

# Religions of the Ancient Middle East—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

## Section 3



### MAIN IDEAS

1. Arabia is a mostly a desert land, where two ways of life, nomadic and sedentary, developed.
2. A new religion called Islam, founded by the prophet Muhammad, spread throughout Arabia in the 600s.

## Key Terms and Places

**Mecca** birthplace of Muhammad

**Islam** religion based on messages Muhammad received from God

**Muslim** a person who follows Islam

**Qur'an** the holy book of Islam

**Medina** city that Muhammad and his followers moved to from Mecca in 622

**mosque** a building for Muslim prayer

## Section Summary

### LIFE IN A DESERT LAND

Arabia, in the southwest corner of Asia, is the crossroads for Africa, Europe, and Asia. Arabia is a mostly hot and dry desert of scorching temperatures and little water. Water is scarce and exists mainly in oases, or wet, fertile areas in the desert. Oases are key stops along Arabia's trade routes.

People developed two ways to live in the desert. Nomads moved from place to place. Nomads lived in tents and raised goats, sheep, and camels. They traveled with their herds to find food and water for their animals. They traveled in tribes, or groups of people. Tribe membership provided protection from danger and reduced competition for grazing lands.

Others led a settled life. Towns sprang up in oases along the trade routes. Merchants and craftspeople traded with groups of traders who traveled together in caravans. Most towns had a market or bazaar. Both nomads and caravans used these centers of trade.

**Arabia was the trading crossroads for what three continents?**

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**Why would a nomad prefer to travel in a tribe?**

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**Section 3, continued**

**A NEW RELIGION**

A man named Muhammad brought a new religion to Arabia. Much of what we know about him comes from religious writings. Muhammad was born in the city of **Mecca** around 570. As a child, he traveled with his uncle’s caravans. As an adult, Muhammad managed a caravan business.

Muhammad was upset that rich people did not help the poor. He often went to a cave to meditate on this problem. According to Islamic belief, when Muhammad was 40, an angel spoke to him. These messages form the basis of a religion called **Islam**. A follower of Islam is called a **Muslim**. The messages were written in the **Qur’an** (kuh-RAN), the holy book of Islam.

Muhammad taught that there was only one God, Allah. The belief in one god was a new idea for many Arabs. Before this time, Arabs prayed to many gods at shrines. The most important shrine was in Mecca. Many people traveled to Mecca every year on a pilgrimage. Muhammad also taught that the rich should give money to the poor. But rich merchants in Mecca rejected this idea.

Slowly, Muhammad’s message began to influence people. The rulers in Mecca felt threatened by him. Muhammed left and went to **Medina**. His house there became the first **mosque**, or building for Muslim prayer. After years of conflict, the people of Mecca finally gave in and accepted Islam.

**Circle the name of Islam’s prophet and founder.**

**Where did Muhammad first hear from an angel of God?**  
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**Why do you think the rich merchants disliked being told they should give money to the poor?**  
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**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences** If you lived in Arabia, would you choose a nomadic or more settled, sedentary life? Write a one-page description of what your life would be like.