

## Timeline of Early Islamic History

822 BCE	The Phoenicians establish the historic city of Carthage (in present-day <a href="#">Tunisia</a> ) and set up trading posts along the North African coast
586 BCE	Babylon, under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar II, conquers Judah and destroys the Jewish Temple.
553 BCE	Cyrus the Great establishes the Achaemenid Persian Empire after a successful revolt against the Medes, an ancient Iranian people.
480 BCE	At the Battle of Salamis, an Athenian naval victory stops the Persian advance into Greece.
334 BCE	Alexander the Great invades the Persian Empire.
332-331 BCE	Alexander the Great conquers Syria and Egypt.
c. 208 BCE	Massinisa becomes king of Eastern Numidia — an ancient Berber kingdom also known as Massyli (east of current Algeria), succeeding his father Gala. He establishes the capital of his kingdom in Cirta (present-day Constantine, <a href="#">Algeria</a> ). He will die in 146 BCE during the siege of Carthage by Rome.
146 BCE	Rome destroys the Phoenician settlement along the North African coast after a prolonged conflict.
31 BCE	Octavian defeats Cleopatra and Marc Antony, signaling the start of the Roman Empire.
70	Judea, then part of the Roman Empire, rises up in a revolt which is crushed by Emperor Titus. Jerusalem is sacked and the Second Temple is destroyed.
224	Ardashir I founds the Persian Sassanid Empire.
356	Death of Saint Antony, an Egyptian Coptic monk and pioneer of ascetic monasticism.
410	Rome falls to the Visigoths, throwing Europe into a period of great instability.
570	Death of Imru'ul-Qays, who is later recognized by Prophet Muhammad and by Arab literary critics of the ancient Basra school (Iraq) as the most distinguished poet of pre-Islamic times. He is the author of one of the seven Mu'allaqat [suspended poems], which are among the most important works in Arabic literary history.
c. 570	Birth of the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca in the Hijaz region in the NW of the <a href="#">Arabian Peninsula</a> . Having lost his father, Abdullah, at a young age he was first put in the care of his grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib, then of his uncle Abu Talib, who raises him and later becomes his mentor and protector. Abu Talib is the father of the Muhammad's cousin, Ali, who will become an important figure in the history and <a href="#">early literature</a> of the Muslim Shi'a sect. A genealogical chart can be found <a href="#">here</a> .
610	According to Islamic belief, during the lunar month of Ramadan the archangel Gabriel reveals the first verses of the <a href="#">Qur'an</a> to Prophet Muhammad on Hira', the mountain on which the Prophet spent time in meditation. Muslims believe that these revelations are God's final message to mankind, never to be superseded by another, and that God chose Muhammad as his final messenger and instructed him to spread the message of Islam. The month of <a href="#">Ramadan</a> is celebrated every year, in remembrance of these revelations.
622	Muhammad and his followers flee from Mecca to Medina (known at the time as Yathrib) to escape increased persecution from the non-believers of Mecca, who are thought to have plotted to kill him. This episode in Islamic history is known as Hijra (migration) . During his early years in Medina, Muhammad receives revelations offering guidance on the social and economic relations between individuals. A small state begins to form, and the Islamic community ( Ummah ) acquires a self-conscious identity. For this reason, the date of Hijra becomes the start of the Islamic calendar.

624-630	A series of small battles in Badr and Uhud among other places, between the people of Mecca and Muhammad's followers in Medina, lead to the conquest of Mecca. Muhammad and his forces enter the city without bloodshed and establish political control over both Medina and Mecca.
632	Death of the Prophet. As Muhammad had not expressly designated anyone to succeed him, his companions split into two camps over his succession. One camp believes that Ali, the Prophet's cousin, is entitled to succeed him on the basis of the bloodline; this group eventually evolved into the present-day <a href="#">Shi'i</a> or Shi'a branch of Islam. The second camp, today's <a href="#">Sunni</a> branch, believes that succession should be decided by a process of election and consultation. Owing to this early bifurcation in Islam, the tradition of Sunni caliphs <a href="#">differs</a> from the Shi'i imams. The second camp prevails and Abu Bakr is chosen to be the first Caliph ( Khalifa ), or successor. His Caliphate will last until 634, during which time rebellious tribes are reined in and the Arabian Peninsula is united.
634	Omar Ibn Al Khattab is selected as the second Caliph following Abu Bakr's death. Muslim armies begin to move into what is now <a href="#">Iraq</a> , <a href="#">Syria</a> and <a href="#">Egypt</a> . At the same time, the campaigns of <i>ridda</i> , of Apostasy, quick and certain skirmishes to subdue recalcitrant tribes, came to an end.
635-637	Conquest of Damascus (in 635), taken easily with the element of surprise; Ctesiphon (637), the Sasanian capital on the Tigris; and <a href="#">Jerusalem</a> (637), which becomes the third holiest city in Islam.
642	The Muslims complete their conquest of what is now <a href="#">Syria</a> , <a href="#">Palestine</a> and <a href="#">Egypt</a> , at the expense of the Byzantine empire. Garrison cities are built in Iraq: Basra, Kufa, Fustat, Mosul, Wasit. Amr Ibn al-Aas, commander of the invading armies in Egypt, erects the first mosque. The Arabs press on into North Africa. According to some historians, the Amazigh (Berber) inhabitants of the region, led by Queen Kahina, put up a staunch resistance to this first wave of Muslim conquest. However, local infighting weakens that resistance by the time of the second wave of conquest.
644	Assassination of the Caliph Omar. Othman ibn Affan succeeds him as the Third Caliph. During his reign, Othman urges the trusted companions of Prophet Muhammad to come to a consensus on what constitutes the exact text of the <a href="#">Holy Qur'an</a> . This agreed-upon orthodox collection of Qur'anic texts becomes the undisputed holy book of Islam.
644-50	Under Othman, the Muslims conquer Cyprus, Tripoli, Iran, and Afghanistan, though with smaller financial returns.
656	Othman is murdered. He is succeeded by Ali, the Prophet's cousin and a candidate for the original succession back in 632. However, not everybody is willing to accept Ali's rule, and the first fitnah (conflict among believers; civil war) ensues. Aisha, the Prophet's widow, and several other companions lead a rebellion against Ali for failing to avenge Othman's death. Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria and a member of Othman's clan, claims control over the caliphate.
657	The parties to the succession controversy agree to arbitration, but it is inconclusive. A small, radical group known as the Khawarij or <a href="#">Kharijites</a> <a href="#">secedes</a> from Ali's camp because they view both Mu'awiyah's claim and Ali's submission to arbitration as religiously unacceptable acts; hence the authority of both men is rejected. This doctrine will be resurrected by Islamic radicals in the <a href="#">20th century</a> . The Kharijites are sometimes called the Puritans of Islam, as they placed particular importance on preserving the purity of mind and body; they were highly critical of Muslims who did not follow their path, but at the same time surprisingly tolerant of contemporary non-Muslims. A sub-sect, the <a href="#">Azraqites</a> , were known as particularly brutal in meting out righteous justice against fellow Muslims. See, also, <a href="#">this reading</a> on divisions in Islam.