

Engaging with Islam

THE LIFE OF MUHAMMAD - SESSION 2

PART 1: Preparation and Discussion

Muhammad (c. 570-632 AD.) is the main person in the religion of Islam. He is the founder of the first Islamic state and the religion. He is considered the greatest prophet. He lived in the towns of Mecca and Medina in modern day Saudi Arabia and was a member of the Arabian Quraysh tribe.



Q1. What attitude are Muslims to have to Muhammad?

The Prophet is closer to the Believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers. ... (Qur'an 33:6, translator: Yusuf Ali)

God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet: O you that believe! Send blessings on him, and salute him with all respect. (Qur'an 33:56, translator: Yusuf Ali)

Narrated (told by) Anas: The Prophet said "None of you will have faith till he loves me more than his father, his children and all mankind." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 1, bk 2, no. 14)

When Muslims pray five times a day a section of these prayers are addressed to Muhammad. He is included in the Islamic confession of faith (the Shahada) with God. His life is the perfect model for Muslims and it is his intercession that will help save Muslims on Judgement Day. Muhammad is the patron saint of Islam.

The Prophet of Allah - The name of God in Islam is *Allah*, not *Yahweh*. Below is the traditional Islamic account of how Muhammad was called to be a prophet. He was 40 years old.

Narrated (told by) 'Aisha (one of Muhammad's wives): The start of the divine inspiration to Allah's Apostle (Muhammad) was in the form of good dreams which came true like bright day light, and then the love of seclusion was bestowed upon him. He used to go in seclusion in the cave of Hira where he used to worship (Allah alone) continuously for many days before his desire to see his family. He used to take with him the journey food for the stay and then come back to (his wife) Khadija to get more food until suddenly the Truth descended upon him while he was in the cave of Hira. The angel came to him and asked him to recite. The Prophet replied, "I do not know how to recite."

The Prophet added, "The angel caught me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to recite and I replied, 'I do not know how to recite.' Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time till I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to recite but I replied, 'What shall I recite?' Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said, 'Recite in the name of your Lord, who has created all that exists and has created man from a clot. Recite! And your Lord is the Most Generous.' (Qur'an 96.1, 96.2, 96.3)" Then Allah's Apostle returned with the Inspiration and with his heart beating severely. He went to

Khadija and said, "Cover me! Cover me!" They covered him till his fear was over and after that he told her everything that had happened and said, "I fear that something may happen to me." Khadija replied, "Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your family and friends, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously and assist the afflicted."

Khadija then accompanied him to her cousin Waraqa ... who, during the Pre-Islamic Period became a Christian and used to write the scripture with Hebrew letters. He would write from the Gospel in Hebrew as much as Allah wished him to write. He was an old man and had lost his eyesight. Khadija said to Waraqa, "Listen to the story of your nephew, O my cousin!" Waraqa asked, "O my nephew! What have you seen?" Allah's Apostle (Muhammad) described what he had seen. Waraqa said, "This (angel) is the same one who keeps the secrets which Allah had sent to Moses. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 1, bk. 1, no. 3)

Summary

- Muhammad used to have vivid dreams.
- He spent a lot of time secluded in a cave.
- One day in the cave he had a violent encounter with a spirit.
- His uncle had been learning Christianity and told Muhammad this spirit must be the angel God (Allah) sent to Moses.
- Muhammad was now a prophet.

For the next 23 years Muhammad recited words which he claimed came from this angel who brought the words from God. In time these words became the Qur'an.

Q2. Do you have any comments about Muhammad's experience in the cave?

Muhammad the Student

Narrated (told by) Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet (Muhammad) used to copy the people of the Scriptures (Jews and Christians) in matters in which there was no order from Allah. ... (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 7, bk. 72, no. 799)

Narrated Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-'As: The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to relate to us traditions from the children of Israel till morning came; he would not get up except for obligatory prayer. (*Sunan Abu-Dawud*: bk. 25, no. 3655)

Narrated Al-Bara: We prayed along with the Prophet facing Jerusalem for sixteen or seventeen months. Then Allah ordered him to turn his face towards the Qibla (in Mecca). (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 6, bk. 60, no. 19)

Narrated Anas: There was a Christian who embraced Islam and read chapters 2 & 3 of the Qur'an, and he used to write (the Qur'an) for the Prophet. Later on he returned to Christianity and he used to say: "Muhammad knows nothing but what I have written for him". Then Allah caused him to die ... (*Sahih al-Bukhari*: vol. 4, bk. 56, no. 814)

Q3. Who were some of the influences in Muhammad's life?

Mecca and Medina

There are two main periods in Muhammad's life: his time in the city of Mecca and his time in Medina. In Mecca he was powerless. He preached against the idolatry of the city, invited people to accept him as a prophet, and warned them of God's judgement. The people of Mecca did not accept him and he left and went to Medina.

In Medina he started the first Islamic state. At first he said that the Jews, Christians, and Muslims were all parallel communities (Q. 4:48). Later he said Islam was to be the dominate community (Q. 9:29-33). In Medina he trained many soldiers (in Arabic called the *mujahideen* in English *jihadists*) and sent them out to establish the rule of Islam. In time he returned and conquered Mecca. The people of Mecca surrendered and accepted him as a prophet. Muhammad then made Mecca the centre of the Islamic religion. He then began to send his armies against the surrounding nations and died at this time.

Muhammad's Death - Muslims disagree about the death of Muhammad. For Sunni Muslims Muhammad died three and half years after being poisoned by a Jew at the battle of Khaibar. Shia Muslims reject this. They say that just as Sunni Muslims killed Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali, and his grandsons in the battle of Karbala, so too they assassinated Muhammad.

Muhammad's Followers - The people who Muhammad personally taught are called his *companions* (Arabic: *sahaba*). These companions taught Islam to their own *students* (Arabic: *taliban*). These are the people who established Islam after Muhammad.

PART 2: Video Presentation (24 minutes) <https://youtu.be/IvaEGAr0toc>



The Sources of Muhammad's life

Early Life

The World at that Time.

Muhammad in Mecca (610-622 A.D.)

Learning about Muhammad

Muhammad in Medina (622-632 A.D.)

Muhammad himself had four famous battles: Badr, Uhud, the Trench and Mecca.

How people became Muslim? There were various ways

After Muhammad's death. (632 A.D.)

How the Bible Interprets the History of Islam

PART 3: Discussion

Q4. Do you have any comments about the video?

Q5. Does the Qur'an tell the story of Muhammad's life?

Q6. What were the two main towns that Muhammad lived in? How was his behaviour different in each town?

Q7. What was Muhammad's great commission to his followers?

Q8. How did Muhammad try to bring God's kingdom? Did he succeed?

Q9. How does Jesus bring the kingdom of God?

Answers

Q3. Muhammad was influenced by the Christians and Jews around him.

Q5. No. The story of Muhammad's life comes from the Hadith and Sira literature.

Q6. Mecca and Medina. In Mecca Muhammad was a powerless preacher. In Medina he started the Islamic State.

Q7. Muhammad's great commission was to subdue the world under Islamic rule.

Q8. Muhammad tried to establish the kingdom of God with the sword. Muhammad's kingdom failed and fell apart.

Q9. Jesus deals with sin and brings the kingdom of the resurrection, God's eternal kingdom. It is Jesus' kingdom that Muslims are to hope for, not Muhammad's kingdom.

PART 4: Activities

Have you done the following? Circle an answer.

- Smile at a Muslim. Greet the Muslims you know. Yes/No.
- Pray at home and at church for the Islamic world and the Muslims you know, and for Christians who are suffering under Islam. Yes/No.
- Have you planned as a group which activities you will do? Yes/No.

Further Reading

Martin Lings, *Muhammad - his life based on the earliest sources*, various publishers, first published 1983.

Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, (Trans. A. Guillaume) Oxford University Press, 1998.