

IN THE BEGINNING

CHAPTER 1

3:32 Say: Obey Allah and His messenger, but if they reject it, then truly, Allah does not love those who reject the faith.

TO THE READER

It is important to read the overview on page vii. This is not an ordinary story and you must understand its context.

THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET OF ALLAH

Fourteen hundred years ago in Arabia, there was an orphan who became the first king of Arabia. His name, Mohammed, would become one of the most common names in the world. He was to create a kingdom that would dwarf the Roman Empire. According to the god of the Arabs, he was the ideal pattern for all men, and he would make the god of the Arabs the god of all. The smallest detail of his behavior would set the pattern of life for billions.

Mohammed's father was called Abdullah, meaning "slave of Allah." There were many gods in Arabia at that time. Allah, a moon god, was the tribal god of the Quraysh, the ruling clan of Mecca. Allah was a high god of the many gods worshipped in the town of Mecca.

Mohammed was still in his mother's womb when his father died, and when he was five his mother died. His grandfather raised Mohammed and then he was orphaned for the third time when his grandfather died. His uncle, Abu Talib, then took him in. All were of the Quraysh tribe. These brief facts are about all of the history known about Mohammed's early childhood.

MOHAMMED'S TRIBE—THE QURAYSH

When Mohammed was born, there was no nation of Arabia, no Arabian king, and no political unity. Society was tribal in nature; a person was not an individual so much as a member of a tribe. Blood relations were everything, and when people met the first question was, "What are your tribe and your lineage?" A person's name provided a clue to his lineage.

In fact, without a tribe, an individual was very weak and was fair game. Squabbling and fighting among clans were common and ruled by blood laws, which were the laws of retaliation and “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Under certain circumstances, blood money could be paid to the surviving kin.

The Quraysh tribe came to Mecca five generations before Mohammed under the leadership of Qusayy, who established the rituals of worship in Mecca. The Quraysh became the priestly tribe of Mecca, similar to the Levi or Cohen of the Jews, and were the nobility of the town holding the ceremonial offices. In addition, the Quraysh were traders and businessmen, blending religion and business when pilgrims came to town for religious services. Mohammed’s clan was the Hashim clan, which is still active in politics today.

MECCA AS A RELIGIOUS CENTER

Mecca in Mohammed’s day was very small, about a quarter mile by an eighth of a mile, and it was in an area of Arabia called the Hijaz. The climate of Mecca is dry, very dry, but when a heavy rain comes it causes huge runoffs so that Mecca will actually flood for a brief time.

There was a stone building in Mecca in the shape of a cube called the *Kabah* that was a religious site containing images of several tribal gods. There were at least six other square stone houses called Kabahs in other towns in Arabia; however, the legend about the Kabah in Mecca was that Abraham, the patriarch of the Jews, had built it. The Kabah was used for religious rituals and served as a community center. Rituals established by Qusayy included prostrations (bowing down to the earth), ritual prayers, circling the Kabah while praying, and drinking from the well called Zam Zam. Other rituals included throwing stones at pillars that symbolized the devil.

Stones played an important part in the religions of Arabia. The Kabah was made of stone and had the important Black Stone built into one corner. This stone was probably a meteorite as it was a composite of several stones melded together. It was small in size, roughly seven inches in diameter, and was touched only with the right hand and kissed by pilgrims. All of these native rituals were incorporated into Islam.

Each tribe had its gods and the moon god, Allah, seems to have been a male god of the Quraysh. There was not much of an organization of the Arabic gods, unlike the Greek and Roman gods, but children were named after them; for instance, Mohammed’s father was named after Allah, but his brothers were named after other Arabic gods.

EARLY LIFE

CHAPTER 2

3:131 Obey Allah and His messenger so that you may receive mercy.

1130-136,1501 The Sira says that Christians and Jews knew from their scriptures that Mohammed was coming, but these scriptures are unknown to them. Not only the monotheists but many Arab mystics and soothsayers are said to have prophesied the coming of Mohammed. According to the Sira all the religious world was waiting for Mohammed, and he was the fulfillment of all scriptures. Islam gives him a perfect lineage that goes back to Abraham of the Jews and from there back to Adam.

Ishaq's Sira repeatedly claims the conception, pregnancy, birth, and early childhood of Mohammed were all miraculous events, foreshadowing his recognition as prophet of all the world.

Miracles and noble lineage were standard fare for that time. In truth, very little is known of Mohammed's life before he was a grown man. The miracle stories were first recorded two hundred years after his death, and the Koran says he never worked any miracles. The later the history is recorded, the higher the number of miracles it contains. The number of miracles included in a text is a good indicator of when it was written.

CHILDHOOD

1115 Mohammed was eight years old when his grandfather died. He was then raised by Abu Talib, his uncle, who took him on a trading trip to Syria, a very different place from Mecca. Syria was a Christian country that was sophisticated and very much a part of the cosmopolitan culture of the Mediterranean. It was Syrian Christians who gave the Arabs their alphabet. At that time, the only writing in Arabic was business correspondence. There was no such thing as an Arabic book.

MARRIAGE

1120 Mohammed was grown when he was hired by a distant cousin, the wealthy widow Khadija, to act as her trading agent in Syria. Mohammed had a reputation of good character and good business sense. Trading

between Mecca and Syria was risky business; it not only took skill to manage a caravan but also to cut the best deal in Syria. Mohammed managed Khadija's affairs well and she turned a good profit.

1120 Khadija was well known among the Quraysh tribe. Sometime after hiring Mohammed as her business agent, she proposed marriage to him. They married and had six children. Their two sons died in childhood and the four daughters lived to adulthood.

1121 Khadija had a cousin, Waraqa, who was a Christian. To the north and to the east were the Christian areas of Syria and Turkey, but Christians were rare in Arabia.

REBUILDING THE KABAH

1122 When Mohammed was about thirty-five, the Quraysh religious leaders decided to rebuild the Kabah. It had been rebuilt several times before, but until then it had never had a roof and some religious objects inside had been stolen. One of the suspected thieves had had his hand cut off and was banished from Mecca.

1123 A roof would make it more secure but would require wood, and wood was in short supply in Mecca. As luck would have it, a Greek ship had been driven ashore near Mecca, which is close to the Red Sea. The timbers of the ship would become the timbers and decking of the Kabah's first roof.

1124 To put on a roof, it was necessary to demolish the walls and rebuild them. Since the structure was old and shrouded in mystery, there was some anxiety about the demolition. But one of the Quraysh had the courage to start the task. With a brief prayer he removed the first stone. Nothing happened and he proceeded to demolish two corners of the stone structure. At the end of the day the Quraysh who were watching decided that if he lived through the night the task had not offended any of the gods of the Kabah.

1125 In the morning they all returned to the task and soon the Kabah had been demolished down to the foundation. Each clan fell to the task of collecting more stones so that the new Kabah would provide more support for its new roof. Once the new stone structure was completed, only one job remained: the ritual task of installing the Black Stone.

1125 Which clan would be privileged to install the most sacred part of the Kabah? The clans argued for days; bloodshed was threatened. They gathered at the grounds to settle the issue. One of the elders of the Quraysh suggested they let the next man who came through the door decide which

of the clans should install the Black Stone. It was agreed and the next man through the door was Mohammed.

1125 Mohammed made a decision that would have pleased Solomon. He had them spread a cloak on the ground and place the Black Stone in the middle of it. Each clan had one of its members grasp the hem of the cloak and lift the stone into place; so the Stone was installed. Another small feud was avoided and, even better, everyone was happy. The carpenter who was a Copt (Egyptian) took the timbers from the Greek ship and built the first roof for the Kabah.

MONOTHEISM IN ARABIA

1144 The Arabs referred to monotheism as *Hanifiya* and to those who were monotheists as *Hanifs*. The strongest strain of monotheism by far was represented by the Jews. After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans as a result of the Jewish Zealots' rebellion, Jews dispersed throughout the Middle East, and there was a strong presence of Jews in Arabia. A few local Arabs were Christians, but the type of Christianity in the area of Mecca was unorthodox, with a trinity of God, Jesus, and Mary.

1144 Jews and Christians were "People of the Book." Since there was no book yet published in Arabic, this distinction was a strong one; all the sources of the Arabic religions were found in oral tradition and custom. The Meccans were aware of the Jewish Abrahamic account. Mecca was a long way from Syria where Abraham dwelt, but the Meccans claimed Abraham and Ishmael had built the Kabah in ancient times.

1144 At this time there was a monotheistic pull away from the ancient Arabic tribal religions with their local gods, all with different areas of influence in the world, but there was a tolerance for different religious beliefs. Often families in the same clan would include different deities in their worship. These other deities might be brought into the home by marriage outside the clan or tribe.

1144 There were a very few Christian Meccans. One of them went to Constantinople and served the emperor. Another later became a Muslim and then emigrated to Ethiopia where he converted back to Christianity.

1144-149 One monotheist, Zayd, was very interesting. He abandoned all religion and then created his own monotheistic religion. His prayers and rituals were a fusion of Judaic theology and tribal rituals, including prostrations and the use of the Kabah for a prayer focus. He said that Abraham prayed facing the Kabah. He publicly attacked and condemned his tribal members for their beliefs, and he condemned any form of worship of any god except the One-God. He submitted to the unnamed

One-God. The One-God was to be feared, heaven was a garden, and infidels would burn in Hell. Much of his poetry used the same language as the Koran. He referenced his worship to the Jewish patriarchs, as they were pure in their worship. Mohammed recognized Zayd as a precursor.

THE FIRST DAYS OF BEING A PROPHET

CHAPTER 3

4:13 These are the limits set up by Allah. Those who obey Allah and His Messenger will be led into the Gardens watered by flowing rivers to live forever. This is the ultimate reward! But those who disobey Allah and His Messenger and go beyond His limits will be led into the Fire to live forever, and it will be a humiliating torment!

1150 Mohammed would take month-long retreats to be alone to perform the Quraysh religious practices. After the retreat, he would circumambulate (circle the Kabah) and pray.

1152 At the age of forty, Mohammed began to have visions and hear voices. His visions were first shown to him as bright as daybreak during his sleep in the month of Ramadan. Mohammed said that the angel Gabriel came to him with brocade embroidered with writing and commanded him to read. "What shall I read?" The angel pressed him and said, "Read." Mohammed said again, "What shall I read?" The angel pressed him again tightly and again commanded, "Read!" Again the reply, "What shall I read?"

The angel said:

96:1 *Recite: In the name of your Lord, Who created man from clots of blood.*

96:3 *Recite: Your Lord is the most generous, Who taught the use of the pen, and taught man what he did not know.*

T1150¹ Mohammed awoke from his sleep. Now, Mohammed hated ecstatic poets and the insane. His thoughts were that he was now either a poet or insane, that which he hated. He thought to kill himself by jumping off a cliff. So off he went to do just that. Half-way up the hill, he saw a being. "Mohammed," it said, "thou art the Apostle of Allah and I am Gabriel." He gazed at the angel and no matter which way he turned his head the vision was before his eyes. Mohammed stood and watched for a long time.

1. The T means that this is a margin reference from *The History of al-Tabari*.

1153 He went back home to his wife, Khadija, and told her he was either crazy or a poet. She replied that he was neither, that perhaps the vision was true; he was a good man, and Allah would not play tricks on him. She was elated and said she thought him to be a prophet and set off to tell her Christian cousin about the visions.

T1150 When she told her cousin what Mohammed had said, he replied that this was wonderful news. He was sure the angel was Gabriel of the Torah (Old Testament) and that Mohammed was a prophet. She returned and told Mohammed what he had said. Mohammed felt better and went to the Kabah to pray. Khadija's Christian cousin, Waraqa, found him there and had him repeat his story. Waraqa agreed that surely Mohammed was a prophet.

Mohammed's visions, dreams, and voices were called revelations. A great many of these revelations were expressed in poetry that was easily memorized and recited. The recitations (*Koran* means recitation) were recorded and slowly grew into the complete Koran over the next twenty-three years.

THE FIRST CONVERT

1156 Mohammed's wife, Khadija, was the first convert. From the first she encouraged him, believed him. She knew him to be of good character and did not think him to be deceived or crazy.

Soon he stopped hearing voices or seeing visions and became depressed and felt abandoned. Then his visions started again and said:

93:1 *By the brightness of the noonday sun and by the night at its darkest, your Lord has not forgotten you, and He does not hate you.*

93:4 *Certainly the future will be better than the past, and in the end your Lord will be generous to you, and you will be satisfied.*

Then Mohammed began to tell others who were close to him of his visions.

PRAYER

1157 Mohammed began to pray with his new understanding. At first he did two prostrations with each prayer. Later he understood that he should use four prostrations per prayer and use two prostrations when he was traveling.

1158 Then, when he was on a mountain, he saw a vision in which Gabriel showed him how to perform ablutions (ritual cleansing with water) as a purification ritual before prayer. He went home and showed Khadija

the way he now understood the prayer rituals should be performed and she copied him.

1158 Further inner visions made Mohammed pray at different times of the day.

THE FIRST MALES TO ACCEPT ISLAM

1159 A famine had overtaken the Quraysh and Mohammed's uncle, Abu Talib, had a large family. He was a well respected tribal leader but had fallen on hard times. Mohammed went to another uncle, Al Abbas, and they both went to Abu Talib and offered to help raise two of his children. One, Ali, went into Mohammed's house to be raised by him and Khadija. When Ali turned ten he joined Mohammed in his new religion, *Islam*, which means submission.

1162 Mohammed, his wife, and his nephew, Ali, started praying at the Kabah with their new rituals of ablutions and prayer with prostrations. A visitor asked about this new ritual and was told it was a new religion and that Mohammed had said he would receive the treasures of Rome and Persia.

1160 Mohammed and Ali used to go to the edge of town to practice their new ritual prayers. One day Abu Talib came upon them and asked what were they doing. Mohammed replied, "Uncle, this is the religion of Allah, his angels, and his prophets and the religion of Abraham. Allah has sent me as an apostle to all mankind. You, my uncle, deserve that I should teach you the truth and call you to Islam." His uncle said he could not give up the religion of his ancestors but that he would support Mohammed. He also advised Ali, his son, to keep up his relation with Mohammed.

1161 Next, a freed slave joined Mohammed. After him, Abu Bakr joined the new religion. Abu Bakr was a very influential man among the Quraysh. He was well liked and had an easy manner. He knew more of the lineage of the Quraysh than any other man. Such knowledge was of extreme value in a tribe that worshiped its ancestors. In addition, Abu Bakr was a prosperous merchant. He counseled many of the tribe about business and tribal matters. He was the first Meccan to preach the new religion in public and was influential in bringing many Quraysh to Islam. Until this time, Mohammed had been as private as possible about his new religion.

1161 A new element was added to the religion. It was not enough to say that Allah was god, but it was also necessary to renounce the tribal gods as well. Islam was not just an affirmation but a denial and opposition as well.

PUBLIC PREACHING

CHAPTER 4

4:14 But those who disobey Allah and His Messenger and go beyond His limits will be led into the Fire to live forever, and it will be a humiliating torment!

1166 Since the word was out, Mohammed began to openly preach his new doctrine. He had kept private for three years before going public.

15: 92 By your Lord, We will certainly call them to account for all their deeds, so openly proclaim what you are commanded, and turn away from the polytheists.

15:95 Surely, We will defend you against those who scoff, who set up other gods with Allah.

26:213 Do not call upon any god but Allah, or you will be doomed. Rather, warn your close relatives, and be kind to the believers who follow you. If they disobey you, say, "I will not be responsible for your actions"

15:8 We do not send the angels without good reason. If We did, the Kafirs would still not understand. Surely, We have sent down the message, and surely, We will guard it.

Those who listened to Mohammed's message and joined him were called *Muslims*, which meant "those who have submitted."

1166 Mohammed called together about forty of his kinsmen. He addressed them, "I know of no Arab who has come to his people with a nobler message than mine. I have brought you the best in this world and the next. Allah has ordered me to call you to him. So which of you will cooperate with me in this matter?" Mohammed's nephew, Ali, fat in the belly and thin in the legs, with watery eyes, said, "Prophet of Allah, I will be your helper in this matter." Mohammed laid his hand on Ali's back and said, "This is my brother, my successor, and my executor among you. Harken to him and obey him." The Quraysh laughed, got up, and said to Abu Talib, Mohammed's uncle, "He has ordered you to listen to your son and obey him." The Quraysh left.

1166 The Muslims went to the edge of Mecca in order to be alone to pray. One day a bunch of the Quraysh came upon them and began to mock them, and a fight started. One of the Muslims by the name of Saed,

chief of a Medinan Arab clan, picked up the jaw bone of a camel and struck one of the Quraysh with it and bloodied him. This violence was the first blood to be shed in Islam.

1167 When Mohammed spoke about his new religion, it did not cause any problems among the Meccans. After all, there were hundreds of religions in Mecca; it was a polytheistic culture and very religiously tolerant. Then Mohammed began to condemn their religion and rituals and worship. This was a new phenomenon. New religions could be added, and had been, but not to the detriment of others. The Meccans took offense and resolved to treat him as an enemy. Luckily, he had the protection of his influential uncle, Abu Talib.

1168 Some of the Quraysh went to Abu Talib and said to him, “Your nephew has cursed our gods, insulted our religion, mocked our way of life, criticized our civilization, attacked our virtues, and said our forefathers were ignorant and in error. You must stop him, or you must let us stop him. We will rid you of him.” Abu Talib gave them a soft reply and sent them away.

1168 Mohammed continued to preach his religion and condemn the other religions. His relationship with the Meccans continued to deteriorate and men withdrew from him in dislike. He became the talk of Mecca and upset his tribe by saying the Quraysh’s ancestors were burning in Hell and that the Meccans were wrong. It was not just that he was right or had a different way or even a better way, but that they were wrong.

1168 Mohammed continued to preach Islam and his relations with his tribal kin grew worse and men drew away from him and his condemnation of who they were.

1168 Abu Talib called Mohammed to him and told him to spare him the burden of the pain of the Quraysh resentment. Mohammed told him that if they gave him the sun and the moon he would not change until Allah had made him victorious. Even if he died he would not quit. Abu Talib could not stand to censor his nephew and let him go with his consent.

1169 The Quraysh saw that Abu Talib would not help. Mohammed continued to preach Islam and attack them and their lives. Mecca was a small town; everybody knew everybody else. Islam had split the town of Mecca and divided the ruling and priestly tribe. The Quraysh were attacked at the very ground of their social being.

1169 The Quraysh were desperate and approached Mohammed’s protector with a desperate plea. “Here is our strongest and most handsome man. Adopt him for his intelligence and support. Give us Mohammed. He has opposed both your religion and ours, divided us as a people, and

mocked us for who we are. Let us trade our best man for your Mohammed so we can kill him. Then it would be man for man. Fair and just.” Abu Talib would not give Mohammed up.

1170 Things got much worse. Now there was open hostility in the town. Quarrels increased; arguments got very heated. Complete disharmony dominated the town. The tribe started to abuse newly converted Muslims, but Mohammed’s uncle was a respected elder and was able to protect them from serious harm.

THE FAIR

Mecca was a town with two sources of money. The first was trading. Mohammed had made his money in the caravan trade. The other was fees from pilgrims to the shrine of the Kabah, and fairs combined a little of both. All the tribes came for a fair where people would see old acquaintances and buy, sell, and trade goods. Since Mecca was one of several sacred or pilgrim sites, rituals for the different tribal gods were performed around the Kabah and Mecca.

1171 It was time for the fair and the Quraysh were in turmoil. They did not want the divisions and rancor that had come with Mohammed’s preaching not spread to the other clans outside Mecca. A group of concerned Quraysh talked and decided to meet with Al Walid, a man of respect and influence. He told them that all the visitors would come to them and ask about this man Mohammed and what he was preaching. It was a foregone conclusion that Mohammed would preach.

1171 But what could they agree on to tell the visitors so that there could be one voice. What would they call him? Was he possessed? Crazy? An ecstatic poet? A sorcerer? Who was he? What was he? Finally they agreed that Mohammed was a sorcerer since he separated a son from his father or brother or wife or other family.

1171 They split up and went out on the roadsides of town to speak with the travelers before they even got to Mecca.

1171 Mohammed delivered a message from Allah about Al Walid, the leader of the Kafirs:

74:11 Let me deal with my creations, whom I have given great riches and sons to sit by their side, and whose lives I have made smooth and comfortable. And still he wants me to give him more. No, I say. He is an enemy of Our revelations. I will impose a dreadful punishment on him because he plotted and planned.

74:19 Damn him! How he planned. Again, Damn him! How he planned.

74:21 *Then he looked around and frowned and scowled and turned his back with vain pride and said, "This is nothing but old magic; it is the work of a mere mortal."*

74:26 *We will certainly throw him into Hell.*

1172 The plan of hurting Mohammed by warning the visitors just made everyone more curious. When they heard Mohammed's soaring words from the Koran, many visitors were impressed. When they left they took all the stories from Mecca, the Quraysh, the new Muslims, and, of course, Mohammed. Soon all of that part of Arabia was talking.

1178 Circumstances would soon prove fortuitous for Mohammed that the Arabs of Medina were attracted to his message. Since half the people of Medina were Jews, the Arabs of Medina were accustomed to talk of only one god.