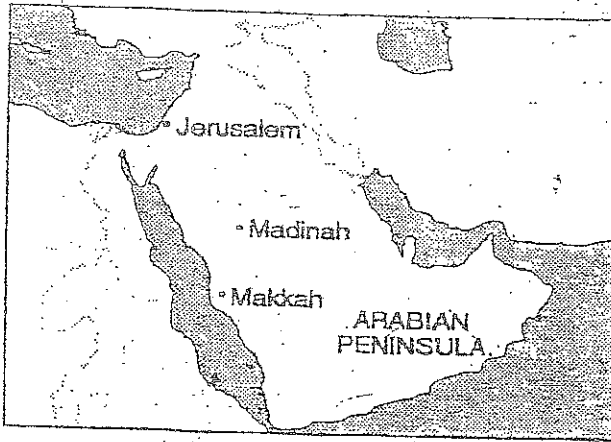




Information About Islam

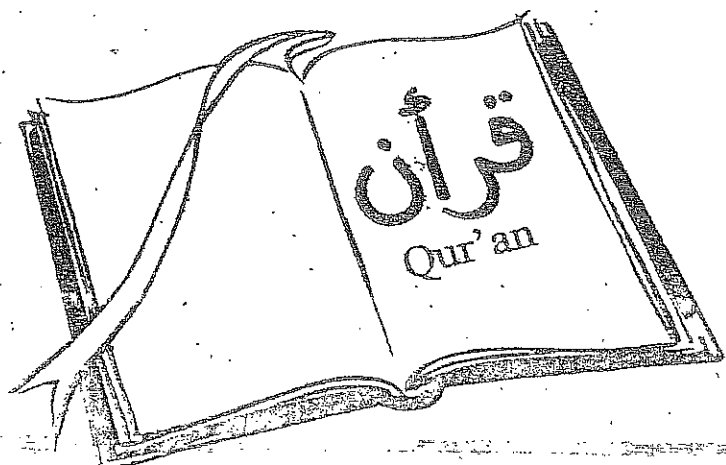


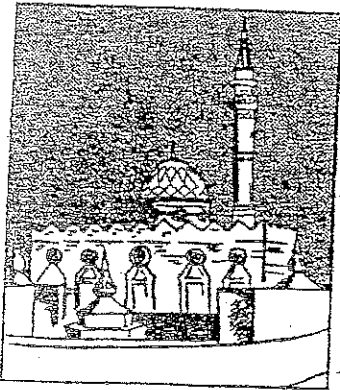
Arabian peninsula in A.D. 530

Followers of Islam, called Muslims, believe in one God—the God of Abraham—called *Allah* in the Arabic language. Abraham lived in the Middle East about 4,000 years ago at a time when most people believed in many gods. Abraham believed that only one all-powerful God had created the world. Muslims believe God made a covenant (agreement) with Abraham that Abraham and his descendants would be a favored people for their faith and submission to God. Abraham had a son, Isaac, by his wife Sarah, and a son, Ishmael, by his wife Hajar. Muslims believe that the Hebrews, or Jews, descended from Isaac and that the Arabs descended from Ishmael.

Islam is based on God's teachings and on the example of the life of Muhammad. Muhammad was born in Makkah (Mecca), located on the Arabian peninsula, around A.D. 570. Muslims believe that when Muhammad was 40 years old, he had a vision in which the Angel Gabriel appeared and told him to repeat a message from God. As God's message was revealed over the next 23 years, Muslims learned to accept all the Hebrew prophets (messengers of God's revelation), including Moses and Jesus—though they do not believe that Jesus was divine—and that God's chosen people had not properly followed the prophets. Muslims consider Muhammad to be God's final prophet. They believe that through Muhammad, God made Makkah the center of Islam and the religion's holiest city. After Muhammad's death, God's teachings, as revealed to Muhammad, were written down in the holy book of Islam.

The holy book of Islam is the Qur'an (Koran). Arabic is the sacred language of Islam. Though the Qur'an has been translated into many languages, it is used for religious purposes only in its Arabic form. The Qur'an, though distinct from Jewish and Christian texts, contains the revelations God made to Muhammad, which include many of the ideas from the history and law of the ancient Hebrews and their prophets, and the story of Jesus's life. The Qur'an outlines the goal of Islam:





Exterior of a mosque

living according to God's guidance, which will be rewarded with salvation, or eternal life in paradise with God. The opposite is damnation, or eternal suffering in hell.

To attain salvation, Muslims must practice five basic tenets known as the "five pillars," which are found in the Qur'an. The first is *shahada*, a public declaration of faith, which is the recitation of the Islamic creed (basic belief). The second is *salat*, or prayer. Muslims pray five times a day at appointed times, always facing Makkah. Third is *zakat*, or almsgiving. Islam requires a Muslim to give approximately 2.5 percent of his or her wealth to charity. *Siyam*, or fasting, the fourth

pillar, occurs during the month of Ramadan. For 30 days Muslims cannot eat, drink, or have sexual relations from dawn to sunset. The final pillar requires each Muslim who is able to make a *hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Makkah once in his or her life. The Qur'an also describes *hallal*, allowed acts, and *haram*, forbidden acts, which make up a way of life. These include dietary laws, which do not allow the eating of pork or the drinking of alcohol.

Muslims worship in a holy building called a *masjid*, or mosque. Friday noon prayers are the most important. During the Friday worship service, an *imam*, or prayer leader, leads prayers, reads from the Qur'an, and gives a sermon. Muslims select as imam a person of good character and religious knowledge, but the imam has the same relationship with God as any other Muslim. Muslims also hold Jerusalem sacred as the city of prophets and as the place where Muhammad is believed to have met the other prophets and ascended to heaven.

The two major sects of Muslims, Sunni and Shi'i, share most beliefs, but differ mainly over the issue of leadership in the Muslim community.