

MOHAMMED

(570?-632)

Arabia in the early seventh century was in decline. The people had grown soft and lazy. They spent much of their time gambling and drinking. Their major recreation was trying to tell the future. This, in turn, led to even more gambling. Mecca, the largest city in Arabia, was alive with sin. In addition, the Arabs had many superstitions. They thought that certain trees, like the palm, were sacred. They also worshipped various rocks, hills, and stars. Each Arab tribe had its own special idols, or false gods. This often led to violent conflicts among the tribes. Yet, out of this confusion came a new faith. It was started by a man named Mohammed.

The Prophet Arrives

Mohammed was born in Mecca around the year 570 A.D. Members of his family were important traders in Mecca. His father and mother died when Mohammed was very young. Mohammed was raised by his grandfather and his uncle. He never had a chance to go to school. He worked cleaning his uncle's stables. When he was older he traveled to distant markets all over the Middle East. Whatever Mohammed learned, he learned from his talks with many different people.

Then, at the age of twenty-five, he married a wealthy widow. She was fifteen years older than he was. Yet, the marriage was a happy one. Mohammed took care of his wife's business. He became a successful merchant. There was something missing in Mohammed's life, however. He would often go into the hills to think.

On one of his trips to the mountains, Mohammed fell asleep in a cave. Then, according to legend, he was visited by the angel Gabriel. At first Mohammed was upset and confused. He did not know the meaning of the visit. The visits continued. Gabriel told Mohammed that he had work to do. He told Mohammed that he was God's messenger, or prophet. He was to follow in the footsteps of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. His message was simple. There is only one God and Allah is his name. All people are equal before God. All people must share their wealth with the poor.

Mohammed returned to Mecca with his message. He began to preach his sermons. The people of Mecca just laughed at him. For three years Mohammed preached. Only a handful of people joined him. Then

Mohammed changed his approach. He began to attack directly beliefs in idols. A few more people come over to his side. Now the merchants of Mecca were not laughing. They were angry. Much of their business was based on the sale of idols.

The merchants decided to kill Mohammed. Luckily for Mohammed, the plot was uncovered in time. Mohammed fled one night to the city of Medina about 250 miles away. The night was June 20, 622 A.D. It is called the Night of the Flight. It is now regarded as the beginning date of Mohammed's new faith which he called Islam.

In Medina Mohammed's strength grew quickly. His small group of followers became an army. Mohammed worked to end the blood feuds among tribes. Disputes would now be settled by Mohammed. Old tribal ways had to give ground to the new faith. Now it was the faith, not the tribe, that held people together. By 627 A.D. Medina was one united community under Mohammed.

Eight years after his flight, Mohammed went back to Mecca. He had fled that city in the night. Now he came back in broad daylight. His army was stronger than the one in Mecca. When the people of Mecca saw Mohammed's army, they fled in great fear. Mohammed entered the city without opposition. Mohammed then demanded that all the idols be destroyed. Nothing else, however, was to be touched. When the people of Mecca returned, they saw what Mohammed had done. They were grateful for his kindness. The people of Mecca now accepted Islam.

Soon the teaching of Mohammed spread all over Arabia. Even after Mohammed died in 632 A.D., Islam continued to grow. In a short time the faith had been spread from Europe to Asia. Islam today remains one of the world's great religions.

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

The following sentences appeared in the story about Mohammed. Note the underlined word in each sentence. In the space provided make up a sentence of your own using the underlined word. Your sentence can be on any subject.

1. Arabia in the early seventh century was in decline.

Your sentence: _____

2. They thought that certain trees, like the palm, were sacred.

Your sentence: _____

3. He began to preach his sermons.

Your sentence: _____

4. Luckily for Mohammed, the plot was uncovered in time.

Your sentence: _____

5. Mohammed worked to end the blood feuds between tribes.

Your sentence: _____

6. Disputes would now be settled by Mohammed.

Your sentence: _____

COMPREHENSION CHECK

Match each name or word in the left-hand column with its description in the right-hand column. Write the letter of the description in the blank.

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|------------------|---|
| 1. ____ Arabia | A. the angel who spoke to Mohammed |
| 2. ____ Mecca | B. the country where Mohammed lived |
| 3. ____ Mohammed | C. one of the early messengers of God |
| 4. ____ Gabriel | D. false gods |
| 5. ____ Allah | E. city where Mohammed fled in 622 A.D. |
| 6. ____ idols | F. city where Mohammed grew up |
| 7. ____ Medina | G. another word for messenger |
| 8. ____ Islam | H. Mohammed's new religion |
| 9. ____ prophet | I. His mother and father died when he was very young. |
| 10. ____ Abraham | J. Mohammed's name for God |