
The Prophet Muhammad: history of the life

The Prophet Muhammad is the most important human in Islamic history, second only to Allah in reverence. To Muslims he was the last prophet, delivering God's final message, and is therefore often referred to as The Prophet or the Messenger, the capital initial letters differentiating him from other prophets and messengers. Muslims see him as the restorer of monotheism in a world which was reverting to polytheism and idolatry; monotheism is the primary belief of Muslims and is the first Pillar of Islam, along with an acceptance that Muhammad is his messenger. He is also noted as a diplomat, philosopher, military general, and orator. His name is alternatively spelled Muhammed or Mohammed.

Muhammad was born in Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia) in 570 ce. Orphaned at an early age, he was brought up by his uncle, Ibn Talib, head of the Banu Hashim clan in the Quraysh tribe which dominated Mecca. He was therefore born into a powerful and influential society. He worked as a merchant and a shepherd and married at age 25. By the time he was 40 he had become disillusioned with Meccan life and had taken to retreating to a cave every year to meditate. During his 610 ce retreat, during the month of Ramadan, he received his first revelation from God, via his messenger, the Angel Gabriel. The message stated that there was but one God and that Muhammad must surrender to him (the Arabic word for surrender is Islam). Gabriel also declared that Muhammad was a prophet and that he must spread the word. This was the first of many revelations which Muhammad received during his life, and these revelations form the basis of the Qur'an.

On his subsequent return to Mecca, Muhammad gained few followers in the city, his first followers being his wife Khadija and his cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib. He was treated with suspicion and hostility by the rest of Meccan society and attracted persecution. To escape this persecution, he sent some of his followers to Abyssinia (roughly equivalent to modern-day Ethiopia), while he and his followers set off for Yathrib (later named al-Madinah I-Munawwarah, 'The Radiant City' by Muhammad; it is currently known simply as Medina) in 622 ce. It is this event, known as the Hijrah, which is the starting point of the Islamic Hijri calendar. During this time, the Arabian Peninsula was a rather inhospitable place and towns could only grow up near oases. However, Mecca and Yathrib were the two most important settlements, each with relatively large populations. While Mecca was a mercantile and tribal hub, Yathrib was an important agricultural town.

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