

Islam Spreads Rapidly

A New Religion

To Europeans, it must have seemed that every disaster that could happen had already happened: Goths, Huns, Lombards, Franks, and other travelers had dropped by, taken what they wanted, and destroyed everything else. Then came the pressure of a new religion that was spreading rapidly: **Islam**.

Its founder was **Muhammad**, a camel driver and traveling merchant who had been born in the Arabian town of Mecca. There were 300 gods honored by the people in this town. As Muhammad talked with **Jews** and **Christians**, he was convinced there was only one God, whom he called **Allah**. His public attacks on the **pagan** gods created enemies for him since Mecca was a center for pagan worship. In A.D. 622, he escaped the city with his family. This event was Year One for the **Muslim** (Islamic) faithful. His escape from Mecca to live in the city of Medina was called the **Hegira** (flight). His teachings were written in the **Koran** (Qur'an).

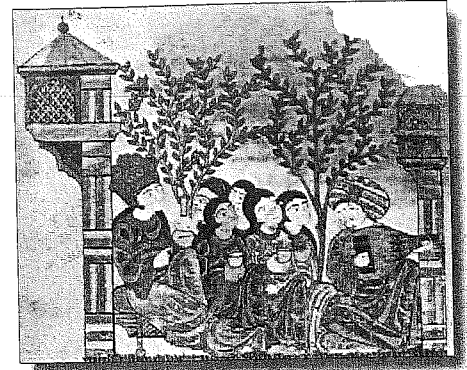
Islam expanded quickly. Arabs were great warriors and believed they were fighting a **jihad**, or holy war. Many people in the Middle East were weary of Byzantine taxes and restrictions, and the Byzantine Empire was exhausted by warfare. As a result, the Byzantine Empire, except what is now Turkey, came under Muslim control.

Islam Threatens Rome

Islam was like a mighty sword, cutting its way across the Middle East. By 639, the region from Iraq across Egypt was Muslim. Then it continued across North Africa. The Byzantines tried to stop the Muslims from taking any more of their land in Africa and were defeated in 640 at Heliopolis. In 711, the Muslims crossed from Africa into Spain; the Pillars of Hercules were renamed the Straits of Gibraltar in honor of a Muslim general. On the other side of the Mediterranean, the Muslims besieged Constantinople; the Eastern Empire was in danger of extinction. The **siege** failed, but in Spain, the **Moors** (as the Spanish Muslims were called) wiped out the old kingdom of the Visigoths and crossed the Pyrenees Mountains into France. They conquered southern France and were advancing on Paris. If they succeeded in destroying France, then conquering Europe was certainly a real possibility.

Charles Martel, known as Charles the Hammer, rose to the occasion and defeated the Muslims at the Battle of Tours in 732. The Muslims were pushed back across the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain. The Moors built a kingdom in Spain that lasted until 1492, the year Columbus sailed.

At first, the Europeans looked upon the Muslims as more barbarians, but in truth, the Moors were to play a valuable role in the future of Europe. While others ignored the literature of the Greeks, the Moors preserved it. The Moors had high regard for Aristotle and referred to him simply as the Philosopher. As practical people, the Muslims valued the insights of those with whom they came in contact. They expanded on the mathematical work of Ptolemy and Euclid. Their medical schools taught the importance of cleanliness, diagnosis, and the uses and effects of drugs. Our language still uses many of their terms: alcohol, algebra, zero, etc. Their navigational instruments were important to sailors who traveled beyond sight of land in later years.



Moors during the Middle Ages



The Battle of Tours

Name: _____ Date: _____

Knowledge Check

Matching

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| _____ 1. jihad | a. a Muslim leader who had both political and religious authority |
| _____ 2. Muhammad | b. the religion of Muslims based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad |
| _____ 3. caliph | c. a group of Muslims that invaded Spain |
| _____ 4. Allah | d. a Holy War undertaken as a sacred duty by Muslims |
| _____ 5. Islam | e. the Muslim name for God |
| _____ 6. Koran | f. the person who founded Islam, the religious faith of Muslims |
| _____ 7. Moors | g. the sacred text of Islam, considered by Muslims to contain the revelations of God to Muhammad |

Multiple Choice

8. Who defeated the Muslims at the Battle of Tours in 732?
- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| a. Charles Martel | b. Aristotle |
| c. Ptolemy | d. Euclid |
9. How did the Moors refer to Aristotle?
- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| a. the Great One | b. the Hammer |
| c. the Only One | d. the Philosopher |
10. What was Muhammad's escape from Mecca to live in the city of Medina called?
- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| a. Qur'an | b. Hegira |
| c. Islam | d. Jihad |

Constructed Response

11. Describe how the Moors played a valuable role in the future of Europe. Use at least two details from the selection to support your answer.
