

Chapter 3: The Beginnings of Islam

Lesson 1 Life on the Arabian Peninsula

MAIN IDEAS

Geography The geography of the Arabian peninsula encouraged a nomadic way of life.

Economics Trade routes opened the Arabian peninsula to goods and ideas from many parts of the world.

Belief Systems Mecca was an important religious center as well as a trade city.

A Desert Culture

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the geography of the Arabian peninsula encourage a nomadic way of life?

Physical Features and Climate

- Arabian peninsula
 - arid region of Southwest Asia between Red Sea, Persian Gulf
 - mainly desert; about 1/4 size of U.S.
 - farmland is sparse, mostly in south mountains and north coastline

Nomads

- **Nomads**—herders who move place to place seeking grazing land, water
 - Arab nomads also called Bedouins
- **Oasis**—desert area that contains water
- Nomads found oases; traded, interacted with oasis-based groups

Family Life

- **Clans**—close-knit families related by blood, marriage
 - own governing unit, fierce fighters protected family, food, water

REVIEW QUESTION

How did people of Arabia adapt to its landforms and climate?

Crossroads of Three Continents

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What made the Arabian peninsula important for trade?

Growth of Trade Cities

- Arabian peninsula at trade crossroads for Asia, Africa, Europe
- Mediterranean, Red, Arabian Seas and Persian Gulf aided trade access
- By A.D. 600, nomads settled in market towns near coasts for trade
- Oases with good soil and water for farming became key trade stops

Trade Routes and Trade Goods

- Trade routes linked peninsula to the Byzantine and Persian empires
 - textiles, metals, spices, carried by camels; ideas exchanged, too

REVIEW QUESTION

Why did so many trade routes develop on the Arabian peninsula?

The Holy City of Mecca

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Why was Mecca important as a religious center?

Abraham in Mecca

- Mecca was important trade, religious center in western Arabia
- Caravans brought worshippers to Ka'aba shrine in center of Mecca
 - Ka'aba linked to Abraham, key figure in Judaism, Islam, Christianity
 - built as temple to God—called **Allah** in Arabic
- **Monotheism**—belief in one God (belief system shared by Judaism, Islam, Christianity)

Many Religions

- Some desert Arabs practiced polytheism—belief in many gods
 - eventually began to worship at the Ka'aba
- **Pilgrimage**—journey to sacred place
- Mecca became annual pilgrimage site for many in Arabia
- Jews, Christians peopled Arabia; Arabs blended many beliefs, rituals
- Muhammad, Prophet of Islam, born in Mecca A.D. 570

REVIEW QUESTION

What factors made Mecca a center of religious activity?

Lesson Summary

- The harsh physical features of the Arabian peninsula and its arid climate caused many people to be nomads.
- The peninsula's location at the crossroads of three continents encouraged trade and cultural exchange.
- Mecca was a trade center and a religious center.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Muslims from every corner of the globe try to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in their lives.