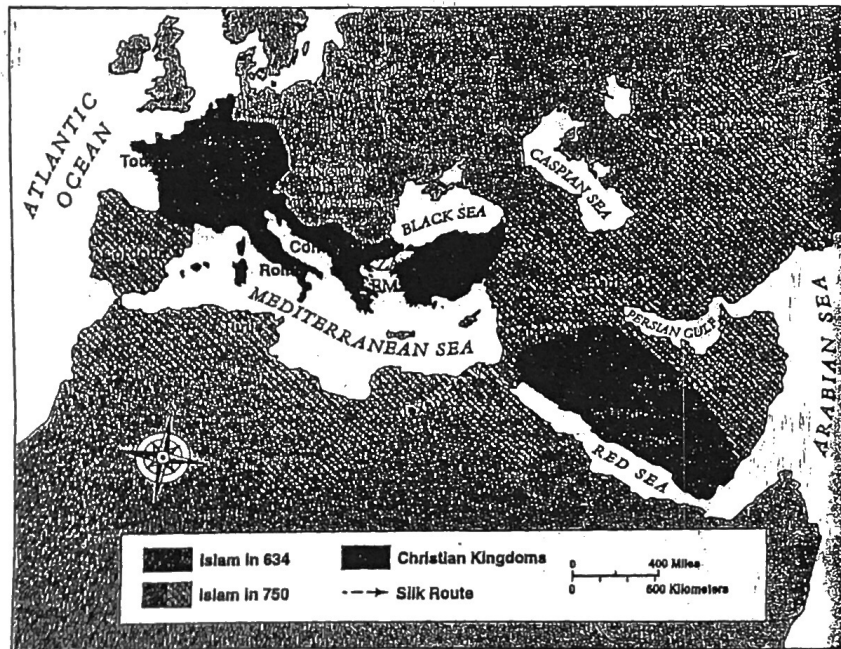
save their souls. One way or another, I will teach them that there is no god but Allah, and that I, Muhammad, am his prophet."

Postscript

Muhammad died in 632. His father-in-law, Abu Bakr, was chosen as *caliph* (successor to the prophet). In less than a decade, Muhammad's followers had spread his teachings to the pagan people of Arabia and converted most of them to Islam.

Over the next century, Islamic armies conquered and converted the peoples of Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, most of North Africa, and part of India. In the Mediterranean, they took over many of the islands, and Moors (North African Muslims) became the rulers of Spain. Moorish civilization was the most advanced in Europe for many centuries. In the year 732, European armies defeated a Muslim army at Tours, in France. Muslim armies never again entered northern Europe, but for many centuries that followed they fought and sometimes conquered the lands of Eastern Europe.

THE EXPANSION OF ISLAM 634-750



In the units that follow, we shall discuss the achievements of later Muslim societies in the Middle East and India.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. How were Muhammad's beliefs similar to those of the Jews and Christians?
2. Why did Muhammad live in exile in Medina?
3. Why did Muhammad tell his wife that he could not rest?
4. What were women's privileges and duties under Islam?
5. How did Muhammad propose to teach the infidels (unbelievers) that there was no god but Allah?

UNDERSTANDING THE STORY

- A. Write T for each statement that is true and F for each statement that is false.
1. For thousands of years, the Arabian peninsula has been the home of many groups of people.
 2. Before Muhammad's time, the Arabian people worshiped only one god.
 3. Muhammad studied the writings of the Hebrew prophets and the Christian apostles.
 4. Muhammad believed that Allah had chosen him as his prophet.
 5. For some years, Muhammad lived in exile in the city of Mecca.
 6. People from all over Arabia went to Mecca to worship the pagan gods.
 7. Under Islam, a husband is not permitted to divorce his wife.
 8. Muslims are required to pray five times a day.
 9. Muhammad did not believe that a judgment day would ever come.
- B. Assume that Muhammad is living today. How might he react to the growth and development of Islam? What suggestions might he offer to Islamic leaders?

ACTIVITIES AND INQUIRIES

Study the map of the expansion of Islam on page 126. Choose the term or phrase that best completes each statement.