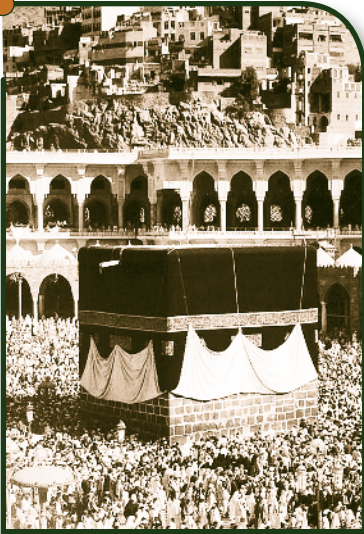


Understanding Islam

The word "Islam" simply means *submission to God*, and a Muslim is one who follows the religion of Islam. The revelation of Islam was given to Mohammed, who is revered by Muslims as the greatest prophet. Mohammed is not just a name, but a title which means *The Praised One*.

The Life of Mohammed

Mohammed was born about A.D. 570 in Mecca, a city in Arabia. His father, a member of the Hashim clan of the powerful Quraysh tribe, died before he was born. His mother, Amina, died when he was only six, and Mohammed went to live with his grandfather. Sadly, two years later his grandfather also died, so from the age



of eight Mohammed was brought up by his uncle, Abu Talib, who was a merchant along the great camel trade routes.

Mohammed grew up during a time of economic unrest and discontent stemming from the vast difference between the very rich and the very poor. Pagan worship abounded in Arabia with an estimated 360 gods and goddesses to appease, and Mecca was a center for idolatry. Muslim historians record that even as a boy Mohammed detested idol worship and lived a morally pure life.

Mohammed managed the caravan trade for a wealthy widow named Khadija. He became known as al-Amin, the trustworthy one, and was a prominent member of the trade guild of Mecca. He eventually married Khadija and they had 6 children, although only the youngest daughter, Fatima, survived. After 25 years of marriage, Khadija died and Mohammed endorsed polygamy, marrying several wives.

At the age of 40, he became very concerned about the state of his fellow countrymen and spent much of his time in meditation on religious matters. During his travels, Mohammed talked with many Christians and Jews, including priests. He regularly sought counsel from a particular Jacobite monk, who taught him many aspects of Jewish religious customs.

Mohammed often retreated for meditation to a cave on the slopes of Mount Hira, 3 miles from Mecca. It was during one of these times (it was the month of Ramadan), that Mohammed began to receive revelation and instruction that he believed came from the angel Gabriel. These writings form the basis of the *Qur'an*, Islam's holy book. In later years the *Hadith* (traditional sayings and acts of Mohammed and the first Muslims) were written and are considered by many Muslims to be of nearly equal importance to the *Qur'an*.

Mohammed proclaimed the *Qur'an* as the final and superior revelation from the One Supreme God (Allah). He banned the worship of idols and taught that a Muslim's life must be wholly committed to Allah. He established five daily times of prayer, facing Mecca, with ritual washing beforehand. Friday became the appointed day for corporate worship at the mosque. Mohammed died in A.D. 632 in Medina, Saudi Arabia.

