

LESSON 1: The Story of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W)

The Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad was the founder of the religion of Islam. Followers of Islam, called Muslims, believe that Muhammad received messages from Allah (God). These messages were later collected into the Quran, the holy book of Islam. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad received messages from Allah through the angel Gabriel (Jibril in Arabic). This process began in the year 610 CE when Muhammad was meditating in the cave of Hira near Mecca. The angel Gabriel appeared to him and instructed him to "Read" or "Recite" (the Arabic word "Iqra" can mean both). This marked the beginning of the revelation of the Quran.

Over the next 23 years, until Muhammad's death in 632 CE, he received these revelations intermittently. The messages were conveyed in Arabic and were memorized and recorded by his followers. Muhammad himself was illiterate, so he would recite the revelations to his companions, who would then write them down or memorize them. These scribes included notable companions like Zayd ibn Thabit.

After Muhammad's death, the revelations were compiled into a single book during the caliphate of Abu Bakr, the first caliph, and later standardized under the third caliph, Uthman ibn Affan. Uthman ordered the production of several copies of the Quran, which were then distributed to various Islamic regions to ensure uniformity in the text. This compilation and standardization process involved collecting all the written fragments and verifying them against the memorized versions recited by Muhammad's companions. This careful preservation ensured that the Quran remained consistent and unchanged through the centuries.

Early Life

Muhammad was born in the Arabian town of Mecca (now in Saudi Arabia) in about 570. Muhammad's father died before Muhammad was born, and Muhammad's mother died when he was 6. He was then raised by his grandfather and later by his uncle. When Muhammad was about 25 years old, he married a rich, older woman named Khadijah. Their marriage helped Muhammad gain wealth and social standing, and they had six children. Although many men at the time had more than one wife, Khadijah was Muhammad's only wife until after her death.

Beginnings of Islam

According to tradition, in about 610, Muhammad had a vision (thought to be of the angel Gabriel) and heard a voice tell him, "You are the messenger of God." At various times during the rest of his life, Muhammad received verbal messages that he believed came directly from God. Muhammad began preaching in Mecca in about 613. He told people they should worship only one God, which was different from the Arab practice of worshiping many gods. He also told people to be generous as a way of expressing their appreciation to God. His new religion came to be called Islam, meaning "submission to God."

Leaving Mecca

Many people in Mecca were against the new religion. Those who believed in several gods were afraid that their holy places might be destroyed. Merchants disliked Muhammad because he criticized them for being greedy. Muhammad worried that his enemies might hurt him and his followers, so he encouraged his followers to move to the nearby city of Medina. Muhammad himself reached Medina on September 24, 622, which is considered the starting date for the history of Islam. Muhammad's trip to Medina is known as the Hegira.

Uniting the Tribes

Most Arabs at the time were part of large groups called tribes. Muhammad was determined to join the many Arab tribes together under Islam. He hoped that by uniting they could use their military strength to spread Islam to other areas. To achieve his goal, Muhammad had to get the support of Mecca. From 622 on, he and his followers fought several battles with forces from Mecca. By the time Muhammad and his forces entered Mecca in 630, many notable citizens had already moved to Medina to become Muslims. Mecca gave up with little fight. Muhammad died on June 8, 632, in Medina. He left most of Arabia united and ready to spread the faith. But after his death, his followers could not agree on who should lead them. This led to the breakup of Islam into different branches.