

MUHAMMAD'S BIOGRAPHY (PART 2 OF 12): FROM BIRTH TO ADULTHOOD

Rating: 4.6

Description: A glimpse at the life of the Prophet prior to revelation.

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Published on: 13 Feb 2006

Last modified on: 04 Oct 2009

The Prophet's Birth

It was in the year 570 of the Christian Era that Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was born in Mecca, a city in present day Saudi Arabia. His father, Abdullah, was a great-great-grandson of Qusayy, the founder of Mecca, and belonged to the Hashimite family of Quraish. His mother, Aameena, was descended from Qusay's brother. Returning with a caravan from Syria and Palestine, Abdullah stopped to visit relatives in an oasis to the north of Mecca, fell ill there and died several months before his son's birth.

It was customary to send the sons of Quraysh into the desert to be suckled by a wet-nurse and spend their early childhood with a Bedouin tribe. Apart from considerations of health, this represented a return to their roots, an opportunity to experience the freedom that accompanies the vastness of the desert. Prophet Muhammad was taken by Halima, and spent four or five years with this Bedouin family, tending the sheep as soon as he was old enough to walk, learning the ways of the desert.

When he was six, not long after he had rejoined his mother, she took him on a visit to Yathrib, where his father had died, and she herself fell ill with one of the fevers prevalent in the oasis, dying on the journey home. Muhammad now came under the guardianship of his grandfather, Abdul-Muttalib, chief of the Hashimite clan. When the boy was eight years old, Abdul-Muttalib died, and thus he entered the care of the new Hashimite chieftain, his uncle Abu Talib. Prophet Muhammad tended sheep, and when he reached the age of nine, he was taken by his uncle on the caravan journey to Syria so that he could learn the art of trade.

He continued working as a merchant, and soon he made a reputation for himself. Among the substantial fortunes of Mecca was that of the twice widowed Khadeeja. Impressed by what she heard of Muhammad, who was now commonly known as al-Ameen, 'the trustworthy', she employed him to take her merchandise to Syria. Even more impressed by his competence, when this task was completed, than by his

personal charm, she sent a proposal for marriage. By this time Prophet Muhammad was twenty-five, and Khadeeja was the age of forty. Khadeeja presented her husband with a young slave, Zayd, who was then freed by Muhammad. When Zaid's relatives came to ransom him, his affection ran so deep for his benefactor that he chose to remain with Prophet Muhammad. Khadeeja bore Muhammad six children, including one boy, Qasim, who died before his second birthday.

Prophet Muhammad was by now a man of substance, respected in the community, admired both for his generosity and his good sense. His future seemed assured. In due course, having re-established the prosperity of his clan, he would become one of the more influential elders of the city and end his life, perhaps, as his grandfather had done, reclining in the shade of the Kaaba and recollecting long years well spent in worldly terms. Yet his spirit was uneasy and became increasingly so as he approached middle age.

The Hunafa

The Meccans claimed descent from Abraham through Ishmael, and their temple, the Kaaba, had been built by Abraham for the worship of the One God. It was still called the House of God, but the chief objects of worship came to be a number of idols placed inside, sculptural depictions of deities they believed to be the daughters of God which acted as intercessors. The few who felt disgust at this idolatry which had prevailed for centuries longed for the religion of Abraham. Such seekers of the truth were known as Hunafaa, a word originally meaning "those who turn away" from idol-worship. These Hunafaa did not form a community, but rather each sought the truth by the light of their own inner consciousness. Muhammad son of Abdullah was one of these.

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