The religion of Islam, whose followers are called Muslims, emerged in the Arabian Peninsula. There, in A.D. 570, Muhammad was born in Mecca—a trading and religious center. Muhammad worked among nomadic herders called Bedouins. Later, he became a successful merchant and decided to marry at 25. He was known for his honesty in business and devotion to his family.

Muhammad often meditated on the moral ills of Meccan society, including greed. According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad became a prophet at 40 when he was asked by an angel to become God’s messenger. When he began teaching, a few listened, but others opposed him with threats. In 622, he and his followers fled Mecca for Yathrib, on a journey called the hijra. Later Yathrib was called Medina. In Medina, thousands adopted Islam and formed strong, peaceful communities. When Meccan leaders grew hostile, Muslims defeated them in battle. Muhammad returned to Mecca in 630, where the Kaaba, which Muhammad dedicated to Allah, became the holiest Islamic site. Muhammad died in 632.

The sacred text of Islam is the Quran, believed to be the direct word of God as told to Muhammad. All Muslims study it to learn about God’s will and living a good life.

Muslims believe that priests are not necessary to mediate between people and God. Muslims gather in mosques to pray. They follow the Five Pillars of Islam, which are the following duties: declaring faith, praying five times daily, giving charity to the poor, fasting during their holy month, and making the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, if a person is able. Another duty is jihad, which means to struggle in God’s service.

Because Jews and Christians worship the same God and study what are considered God’s earlier revelations, Muslims call them “People of the Book.” In most cases, they have been allowed religious freedom in Muslim societies.

The Sharia is a body of laws that interprets the Quran and applies religious principles to legal situations. According to the Quran, women are spiritually equal to men but have different roles. In different places, Muslims interpret women’s roles and rights differently. In some cases, Muslims adopted practices of conquered peoples, such as requiring upper-class women to wear veils.

Review Questions

1. What is the Quran?

2. Why do Muslims call Jews and Christians “People of the Book”?

READING CHECK

What was the hijra?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word mediate mean in the underlined sentence? What clues to its meaning can you find in the surrounding words or phrases? Circle the context clues you find that help you to figure out what mediate means.

READING SKILL

Identify Main Ideas Which of the following would be considered main ideas for this Summary? Circle your answers.

- Muslim holy days are enforced very strictly.
- Muslims believe in making a hajj.
- Muslims believe in one God, the Quran, and the Five Pillars of Islam.
- Islam governs daily life and affects the roles and rights of women.
- Muslims have little religious connection to Jews and Christians.