

“Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God, the Controller, the Holy One, the Almighty, the Wise. It is He who raised a messenger, among the people who had no Scripture, to recite His revelations to them, to make them grow spiritually and teach them the Scripture and wisdom—before that they were clearly astray—to them and others yet to join them. He is the Almighty, the Wise.”
(Quran 62:1-3)



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In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Muhammad^P, the final prophet of Islam, is widely considered one of the most influential men in history. Today, nearly one fourth of the world's population follows the message he delivered. Despite Muhammad^P's lasting influence, many misconceptions continue to surround his persona and his teachings. This brief introduction of Muhammad^P summarizes his life and highlights what esteemed non-Muslim scholars have said about him. So, who was Muhammad^P?

“He was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without Pope's pretensions, Caesar without the legions of Caesar: without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a palace, without a fixed revenue; if ever any man had the right to say that he ruled by the right divine, it was Mohammad, for he had all the power without its instruments and without its supports. He cared not for the dressings of power. The simplicity of his private life was in keeping with his public life.” --Reginald Bosworth Smith

Muhammad^P's life began in a seemingly conventional manner in the deserts of Arabia in the sixth century. When he turned 40 years old, God tasked him with prophethood and began revealing His final book, the Quran, to him. As a prophet, Muhammad^P called people to the divine teachings of Islam. He encouraged them to worship the One God and to uphold a morally upright life.

Studying Muhammad^P's life is crucial to understanding his momentous journey from being an apparently ordinary human to fulfilling his destiny as the final prophet chosen by God (Allah in Arabic). It also helps one gain a deeper insight into the religion of Islam and the lives of Muslims.

MUHAMMAD^P: THE MAN

Muhammad^P was born in 570 C.E. in Mecca. He was orphaned at a young age; his father died before his birth, followed by his mother six years later.

Muhammad^P's grandfather, and then his uncle, cared for him for the remainder of his youth. As a result, no single figure molded Muhammad^P's beliefs and outlook on life from an early age.

As a young boy, he worked as a shepherd. This was significant, as he noted much later,

“All the prophets of God were shepherds.” Muhammad^P then adopted the premier Arab occupation of trading and was widely respected for his integrity and sincerity. However, despite his intelligence, he could not read or write, nor was he skilled in composing poetry, a hallmark of Arab society. Therefore, the claim that Muhammad^P authored the Quran is unfounded. To this effect, God declares in the Quran, “[Muhammad] does not speak from his own desire. The Quran is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him” (Quran 53:3-4).

Prior to prophethood, Muhammad^P was greatly regarded for his superior character and exceptional manners, earning him the title of the ‘Truthful One.’ Meccans entrusted him with their possessions for safekeeping and he was often asked to mediate disputes as an impartial judge.

At the same time, Muhammad^P detested the polytheistic Arab customs and did not participate in idolatry. He was also deeply bothered by the many social evils in Arabia, such as the ill treatment of women, widespread alcoholism, constant warfare and subjugation of the poor. He often escaped the

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atmosphere of Mecca to a cave outside the city, isolating himself for days at a time in meditation.

Although Muhammad^P's pre-prophetic life was highly reputable, it does not indicate that he was poised to make any significant worldly impact. Yet, these life experiences and the development of his character were God's way of preparing Muhammad^P for the monumental task ahead.

MUHAMMAD^P: THE PROPHET

One night, in the year 610 C.E., God sent the angel Gabriel with revelation to Muhammad^P. This was one of the most significant events in human history. It marked the beginning of his prophethood and transformed his life entirely. As the prophet of God receiving divine inspiration, all his endeavors henceforth were devoted to leading humanity back to the pure worship of God. He led an earnest life based on the most sublime values, initiating tremendous changes in Arabia and beyond.

Whereas earlier he removed himself from the social and spiritual corruption in Mecca, he now proactively worked to reform it. Muhammad^P called his fellow Meccans to cease their worship of idols and to affirm the Oneness of God; he also invited them to a life of righteousness and piety. He warned them of an afterlife where they will be held accountable for their earthly deeds and also gave joyful news of paradise to those who believed and lived a God-conscious life.

Like previous prophets, Muhammad^P's message was rejected by many of his people. They insisted on maintaining the religious and social customs of their ancestors. The elite mocked Muhammad^P, accusing him of deceit and madness – the same man whom they freely trusted and honored before. Only a few people believed in

him, particularly the poor and disadvantaged who were attracted to his message due to its emphasis on equality and justice.

Prophet Muhammad^P and his small group of followers endured persecution for 13 years in Mecca. Eventually, they were forced to leave Mecca and migrate to Medina, a city whose people eagerly welcomed them. Here, Muhammad^P established the very first Islamic society which eliminated the spiritual and social problems rampant in the Arabian Peninsula. Freedom of religion was instituted in Medina; women were honored and respected as equals; racial discrimination was practically eliminated; tribal warfare was replaced with united ties of brotherhood; usury and alcohol were completely forbidden.

The French historian, Alphonse de Lamartine, has stated: **“If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad?”**

When comparing his life before and after becoming a messenger, it becomes clear that God enabled him to attain this stature and renown through his prophethood. By the end of his life in 622 C.E., the powerful teachings of Islam had overcome even its most ardent enemies. Convinced by the truth of Muhammad^P's message and inspired by the purity of his character, the entire Arabian Peninsula embraced Islam.

Yet, some individuals have alleged that Muhammad^P was not a true messenger of God but a sham; this reflects a poor understanding of his teachings, personality and life achievements. Many non-Muslim intellectuals throughout history have attested to the impossibility of this view. The British historian, Dr. Montgomery Watt, addresses this perspective in his writing, **“His readiness to undergo persecutions for his beliefs, the high moral character of the men who believed in him and looked up to him**

as leader, and the greatness of his ultimate achievement all argue his fundamental integrity. To suppose Muhammad an impostor raises more problems than it solves. Moreover, none of the great figures of history is so poorly appreciated in the West as Muhammad.”

In *Life of Muhammed^P*, the famous American intellectual, Washington Irving, wrote: **“In his private dealings, he was just. He treated friends and strangers, the rich and poor, the powerful and weak, with equity, and was beloved by the common people for the affability with which he received them, and listened to their complaints... In the time of his greatest power he maintained the same simplicity of manners and appearance as in the days of his adversity... He was displeased if, on entering a room, any unusual testimonials of respect were shown to him.”**

MUHAMMAD^P: THE LEGACY

In the century following Muhammad^P's death, Islam expanded in all directions, absorbing the Persian and Byzantine Empires to the North, reaching as far as Spain in the West and extending its borders to include parts of India and China to the East. This rapid spread of Islam in such a short period of time has caused many to marvel at how a man with a simple message could produce such an astonishing impact on the world.

Mahatma Gandhi, a champion of peace in modern times, said about his experience of studying the life of Muhammad^P, **“I wanted to know the best of the life of one who holds today an undisputed sway over the hearts of millions of mankind... I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle.”**

Similar admiration was expressed by British intellectual and women's rights activist, Annie Besant: **“It is impossible for anyone who studies the life and character of the great Prophet of Arabia, who knows how he taught and how he lived, to feel anything but reverence for that mighty Prophet, one of the great messengers of the Supreme.”**

Muhammad^P was the final prophet in a long line of messengers sent by God which included, among others, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, peace be upon all of them. Like previous prophets, Muhammad^P called people towards belief in the One God and taught them to be just and merciful. His life and teachings have been meticulously documented by thousands of historical sources dating back to his companions.

Michael M. Hart, a Jewish-American historian, placed Muhammad^P first in his book, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*. According to Hart, **“He was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels... It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history.”**

Muhammad^P was indeed one of the most important men in human history; his impact on the world continues to be felt strongly today. Reflecting on his remarkable life and amazing accomplishments leads to an inevitable question: Was Muhammad^P simply an extraordinary person or did his greatness result from his being a genuine prophet of God?

Without a doubt, the answer to this question carries great implications. We encourage you to delve deeper into the study of Muhammad^P's life and explore this potentially life-changing question yourself.

Note: The superscript “^P” next to Prophet Muhammad^P represents the invocation Muslims say with his name:
May God's peace and blessings be upon him.