

guided by the example of Muhammad's life, called the Sunna, and by a set of laws and rules.

Muslims believe that Allah is the same God that Jews and Christians worship. To Muslims, the Qur'an perfects the earlier teachings of God found in the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible. Because their holy books were related to the Qur'an, Jews and Christians enjoyed special status in Muslim societies.

3 Islam Expands

KEY IDEA In spite of internal conflicts, the Muslims created an empire of land on three continents.

When Muhammad died, his followers elected a new leader, Abu-Bakr. He had been loyal to Muhammad. He was given the title caliph, which means "successor" or "deputy."

Abu-Bakr reacted quickly when a group of Arabs abandoned Islam. He defeated them in battle over a two-year period. Abu-Bakr died soon thereafter. However, his army became an effective fighting force that began to conquer new lands. The Arabs took Syria and lower Egypt from the Byzantine Empire. By 750, the Muslim Empire stretched from the Indus River in India west to the Atlantic Ocean.

The Muslims' faith helped them achieve this rapid expansion. They saw each victory as a sign of Allah's support of Islam. Other factors were the fighting skill of the armies and the strong leadership of their generals. The Byzantine and Sassanid empires to the north were also weak at this time, and the Arabs took advantage of that. Finally, many people who lived in those empires did not support the official religions. They often supported the Arabs, who they thought would liberate them from the harsh rule of these empires.

Many of these people accepted Islam. Some found the message of Islam appealing. Some liked the fact that by becoming Muslims they avoided paying a tax put only on non-Muslims. The Qur'an prevented Muslims from forcing others to accept the religion, however. Muslim rulers allowed people to follow whatever beliefs they chose.

After the murder of a ruling caliph in 656, different Muslim groups began to struggle for control of the empire. Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, was chosen caliph. After a few years, he, too, was killed. The system of electing caliphs died with him.

A family known as the Umayyads took power

over the vast empire. They did not follow the simple life of earlier caliphs and surrounded themselves with wealth. This created a division within the Muslim community.

Most Muslims accepted Umayyad rule. However, some did resist, and a different view of the office of caliph developed. The Shi'a group—the "party" of the deceased Ali—felt that caliphs needed to be relatives of Muhammad. Those who did not outwardly resist Umayyad rule became known as the Sunni. Another group, the Sufi, reacted to the Umayyads' life of luxury. The Sufis emphasized a more spiritual way of life.

After 750, Muslim caliphates existed on three continents. The Abbasids (750–1258) conquered the Umayyads and took over the east. They held the lands of modern Iraq, Iran, and central Asia. They built the city of Baghdad in central Iraq as their capital. They were powerful, using their location to control the rich trade between China and Europe. They formed a complex government to run their empire.

One Umayyad prince had escaped to Spain in 750. There Muslims known as Berbers already existed. The prince set up a Muslim state called al-Andalus. The Umayyads of al-Andalus (756–976) controlled parts of Spain and North Africa.

Another Muslim state—the Fatimid caliphate (909–1171)—sprang up in North Africa. It eventually spread to western Arabia and Syria.

The Muslims were divided politically. However, the Abbasids, Umayyads of al-Andalus, and Fatimids were linked by religion, language, culture, and trade. Muslim traders brought goods from China to Spain. They formed banks along the route. They also accepted a form of substitute money later known as checks.

3 Muslim Culture

KEY IDEA Muslims combined and preserved the traditions of many peoples and also advanced learning in a variety of areas.

The vast Muslim Empire included people of many different lands and cultures. Muslims blended Arabic culture with these other traditions to create a new culture of great achievement. This new culture arose in the major cities of the Muslim world.

Damascus, in modern Syria, was the leading city and cultural center of Islamic learning. The cities of Córdoba and Cairo were centers of Muslim rule