

A Brief Biography of Prophet Muhammad (part 1 of 2): The Meccan Period

Description: The early life of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him.

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Objectives:

- To understand the influences in Prophet Muhammad's early life.
- To understand the political situation at the time.
- To realise and ponder the difficulties suffered by the first Muslims.

Arabic Terms:

- *Kabah* - The cube-shaped structure located in the city of Mecca. It serves as a focal point towards which all Muslims face when praying.

Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, is the man loved by the world's more than 1.5 billion Muslims. He is also respected by those of other faiths and beliefs.

Throughout history and around the world non-Muslims have shown great respect and honour to Prophet Muhammad and he is considered influential in both religious and secular matters. It was to Prophet Muhammad that Allah revealed the Quran and Muslims are urged to imitate his behaviour and moral standards. This is because Prophet Muhammad's life was the Quran. He understood it, loved it and he lived his life based on its standards. When Muslims declare their faith in Allah, they also declare their belief that Muhammad is His slave and messenger.



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Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, is beloved by many, his behaviour is studied and emulated, but who exactly is this man? Where did he come from, where and when was he born, what exactly makes him a man esteemed above other men. Allah calls him a mercy to humankind thus it is wise for us to know as much as possible about this man. In this and the following lesson we will briefly discuss Prophet Muhammad's life and times. The life of Prophet Muhammad can be divided into two distinct periods, the Meccan period and the Madinan period.

The Meccan Period

Prophet Muhammad was born in 570 CE (Common Era) in the city of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula, part of modern day Saudi Arabia. His father, Abdullah had died shortly after his marriage to Aminah daughter of Wahb, thus Muhammad's guardianship fell to his grandfather Abdul-Muttalib who was the respected and well liked leader of both the clan of Hashim and the influential tribe of the Quraish.

As was the custom in those days, after birth Muhammad was entrusted to a wet nurse named Halima from the nomadic tribe of Sa'd ibn Bakr. Thus he spent his early years in the hill country, learning the Bedouin ways and the pure Arabic language. When Muhammad was five or six his mother took him to Yathrib, an oasis town north of Mecca, to stay with relatives and visit his father's grave there. On the return journey, Amina became ill and died. At this point Muhammad was returned to Mecca and placed under the sole care and protection of his grandfather Abdul-Muttalib. In his grandfather's care, Muhammad began to learn the rudiments of statecraft.

Mecca was Arabia's most important pilgrimage centre and Abdul-Muttalib its most respected leader. Abdul-Muttalib respected and honoured treaties and displayed the finest of morals. He loved the poor and fed them in times of famine; he helped the pilgrims and restrained wrongdoers. Muhammad learned at an early age that good manners and morals were possible even in a time and place where the strong trampled upon the weak, and the widow and the orphan were quite helpless.

When Muhammad was eight years old his grandfather also died leaving him in the care of his uncle Abu Talib. Abu Talib went on to protect, serve, defend and honour Muhammad through the testing times of Prophethood and until the day he died. It was under his tutelage that Muhammad grew up to become a fine young man known for his excellent manners and honesty. Muhammad was referred to as as-Sadiq (The Truthful One) and al-Amin (The Trustworthy One).

As a youngster Muhammad used to accompany his uncle on his business trips to Syria. He thus learned the art of buying, selling and trading, and hence by the age of 25 he was skilled in these matters. He was often hired by people to trade for them with the great caravans and cities. It was at this time that Muhammad was hired by the Meccan business woman Khadijah.

Khadijah recognised and admired Muhammad's irreproachable character and skills and proposed marriage to him even though she was approximately 15 years older than he. Muhammad accepted and they lived together for almost twenty five years, until the death of Khadijah, may Allah be pleased with her, about 8-9 years after the revelation of the Quran. During this time, although it was permissible, Muhammad did not marry any other wives. Their life together is a beautiful love story that produced six children, two sons and four daughters.

Muhammad had always been a man inclined to think deeply and contemplate the wonders of the universe. At around the age of forty he began to frequent a cave on the outskirts of Mecca known as Hira. It was in this cave, in the year 610 CE, that the first

verses of the Quran were revealed to Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him. The Quran in its entirety would continue to be revealed over the next 23 years, in different places and in different ways.

Over the next two to three years after the first revelation, Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, taught Islam secretly to those he trusted. However, when he started calling to Islam publicly the hostility from the idol worshippers increased and Prophet Muhammad and his followers were subjected to abuse and harassment. The Quraish tribe were the guardians of the *Kabah*, the holy house to which all Arabs made pilgrimage, and it was a source of great prestige and profit, therefore they became openly aggressive and Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, himself would have been killed except that his Uncle Abu Talib's position and rank made it all but impossible.

Nevertheless plans were made to eradicate this so-called scourge and the followers of Islam were harassed, tortured and murdered. This period of persecution culminated in three years of social and economic sanctions resulting in severe deprivation and deaths from starvation. Approximately one year after the imposition of sanctions Khadijah, may Allah be pleased with her, died. Also in that year, that was to become known as the year of sorrow, Abu Talib died, leaving the Meccans free to plot and plan to exterminate the Muslims. In response to their dire situation Prophet Muhammad sent a group of the Muslims to Abyssinia to seek the protection of the just Christian king, Negus.

Persecution in Mecca grew ever fiercer, and Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, sought protection in the neighbouring city of Taif. Here he was met with great and open hostility and escaped beaten and bloody. However a turning point was at hand for in that year several people accepted Islam from the city of Yathrib and Prophet Muhammad met with them.

Having converted to Islam, the leaders of Yathrib made a secret pledge to protect the Prophet should the disbelievers try to kill him. Thus began the slow migration to Yathrib. Prophet Muhammad instructed his followers to leave Mecca individually or in small groups. This was very disturbing news for the Quraish, and they decided there was no other option but to kill Prophet Muhammad and put a stop to the changes taking place once and for all.

We will continue this brief biography in lesson 2, The Madinan Period, where we will discover that divine intervention thwarts the murderous plan and the city of Yathrib soon becomes known as al-Madina an-Nabawiyah (the Prophet's city), or Madina.

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