
Short Biography of Prophet Muhammad

The Prophet's Birth

Muhammad, son of Abdullah, son of Abdul Muttalib, of the tribe of Quraysh, was born in Makkah in the year 571 C.E. His father died before he was born, and he was raised first by his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, and after his grandfather's death, by his uncle Abu Talib.

As a young boy he travelled with his uncle in the merchants' caravan to Syria, and some years later made the same journey in the service of a wealthy widow named Khadijah. So faithfully he conducted her business, and so excellent was the report of his behaviour, which she received from her old servant who had accompanied him, that she soon afterwards married her young agent; and the marriage proved a very happy one, though she was fifteen years older than he was. Throughout the twenty-six years of their life together he remained devoted to her; and after her death, when he took other wives he always mentioned her with the greatest love and reverence. This marriage gave him rank among the notables of Makkah, while his conduct earned for him the title al-Amin, the "trust-worthy."

Physical Description

One of the most comprehensive and detailed descriptions we have of the Prophet Muhammad came from a Bedouin woman who would take care of travellers who passed by her tent. The Prophet once stopped by her with his companions for food and rest. The Prophet asked her if they could buy some meat or dates from her but she could not find anything. The Prophet looked towards a sheep next to the tent. He asked her, "What is wrong with this sheep?" She replied, "The sheep is fatigued and is weaker than the other sheep." The Prophet asked, "Does it milk?" She replied, "I swear by your mother and father, if I saw milk from it then I would milk it." He then called the sheep and moved his hand over its udder; he pronounced the name of God and praised Him. Then he called the woman when the sheep steadied its feet and its udder filled. He asked for a large container and milked it until it was filled. The woman drank until full as did his companions. Then it was milked for a second time until the container was full and they left her and continued on their journey. After a short while, the husband of the Bedouin woman returned from herding goats. He saw the milk and said to his wife, "Where did you get this milk from?" She replied, "I swear by God, a blessed man came to us today" He said, "Describe him to me."

She began; "I saw him to be a man of evident splendour. Fine in figure. His face handsome. Slim in form. His head not too small, elegant and good looking. His eyes large and black [and] his eye lids long. His voice deep. Very intelligent. His brows high and arched [and] his hair in plaits. His neck long and his beard thick. He gave an impression of dignity when silent and of high intelligence when he talked. His words were impressive and his speech decisive, not trivial nor trite. His ideas like pearls moving on their string. He seemed the most splendid and fine looking man from a distance and the very best of all from close by. Medium in height, the eye not finding him too tall nor too short. A tree

branch as it were between two others but he was the finest looking of the three. The best proportioned. His companions would surround him, when he spoke they would listen attentively to his speech...”

The First Revelation

The Makkans claimed descent from Abraham through Ishmail and tradition stated that their temple, the Ka`bah, 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 here were a number of idols, which were called “daughters” of God and intercessors.

It was the practice of the Prophet to retire often to a cave in the desert for meditation. His place of retreat was Hira, a cave in a mountain called the Mountain of Light not far from Makkah, and his chosen month was Ramadan, the month of heat. It was there one night towards the end of this quiet month that the first revelation came to him when he was forty years old.

He heard a voice say: “Read!” He said: “I cannot read.” The voice again said: “Read!” He said: “I cannot read.” A third time the voice, more terrible, commanded: “Read!” He said: “What can I read?” The voice said:

“Recite in the name of your Lord who created

Created man from a clinging substance.

Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous –

Who taught by the pen –

Taught man that which he knew not.”

The Vision of Cave Hira

He went out of the cave on to the hillside and heard the same awe-inspiring voice say: “O Muhammad! Thou art God’s messenger, and I am Gabriel.” Then he raised his eyes and saw the angel standing in the sky above the horizon. And again the voice said: “O Muhammad! Thou art God’s messenger, and I am Gabriel.” Muhammad stood quite still, turning away his face from the brightness of the vision, but wherever he turned his face, there stood the angel confronting him. He remained thus a long while till at length the angel vanished, when he returned in great distress of mind to his wife Khadijah. She did her best to reassure him, saying that his conduct had been such that God would not let a harmful spirit come to him and that it was her hope that he was to become the Prophet of his people. On his return to Makkah she took him to her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a very old man, “who knew the Scriptures of the Jews and Christians,” who declared his belief that the heavenly messenger who came to Moses of old had come to Muhammad, and that he was chosen as the Prophet of his people.

Message of Islām

Most of the people of Makkah who had acclaimed him as the trustworthy (al-Amīn) and the trustful (as-Sādiq) could not bring themselves to believe in him. Nor could most of the Jews and Christians who had for so long been living in expectation of his arrival. Not that they doubted his truthfulness or integrity but they were not prepared to turn their whole established way of living upside down by submitting to his simple but radical message. He would tell them;

When I recite the Qurʾān, I find the following clear instruction: God is He who has created you, and the heavens and the earth, He is your only Lord and Master. He is your only Lord and Master. Surrender your being and your lives totally to Him Alone, and worship and serve no one but Him. Let God be the Only God.

The words I speak, He places in my mouth, and I speak on His authority, Obey me and forsake all false claimants to human obedience. Everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to God; no person has a right to be master of another person, to spread oppression and corruption on earth. An eternal life beyond awaits you; where you will meet God face to face, and your life will be judged; for that you must prepare.

This simple message shook the very foundations of Makkan society as well as the seventh-century world. That world, as today, lived under the yoke of many false gods, kings and emperors, priests and monks, feudal lords and rich businessmen, soothsayers and spell-binders who claimed to know what others knew not, and who all lorded over the human being.

The Prophet's message challenged them all, exposed them all and threatened them all. His immediate opponents in Makkah could do no better than brand him unconvincingly as a liar, a poet, soothsayer and a man possessed. But, how could he who was illiterate, he who had never composed a single verse, who has shown no inclination to lead people, suddenly have words flowing from his lips so full of wisdom and light, morally so uplifting, specifically so enlivening, so beautiful and powerful, that they began to change the hearts and minds and lives of the hearer? His detractors and opponents had no answer. When challenged to produce anything even remotely similar to the words Muhammad claimed he was receiving from God, they could not match God's words.

Stages of the Call

First privately, then publicly, the Prophet continued to proclaim his message. He himself had an intense, living relationship with God, totally committed to the message and mission entrusted to him. Slowly and gradually, people came forward and embraced Islām. They came from all walks of life – chiefs and slaves, businessmen and artisans, men and women – most of them young. Some simply heard the Qurʾān, and that was enough to transform them. Some saw the Prophet, and were immediately captivated by the light of mercy, generosity and humanity that was visible in his manner and morals, in his words and works and also in his face.

The opposition continued to harden and sharpen. It grew furious and ferocious. Those who joined the Prophet were tortured in innumerable ways; they were mocked, abused, beaten, flogged, imprisoned and boycotted. Some were subjected to severe inhuman tortures; made to lie on burning coal fires until the melting body fat extinguished them, or were dragged over burning sand and rocks. Yet such was the strength of their faith that none of them gave it up in the face of such trials and tribulation.

The Flight to Abyssinia

However, as the persecutions became unbearable, the Prophet advised those who could, to migrate to Abyssinia. It turned out that there, the Christian king gave the Muslims full protection despite the pleading of the emissaries sent by the Quraysh chiefs. This was the first emigration of Islām.

In the meantime, the Prophet and his Companions continued to nourish their souls and intellect and strengthen their character and resolve for the great task that lay ahead. They met regularly, especially at a house near the Ka'bāh called Dār al-Arḡam, to read and study the Qur'ān, to worship and pray and to forge the tied of brotherhood.

In Makkah

Years passed and the people of Makkah would not give their allegiance to the Prophet's message nor showed any sign of any easing in their persecution. At the same time, the Prophet lost his closest companion, his wife Khadijah, as well as his uncle Abu Tālib, his chief protector in the tribal world of Makkah. The Prophet now decided to carry his message to the people of the nearby town of Tā'if known for its wealth. In Tā'if, too, the tribal leaders mocked and ridiculed him and rejected his message. They also stirred up their slaves and youth to insult him, mock him and pelt stones at him. Thus he was stoned until he bled and was driven out of Tā'if, and when God placed at his command the Angel of Mountains to crush the Valley of Tā'if if he so wished, he only prayed for them to be guided. Such was the mercy and compassion of the one who is the 'mercy for all the worlds.'

This year is known by historians as the 'Year of Sorrow' due to the grief which the Prophet suffered as a result of all these worldly setbacks. However, as the Qur'ān states that after hardship there is ease, the Prophet was to be blessed with an amazing journey culminating with a meeting with Almighty God himself.

One night the Prophet was awoken and taken, in the company of the Angel Gabriel, first to Jerusalem. There he was met by all the Prophets, who gathered together behind him as he prayed on the Rock at the centre of the site of Masjid Aqsa, the spot where the Dome of the Rock stands today. From the Rock, led by the Archangel, he ascended through the seven heavens and beyond. Thus he saw whatever God made him see, the heavenly worlds which no human eye can see, and which were the focus of this message and mission. It was also during this journey God ordained on the believers the five daily prayers.

Joy After Sorrow

In quick succession, the Prophet had suffered the terrible loss of his wife Khadijah, his intimate and beloved companion for 25 years, and of Abu Tālib, his guardian and protector against the bloodthirsty Makkan foes, and encountered the worst ever rejection, humiliation and persecution at nearby Tā'if. As the Prophet reached the lowest point in his vocation, God bought him comfort and solace. On the one hand, spiritually, He took him during the Night of Ascension to the Highest of Highs, realities and Divinities, face to face with the Unseen. And on the other, materially, he opened the hearts of the people of Yathrib to the message and mission of Prophet Muhammad.

The message that Makkah and Tā'if rejected, found responsive hearts in Yathrib, a small oasis of about four hundred kilometres to the north of Makkah. Now known as Madīnah tunnabī (the city of the Prophet), or Madīnatun Munawwarah (the radiant city), it was destined to be the centre of the Divine light that was to spread to all parts of the world for all time to come.

The Men of Madīnah (Yathrib)

Soon after Prophet Muhammad's return from Tā'if and the Night Journey, at the time of the pilgrimage, six men from Yathrib embraced Islām. They delivered the message of Islām to as many as they could, and at the time of the next pilgrimage in the year 621 C.E., 12 people came. They pledged themselves to the Prophet, that they would make no god besides God, that they would neither steal nor commit fornication, nor slay their infants, nor utter slanders, nor disobey him in that which is right. The Prophet said; 'If you fulfil this pledge, then Paradise is yours.' This time the Prophet sent Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr with them to teach them the Qur'ān and Islām and to spread the message of Islām.

More and more people over the course of a year – tribal leaders, men and women – became Muslims. At the time of the next pilgrimage, they decided to send a delegation to the Prophet, make a pledge to him, and invited him and all Muslims in Makkah to Madīnah as a sanctuary and as a base for spreading the Divine message of Islām. In all, 73 men and two women came. They met the Prophet at Aqabah. They pledged to protect the Prophet as they would protect their own women and children, and to fight against all men, red and black, even if their nobles were killed and they suffered the loss of all their possessions. When asked what would be their return if they fulfilled their pledge, the Prophet said; 'Paradise.' Thus the beginning was made, the foundations of the Islāmic society, state and civilisation were set.

The road was now open for the persecuted and tortured followers of the Prophet to come to the Land of Islām, which was to be Madīnah. Gradually most of the believers found their way to Madīnah. Their Makkan foes could not bear to see the Muslims living in peace. They knew the power of the Prophet's message, they knew the strength of those dedicated believers who cared about nothing for the age-old Arab customs and ties of kinship, and who if they had to, would fight for their faith. The Makkans sensed the danger that the Muslims' presence in Madīnah posed for their northern trade caravan routes. They saw no other way to stop all this but to kill the Prophet.

Plot to Murder the Prophet

Hence they hatched a conspiracy; one strong and well-connected young man was to be nominated by each clan, and all of them were to pounce upon and kill the Prophet one morning as he came out of his house, so that his blood would be on all the clans' hands. Thus, the Prophets' clan would have to accept blood money in place of revenge. Informed of the plot by the Angel Gabriel, and instructed to leave Makkah for Madīnah, the Prophet went to Abu Bakr's house to finalise the travel arrangements. Abu Bakr was overjoyed at having been chosen for the honour and blessing of being the Prophet's companion on this blessed, momentous, sacred and epoch-making journey. He offered his she-camel to the Prophet, but the Prophet insisted on paying its price.

On the fateful night, as darkness fell, the youths selected by the Quraysh leaders to kill the Prophet surrounded his house. They decided to pounce on him when he came out of his house for the dawn prayer. Meanwhile, the Prophet handed over all the money left by the Makkans with him for safe-keeping to Ali. Ali offered to lie in the Prophet's bed. The Prophet slipped out of his house, threw a little dust in their direction, and walked past his enemies, whose eyes were still on the house. He met Abu Bakr at his house, and they both travelled to a nearby cave. When the Quraysh realised that the Prophet had evaded them, they were furious. They looked for him everywhere to no success and then announced a reward of 100 she-camels for anybody who would bring them the Prophet, dead or alive. A tribal chief, Surāqah, sighted the Prophet and followed him, hoping to earn the reward. The Prophet, with bloodthirsty foes in pursuit and an uncertain future ahead of him in Madīnah, told Surāqah; A day will soon come when Kisra's golden bracelets will be in Surāqah's hands. Thereafter, Surāqah retreated, and the Prophet proceeded towards Madīnah.

Four stages of the Prophets life in Makkah

The Makkan period can be summarized in four stages:

1. The first stage began with his appointment as a Messenger and ended with the proclamation of Prophethood three years later. During this period the Message was given secretly to some selected persons only but the common people of Makkah were not aware of it.
2. The second stage lasted for two years after the proclamation of his Prophethood. It began with opposition by individuals: then it took the shape of antagonism, ridicule, derision, accusation, abuse and false propaganda then gangs were formed to persecute those Muslims who were comparatively poor, weak and helpless.
3. The third stage lasted for about six years from the beginning of the persecution to the death of Abu Talib and Khadijah in the tenth year of Prophethood. During this period the persecution of the Muslims became so savage and brutal that many of them were forced to migrate to Abyssinia while social and economic boycott was applied against the remaining Believers.
4. The fourth stage lasted for about three years from the tenth to the thirteenth year of Prophethood. This was a period of hard trials and grievous sufferings for the Prophet and his followers. Life had become unendurable at Makkah and there ap-

peared to be no place of refuge even outside it. So much so that when the Prophet went to Tā'if, it offered no shelter or protection. Besides this, on the occasion of Hajj, he would appeal to each and every Arab clan to accept his invitation to Islām but was met with blank refusal from every quarter. At the same time, the people of Makkah were holding counsels to get rid of him by killing or imprisoning or banishing him from their city. It was at that most critical time that God opened for Islām the hearts of the People of Yathrib where he migrated at their invitation.

The Hijrah (622 C.E.)

This was the year the Prophet migrated from Makkah to Madīnah - a small distance in space, a mighty leap in history, an event that was to become a threshold in the shaping of the Islāmic Ummah. This is why the Muslims date their calendar from the Hijrah and not from start of revelation or from the birth of the Prophet.

In Qubah, 10 kilometres outside Madīnah, the Prophet made his first stopover. Here he built the first Masjid. Here he also made his first public address; 'Spread peace among yourselves, give away food to the needy, pray while people sleep – and you will enter Paradise, the house of peace.'

Three days later, the Prophet entered Madīnah. Men, women, children, the entire populace came out on the streets and jubilantly welcomed him. Never was there a day of grater rejoicing and happiness. 'The Prophet has come! The Prophet has come!' sang the little children.

The first thing the Prophet did after arriving in Madīnah was to weld the Muhājirs or Emigrants and the hosts, called the Ansār or Helpers into one brotherhood. Still today this brotherhood remains the hallmark of the Muslims. One person from the Emigrants was made the brother of one from among the Helpers – creating a bond stronger than blood. The Helpers offered to share equally all that they possessed with their new brothers.

Brotherhood

So, the Muslims were forged into a close-knit community of faith and brotherhood, and the structure of their society was being built. The first structure was also raised. This was the Masjid, the building dedicated to the worship of One God – called Masjid al-Nabi, the Prophet's Masjid. Since then the Masjid has also remained the hallmark of the Muslims' collective and social life, the convenient space for the integration of the religious and political dimension of Islām, a source of identification, a witness to Muslim existence.

At the same time, steps were taken and required institutions built to integrate the entire social life around the centre and pivot of the worship of One God. For this purpose, five daily prayers in congregation were established. Ramadhān, fasting every day from dawn to sunset for an entire month, was also prescribed. Similarly, to establish 'giving' as the way of life, Zakāh, a percentage of one's wealth to be given in the way of God, was made obligatory.

The Jews and Hypocrites

In the first year of his reign at Madīnah the Prophet made a solemn treaty with the Jewish tribes, which secured to them rights of citizenship and full religious liberty in return for their support of the new state. But their idea of a Prophet was one who would give them dominion, not one who made the Jews who followed him, brothers of every Arab who might happen to believe as they did. When they realised that they could not use the Prophet for their own ends, they tried to shake his faith and his Mission and to seduce his followers, behaviour in which they were encouraged secretly by some professing Muslims who considered they had reason to resent the Prophet's coming, since it robbed them of their local influence. In the Madīnan sūrahs there is frequent mention of these Jews and Hypocrites.

The First Expeditions

The Prophet's first concern as ruler was to establish public worship and lay down the constitution of the State: but he did not forget that Quraysh had sworn to make an end to his religion, nor that he had received command to fight against them till they ceased from persecution. After twelve months in Madīnah several small expeditions went out, led either by the Prophet himself or other migrants for the purpose of reconnoitring and of dissuading other tribes from siding with Quraysh. One of the other purposes of those expeditions may have been to accustom the Makkan Muslims to engage with enemy forces. For thirteen years they had been strict pacifists, and it is clear, from several passages of the Qur'ān, that many of them disliked the idea of fighting and had to be inured to it.

The Campaign of Badr

In the second year after Hijrah, the Makkan merchants' caravan [which had the confiscated possessions of what the Muslims had left in Makkah] was returning from Syria as usual by a road which passed not far from Madīnah. As its leader Abu Sufyan approached the territory of Madīnah he heard of the Prophet's plan to capture the caravan. At once he sent a camel-rider towards Makkah, who arrived in a worn-out state and shouted frantically from the valley to Quraysh to hasten to the rescue unless they wished to lose both wealth and honour. A force of a thousand strong was soon on its way to Madīnah: less, it would seem, with the hope of saving the caravan than with the idea of punishing the raiders, since the Prophet might have taken the caravan before the relief force started from Makkah.

Did the Prophet ever intend to raid the caravan? In Ibn Hisham, in the account of the Tabuk expedition, it is stated that the Prophet on that one occasion did not hide his real objective. The caravan was the pretext in the campaign of Badr; the real objective was the Makkan army.

He had received command to fight his persecutors, and with the promised of victory, he was prepared to venture against any odds, as was well seen at Badr. But the Muslims, ill-

equipped for war, would have despaired if they had known from the first instance that they were to face a well-armed force three times their number.

The army of Quraysh had advanced more than half-way to Madīnah before the Prophet set out. All three parties – the army of Quraysh, the Muslim army and the caravan – were heading for the water of Badr. Abu Sufyan, the leader of the caravan, heard from one of his scouts that the Muslims were near the water, and turned back to the coast-plain leaving the Muslims to meet the army of Quraysh by the well of Badr.

Before the battle, the Prophet was prepared, still further to increase the odds against him. He gave leave to all the natives of Madīnah (The Ansār) to return to their homes un-reproached, since their oath did not include the duty of fighting in the field; but the Ansār were only hurt by the suggestion that they could possibly desert him at a time of danger. The battle went at first against the Muslims, but against the odds with a much weaker army they were victorious.

The victory of Badr gave the Prophet new prestige among the Arab tribes; but thenceforth there was the feud of blood between Quraysh and the Islāmic State in addition to the old religious hatred. Those passages of the Qur’ān which refer to the battle of Badr give warning of much greater struggles yet to come.

In fact in the following year, an army of three thousand came from Makkah to destroy Madīnah. The Prophet’s first idea was merely to defend the city, a plan of which Abdullah ibn Ubayy, the leader of “the Hypocrites” (Muslims by name only), strongly approved. But the men who had fought at Badr and believed that God would help them against any odds thought it a shame that they should linger behind walls.

The Battle on Mount Uhud

The Prophet, approving of their faith and zeal, gave way to them, and set out with an army of one thousand men toward Mt. Uhud, where the enemy were encamped. Abdullah ibn Ubayy was much offended by the change of plan. He thought it unlikely that the Prophet really meant to give battle in conditions so adverse to the Muslims, and was unwilling to take part in a mere demonstration designed to flatter the Muslims. So he withdrew with his men, a fourth or so of the army.

Despite the heavy odds, the battle on Mt. Uhud would have been an even greater victory than that at Badr for the Muslims but for the disobedience of a band of fifty archers whom the Prophet set to guard a pass against the enemy cavalry. Seeing their comrades victorious, these men left their post, fearing to lose their share of the spoils. The cavalry of Quraysh rode through the gap and fell on the exultant Muslims.

The Prophet himself was wounded and the cry arose that he was slain, till someone recognised him and shouted that he was still living; a shout to which the Muslims rallied. Gathering round the Prophet, they retreated, leaving many dead on the hillside.

On the following day the Prophet again ventured forth with what remained of the army, with the intention that the Quraysh might hear that he was in the field and so might per-

haps be deterred from attacking the city. The stratagem succeeded, thanks to the behaviour of a friendly Bedouin, who met the Muslims and conversed with them and afterwards met the army of Quraysh. Questioned by Abu Sufyan, he said that Muhammad was in the field, stronger than ever, and thirsting for revenge for yesterday's affair. On that information, Abu Sufyan decided to return to Makkah.

Massacre of Muslims

The reverse which they had suffered on Mt. Uhud lowered the prestige of the Muslims with the Arab tribes and also with the Jews of Madīnah. Tribes which had inclined toward the Muslims now inclined toward the Quraysh. The Prophet's followers were attacked and murdered when they went abroad in little companies. Khubayb, one of his envoys, was captured by a desert tribe and sold to Quraysh, who tortured him to death in Makkah publicly.

Expulsion of Banu-Nadheer

The Jews, despite their treaty, now hardly concealed their hostility. They even went so far in flattery of Quraysh as to declare the religion of the pagan Arabs superior to Islām. The Prophet was obliged to take punitive action against some of them. The tribe of Banu-Nadheer were besieged in their strong towers, subdued and forced to emigrate. The Hypocrites had sympathized with the Jews and secretly egged them on.

The War of the Trench

In the fifth year of the Hijrah the idolaters made a great effort to destroy Islām in the War of the Clans or War of the Trench, as it is variously called; when Quraysh with all their clans and the great desert tribe of Ghatafan with all their clans, an army of ten thousand men rode against Madīnah. The Prophet (by the advice of Salman the Persian) caused a deep trench to be dug before the city, and himself led the work of digging it.

The army of the clans was stopped by the trench, a novelty in Arab warfare. It seemed impassable for cavalry, which formed their strength. They camped in sight of it and daily showered their arrows on its defenders. While the Muslims were awaiting the assault, news came that Banū Quraythah, a Jewish tribe from Madīnah which had till then been loyal, had gone over to the enemy. The case seemed desperate. But the delay caused by the trench had dampened the zeal of the clans, and one who was secretly a Muslim managed to sow distrust between Quraysh and their Jewish allies, so that both hesitated to act. Then came a bitter wind from the sea, which blew for three days and nights so terribly that not a tent could be kept standing, not a fire lighted, not a pot boiled. The tribesmen were in utter misery. At length, one night the leader of Quraysh decided that the torment could be borne no longer and gave the order to retire. When the Ghatafan awoke next morning they found Quraysh had gone and they too took up their baggage and retreated.

Punishment of Banū Quraythah

On the day of the return from the trench the Prophet ordered war on the treacherous Banū Quraythah, who, conscious of their guilt, had already taken to their towers of refuge. After a siege of nearly a month they had to surrender unconditionally. They only begged that they might be judged by a member of the Arab tribe of which they were adherents. The Prophet granted their request. But the judge, upon whose favour they had counted, condemned their fighting men to death, their women and children to slavery.

Early in the sixth year of the Hijrah the Prophet led a campaign against the Bani al-Mustaliq, a tribe who were preparing to attack the Muslims.

Al-Hudaybiyah

In the same year the Prophet had a vision in which he found himself entering the holy place at Makkah unopposed, therefore he determined to attempt the pilgrimage. Attired as pilgrims, and taking with them the customary offerings, a company of fourteen hundred men journeyed to Makkah. As they drew near the holy valley they were met by a friend from the city, who warned the Prophet that Quraysh had put on their leopard-skins (the badge of valour) and had sworn to prevent his entering the sanctuary; their cavalry was on the road before him. On that, the Prophet ordered a detour through mountain gorges and the Muslims were tired out when they came down at last into the valley of Makkah and encamped at a spot called Al-Hudaybiyah; from here he tried to open negotiations with Quraysh, to explain that he came only as a pilgrim.

The first messenger he sent towards the city was maltreated and his camel hamstrung. He returned without delivering his message. Quraysh on their side sent an envoy which was threatening in manner, and very arrogant. Another of their envoys was too familiar and had to be reminded: sternly of the respect due to the Prophet. It was he who, on his return to the city, said: "I have seen Caesar and Chosroes in their pomp, but never have I seen a man honoured as Muhammad is honoured by his comrades."

The Prophet sought some messenger who would impose respect. Uthman was finally chosen because of his kinship with the powerful Umayyad family. While the Muslims were awaiting his return the news came that he had been murdered. It was then that the Prophet, sitting under a tree in Al-Hudaybiyah, took an oath from all his comrades that they would stand or fall together. After a while, however, it became known that Uthman had not been murdered. A troop which came out from the city to molest the Muslims in their camp was captured before they could do any hurt and brought before the Prophet, who forgave them on their promise to renounce hostility.

Truce of Al-Hudaybiyah

Then proper envoys came from Quraysh. After some negotiation, the truce of Al-Hudaybiyah was signed. For ten years there were to be no hostilities between the parties. The Prophet was to return to Madīnah without visiting the Ka'bāh, but in the following year he might perform the pilgrimage with his comrades, Quraysh promising to evacuate

Makkah for three days to allow of his doing so. Deserters from Quraysh to the Muslims during the period of the truce were to be returned; not so deserters from the Muslims to Quraysh. Any tribe or clan who wished to share in, the treaty as allies of the Prophet might do so, and any tribe or clan who wished to share in the treaty as allies of Quraysh might do so.

There was dismay among the Muslims at these terms. They asked one another: “Where is the victory that we were promised?” It was during the return journey from al-Hudaybiyah that the sūrah entitled “The Conquest” (sūrah 48) was revealed. This truce proved, in fact, to be the greatest victory that the Muslims had till then achieved. War had been a barrier between them and the idolaters, but now both parties met and talked together, and the religion spread more rapidly. In the two years which elapsed between the signing of the truce and the fall of Makkah the number of reverts was greater than the total number of all previous reverts. The Prophet travelled to Al-Hudaybiyah with 1400 men. Two years later, when the Makkans broke the truce, he marched against them with an army of 10,000.

The Campaign of Khaybar

In the seventh year after the Hijrah, the Prophet led a campaign against Khaybar, the stronghold of the Jewish tribes in North Arabia, which had become a hornets’ nest of his enemies. The forts of Khaybar were reduced one by one, and the Jews of Khaybar became thenceforth tenants of the Muslims until the expulsion of the Jews from Arabia in the ‘Caliphate of Umar.’ On the day when the last fort surrendered Ja’far son of Abu Talib, the Prophet’s first cousin, arrived with all who remained of the Muslims who had fled to Abyssinia to escape from persecution in the early days.

They had been absent from Arabia for fifteen years. It was at Khaybar that a Jewess prepared for the Prophet poisoned meat, of which he only tasted a morsel without swallowing it, and then warned his comrades that it was poisoned. One Muslim, who had already swallowed a mouthful, died immediately, and the Prophet himself, from the mere taste of it, derived the illness which eventually caused his death. The woman who had cooked the meat was brought before him. When she said that she had done it on account of the humiliation of her people, he forgave her.

Pilgrimage to Makkah

In the following year the Prophet’s vision was fulfilled: he visited the holy place at Makkah unopposed. In accordance with the terms of the truce the idolaters evacuated the city, and from the surrounding heights watched the procedure of the Muslims. At the end of the stipulated three days the chiefs of Quraysh sent a reminder to the Prophet that the time was up. He then withdrew, and the idolaters reoccupied the city.

Mu’tah Expedition

In the eighth year of the Hijrah, hearing that the Byzantine emperor was gathering a force in Syria for the destruction of Islām, the Prophet sent three thousand men to Syria under

the command of his freed slave Zayd. The campaign was unsuccessful except that it impressed the Syrians with a notion of the reckless valour of the Muslims. The three thousand did not hesitate to join battle with a hundred thousand. When all the three leaders appointed by the Prophet had been killed, the survivors under the command of Khalid ibn al-Walid, who, by his strategy and courage, managed to preserve a remnant and return with them to Madīnah.

Truce Broken by Quraysh

In the same year Quraysh broke the truce by attacking a tribe that was in alliance with the Prophet and massacring them even in the sanctuary at Makkah. Afterwards they were afraid because of what they had done. They sent Abu Sufyan to Madīnah to ask for the existing treaty to be renewed and, its term prolonged. They hoped that he would arrive before the tidings of the massacre. But a messenger from the injured tribe had been before him, and his embassy was fruitless.

Conquest of Makkah

Then the Prophet summoned all the Muslims capable of bearing arms and marched to Makkah. The Quraysh were overawed. Their cavalry put up a show of defence before the town, but were routed without bloodshed; and the Prophet entered his native city on horseback with his head humbled before God as conqueror. The inhabitants expected vengeance for their past misdeeds. The Prophet proclaimed a general amnesty. Only a few known criminals were proscribed, and most of those were in the end forgiven. In their relief and surprise, the whole population of Makkah hastened to swear allegiance. The Prophet caused all the idols which were in the sanctuary to be destroyed, saying: "Truth has come; darkness has vanished away;" and the Muslim call to prayer was heard in Makkah.

Battle of Hunayn

In the same year there was an angry gathering of pagan tribes eager to regain the Ka'bāh. The Prophet led twelve thousand men against them. At Hunayn, in a deep ravine, his troops were ambushed by the enemy and almost put to flight. It was with difficulty that they were rallied to the Prophet and his bodyguard of faithful comrades who alone stood firm. But the victory, when it came, was complete and the booty enormous, for many of the hostile tribes had brought out with them everything that they possessed.

Conquest of Tā'if

The tribe of Tha'if was among the enemy at Hunayn. After that victory their city of Tā'if was besieged by the Muslims, and finally reduced. Then the Prophet appointed a governor of Makkah, and himself returned to Madīnah to the boundless joy of the Ansār, who had feared lest, now that he had regained his native city, he might forsake them and make Makkah the capital.

The Tabuk Expedition

In the ninth year of the Hijrah, hearing that an army was again being mustered in Syria, the Prophet called on all the Muslims to support him in a great campaign. The far distance, the hot season, the fact that it was harvest time and the prestige of the enemy caused many to excuse themselves and many more to stay behind without excuse. Those defaulters are denounced in the Qur'ān. But the campaign ended peacefully. The army advanced to Tabuk, on the confines of Syria, and then learnt that the enemy had not yet gathered.

Declaration of Immunity

Although Makkah had been conquered and its people were now Muslims, the official order of the pilgrimage had not been changed; the pagan Arabs performing it in their manner, and the Muslims in their manner. It was only after the pilgrims' caravan had left Madīnah in the ninth year of the Hijrah, when Islām was dominant in North Arabia, that the Declaration of Immunity, as it is called, was revealed (sūrah 9). The Prophet sent a copy of it by messenger to Abu Bakr, leader of the pilgrimage, with the instruction that Ali was to read it to the multitudes at Makkah. Its declaration was that after that year, Muslims only were to make the pilgrimage, exception being made for such of the idolaters as had a treaty with the Muslims and had never broken their treaty nor supported anyone against them. Such were to enjoy the privileges of their treaty for the term thereof, but when their treaty expired they would be as other idolaters. That proclamation marks the end of idol-worship in Arabia.

The Year of Deputations

The ninth year of the Hijrah is called the Year of Deputations, because from all parts of Arabia deputations came to Madīnah to swear allegiance to the Prophet and to hear the Qur'ān. The Prophet had become, in fact, the Ruler of Arabia, but his way of life remained as simple as before. He personally controlled every detail of organisation, judged every case and was accessible to every suppliant. In the last ten years he destroyed idolatry in Arabia; raised women from the status of a cattle to legal equity with men; effectually stopped the drunkenness and immorality which had till then disgraced the Arabs; made men in love with faith, sincerity and honest dealing; transformed tribes who had been for centuries content with ignorance into a people with the greatest thirst for knowledge; and for the first time in history made universal human brotherhood a fact and principle of common law. And his support and guide in all that work was the Qur'ān.

The Farewell Pilgrimage

In the tenth year of the Hijrah, the Prophet Muhammad went to Makkah as a pilgrim for the last time – his “pilgrimage of farewell” as it is called – when from Mt. 'Arafat he preached to an enormous throng of pilgrims. He reminded them of all the duties Islām enjoined upon them, and that they would one day have to meet their Lord, who would judge each one of them according to his work. He said:

“O People, listen well to my words, for I do not know whether, after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and take these words to those who could not be present here today.

O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Treat others justly so that no one would be unjust to you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that He will indeed reckon your deeds. God has forbidden you to take usury (*riba*), therefore all *riba* obligation shall henceforth be waived. Your capital, however, is yours to keep. You will neither inflict nor suffer inequity....

.... Beware of the devil, for the safety of your religion. He has lost all hope that he will ever be able to lead you astray in big things, so beware of following him in small things.

O People, it is true that you have certain rights over your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under God's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Treat your women well and be kind to them, for they are your partners and committed helpers. It is your right that they do not make friends with anyone of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste...

O People, listen to me in earnest, worship God (The One Creator of the Universe), perform your five daily prayers (*Salah*), fast during the month of Ramadan, and give your financial obligation (*zakāh*) of your wealth. Perform Hajj if you can afford to.

All mankind are from Adam and Eve - an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves.

Remember, one day you will appear before God (The Creator) and you will answer for your deeds. So beware, do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone.

O People, no prophet or messenger will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand words which I convey to you. I am leaving you with the Book of God (the Qur'ān) and my Sunnah (practices), if you follow them you will never go astray.

All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness O God, that I have conveyed your message to your people.”

Illness and Death of the Prophet

It was during that last pilgrimage that the sūrah entitled ‘Victory’ (sūrah 110) was revealed, which he received as an announcement of approaching death. Soon after his return to Madīnah he fell ill. The tidings of his illness caused dismay throughout Arabia and anguish to the folk of Madīnah, Makkah and Tā’if, the hometowns. At early dawn on the last day of his earthly life he came out from his room beside the masjid at Madīnah and joined the public prayer, which Abu Bakr had been leading since his illness. And there was great relief among the people, who supposed him well again.

When, later in the day, the rumour grew that he was dead. Umar threatened those who spread the rumour with dire punishment, declaring it a crime to think that the Messenger of God could die. He was storming at the people in that strain when Abu Bakr came into the mosque and overheard him. Abu Bakr went to the chamber of his daughter Aisha, where the Prophet lay, having ascertained the fact, kissed the Prophet’s forehead and went back into the mosque. The people were still listening to Umar, who was saying that the rumour was a wicked lie, that the Prophet who was all in all to them could not be dead. Abu Bakr went up to Umar and tried to stop him by a whispered word. Then, finding he would pay no heed, Abu Bakr called to the people, who, recognizing his voice, left Umar and came crowding round him. He first gave praise to God, and then said: “O people! Lo! As for him who worshipped Muhammad, Muhammad is dead. But as for him who worships God, God is Alive and dies not.” He then recited the verse of the Qur’ān:

“Muhammad is not but a messenger. [Other] messengers have passed on before him. So if he was to die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]? And he who turns back on his heels will never harm God at all; but God will reward the grateful.” (Qur’ān 3:144)

“And,” says the narrator: an eye-witness, “it was as if the people had not known that such a verse had been revealed till Abu Bakr recited it.” And another witness tells how Umar used to say: when “I heard Abu Bakr recite that verse my feet were cut from beneath me and I fell to the ground, for I knew that God’s messenger was dead, May God bless him!” The final messenger sent to humanity died at the age of 63 years old in the 10th year of the Hijrah (migration) – 632 C.E.

Such is Prophet Muhammad. According to every standard by which human greatness can be measured he was matchless; no person was ever greater.

- Source: A.B. al-Mehri. Edited from following sources –
- M. Pickthall, *Introduction – The Glorious Qur’ān*
 - K. Murrad, *Who is Muhammad?*
 - M. Mawdudi, *Tafhim al-Qur’ān*

