

Historical Origins

Islam teaches that in the year 610, an Arab trader named Muhammad was visited by the angel Gabriel. The angel told Muhammad that he was God's messenger. Muslims believe that through a series of these visits, Muhammad received the words of the Qur'an, or sacred book. According to Islam, Muhammad was the last prophet that Allah, the Muslim name for God, sent to humanity. Muslims believe he is a direct descendant of Abraham, who is also the founder of Judaism.



A 17th-century Turkish ceramic tile from a mosque

Central Beliefs

Muslims, or followers of Islam, believe there is only one God, the same God worshipped by Jews and Christians. The word *Islam* means surrender, and the goal of Islam is to surrender to the will of Allah. Muslims do this by practicing the Five Pillars of Islam. These are professing faith, praying five times a day, giving to charity, fasting, and making a journey to Mecca to reenact Abraham's dedication. Muslims worship in mosques.

Spread of Islam

In the centuries after Muhammad's death, Muslims spread their religion by conquest. Islamic rulers took control of Southwest Asia, Central Asia, North Africa, and parts of India and Spain. Today Islam continues to spread around the world through migration and conversion. It is the world's second largest religion.

Muslims engage in prayer at a mosque in Delhi, India, during Ramadan, a holy month of fasting.

