

Detailed Biography of Prophet Muhammad - Meccan Period (part 1 of 3)

Description: A three-part lesson detailing the life of Prophet Muhammad before prophethood and the years to follow after prophethood until the Muslims were forced to leave Mecca. Part 1: Pre-Islamic Arabia and the early life of Prophet Muhammad.

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Objectives

- To understand pre-Islamic Arabia.
- To learn about the Age of Ignorance.
- To learn about the birth and early life of the Prophet.
- To learn about his reputation as a young man.

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.

The life of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, begins in Arabia, but his story begins thousands of years before his birth. The book of Genesis, which both Jews and Christians respect, mentions the story of Abraham and his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham was commanded by God to leave his wife Hagar and his son Ishmael there, all alone, as a test of their devotion to God. God sprang up a well for them and they survived in the barren desert.



Soon after, some of the surrounding tribes began to inhabit this valley, which became known as Mecca. Ishmael grew up with the Arab tribe of *Jurhum*, learned their language, and became known as Ismail.

Later, when Abraham, known in Arabic as Ibrahim, returned, he and his son were instructed by Allah to build a small place of worship dedicated to Him. This was the first structure entirely dedicated to the worship of Allah alone. The father and son invited the Arabs to worship Allah and renounce all other false gods.

Ismail eventually became a prophet like his father and remained in Mecca with his family. After Ismail, his descendants worshipped Allah and followed their moral teachings. The *Kabah* remained a center for worshipping Allah and believers would come from all over Arabia for the pilgrimage.

Age of Ignorance

Things changed with time and the Arabs forgot the true way of Ismail. The pilgrimage became an empty ritual rather than an act of worship. Around the 4th century, the tribe named Khuza'ah kicked the descendants of Ismail out of Mecca and one of their chiefs introduced idol worship. Within a few centuries, idolatry prevailed around Arabia and the House of Allah was turned into a House of Idolatry. It is not that they didn't believe in a Creator; they did. However, they began to believe that Allah could not be approached directly and that these idols were the mediators between them and Allah. In order to appease these statues, they would even slaughter animals and dedicate the sacrifice to them. Idolatry became an organized religion with the invention of certain religious customs.

There were other Arabs who didn't believe in Allah at all. Some were pure materialists who only believed that time eventually destroys everything. Others worshipped the sun, the moon, or certain stars and planets. Most of the idol worshippers had little or no concept of an afterlife.

The status of women can be seen from the fact that when a child was born, parents would openly express their discontent if it was a girl. Some fathers would even bury the girl alive, out of fear of poverty. Prostitution was common and became an accepted social norm.

Very few people could read or write, or had any type of formal education. The only science worth mentioning was poetry, of which the Arabs were masters.

Events Before his Birth

Around the 5th century, Qusayy ibn Kilab led a revolt against the tribe of Khuza'ah and managed to retake control of Mecca. The members of his tribe, known as the Quraysh, were direct descendants of Prophet Ismail.

By the 6th century, the Quraysh enjoyed a position of honor among the several tribes scattered around Arabia because they took care of the *Kabah* and the pilgrims that would come to visit.

The tribe of Quraysh consisted of many different families or clans. The family of Hashim was now among the most prominent. Abdul Muṭṭalib, the chief of the clan, became the unofficial leader of the Quraysh in Mecca. He had many children, but one of his favorite was Abdullah. It was predicted that he would carry on the legacy of his father, but it was not to be. Abdullah married Aminah from the Zuhrah clan. A few months later, on

his way to Yathrib in the north, he became ill and passed away, leaving his wife pregnant.

An Orphan Is Born

Aminah gave birth to a son in the year 570. The child's grandfather named him Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, which meant 'the praised one', a rare name in Arabia.

It was the custom in Arabia that infants of noble families be brought up in the desert with the Bedouins. Muhammad grew up in the household of Halima who was his foster mother and learnt the ways of the desert. He would visit Mecca every few months to see his mother, only to return to the desert again. After a short while, when Muhammad was only six, his mother Aminah, became very ill and passed away while they were on a journey. His grandfather Abdul Muttalib took care of him and treated him like his own son. However, when young Muhammad was only eight, he also passed away. It was his uncle Abu Talib who would raise him from now on.

Abu Talib loved his nephew very much and would even take him along when he journeyed to Syria and other places for business.

As a Shepherd

However, Abu Talib was not very wealthy like his father, so Muhammad had to work to earn a living and help his uncle. He began his career as a shepherd, taking care of flocks of sheep and goats for the people of Mecca. A shepherd learns a great deal of responsibility. He must guide the sheep, together as a group, and protect them from predators at the same time.

It also teaches the shepherd patience and gives him much time to think and reflect, away from the excessive noise of the city.

Many of the prophets sent by Allah to other communities were known to be shepherds at some point in their life because a person's occupation has a great effect on his personality.

His Reputation

Muhammad was one of the few who refused to worship idols from a very young age. He would visit the *Kabah* but direct his worship only to Allah. He also abstained from eating any meat that was slaughtered in the name of an idol. After shepherding for a few years, he took an interest in trade and became a businessman who would trade people's goods on their behalf. Most noblemen among the Quraysh were merchants by profession. However, Muhammad stood out from the rest due to his honesty and sincerity. He quickly became known in Mecca as al-Amin, 'the honest one.' Also, he was known for his high morals, chaste character, and avoidance of wine, gambling, illicit relationships, and other

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