CONTENTS

AN OVERVIEW OF ISLAM ................................................................. 1

CHAPTER ONE — The Development of Islam .................................. 2
  Life Before Muhammad ......................................................... 3
  Muhammad—The Great Prophet .............................................. 2
  The Middle East ................................................................. 5

CHAPTER TWO — The Spread of Islam ......................................... 6
  The Caliphs (632 – 661) ......................................................... 6
  The Umayyads (661 – 750) ..................................................... 7
  The Beginning of Islam Expansion ......................................... 7
  The Abbasids (750 – 1258) ..................................................... 8
  The Crusades: A Fight for the Holy Lands ............................... 9
  The Mongols .................................................................. 10
  Three Powerful Muslim Monarchies ...................................... 11
  I. The Ottoman Empire ....................................................... 11
  II. The Safavid Dynasty ....................................................... 11
  III. The Mughal Empire ....................................................... 12
  The Rise of the West: Colonialism and its Aftermath ............... 12

CHAPTER THREE — Teachings and Practices ................................. 14
  The Quran .................................................................. 14
  The Mosque ................................................................. 15
  The Five Pillars of Islam ...................................................... 17
  Pillar I – The Shahada ......................................................... 17
  Pillar II – Salat ................................................................. 18
  Pillar III – Zakat ................................................................. 18
  Pillar IV – Sawm ................................................................. 18
  Pillar V – Hajj ................................................................. 19

CHAPTER FOUR — Islamic Law ..................................................... 20
  Sbaria .................................................................. 20
  Muslim Actions ............................................................... 20
  Sin and God’s Forgiveness ................................................... 21
  Good Deeds ................................................................ 21
  Major Sins .................................................................. 21

CHAPTER FIVE — Women in Islam ................................................. 22
  Men and Women Are Equal—Or Are They ......................... 22
  Muslim Women and What They Wear ................................ 23

CHAPTER SIX — Islamic Sects ...................................................... 24
  Sunnis and Shiites ............................................................... 24
  Sufism .................................................................. 25

CHAPTER SEVEN — Arab Contributions ....................................... 26
  Islamic Architecture .......................................................... 26
  Islamic Art ................................................................ 27
  Arabic Literature ............................................................. 30
  Arabic Contributions to Science ......................................... 32

CHAPTER EIGHT — Islamic Holy Festivals and Holy Days of Observance ...................................................... 34

CHAPTER NINE — A Comparison of Islam with Other World Religions .................................................. 35

Test ........................................................................ 39

Answer Key .................................................................. 42

Bibliography & Internet Sites ...................................................... 47
Islam is a religion that developed almost 1400 years ago in Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia). Today, Islam is the second largest and fastest growing religion in the world. Approximately 1.3 billion Muslims can be found in 55 different countries. Between four and seven million Muslims are United States citizens.

Islam is an Arabic word, the root of which (s-l-m) primarily means “peace,” but in a secondary sense means “surrender.” In its broadest sense, the word Islam means “the peace that comes when one’s life is surrendered to God.” Muslims submit to God, called Allah in Arabic, and follow Islamic teachings.

Islam is a way of life based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad who lived from 570—632. Muhammad is believed by Muslims to have received revelations from God. These revelations were assembled in a book called the Quran (also, Koran), which Muslims believe contains the actual word of God. The Quran is the Muslim holy book, containing the guidelines by which followers of Allah are to live, which cannot be changed or added to.

Islam provides guidelines for the moral, spiritual, and political organization of society. Thus, Muslims believe all actions must be guided by God’s will.

The fundamental concept of Islam is monotheism—the belief that there is one God, Allah—and Muhammad is his messenger and servant. God requires both moral behavior and devotion from Muslims. Muslims believe that they were created to worship and serve God and humanity.

Muslims have six fundamental beliefs called the articles of faith. The six beliefs are: belief in Allah, belief in angels, belief in the previously revealed books of God, belief in all the prophets, belief in the Day of Judgment, and belief in divine laws.
**CHAPTER ONE**

The Development of Islam

**Life Before Muhammad**

Before Islam, people living in the Middle East (see map on page 5) were known as Arabs, as they are today. Their native language was and still is Arabic. All Arabs share a common history and culture.

Arabs before Islam were traders, farmers, nomads, and town-dwellers. They had many religions and worshiped a number of gods.

Muslim history begins with the story of Abraham, a prophet. It is believed that Abraham may have lived between 2100 and 1500 B.C. He is regarded by Muslims (and Jews) as the father of their people. Abraham is also considered to be the first monotheist (believer in one God).

Abraham and his wife’s servant, Hagar, had a son named Ishmael. Hagar and Ishmael were sent away when Abraham’s wife, Sarah, had a son, Isaac.

Hagar and Ishmael traveled to what came to be called the city of Mecca (the birthplace of Islam). There they found a sacred well. This well provided them with the water they needed to live.

When Ishmael grew to be an adult, Abraham visited him in Mecca. There, next to the sacred well, Abraham and Ishmael (a prophet, like his father) built a temple to God. This temple is called the Kaaba. It is the holiest shrine of the Islamic faith. In the wall of the Kaaba, the two prophets placed the Black Stone. Muslims believe the Black Stone fell from heaven as a sign of the first covenant between God and humankind.

Although the Kaaba was built as a temple to God, many Arabs before Islam filled it with idols that represented a number of gods. These Arabs then made pilgrimages there to worship the idols. It was not until Muhammad conquered Mecca, in 630, that the Kaaba was cleansed of its idols and returned to its original state of holiness as a temple to the one God of Islam—Allah.

**Muhammad – The Great Prophet**

Islam began with the prophet Muhammad. Although Muhammad (his name means “the praised one”) is not the first Islamic prophet, he is believed by Muslims to be the last. The Quran cites Adam as the first prophet, with thousands falling between Adam and Muhammad, but only 25 listed by name. Some of those listed by name include Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus.

Muhammad was aware of Hebrew and Christian traditions and believed that God had already revealed himself in part through Moses and Jesus. However, Muhammad believed he was chosen to be God’s messenger to deliver the final revelations of God to the people.

Muhammad was born in the Arabian city of Mecca, near the coast of the Red Sea in about 570. According to tradition,
on the night of his birth, a star filled
the sky with a bright light.
Muhammad’s parents died when he
was young, so he was raised by his
uncle. As a young man, Muhammad
worked as a trade agent for a wealthy
widow. At the age of twenty-five, he
married this woman (who was fifteen
years older than he) and had several
children with her.

Muhammad was a successful caravan
merchant. In the course of his many
journeys, Muhammad had repeated
encounters with Jews and Christians.
Through them, he became interested in
religious questions and grew increasingly
uncomfortable with worldliness, greed,
and the pagan worship in Mecca. He
began to meditate in a cave on the
mountain, Hira, outside the city.

There, one night, at age 40, in about
610, Muhammad is said to have received
the first of his revelations from God. The
angel Gabriel appeared to him and
commanded him to recite words that
later became part of the Quran. “Recite,”
Gabriel said, “in the name of the Lord
who created man from clots of blood.
Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One,
who by the pen taught man what he did
not know.”

Initially frightened, Muhammad came
to accept the revelations which were
from then on frequently imparted to him.
In 613, Muhammad began preaching the
message of monotheism—a belief in the
one true God. He also taught that idolatry
was wrong. This concept was highly
controversial, as Arabs had been
worshipping a number of gods for many
years.

At first, Islam was merely a local
religion led by Muhammad, and Meccans
tolerated his preaching. Some laughed at
Muhammad and thought his teachings
odd. But as he grew more confident and
uncompromising, condemning the
idolatry and immorality of his fellow
townsmen, Muhammad was increasingly
seen as a danger to the existing way of life
and a threat to the Meccan economy.
Merchants, in particular, feared that if Arabs
became followers of Muhammad and
stopped making pilgrimages to Mecca to
worship idols at the Kaaba, they would
stop spending money there, and the