

Medieval Times to Today

Chapter 1, Section 3

The Religion of Islam

A **muezzin**, a man who calls Muslims to prayer looks out over the city and begins his call to noon prayers. The call rings out in four directions. “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his prophet.” All over the world, faithful Muslims heed the call. Some kneel in houses of worship called **mosques**.

I. Muslim Belief

Muslims share beliefs with others in the Islamic world. Their basic beliefs are expressed in what Muslims call the Five Pillars of Islam: faith, prayer, sharing, fasting, and pilgrimage. These five practices are the foundations of Islam.

A. *The Five Pillars of Islam*

The first pillar, faith, is based on the words of the call to prayer. “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His prophet.” This call expresses the Muslim statement of faith.

Through the second pillar, prayer, Muslims communicate with God. The muezzin calls Muslims to prayer from the minaret, or tower, of a mosque. Muslims pray five times a day – in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon, at sunset, and in the evening. The muezzin signals the various prayer times.

The third pillar is sharing. Muslims who can do so give a generous share of what they own to Muslims who are poor or sick. The fourth pillar, fasting, occurs during a special month called Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset everyday. They neither eat nor drink.

The fifth pillar is hajj, a pilgrimage, or sacred journey, to Mecca. All Muslims

B. The Quran

Islam is not just a set of beliefs; it is a way of life. Islam is a guide to the way Muslims should live, conduct family life, and deal with others. The things God revealed to Muhammad included the rules of Islam, which are written in a book called the Quran. Many Muslims know the Quran by heart.

II. Relationships Outside and Inside Islam

There is a reason for the similarity of the Quran to Jewish and Christian holy books. Muslims, like Jews and Christians, regard Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses as important people in their religious history. Muhammad saw himself as the last prophet in a long line of prophets that included all of these people.

A. People of the Book

Muhammad felt respect for Jews and Christians. He called them “people of the Book.” Muslims, Jews, and Christians all practice a religion revealed in holy writings. They all believe in one single God.

B. Men’s and Women’s Roles

Muhammad insisted that all Muslims were equal in spirit – whether rich or poor, men or women. Despite this type of equality, men and women had very different roles in Islamic communities.

As Islam moved into other lands, Muslims sometimes adopted the attitudes toward women that they found in the places they conquered. In a few Muslim countries today, women must cover their faces when they go out of the house. Some Muslims find

support for this in the Quran, which says that all believers, both men and women, should dress modestly.

C. Schism: Sunni and Shiite Muslims

In 656, Uthman, the ruler of the Muslim empire, was assassinated. His death split the Islamic world in two. Over the next few hundred years, two main groups emerged over this disagreement. The smaller group, the Shiites, argued that the ruler should be a direct descendent of Muhammad. They believed that Muhammad's descendents would be inspired by God, just as Muhammad had been.

The larger group of Muslims, the Sunni, disagreed. They argued that any truly religious Muslim could lead the community