

SOUTHWEST ASIA (MIDDLE EAST)

GEOGRAPHIC UNDERSTANDINGS

SS7G5 The student will locate selected features in Southwestern Asia (Middle East).

a. Locate on a world and regional political-physical map: Euphrates River, Jordan River, Tigris River, Suez Canal, Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, and Gaza Strip.

The **rivers of Southwest Asia** (the Middle East) are important because much of this region of the world is dry and desert or semi-desert. One of the longest rivers in the region is the **Euphrates River**, which begins in Turkey, and flows through Syria and Iraq. In southern Iraq, the Euphrates River joins with the Tigris River to form one waterway called the **Shatt al-Arab**, which then flows along the border between Kuwait and Iran before emptying into the Persian Gulf.



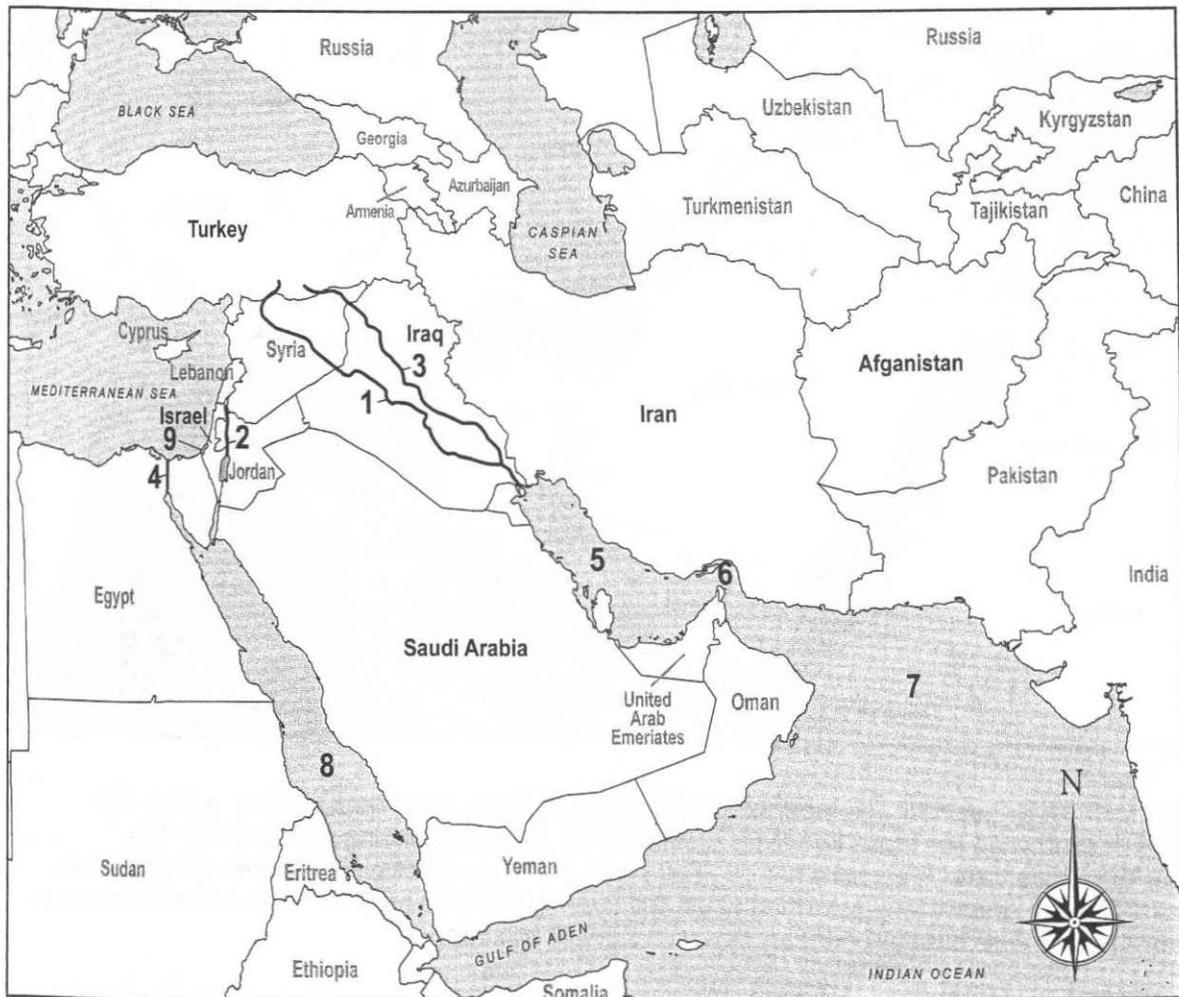
The **Tigris River** begins in the mountains of Turkey and flows south through Iraq. It joins the Euphrates in southern Iraq. These two rivers provide water for both drinking and farming. The countries that share these rivers have had problems over how the water will be shared among them. The **Shatt al-Arab**, the waterway formed when the Euphrates River and Tigris River come together, is also important because it is the boundary between Kuwait and Iran.

The **Persian Gulf** is one of the main ways oil is shipped from the rich fields of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the other countries that line its shores. All of the countries that produce oil in that region depend on the Persian Gulf as a shipping route. Any ships coming out of or into the Persian Gulf must navigate through the very narrow **Strait of Hormuz**, located at one end of the Persian Gulf. This waterway connects the Persian Gulf to the **Arabian Sea**.

Once in the Arabian Sea, ships can sail east into the **Red Sea**, which is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the east and Egypt to the west. At the northern end of the Red Sea, ships can enter the man-made **Suez Canal**, which will allow them to get to the Mediterranean Sea without having to sail all around the continent of Africa.

The **Jordan River** is a much smaller river than either the Tigris or the Euphrates, but it is still very important. The waters that form the Jordan River begin in the mountains of Lebanon and Syria and flow down into the Hula Valley in northern Israel before reaching the Sea of Galilee. The Jordan River begins at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee and flows south until it reaches the Dead Sea. This river is one of the main sources of water for Israel, Jordan, parts of Syria, and many of those living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Because so much water is taken out of the Jordan River by the different groups that depend on it, less and less water reaches the **Dead Sea**. The Dead Sea has no outlets. Water that flows in stays there and because so much evaporates in the desert air, the water remaining is high in salts and other chemicals. There are no fish living in the Dead Sea, and that is the reason for its name. The Jordan River is also important because it is the political boundary between Israel and the West Bank, a small part of Syria, and the country of Jordan.

Use the map to answer the next four questions.



SS7G5 The student will locate selected features in Southwestern Asia (Middle East).

- b. Locate on a world and regional political-physical map the nations of Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.

The country of **Afghanistan** is located at the far eastern edge of the region of Southwest Asia. This country is **landlocked**, which means it has no seacoast. Afghanistan is very mountainous, and the people who live there are divided into a number of different ethnic groups or tribes.

Iran, to the west of Afghanistan, is one of the largest countries in Southwest Asia. Iran is mountainous as well, but this country also has long seacoasts and is able to use both the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Iran uses the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz to transport its exports to the Arabian Sea and then on to many different world markets.

Just to the west of Iran is the country of **Iraq**. Iraq has the added advantage of having two of the largest rivers in the region, the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, flowing through its territory. In southern Iraq, these two rivers join and form a waterway called the Shatt al -Arab, a river that runs for about 125 miles before it empties into the Persian Gulf. This river forms part of the international boundary between Iraq and Iran, and a number of disputes have occurred there over access to the waterway.

The Kingdom of **Saudi Arabia** is the largest country of the Arabian Peninsula. The Persian Gulf lies to the northwest of the country and the Red Sea is to its west.

Turkey is located to the north and west of Iraq. Turkey shares a border with Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Turkey is also the country in which the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers begin. Turkey has built a number of dams in recent years to try saving water from these two rivers for use by Turkish farms, villages, and towns.

South of Turkey is the country of Lebanon, and south of Lebanon is Israel. **Israel** was created by the United Nations in 1948 as a homeland for the Jewish people of the world. The country of Israel is bound by the **Gaza Strip** along the southern coast and the **West Bank** to the east. The Jordan River forms the boundary between the West Bank and the country of Jordan.

SS7G6 The student will discuss environmental issues across Southwest Asia (Middle East).

- a. Explain how water pollution and the unequal distribution of water impacts irrigation and drinking water.

Water is a natural resource that is distributed unevenly in Southwest Asia. Some countries, like Turkey and Iraq, have major rivers that provide enough water for farming communities. These two countries share the **Tigris and Euphrates river systems**. Israel, Syria, and Jordan share the **Jordan River**. Others, like Saudi Arabia, have almost no water. They are mostly made up of desert. Others, like Iran, have areas with access to rivers and areas that are made up of deserts. Because water is in short supply in so many parts of Southwest Asia, irrigation has been necessary for those who want to farm and raise animals for market.

Many types of **irrigation** can be found in Southwest Asia as farmers struggle to bring water to their fields from local rivers and from **underground aquifers** (layers of underground rock where water runoff from rains and streams is trapped). Some farmers use water from wells that tap into **fossil water** (water that has been underground for centuries). Rains and streams do not replace this water, and once it is used, is gone forever. Farmers in very rural areas still use methods used by their ancestors to irrigate their fields, including water wheels, irrigation ditches and canals, and animal power to lift water from underground wells. Farmers in countries with more technology use modern irrigation techniques. Israel and Saudi Arabia have developed systems of **drip irrigation** using computers that measure out how much water each plant receives. There has also been a lot of work done to learn how to take water from the ocean and desalinate it to use for drinking and irrigation. **Desalination** (the process of removing salt and other chemicals from seawater) is very expensive and requires complex technology.

As countries in Southwest Asia have worked to modernize their systems of agriculture, **water pollution** has been a growing problem. Increased demand for irrigation to expand farming has led to overuse of rivers and streams. Many farmers have begun to use chemical fertilizers, which have contaminated water supplies through runoff into these same rivers and streams. Constant planting and fertilizer use have led to the build-up of salt levels in soils, eventually making it impossible to farm in those areas. In the rush to develop industry, many cities and towns have grown rapidly, but the people living there have been slow to create effective ways to manage garbage and treat sewage. Access to water is also a source of conflict, especially among countries that share a river system. Dams built along a river to create lakes for irrigation and the production of **hydroelectric power** (electricity produced from the energy of running water) in one country reduce the amount of water available to other countries located further downstream.

SS7G7 The student will explain the impact of location, climate, physical characteristics, distribution of natural resources, and population distribution in Southwest Asia (Middle East).

a. Explain how the distribution of oil has affected the development of Southwest Asia (Middle East).

Two of the most important **natural resources** found in Southwest Asia are **natural gas** and **oil**. These two resources bring wealth into the region because they are needed for much of the world's economy. Deposits of underground oil and natural gas were discovered in Southwest Asia at the beginning of the 1900s. At first, companies from the United States and Europe controlled the drilling and refining of most of this oil, but now most of the oil operations are controlled by the countries themselves. Over half of the world's known oil reserves are found in this part of the world. This has made some of these countries extremely rich and has led them to have a lot of control over the global economy.

In the 1960s, several of these Southwest Asian countries joined with other oil-rich countries around the world to create the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** in order to have more control over the price of oil on the world market. OPEC has called for an embargo, or a slow-down or temporary halt, to oil supplies at different times in the past to get political and economic agreements from the other countries in the world. While some countries in Southwest Asia have grown very rich due to their oil production, others have struggled to help their populations make a decent living.

The Southwestern Asian countries with the greatest reserves of natural gas and oil are Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait. Some other countries have smaller reserves, especially those found around the Arabian Gulf. These countries have enjoyed tremendous growth in national wealth and an improved standard of living in the past fifty years. Those countries without oil reserves have had a much harder time improving living conditions for their populations. This difference in wealth in some of the Southwest Asian countries has led to conflicts among the nations.

SS7G7 The student will explain the impact of location, climate, physical characteristics, distribution of natural resources and population distribution on Southwest Asia (Middle East).

b. Describe how the deserts and rivers of Southwest Asia (Middle East) have affected the population in terms of where people live, the type of work they do, and how they travel.

Three major river systems are located in Southwest Asia: the **Euphrates River** that runs through Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait; the **Tigris River**, which runs through Turkey, Iraq, and Kuwait; and the **Jordan River**, which forms part of the border for Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and Israel. In addition to being important sources of water, these rivers also provide boundaries between nations. These three rivers are important because they furnish water for drinking and irrigation, as well as routes for transportation and trade for those who live along their routes. Many of the major cities in Southwest Asia are located on or near these rivers. These cities and towns are also centers of industry, as that is where workers can most easily be found.

Southwest Asia has a number of very large desert areas: the great **Syrian Desert** shared between Syria and Iraq, and the **Rub al-Khali**, or "**empty Quarter**," in southern Saudi Arabia. These deserts have historically provided Southwest Asia with natural barriers against invasion. They have also led to a way of life that developed around the need to survive in such harsh surroundings. Some people have always managed to live in and around the desert, living in tent camps and surviving as sheep and camel herders and making a living by trading animals and handmade goods with those who lived in the towns on the desert's edge. These people are known as "**Bedouins**," or desert nomads, and their way of life is gradually disappearing.

The countries of Southwest Asia generally have a very hot and dry climate. The climate is the type of weather a region has over a very long period. Four large oceans or bodies of water, the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean border Southwest Asia. Even so, mountain ranges close to many of the coastal areas block rains coming from these bodies of water and the result is that much of the interior of Southwest Asia is desert. Because there are coastal areas as well as a number of large rivers, other parts of this region have enough water to support agriculture and towns and cities of significant size.

Southwest Asia is located between three major continents: Europe, Africa, and Asia. For this reason, the region has played a major role in trade among these continents through the centuries. Ships loaded with trade goods from Asia would travel to the coast of Southwest Asia. These goods would then be loaded onto caravans that traveled across the desert to the coast on the other side of Southwest Asia. Today the **Suez Canal** in Egypt links the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, making it possible to continue the trade among continents without having to use overland caravans.

Many people in Southwest Asia practice **subsistence agriculture**, growing small amounts of crops, to take care of their local needs. Because the climate is so dry, agriculture nearly always depends on irrigation, directing water from small rivers and streams to the farmers' fields. There is some commercial agriculture (growing crops for industrial markets), but even that is limited by lack of water.

Water is a critical resource in Southwest Asia, both as a source of life and as a route for trade. Because the Tigris and Euphrates rivers run through more than one country, access to the water has led to many political conflicts in recent years. Several countries have built dams along their portion of these rivers, to create lakes for irrigation and to generate **hydroelectric power** (electricity created using the energy of running water). Each dam cuts down on the water available to the countries further downstream.

No agriculture or animal herding can take place without access to adequate sources of water. People in this region have used many creative ways to bring water to the fields where it is needed, using water wheels and pumps powered by animals or electricity, digging wells and **qanats** (underground tunnels that bring water from the hills to dry plains), and building canals. An additional problem comes with irrigation. Irrigated land usually needs chemical fertilizers. Repeated use of fertilizer eventually causes salts to build up in the soil, making it hard to grow anything. Many places in Southwest Asia that have been irrigated for many years no longer produce crops as well as they once did.

SS7G8 The student will describe the diverse cultures of the people who live in Southwest Asia (Middle East).

a. Explain the differences between an ethnic group and a religious group.

An **ethnic group** is a group of people who share cultural ideas and beliefs that have been a part of their community for generations. The characteristics they may have in common could include a language, a religion, a shared history, types of foods, and a set of traditional stories, beliefs, or celebrations. These things make up a common culture shared by those in a particular ethnic group.

An example of an ethnic group from Southwest Asia is the Kurds. This group lives in a mountain region that spans Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Kurds speak Kurdish, and most are Muslim. Kurds do not have their own homeland or government. They are a minority group ruled by the country where they live.

A **religious group** shares a belief system in a god or gods, with a specific set of rituals and literature. People from different ethnic groups may share the same religion, though they may be from very different cultures. Religion has been important to the history of Southwest Asia. Christianity, Islam, Judaism were started in this region. People who follow Judaism are called Jews. Followers of Christianity are called Christians. Followers of Islam are called Muslims.

SS7G8 The student will describe the diverse cultures of the people who live in Southwest Asia (Middle East).

b. Explain the diversity of religions within the Arabs, Persians, and Kurds.

Southwest Asia is home to many different ethnic groups who share similar religions. The **Arabs** of Southwest Asia believe themselves to be descendants of Abraham in the Bible, through his son Ishmael. They make up the majority of those who live throughout the region known as Southwest Asia, though there are many differences among them. Most Arabs practice the religion of **Islam** and call themselves **Muslims**.

Those who call themselves Muslims are further divided, as some call themselves **Sunni Muslims**, while others are **Shia Muslims**. Many Arabs are **Christians**. Most Arabs, whether they are Muslim or Christian, speak the Arabic language.

Persians are those who live in the modern country of **Iran**. The Persian people are descended from a different group than those who are Arabs and Jews. Their ancestors were Indo-Europeans, from Central Europe and Southern Russia.

The country of Persia became known as **Iran** after World War I. Persians, or Iranians, speak **Farsi**, a language that uses the Arabic alphabet but is actually a different language. They practice **Islam**, but most belong to the **Shia group of Muslims**. About 15 percent of the Muslims in the world are Shia. The other 85 percent are Sunni Muslims.

The **Kurds** are an ethnic group that lives in several different countries in Southwest Asia. Most Kurds are found in the mountainous areas where Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq come together. The Kurds see themselves as a distinct ethnic group from others in the area. They speak their own language, known as **Kurdish**, and have a separate history, literature, music, and set of traditions. Many Kurds hope to have a nation of their own some day, a hope that has caused conflict with the countries in which Kurdish people live. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslim, though there is a small minority who are Shia Muslims.

SS7G8 The student will describe the diverse cultures of the people who live in Southwest Asia (Middle East).

c. Compare and contrast the prominent religions in Southwest Asia (Middle East): Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have their origins in the lands that make up the countries of Southwest Asia. Though these three religions have much in common, historically there has been a great deal of religious conflict in this part of the world. Today, Israel is the only country in the area that is mostly Jewish. All of the other countries in the region are mostly Muslim, although most also have a Christian minority. There are further divisions within all three religions. Muslims are divided into a number of sects, or groups. The most important are the Sunni Muslims and the Shia Muslims. Christians have many different denominations, which include Protestants, Catholics, and various Orthodox sects. Different groups are found among Jews as well, including those who are Orthodox and those who are Reform. Religion has played a big role in the history and politics of Southwest Asia.

JUDAISM

Judaism is a monotheistic religion, meaning its followers believe in only one God. Judaism traces its origins back to Abraham, a man born in Mesopotamia in approximately 2000 BC. He was one of the first people to profess the belief in a single God, even though the society in which he lived worshipped many different gods. The Torah, the first five books in the Hebrew Scriptures, says that God made a covenant (agreement) with Abraham, promising to set him as the head of a new nation if he would dedicate himself and the Hebrew people to the worship of one God. Abraham left Mesopotamia and eventually came to the land of Canaan (part of the present day state of Israel) on the Mediterranean coast, which he believed God had promised to him and his descendants. Here the Hebrews lived, worshipping Yahweh, the God they believed would protect them for their faithfulness. At a very old age, he and his wife Sarah had a son, Isaac. Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob, are seen as the patriarchs, or founders, of the Hebrew nation. Jacob's twelve sons, in turn, are viewed as the ancestors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

The Hebrew people lived in an area surrounded by more powerful kingdoms, and the Bible says that around 1300-1200 BC the Hebrews were forced into slavery in Egypt. After years of suffering Moses, who took them into the Sinai desert to escape capture, led them out of slavery. This escape is known as the "Exodus" and is remembered each year by the celebration of Passover in the Jewish religious calendar. While wandering in the Sinai desert, the Jewish faith teaches that God renewed his covenant with the Hebrew people, revealing to them the Ten Commandments. After many years, they were able to return to Canaan where they lived in twelve generally self-governing tribes. They gradually extended their territory to the south along the Jordan River. The largest of these tribes was that of Judah, from which the names Judaism and Jews developed.

Around 1000 BC, the Hebrew people united under a series of kings, Saul, David, and Solomon, in the kingdom of Israel. David established his capital in the city of Jerusalem, and Saul later built a great temple there and dedicated it to the one true God of the Jewish people. Struggles with more powerful neighbors continued however, and eventually the kingdom was divided with Judah in the south and Israel in the north. A period of Babylonian rule followed, ended by a revolt of the Maccabeus in 167 BC, which restored Hebrew control of the area. Independent rule in the area was ended finally by a Roman takeover, and the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. Only a portion of the Western Wall of the Temple was left standing. The Jewish people were forced out of the lands around Jerusalem and for many generations lived in what was called "The Diaspora," or the scattering of the Jews to other parts of the world. The importance of Jerusalem and of the remaining western wall of the Temple continued to be central to Jews during the long centuries of the Diaspora. They believed that the lands of ancient Israel and Judea remained part of the **covenant** they had made with God.

ISLAM

Islam is a religion that began in the city of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula in the 600s AD. Mecca was a trading center located along a main route on the Red Sea coast connecting the Byzantine Empire with the shipping and trading centers coming from the Indian Ocean and the Far East. As a stop on the trade route, many different people visited the city of Mecca. In the center of the town stood a rectangular building, the Ka'aba, which held several hundred different idols inside. Meccans believed the building had originally been built by Abraham and his son, Ishmael, to honor God for saving them from dying in the desert. Over the centuries, however, statues of many other idols and gods were placed in the building.

Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570 AD. Orphaned at an early age, he was taken in by his uncle and trained to become a merchant. He married an older woman and took over her caravan business, becoming a respected member of the Mecca community.

At the age of forty, while spending an evening in one of the cool caves in the hills around Mecca, Muhammad began to hear the voice of the angel Gabriel, calling on him to tell the word of God to the people. After much worry and after talking with his wife, Muhammad decided the voice was real, and he began to tell others in Mecca about what he had heard. He told people they needed to rededicate themselves to the worship of one God, whom he called Allah. Those who were willing to agree to this belief became known as "Muslims," or "ones who submit" to the will of God. Many in Mecca worried that his teachings would hurt their trade by angering those who worshipped other gods, and some of his followers began to face threats and violence.

To escape these threats, in 622 AD, Muhammad and his followers moved about 200 miles north to Yathrib, a city Muhammad renamed Medina, which means "the city of the prophet." This move came to be known among Muslims as the "Hijrah," and the date serves as the first year of the Islamic calendar. The people of Medina accepted Muhammad as both a political and a religious leader, and many joined the new religion of Islam.

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is a religious movement that grew out of Judaism during the time of Roman rule in Palestine. The founding figure in Christianity is Jesus, a man who was born in Bethlehem in Judea to a Jewish family in about 4 BC. Tradition holds that he lived a modest life in Nazareth as a carpenter until he began to attract attention as a teacher and preacher when he reached the age of about thirty years of age. While he followed Jewish law and belief, he spoke of a more personal relationship with God, focusing on both the love of God and the generous treatment of neighbors and acquaintances. He had a number of followers who became known as his disciples, and their writings provide much of what is known about the life and teachings of Jesus. The first four books of the New Testament are made of these writings. They are known as the Gospels.

Many among both the Romans and the Jewish leaders worried about the attention Jesus attracted among the common people. Some of his followers went so far as to claim that he was the long awaited Messiah, or "savior of man." Jewish leaders claimed Jesus encouraged such beliefs and was therefore guilty of crimes against Jewish teachings. The Roman ruler, Pontius Pilate, saw him as a threat to his authority and that of the Roman Empire. As a result, Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion, a form of execution in those days in which a person either was tied or nailed to a cross and suspended there until dead.

After his death, his followers believed that he was able to rise from the dead and walk among them again before going to heaven. They continued to call him the Messiah or the Greek "Christos," which was shortened to "Christ." They called him the "Son of God." Word of Jesus' rising from the dead began to spread quickly, and along with his teachings became the basis for a new religion called **Christianity**. His followers emphasized this new religion's willingness to take in all who wished to believe. They angered the Romans, as they refused to worship Roman gods and goddesses. Many of the early Christians were put to death by Roman authorities in the years following the time of Jesus, but the religion continued to have growing appeal among many who did not like Roman rule and who wanted a religion that emphasized both Old Testament teachings and the loving and forgiving God described by Jesus. By the year 300 AD, Christianity had spread to most parts of the Roman world. In 313 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine officially ended the harsh treatment of Christians and made Christianity a religion approved by the empire.

SS7G8 The student will describe the diverse cultures of the people who live in South-west Asia (Middle East).

d. Explain the origin of the division between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

After Muhammad died, there was disagreement about who should lead the **Muslim** community, or the ummah. This question was settled for a time by agreeing to place power in the hands of men who had been friends of Muhammad's in his lifetime. They ruled one after the other, and they were known as the "Four Rightly Guided Caliphs." When the last of these men died, a new argument arose over who should lead the Muslim community. One group thought leadership should go to whoever was most able to keep the community together. These people came to be known as the **Sunni** Muslims, those who saw themselves closely following Muhammad's example. The second group felt leadership should go to a direct descendant of Muhammad. They wanted to choose one of Muhammad's grandsons, the children of his son-in-law Ali, for leadership. They became known as the Shia-Ali, or "supporters of Ali." This name has been shortened to **Shia**. A battle for control soon followed, resulting in the death of one of Muhammad's grandsons and the transfer of power to the Umayyad family and the Sunni supporters. These divisions in the Muslim community remain even today, though there is little difference in their basic religious beliefs. The Sunni Muslims have always been in the majority, making up about 85 percent of those who call themselves Muslims today. The Shia Muslims have always been a minority, but they are a major portion of the populations of a number of countries today including Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. Iran is over 90 percent Shia.

Muhammad returned to Mecca as the head of an army in 630 AD, and the city surrendered rather than face a war. One of his first acts on entering Mecca was to go to the Ka'aba and remove all the idols. He then dedicated the building to Allah, the one God. Mecca and the Ka'aba remained central to Muslim worship.

After Muhammad's death, his followers collected the teachings from the angel Gabriel into the Quran (the holy book of Islam). Muslims believe there is only one God, and they view Muhammad as his final prophet. Much of the Old Testament and the New Testament are also included in the Quran, so Muslims see the Quran and Islam as the final and complete word of God. All Muslims believe they must meet five basic obligations, known as the Five Pillars. The first is called Shahada, the belief that "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet." The second is Salat, or praying five times a day facing the direction of Mecca. Zakat, or charity to the poor is the third, followed by Sawm, or eating or drinking nothing during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan, the tenth month in the Muslim calendar. The final Pillar is to make the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, sometime during one's lifetime.

For Muslims, the Quran offers a handbook for leading a respectable life. Some Muslim countries base their legal code on the law of Quran, a system known as shariah law. Because so much of both the Old and New Testaments are a part of the Quran, Muslims view Jews and Christians as "People of the Book," who should be accorded special respect though they were expected to pay a tax as they were not required to give Zakat to the poor.

After Muhammad's death, the religion of Islam spread rapidly throughout the Arabian Peninsula and parts of the Persian and Byzantine Empires. Led by four men who had been friends of Muhammad, the "Rightly Guided Caliphs," Muslim armies were able to easily conquer areas where these older empires had weakened over the years. The word "Caliph" means leader or ruler. Many people welcomed the Muslims and converted to Islam, finding it a simple and direct religion.

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e. Evaluate how the literacy rate affects the standard of living.

Literacy, or the ability to read and write, has a big effect on the standard of living of a country. Those who cannot read or write have a very difficult time finding decent jobs. Lack of education also prevents many young people from becoming the engineers, doctors, scientists, or business managers that the modern economies need in order to bring improvements to their countries. Many parts of Southwest Asia, particularly those where there are fewer cities and towns, have lower literacy rates than one finds in Europe or the United States. Often schooling is only available to those who can afford to pay to attend. Many countries in this region are working hard to raise literacy rates among young people. Girls tend to have less opportunity to go to school than boys in many areas of Southwest Asia, a problem these countries are trying to correct.