

## Origins of the Muslim Empire

Within a hundred years after Mohammed's death, the Muslim empire had already spread into major sections of Africa, Asia, and Europe. In time, the Muslim empire would grow to be the most powerful empire the world had yet seen. How did all of this happen so quickly?

Mohammed believed that Allah was the same god who had spoken to Moses and Jesus, and he expected Jews and Christians to welcome his message. When they insisted on keeping their old



religions, he grew angry. He raised an army of Arabs (the major group of people in the middle east) and began conquering villages, towns, and cities on the Arabian peninsula. When Mohammed finally passed away, his generals kept driving the Muslim army onward.

One of the most complicated ideas in Islam is the notion of *Jihad*. Jihad literally means "struggle" in Arabic. Most Muslims believe that a jihad is the struggle that happens in our minds and hearts as we try to become good people. Others, however, believe that Muslims should "struggle" to spread Islam to others by force if necessary. They use the term "jihad" to mean a holy war. Some people call this quick expansion of Islam a Jihad. Al Qaeda today believes that they are fighting a Jihad against the United States.

Whether we call it a Jihad or not, the Muslim empire grew quickly. After Mohammed's death, Muslims argued over who should be *caliph*. A caliph was what Muslims called the highest leader of their religion. One group wanted to a relative of Mohammed (his son-in-law named Ali). This group became known as the Shia Muslims. The other group followed one of Mohammed's most trusted advisors (named Abu Bakr). This group became known as the Sunni Muslims. Today, 15% of the world's Muslims are Shia, and about 85% are Sunni.

Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims have much in common: the five pillars, the Koran, and a belief in one God. They disagree over the wording of certain prayers and the number of times a day a Muslim should pray. (Shia say three times a day). Shia Muslims also have an Imam. The Imam is very similar to the pope in Catholicism. The Imam is the supreme religious leader who is believed to have special insight into the will of Allah and Mohammed.



**Directions:** When your team has finished reading, answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. How did Mohammed expect Jews and Christians to respond to his message? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How did they actually respond? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

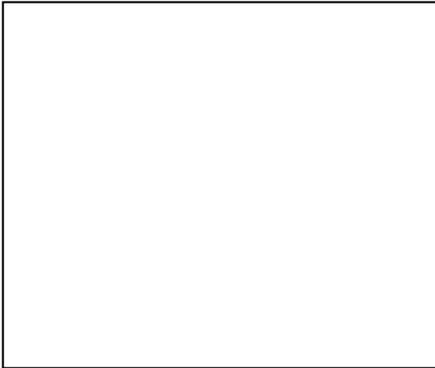
3. What is a caliph? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

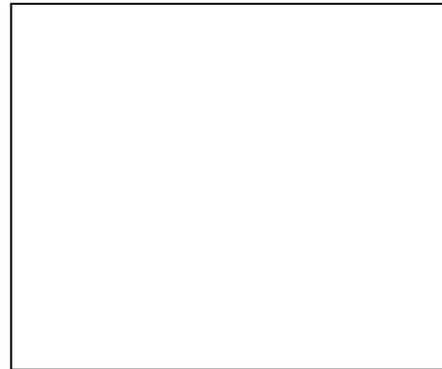
4. On what issue did Sunni and Shia Muslims initially disagree? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Create a sketch in each box to match the description below each box.**



The first understanding of Jihad



The second understanding of Jihad

**Complete the double-bubble graphic organizer below:**