

570 Muhammad's Birth and Infancy

Muhammad was born in the year **570** in the town of Mecca, a mountain town in the high desert plateau of western Arabia. His name derives from the Arabic verb hamada, meaning "to praise, to glorify." He was the first and only son of Abd Allah bin Al-Muttalib and Amina bint Wahb. Abd Allah died before Muhammad's birth and Muhammad was raised by his mother Amina, who in keeping with Meccan tradition entrusted her son at an early age to a wet nurse named Halima from the nomadic tribe of the Sa'd ibn Bakr. He grew up in the hill country, learning their pure Arabic.

575 Muhammad Becomes an Orphan

When Muhammad was five or six his mother took him to Yathrib, an oasis town a few hundred miles north of Mecca, to stay with relatives and visit his father's grave there. On the return journey, Amina took ill and died. She was buried in the village of Abwa on the Mecca-Medina Road. Halima, his nurse, returned to Mecca with the orphaned boy and placed him in the protection of his paternal grandfather, Abdul Al-Muttalib. In this man's care, Muhammad learned the rudiments of statecraft. Mecca was Arabia's most important pilgrimage center and Abdul Al-Muttalib its most respected leader. He controlled important pilgrimage concessions and frequently presided over Mecca's Council of Elders.

578 Muhammad in Mecca in Care of an Uncle

Upon his grandfather's death in **578**, Muhammad, aged about eight, passed into the care of a paternal uncle, Abu Talib. Muhammad grew up in the older man's home and remained under Abu Talib's protection for many years. Chroniclers have underscored Muhammad's disrupted childhood. So does the Qur'an: "Did God not find you an orphan and give you shelter and care? And He found you wandering, and gave you guidance. And he found you in need, and made you independent" (93:6-8).

580-594 Muhammad's Teens

When young boy, Muhammad worked as a shepherd to help pay his keep (his uncle was of modest means). In his teens he sometimes traveled with Abu Talib, who was a merchant, accompanying caravans to trade centers. On at least one occasion, he is said to have traveled as far north as Syria. Older merchants recognized his character and nicknamed him El-Amin, the one you can trust.

594 Muhammad Acts as Caravan Agent for Wealthy Tradeswoman, Khadija

In his early twenties, Muhammad entered the service of a wealthy Meccan merchant, a widow named Khadija bint Khawalayd. The two were distant cousins. Muhammad carried her goods to the north and returned with a profit.

595-609 Muhammad's Marriage and Family Life

Impressed by Muhammad's honesty and character, Khadija eventually proposed marriage. They were wed in about **595**. He was twenty-five. She was nearly forty.

Muhammad continued to manage Khadija's business affairs, and their next years were pleasant and prosperous. Six children were born to them, two sons who both died in infancy, and four daughters. Mecca prospered too, becoming a well-off trading center in the hands of an elite group of clan leaders who were mostly successful traders.

610 Muhammad Receives First Revelation

Mecca's new materialism and its traditional idolatry disturbed Muhammad. He began making long retreats to a mountain cave outside town. There, he fasted and meditated. On one occasion, after a number of indistinct visionary experiences, Muhammad was visited by an overpowering presence and instructed to recite words of such beauty and force that he and others gradually attributed them to God. This experience shook Muhammad to the core. It was several years before he dared to talk about it outside his family.

613 Muhammad Takes his Message Public

After several similar experiences, Muhammad finally began to reveal the messages he was receiving to his tribe. These were gathered verse by verse and later would become the Qur'an, Islam's sacred scripture. In the next decade, Muhammad and his followers were first belittled and ridiculed, then persecuted and physically attacked for departing from traditional Mecca's tribal ways. Muhammad's message was resolutely monotheistic. For several years, the the Quraysh, Mecca's dominant tribe, levied a ban on trade with Muhammad's people, subjecting them to near famine conditions. Toward the end of the decade, Muhammad's wife and uncle both died. Finally, the leaders of Mecca attempted to assassinate Muhammad.

622 Muhammad and the Muslims Emigrate to Medina

In **622**, Muhammad and his few hundred followers left Mecca and traveled to Yathrib, the oasis town where his father was buried. The leaders there were suffering through a vicious civil war, and they had invited this man well known for his wisdom to act as their mediator. Yathrib soon became known as Medina, the City of the Prophet. Muhammad remained here for the next six years, building the first Muslim community and gradually gathering more and more people to his side.

625-628 The Military Period

The Meccans did not take Muhammad's new success lightly. Early skirmishes led to three major battles in the next three years. Of these the Muslims won the first (the Battle of Badr, **March, 624**), lost the second (the Battle of Uhud, **March, 625**), and outlasted the third, (The Battle of the Trench and the Siege of Medina, **April, 627**). In **March, 628**, a treaty was signed between the two sides, which recognized the Muslims as a new force in Arabia and gave them freedom to move unmolested throughout Arabia. Meccan allies breached the treaty a year later.

630 The Conquest of Mecca

By now, the balance of power had shifted radically away from once-powerful Mecca, toward Muhammad and the Muslims. In **January, 630**, they marched on Mecca and were joined by tribe after tribe along the way. They entered Mecca without bloodshed and the Meccans, seeing the tide had turned, joined them.

630-632 Muhammad's Final Years

Muhammad returned to live in Medina. In the next three years, he consolidated most of the Arabian Peninsula under Islam. In March, **632**, he returned to Mecca one last time to perform a pilgrimage, and tens of thousands of Muslims joined him.

After the pilgrimage, he returned to Medina. Three months later on **June 8, 632** he died there, after a brief illness. He is buried in the mosque in Medina. Within a hundred years Muhammad's teaching and way of life had spread from the remote corners of Arabia as far east as Indo-China and as far west as Morocco, France and Spain.