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|  | **Questions** | **Answer each question in note format. Notes:** |
| **Inferences** | **APPOINTMENT 1**  What two rivers did Indus Valley people settle around?  How did the Ka’bah become a holy place? |  |
| **Inferences** | **APPOINTMENT 2**  Who did people worship at the Ka’bah early in it’s existence?  What was Mecca like when Muhammad was born? |  |
| **Inferences** | **APPOINTMENT 3**  How did Arab society organize it’s government or people groups?  What does Arab poetry say about Arab culture? |  |
| **FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE** | **APPOINTMENT 4**  What kind of family life was Muhammad born into?  How was Muhammad’s childhood unique? |  |
|  | **APPOINTMENT 5**  Why was Muhammad a prophet?  How was Islam unique in the ancient world? |  |

Answer the following question independently:

**How did Islam develop? Why was it significant in the Arab world?**

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**The Origins and Spread of Islam**

**Introduction**

In the ancient period, Judaism and Christianity emerge. At the beginning of the Middle ages a religion called Islam emerges.

Muhammad, born around 570 C.E., founded and taught the faith called Islam, which became one of the major religions of the world. In the centuries after his death in 632 C.E., Islam spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.

Muhammad’s birthplace, Mecca (Mekkah), was an ancient place of worship. According to tradition, many centuries before Muhammad was born, God tested the prophet Abraham’s faith by ordering him to leave Hagar and their infant son Ishmael in a desolate valley. As Hagar desperately searched for water, a miracle occurred. A spring, which became known as Zamzam, bubbled up at her son’s feet. According to Islamic beliefs, Abraham built a house of worship at the site, called Ka’bah. Over time, people settled near it.

By the time of Muhammad’s birth, this settlement, or Mecca, was a **prosperous** city at the crossroads of great trade routes. Many people came to worship at the Ka’bah. However, instead of honoring one God as Abraham had preached, the worshippers at the Ka’bah honored the many traditional gods whose shrine were there.

According to Islamic teachings, Muhammad was living in Mecca when he experienced his own call to faith. Just as abraham did, Muhammad **proclaimed** belief in a single God. At first, Islam was met with resistance in Mecca. But Muhammad and his followers, called Muslims, eventually attracted a great number of followers. Mecca became Islam’s most sacred city, and the Ka’bah became a center of Islamic worship. You will learn more about the vast Muslim empire.

1. ***Arabia in the 6th Century***

**Islam** has its roots in Arabia, where **Muhammad** was born. To understand Islam’s beginnings, it is important to first look at the time period in which Muhammad grew up.

The town of Mecca, Muhammad’s birthplace, was located in a dry, rocky valley in western Arabia. Mecca did not have agriculture, but instead gained wealth as a center of trade. Merchants traveling along caran routes stopped at the city’s market, where they bought spices, sheepskins, dates, and other wares from the towns people and nomads.

By the time Muhammad was born, Mecca was a prosperous city. Merchant families brought goods into Mecca from faraway places, growing wealthy through trade with Yemen (southern arabia), Syria, and kingdoms in Africa. Over time, a handful of clans, or families, had come to rule the city. These families refused to share their fortune with the weaker, poorer clans who lived there.

Mecca was also a religious center. According to the Qur’an (koor-AHN), the holy book of Islam, Abraham had built the cube-shaped shrine, the Ka’bah, centuries before to honor God. In Muhammad’s day, according to Islamic teaching, most Arabs followed **polytheism**, and the Ka’bah housed hundreds of statues of different gods. Pilgrims from all over Arabia came to worship at Mecca.

Many Arabs lived a nomadic life in the desert environment. But some Arabs lead a more urban lifestyle in towns like Medina. However, there was no central government in Arabia. Instead, Arabs pledged loyalty to their clans and to larger tribes. These tribes sometimes fought each other to capture territory, animals, goods, watering places, and even wives. When someone from one tribe was killed during a raid, his family was honor-bound to avenge that death. This led to long periods of fighting among tribes.

Although Arabs on the peninsula were not united as a nation, they shared cultural ties, especially language. Arabic poetry celebrated the history of the Arab people, the beauty of their land, and their way of life. Poets and singers from different tribes competed at gatherings held at the markets and during pilgrimages. This was the culture into which Muhammad was born.

***2. Muhammad’s Early Life***

As you have learned, around 570 C.E., an infant named Muhammad was born in Mecca. Muhammad’s early life was ordinary. Few people who were not members of his clan, the Hashim, noted his birth. His father had died before his birth, and his clan was not very wealthy. However, the Hashim had some prestige, as they belonged to the leading tribe in Mecca.

Following custom, Muhammad’s mother sent her baby to live with a family of nomads in the desert. There, the young boy learned about traditional Arab values, such as being kind to strangers and helping orphans, widows, and other needy members of society.

When Muhammad was about six, he returned to the city and to his mother. They had little time together, because she soon died, so Muhammad was left in the care of his grandfather, a highly regarded leader of the Hashim clan. Upon the grandfather’s death, Muhammad’s uncle, Abu Talib, a respected merchant, became head of the clan and took charge of the orphan.

As a boy Muhammad tended his family’s flocks of sheep and goats. When he was about 12 years old, he accompanied his uncle on a trading journey far north to Syria, where Muhammad gained his first experiences outside arabia.

As Muhammad grew up, he took on more duties and made more trading journeys. He became a merchant who enjoyed a reputation throughout Mecca for his honesty. People called him *al-Amin,* which means “the Trustworthy.”

Muhammad was still a young man when he began managing caravans for a widow named Khadijah, who ran a trading business. Muhammad earned her great profits. Impressed with his abilities and honesty, Khadijah proposed marriage. Muhammad accepted her offer and when he was about 25, they married. Muhammad and Khadijah had several children, but only their daughter Fatima had children of her own. She continued the bloodline of Muhammad.

***3. Call to Prophethood***

For the next 15 years, Muhammad made his living as a merchant. In addition to enjoying success in business, he also cared about spiritual matters, often spending time at prayer and meditation in the mountains around Mecca. He was concerned about the effects of wealth and the worship of idols on his city.

In about 610 C.E., Muhammad went to one of his spiritual retreats in a cave in the mountains. There, according to Islamic teachings, Muhammad received the call to be a **prophet**, or messenger of Allah. *Allah* is the Arabic word for God. The same word for God, Allah, is used by Arab Jews and Arab Christians.

Muhammad later described the remarkable events of that night. He told of being visited by the angel Gabriel who brought revelations, or revealed teachings, from God. Gabriel told Muhammad, “You are the messenger of God.”

According to Islamic tradition, at first Muhammad feared that he might be going mad. But Khadijah consoled Muhammad and expressed her faith that God had chosen him as a prophet to spread his words to the people. Khadijah became one of the first converts to Islam.

Islam is based on **monotheism**, or the belief in a single God. This God, Muhammad taught, was the same God of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Through Gabriel, God instructed Muhammad to teach others to practice compassion, honesty, and justice.

Muslim tradition teaches that the angel Gabriel continued to bring God’s messages for about the next 20 years. At first, Muhammad confided these messages only to family and friends, including his cousin Ali and his close friend, Abu Bakr (ah-BOOH BAHK-uhr). Gradually, a small group of followers developed at Mecca. They were called **Muslims**, which means “those who surrender to God.” For Muslims, Islam was a way of life and the basis for creating a just society.

Though Muhammad apparently could neither read nor write, he said that the messages from Gabriel were imprinted on his mind and heart. His followers also memorized them, and eventually some even wrote down these words and collected them in the Qur’an (also spelled *Koran*), the holy book of Islam. The poetic style of his book helped lend **credibility** to Muhammad’s claim that it contained the words of God. It also attracted new believers to Islam.