

CHAPTER TWELVE

Islam

History

Islam is the third of the Abrahamic faiths and the youngest of them, with its followers called Muslims. It has nearly two billion adherents worldwide, most living in North and Central Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Far East Asia. It is the world's second-largest religion and among the fastest-growing. It comprises two major sects: the Sunni branch comprises 85%-90% of the world's Muslims, with the rest belonging to the Shi'a branch primarily concentrated in Iran and Iraq. Islam is a strictly monotheistic faith that believes in one supreme God with no partners or associates that share His divinity. The word 'Islam' in Arabic – its native language – means 'to surrender.' It is based on the root 's-l-m,' which means peace. 'Islam,' thus, is a complete and peaceful surrender to God and His will. The religion traces its origins to Prophet Muhammad in the city of Makkah in Arabia in the seventh century CE. However, the ideological roots of Islam go back much further in time.