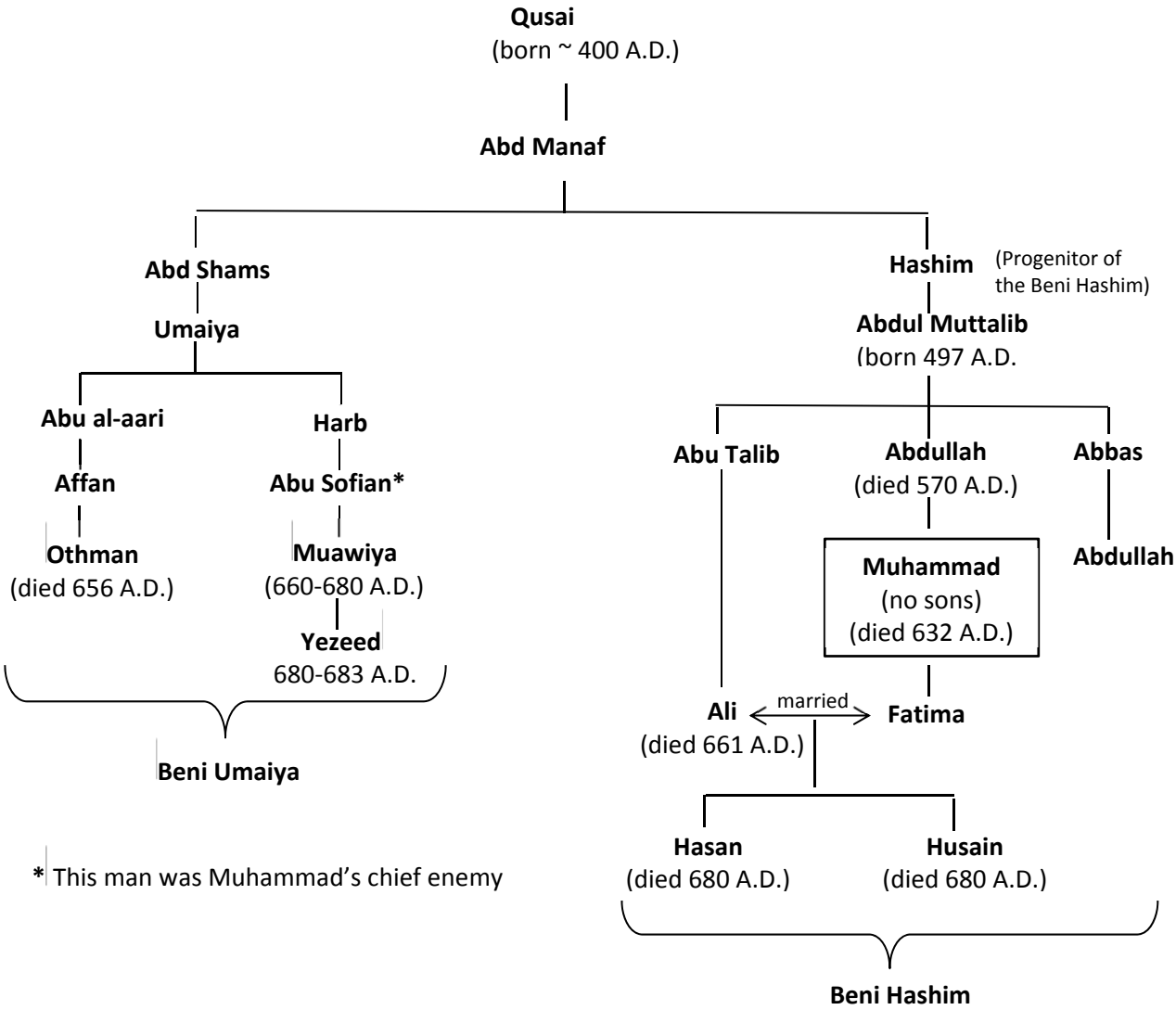
The Birth and Early Life of Muhammad (until he was 40 years old)

The Arabs (Bedouin) of North and central Arabia like to trace their origins to Abraham's oldest son Ishmael. Those from Yemen and Oman say they are descended from Joktan the son of Eber of the family of Shem – See Genesis 10:25-26, 29 and 1 Chronicles 1:19-20, 23)

Genealogical Tree of the Quraish



* This man was Muhammad's chief enemy

Muslims believe that Abdul Muttalib re-dug the well of Zamzam which was previously lost. [This is the well/spring that God showed Hagar in Gen. 16:7.] Abid Manaf was the keeper of the Kaaba as were Hashim and Abdul Muttalib. Abdullah, Muhammad's father, married Amina bint Wahb.

- **The early life of Muhammad**

Abdul Muttalib (born 497 A.D.) achieved a position of considerable influence as did the Hashemite clan. He had five sons of whom Abdullah died an early death in 570 A.D. A few months later – about August 20, 570 A.D. – his wife Amina gave birth to a son who was named Muhammad.

It was in this year that an army from Axum (Ethiopia) marched north from Yemen with a baggage train of war elephants and attacked Mecca. Elephants ran down the streets of Mecca. Smallpox broke out among the Ethiopians and they withdrew to Yemen. From then on the year 570 A.D. was remembered as "the Year of the Elephant".

At Muhammad's birth, his mother Amina heard a voice saying, "Call him Muhammad. He will be Lord of these people" and the light shone out of her. It was the custom of the urban Quraish to give their children to be suckled by women of the neighbouring tribes. The free air of the desert was thought healthier than that of the dusty little town. Muhammad was given to a woman of the Beni Sa'ad tribe outside Mecca. His foster parents were Halimah and Abdullah.

When he was six years old Muhammad was returned to his mother in Mecca, but within a year she died leaving him an orphan. He was looked after by a slave girl until his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib took him into his household. Two years later Abdul Muttalib died and the boy found refuge with his uncle, his father's younger brother) Abu Talib. At the age of 12 young Muhammad accompanied his uncle on a business trip overland to Damascus. On this trip he met a Christian monk called Bahira.

There are no records of Muhammad's life until 767 A.D. when Ibn Ishaq wrote a history of Muhammad. This has been lost, but a recension was made by ibn Hisham who died in 833 A.D. – i.e. over 263 years after Muhammad's birth.

Perhaps as a result of these turmoils, Muhammad apparently grew up as a quiet and pensive young man. His uncle was poor and Muhammad had inherited nothing. Sometimes he worked as a shepherd, at other times he made a small profit in business transactions as did all Meccans. At the age of 25, his uncle secured him a job to conduct a trading caravan to Syria. As he already enjoyed a reputation for honesty, he was made responsible for the disposal of the merchandise and the purchase of Syrian goods for resale in Mecca.

The caravan belonged to a rich widow of the Quraish who managed her own commercial affairs. Muhammad performed the duties entrusted to him to her complete satisfaction with the result that soon afterwards she sent him a marriage proposal. Khadija was ~15 years older than Muhammad, but in other respects the match was a good one. Muhammad consented and the marriage was an unqualified success. She bore him two sons and four daughters. Sadly both sons died in infancy.

His marriage to a rich widow relieved Muhammad of the need to earn his living. Free from financial anxieties he was able to indulge his taste for solitude and meditation. Generally Muhammad was observed to be reserved and silent; however he did relax in congenial groups of friends. So a quiet, kindly, affectionate man, he was a devoted husband to his rather middle-aged wife whom he consulted on all his problems.

Many historians look to psychology as the key to understanding great men and women of the past. So it is frustrating so very little of Muhammad's life is known before he was 40 years old. It is clear that the code of Muruwwah had broken down in Mecca. Merchants and shrine keepers were acquisitive and self-centred driving hard bargains in the marketplace. Religion had also become big business. The many gods and goddesses gave rise to many festivals that were a very useful way of raising wealth.

There were a few Christians in Mecca because it is known that there was a Christian burial ground just outside Mecca. There were other pious people who were monotheists but weren't Jews or Christians. They were called Hanifs. But in general Meccan businessmen, profoundly practical, scoffed at anything that might interfere with their pursuit of money. Khadija had a cousin who was a Hanif (some say a Christian).

There were four Hanifs who broke from Quraish polytheism in Muhammad's day. [See Quran 3:67 for a definition of a Hanif.] These four were:

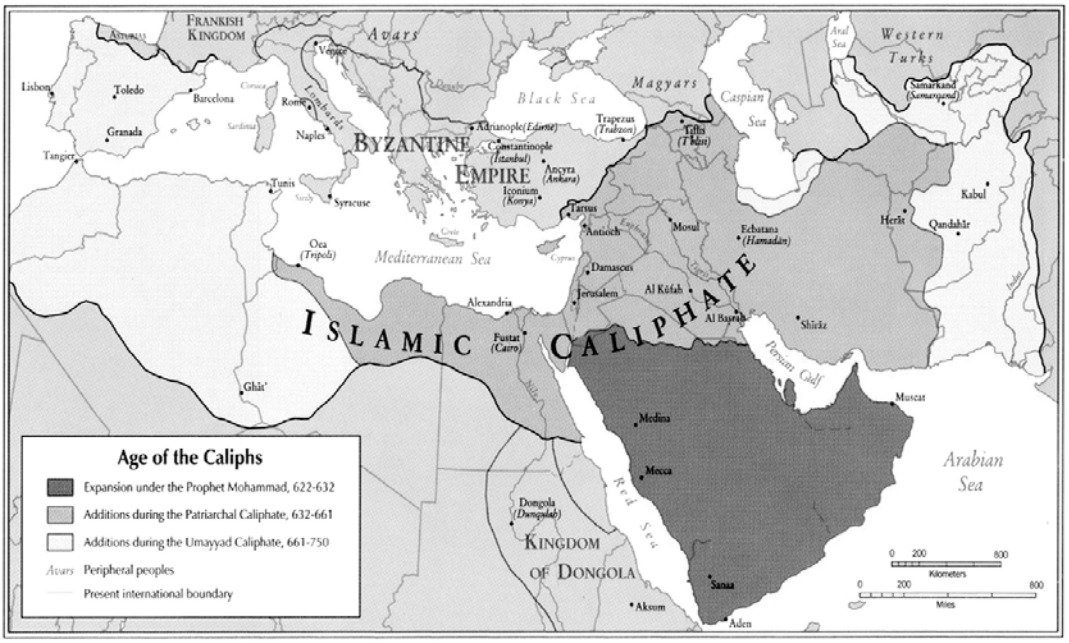
Waraqa bin Naufal – one of Muhammad's uncles. He became a Christian and was known to study the Bible in great depth.

Ubaydullah bin Jahsh – he went on searching until Islam came, then he migrated with a few Muslims to Axum. On arrival he left Islam, became a Christian and died as a Christian in Axum.

Uthman bin al-Huwayreth – he went up to Byzantine territory, eventually met the Emperor and became a Christian. He was given high office in his later life.

Zayd bin Amr – he stayed as he was. He didn't accept Judaism or Christianity. He abandoned the paganism of his people. He refused to worship idols and abstained from eating animals that had died. He forbade the killing of infant daughters saying he worshipped the God of Abraham.

Map of Arabia and the Expansion of Islam



- **Judaism in Arabia at the time of Muhammad in Mecca**

There were several Jewish tribes in Arabia and in Medina. They constituted an influential trading class. Medina is about 300 miles north of Mecca and was much more prosperous than Mecca. The city had several oases and was especially adapted for the growth of date palms. The two main Jewish tribes were the Banu-Nader and the Banu-Qurayzah. The town had become a leading agricultural centre. Judging by their proper names and the Aramean vocabulary used in their agriculture, these Jews were mostly Judaised Arabs. It is possible that they were real Hebrew Jews who fled to Arabia when the Roman armies invaded Judea in 70 A.D. It is possible that they changed the name of the town from Yathrib to the Aramaic Medinta. The two non-Jewish tribes in Medina were the Aws and the Khazraj who both came from Yemen. For a while Dhu Nuwas, a Himyarite king in Yemen, became a Jew probably from a political motive, being very antagonistic to both the Persian "Nestorians" and the Monophysites of Axum.

The Jewish concept of strict monotheism and opposition to all forms of idolatry clearly influenced the Muslim view. Facing a holy city in prayer, regular fasting, the avoidance of pork and a weekly holy day are also due to the Jewish influence on Islam. The concept of the Islamic Sharia (law) as pervading all areas of life with no secular/religious divide is analogous to the Jewish view of the Halacha (Jewish law). There are also many similarities in the methods of interpreting Holy Scriptures, the sources of the law and in the methods of legal deduction and authority.

- **Muhammad's "call" to be a prophet and a period in Mecca – a period of persecution**

In his thirties, Muhammad spent more of his time in meditation in the hill caves around Mecca. It is a barren landscape. There is no vegetation and much of the year it is under the blistering sun. Here Muhammad thought of the endless tortures of hell, the vast power of a single Almighty God and the possible joys of heaven. Were the Hanifs right? He poured his fears and hopes into the sympathetic ear of Khadijah who combined for him the love of wife with the care of the mother he had lost as a child.

One night in 610 A.D. when he was 40 years old, he was sleeping in a cave in the mountains when he said he was visited by the Archangel Gabriel who commanded him to recite:

"Recite in the name of the Lord who created
Who created man of coagulated blood (blood clot)
Recite. The Lord is the most beneficent
Who taught by the pen
Taught what they knew not to men." (Quran 96:1-5)

Apparently he found it hard to speak, but finally managed to say what he was told. This was his first revelation. Muhammad knew later that he had received his "call". This night was later named "The Night of Power" and was fixed towards the end of Ramadan.

Fearing he was being possessed by an evil spirit, Muhammad ran from the cave to throw himself down the hillside, when he saw Gabriel "in the form of a man with his feet astride the horizon". For Muhammad, this was a shattering experience. He went home to tell Khadijah what had happened. He thought it was a jinn and he had often suffered from moods of despair. She was pre-disposed to believe because of the influence of her cousin Waraqah the Hanif, who later became a Christian and at that time was vaguely familiar with the Bible.

It was Khadijah who told Muhammad that he was to be the prophet for the Arabs. His cousin Ali and Zaid, a boy he had adopted, formed the first converts. A Meccan merchant called Abu Bakar, a quiet pleasant man, became his next disciple.

After two years a second vision occurred. In very great stress Muhammad rushed home and asked Khadijah to cover him with blankets/cloaks whereupon these words "descended":

"Oh you, enwrapped in your cloak, arise and warn." (Quran 74:1)

During the Meccan period the voices varied and sometimes "sounded like bells".

Three years after his vision of Gabriel – i.e. 613 A.D. – Muhammad received the order to preach in Mecca that there was one true God and the idols must be destroyed. He was sent by God. One day all the dead would rise again – the righteous to eternal happiness and all idolaters to hellfire. He claimed that the message was not new but was in fact the religion of Abraham which had been distorted by the Jews and further distorted by the Christians. Muhammad taught that Jesus was the Spirit of God, but by five centuries later Christians had adulterated his teaching and believed in things never taught by the Lord Jesus.

So Muhammad originally thought he had been sent to restore the religion of Abraham and he called on the Meccans to surrender to God. Those who chose to follow Muhammad were known as "surrendered persons" (Muslims).

Muhammad began to preach in a worrying time for the Meccan merchants for it was in the year 613 A.D. that the Persian Empire defeated the Byzantine army at the border and raided down the Mediterranean coast of the Near East capturing Syria and Palestine including Jerusalem. The result was that the trade routes to the Mediterranean were partially closed. The Byzantines recaptured this area in 630 A.D.

In spite of Muhammad's earnestness, his preaching met with little response. After four years of preaching (617 A.D.) his disciples were less than 70. The Meccans resented two factors in what Muhammad preached:

- ✓ They were proud of their temple (the Kaaba). Pilgrims from all over Arabia came bringing commodities that the merchants could buy and sell. This made up for some of the loss of profits through the caravan business. If Muhammad insisted on the destruction of all the idols, the commerce of Mecca would suffer greatly.
- ✓ Muhammad taught that their fathers and all their ancestors were suffering in hell for in their lifetime they had worshipped idols.

But the Hashemite clan, even though most of them didn't believe that Muhammad was a prophet, wouldn't allow others to inflict physical injuries on Muhammad. Some of his followers – slaves or servants without tribal protection – were severely persecuted. The rest laughed him to scorn. His chief opponent was Abu Sufyan – a leader in the aristocratic and influential Umayyad branch of the Quraish whose main interest was the economic interests of the Quraish as custodians of the Kaaba. Muhammad did make some concessions. He agreed that Al Hat, Al Uzza and Manat were all worthy of veneration. These are the "Satanic Verses" – see Quran 53:21-23.

Muhammad himself suffered much shame and humiliation. In 615 A.D. fifteen of his followers couldn't stand the violence and fled over the Red Sea to Axum. There some became Christians. Later about 83 others joined them in Axum. Also in this period falls the "isra" – the dramatic night journey on a flying horse from Mecca to Jerusalem and from there his ascent (mi'raj) to the seventh heaven. [Jerusalem is the third most holy city of Islam after Mecca and Medina.]

In 619 A.D. Muhammad experienced two tragedies. Khadija died and so did his uncle, Abu Talib, who had brought him up and was the leader of the Hashemite clan and so his chief protector. These were two great blows to Muhammad. But in March 620 A.D. Muhammad met some men from Yathrib (later known as Medina) who had come to Mecca on pilgrimage. They had long talks with Muhammad and went back to Medina as Muslims. A year later they came back again on pilgrimage and brought five more with them. The 12 met Muhammad secretly at night in a valley east of Mecca and pledged their loyalty to him. Muhammad's hopes were now fixed on Yathrib and he almost stopped preaching in Mecca. As a result persecution was relaxed.

In March 622 A.D. 73 men came from Yathrib and swore allegiance secretly to Muhammad. A few days later he instructed his Meccan disciples to leave Mecca quietly one by one and reassemble in Yathrib. Finally all had left (about 200) with only Ali and Abu Bakr remaining with him.

The Mecca leaders had noticed the disappearance of Muhammad's followers and held a council where they decided to kill Muhammad. Muhammad heard of this. He left his house and sheltered in Abu Bakr's house. He told his friend, "God has given me permission to emigrate". As night came, they climbed out of a back window of the house and crept out of Mecca to a nearby cave. Their escape was soon discovered and the Meccan leaders offered a large reward for the capture of Muhammad and Abu Bakr. They searched for three days but failed to find them. Abdullah, Abu Bakr's son, brought three riding camels to the cave along with food prepared by Asma, Abu Bakr's daughter. So Muhammad and Abu Bakr escaped to Yathrib in June 622 A.D. From now on Yathrib was re-named Medinat al Nabi (the prophet's town).

For all Muslims this date is the beginning of the Muslim calendar. Seventeen years later the Caliph Umar designated that the lunar year should begin at this point in time. It was the turning point in Muhammad's career – 12 years after the first vision in the cave. In these 12 years he had suffered insults, discouragement and much ill-treatment. But once established in Medina his attitude completely changed.

As followers of the Lord Jesus, how are we really to think of Muhammad? It is hard to have an unbiased view of the man! How are we to make judgements not about **the facts**, but about the **moral** and **theological** precedents that are being set? I think we could make the following points:

- ✓ His initial sincerity and his belief in the one true God
- ✓ His traumatised youth – father dying before he was born – death of his mother – separation from his Bedouin nurse
- ✓ He met Jews, Christians of various sorts and hanifs on his trips up to Syria
- ✓ He perceived that the Arabs were backward because of polytheism/animism compared with the Byzantines and Persians – many of whom were Zoroastrians and so were monotheists themselves
- ✓ Mecca was getting wealthy and its prestige was growing through idolatry

- ✓ Muhammad often said that he couldn't read or write – probably meaning he wasn't a scholar [There is a letter that Muhammad wrote in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul.]
- ✓ He was faithful to Khadija until she died
- ✓ Clearly he came to the conclusion that the Arabs **needed** a prophet and a Holy Book
- ✓ To some extent he followed the Biblical pattern in the Meccan period:
  - one true God
  - preached to the people
  - rejected by the people
  - persecuted
  - finally vindicated by God (in the Medinan period)

What about the Medinan period – were there moral problems?

- ✓ Not over multiple marriages for what about David or Solomon!
- ✓ He appeared mostly kind, considerate, approachable and generous to other Muslims, but just the opposite to the Jews in Medina.
- ✓ What about the wars – Jihad? But is any war defensible? War is always morally messy.

But there are two great moral problems:

1) There is a great deal of material in the Quran that is derived from other sources – especially from the Jews. But this is not accurate and certainly differs from the Old and New Testaments. However Muhammad makes the claim that this was given to him directly from God. This was questioned by both Jews and Christians and Muhammad told them to check with the Bible (e.g. sura 10:94) which they did. So this was a deliberately false claim.

2) There is a verse about polygamy in the Quran that restricts it. But Muhammad made exceptions for himself! Was this a conscious get out? He was certainly charged with making up sentences for his own convenience which he said came from God.

Perhaps, like Gideon, Muhammad started well but slipped down to insensitivity and deception. How easy for us to say, "God told me …." Remember 1 Thess. 5:20-21:

"Don't despise prophecies, but <u>test everything</u>; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."

- **Muhammad's life in Medina** (622-632 A.D.) [Al Medina = the city]

One of the reasons Muhammad was invited to Medina was so he would arbitrate over water rights between the Arab tribesmen and the three Jewish tribes. Medina was an oasis area of about 20 square miles with a town at its centre and various villages around it. The various clans/tribes had parts of the town and of the forts. It was a major Jewish business centre. Before Muhammad there were two sorts of people – Jews and Arab tribesmen (later called the Ansar – the helpers). Muhammad still had a reputation for honesty and he realised the potential value of being the leader of a **Muslim** city state in Arabia.

So now, established in Medina, he appeared be a completely different man. He announced that Gabriel had told him that God had ordered him to fight all unbelievers. The most powerful factor in promoting all future Arab conquests was soon to follow. It was the promise of the immediate admission to paradise of all Muslims who died in battle against non-Muslims. It is in the Medinan suras in the Quran that the details are found about paradise – cool, flowing streams, delicious fruit and the houris (beautiful virgins forever young). Young poor Bedouin men whose lives were an endless struggle against great physical hardship were clearly very eager to fight knowing the certainty of paradise if killed.

It was in Medina that Muhammad established his theocratic state with himself as the divinely appointed leader. Ever since, there has been no division between politics and religion in Islam. But it was also the birthplace of the strong anti-Jewish mind-set that Muslims have. The Jews failed to accept the changes he made (see 4:44-49 and 2:142 for his charges against them). It was a political necessity to destroy them. So in the Quran we see this in 2:214, 9:29 and 22:40.

So there were now three sorts of people in Medina – the emigrants from Mecca, (called the Muhajirun) the Ansar of Medina who believed in Muhammad and the Jews.

Medina – about 250 miles north of Mecca as the crow flies – was very well-placed to cut the caravan route north to Petra and Syria and it was on this route that the livelihood of Mecca depended. So "the unbelievers" Muhammad ordered them to fight were not Byzantine Christians, but the idolaters of Mecca, who for twelve years had mocked, scorned and rejected his message.

In March 624 A.D., a caravan of about 1000 camels belonging to the Meccans was due to pass near Medina, returning from Damascus. Muhammad and the Muslims in Medina planned to intercept and grab it. Abu Sufian heard about the plot while the caravan was still in Syria. He sent a message by camel to Mecca telling the Quraish to send a large armed force to escort the caravan past Medina.

Muhammad set out with 314 men to intercept the caravan at the wells of **Bedr** where they were expected to stop for water. Abu Sufian thought no escort was coming and, expecting an attack at Bedr, he had made a large detour before Muhammad realised. However, the Meccans had sent a force of 1000 men to Bedr. Muhammad's 313 spent the night by the wells and in the morning the Meccan army arrived. They realised the caravan had already left and wanted to go home, but Muhammad urged his men to fight and fight they did. About 49 of the Quraish were killed and some were taken prisoner. Some Muslims also died but the rest returned to Medina in triumph. This victory is reported in the Quran 8:17 and 42.

More than half the inhabitants of Medina were Jews. Given Muhammad's leaning towards Judaism and his acknowledged dependence upon it for so much of his teaching, he had to win over the Jews by making concessions to them – e.g. Muhammad's adoption of Jerusalem as the direction to which Muslims should turn in prayer and his recognition of all the Jewish prophets. But the Jews scoffed at Muhammad's pretensions as a prophet and asked for miracles as proof. There are number of anti-Jewish statements in the Quran. There was very considerable tension in the town. Muhammad claimed to preach the religion of Abraham, but the Jews laughed at his claims of being a prophet for they knew the Old Testament well. Returning from Bedr, the Muslims surrounded the Jewish tribe of Beni Qainuqa and compelled them to migrate to Syria. The Jews controlled the town centre and worked as goldsmiths and blacksmiths. Their property, houses and gardens were confiscated and provided homes and livelihood for the exiled Meccans.

The Arabs loved poetry. It was also useful as a tool of propaganda among a people who were largely illiterate. Muhammad was deeply outraged by the bitter ironies of three Medinan poets and ordered that they should be murdered.

So Muhammad started down the route of power politics – war, driving out enemies and having opponents assassinated. Yet he claimed that he preached the same religion as the Lord Jesus. So the legitimacy of force has always been one of the marks of Muslims. For a follower of the Lord Jesus, an individual war may be right or wrong, but no Muslim in general can condemn a war because Muhammad ordered Muslims to fight. It is a religious duty.

Muslims don't believe that men can be made righteous by moral example or by intellectual persuasion alone, but consider force is necessary. Murder is merely an extension of the same principle. Violence, once admitted, is very easy to abuse.

Soon after his arrival in Medina, Muhammad married Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr. She was 9 years old while he was 53 years old. Before he died Muhammad married 11 wives. Muslims are only allowed a maximum of four wives at one time, but Muhammad claimed for himself a divine revelation to exceed the statutory number of four. Why did he want to marry so many? Perhaps it was in the hope of having a son as a successor – a hope that was never realised.

He was never interested in making money, although he could have become very wealthy. Muhammad forbade the use of alcohol, apparently because some of his troops got drunk. In the end Muhammad died penniless in a hut that we would consider unfit for a stable.

The strategy followed by the Muslims in Medina was to intercept all the caravans going from Mecca to Syria with the aim of ruining the Meccans. The open deserts crossed by these caravans were inhabited by various nomadic tribes whose co-operation was obviously necessary for this blockade. Muhammad won over the tribe of Juheina who lived between Medina and the Red Sea. But east of Medina were two tribes who were allies of the Quraish – the Beni Sulaim and the Ghatafan. So the Muslims of Medina declared war on these two tribes. These tactics caused great damage to the Meccan caravan trade.

In 625 A.D. the Quraish marched on Medina, determined to kill Muhammad. The Meccan force was led by Abu Sofian. It consisted of 3000 men and 200 cavalry. Muhammad could only gather 700 men and no cavalry. Battle began at the foot of **Mount Uhud** two miles north of Medina's wall. The Muslims were completely defeated. Muhammad was wounded and his uncle, Hamza, was killed. Some surviving Muslims carried Muhammad to the rocky crags at the top of mount Uhud. Eventually the Quraish mounted their camels and rode away. Why were they defeated? There is an explanation in the Quran sura 3 (145 and 60 ff) that says, in effect, that God wanted the Muslims to lose in order to test their faith.

Two years later the Quraish again marched on Medina with 10,000 men, some of whom were tribes allied to the Meccans. The Muslims in Medina couldn't fight and win against such a force so they locked themselves in Medina behind its walls. This is usually called, “the Battle of the Trench” because they had dug a large ditch around the city. The Quraishi Bedouin enjoyed desert battles but strongly disliked the drudgery of a long siege. So after three weeks the Quraishi army left. One Jewish tribe in Medina, the Beni Quraidha, had secret communications with the Quraish during the siege. So after the Quraish left, Muhammad ordered all 700 men of the Beni Quraidha killed. The women and children were taken as slaves.

At that time there were four holy months during the year when all Arabs could come to Mecca and worship all the idols. In March 628 A.D. Muhammad said he was going to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. By traditional law the Quraish had no right to stop him. Emissaries passed between the two sides. It was decided that in 629 A.D. 2000 Muslims would be allowed to go to Mecca on pilgrimage. This treaty is called, the Treaty of Hudeybiyah. The Quraish evacuated the city and waited to see what would happen. Muhammad went straight to the Kaaba, touched the Black Stone and performed the seven circuits of the building prescribed by heathen ritual. It was a political masterstroke! They believed he wanted to destroy the building and deprive the Meccans of the prestige and money derived from being a centre of pilgrimage. But Muhammad declared the Kaaba was the house of God built by Abraham whose religion he was himself preaching. He said that if they removed the idols from the Kaaba then pilgrimage to Mecca would be a Muslim obligation.

In 629 A.D. Muslims from Medina – about 3000 men – also raided up north in the area of Kerak (Jordan) that was part of the Byzantine Empire. They were completely defeated.

In January 630 A.D. Muhammad and about 10,000 Muslims set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca. On the way he was met by Abu Sofian who accepted Islam. They entered Mecca unopposed. The idols were thrown away. A general amnesty was proclaimed and Meccans were declared Muslims. Muhammad adopted into Islam nearly all the rites of the pagan pilgrimage so that the financial position of the Meccans was not destroyed. The pagan externals were removed and the rites given an Islamic interpretation. The rites of pilgrimage were linked to events in the life of Abraham as the father of the Arabs. For example, the sacred well (Zamzam) was the well that the Angel of the Lord showed to Hagar.

In September 630 A.D. Muhammad led a force up to Tubuk and various Arab chiefs paid him tribute.
In March 632 A.D. he led a large number of Muslims to Mecca in a formal pilgrimage. There he preached to the crowd saying, “O Lord, I have delivered my message and fulfilled my mission.”
In June 632 A.D. he complained of a fever and headache. For a week his condition worsened and he

delegated Abu Bakr to lead public prayers. On the 10th day Muhammad was in a great deal of pain and often delirious. The next day, with Aisha supporting his head, he called for water to wet his face and then said, "O Lord, I beseech you to assist me in the agonies of death." Finally he prayed in a whisper, "Lord, grant me pardon – eternity in Paradise – pardon…" and he died. He left no provision for a successor – a Caliph.

- **Modern scholarship's view of the historicity of "the official story" of Muhammad's life**

There is a great deal of research on the historicity of the life of Muhammad. The usually accepted version is: **The life of Muhammad** by Ibn Ishaq – the **Sirat Rasul Allah**. Mohammad Ibn Ishaq was born in Medina in 85 A.H. and he died in Baghdad in 151 A.H. Before his "official" biography there were apparently several other biographies and stories circulated about Muhammad, but these have been lost.

The Sira was copied and frequently cited by various Arab authors, but no copy exists today. There have been various attempts at the partial restoration of the lost original but these haven't been very successful. Since the whole of the Sira of Ibn Ishaq was lost, Ibn Hisham started to collect together as much of it as he could and he produced an edited version of the Sira. Ibn Hisham was born in Basra and died at Fustat in Egypt in 218 A.H.

So we don't have much documentary evidence of the life story of Muhammad until about 150-180 years after his death. For example, the "fact" that "Islam" was a threat to the trade of the Quraish as guardians of the Kaaba, is nowhere mentioned in Muslim tradition. To Ibn Hisham the central episode in Muhammad's life was his departure from Mecca not his first "revelation" in the cave. After Muhammad's death he became more and more venerated. It was said that his birth was accompanied by the appearance of many new stars, that he was able to foretell the future and to receive messages from camels. Miracles were also cited such as picking up the eyeball of a soldier and re-inserting it so that it was able to work much better than before.

The only real evidence is a tiny shred of papyrus discovered in Palestine and dated around 740 A.D. mentioning the battle of Bedr. So what we do have are all dates 200 years **after** the supposed dates. In fact many modern scholars claim that the Arab armies conquering so much of the Mediterranean basin the 8th and 9th centuries began to construct a past for themselves in order to make sense of their rise to global power. Perhaps Muhammad did exist and Islam was one of many Christian heresies.

Only in 690 A.D. is Muhammad's name recorded. There is a book entitled, **Quranic geography** written by Dan Gibson in which there is a chapter called **"The Mecca question"**. Here he demonstrates that Mecca hardly existed in the 7th century A.D. It had no history prior to 700 A.D. In fact, what is described in the battles and descriptions found in the Quran and traditions is Petra in south Jordan and this is the original city of Islam! Several archaeologists have come to the same conclusion.

All the growing evidence that the story of Muhammad's life outlined above is largely fiction made up 200 years after his death – if he ever lived at all – is interesting. But for those living in the Arab World, it is extremely counter-productive in most environments to bring out the evidence. Our aim is **not** to destroy Muhammad's credibility, but to **present the Lord Jesus** as the only way, the truth and the life.

- **Our view of Muhammad – some questions**

  - ✓ Given the kind of Christianity that Muhammad saw so imperfectly and if he had no opportunity to read the Bible in Arabic, is it fair to think of Muhammad purely as a heretic? Is Muhammad to be thought of in terms of Mt. 24:23-25?

  - ✓ If Muhammad didn't have any clear idea of the Trinity or of the Incarnation, how far can we identify him with the anti-christ in John 2:22-23?

  - ✓ If the moral world in which Muhammad lived was more like the world of the Old Testament, how well does Muhammad compare with people like Abraham, Gideon, Solomon, David and Elijah? Examine their characters and their private lives. Did Muhammad do better or worse than some of them?

A Summary of the life of Muhammad

A.D. 570 The birth of Muhammad of the tribe of the Quraish. His father died a few months before his birth

576 His mother, Amina, died. He was cared for by his grandfather – Abdul Muttalib. He died. He was then cared for by his uncle – Abu Talib for two years till he was eight years old.

582 Began to accompany trading caravans into Syria. Further contacts with Jews and Christians an example is the monk Bahira

593 Trading journeys to Syria in service of Khadijah

595 Married Khadijah and had growing contact with hanifs and some Christians and other monotheists – now 25 years old. Marriage gave him security and status.

610 Muhammad had his first revelation on mount Hira. His first converts were:

- Khadijah, Zaid and Ali – all family members
- Abu Bakr – a friend
- Umar

612-22 Preached in Mecca – content in suras mainly belief in one God and belief in the Last Day of judgement (74:1-7).

616 Persecution by the Quraish at the height of its power. Some of Muhammad's followers fled to Ethiopia and some became Christians.

617 Boycott of Muslims in Mecca – life very difficult. Content of suras is condemnation of idolatry and hellfire for those who don't believe.

621 Abu Talib dies as does Khadija. Muhammad gained some converts from Medina (~72). People of Medina invite Muhammad to come as “arbitrator” in water rights dispute.

622 The Hijra – flight to Yathrib (Medina). Muhammad becomes the spiritual leader of the new faith, the legislator of the Muslim community and the military leader. After the death of Abu Talib and Khadijah his protection goes.

622-30 Main opposition from Meccans. Muhammad also turned against the Jews. Raids on passing caravans lead to battles with the Meccans:

- 624 Badr – Muslims won
- 625 Uhud – Meccans won
- 627 Ahzad – defended Medina from attack
- 628 A truce with the Meccans – Hudaibiya. Also many opponents in Medina were assassinated by order of Muhammad (Quran 48:2)
- 629 Invitations to various rulers to accept Islam – Chief of Bahrain accepted Emperors of Iran and Byzantine Empire did not.
- 630 Muhammad captured Mecca. He smashed the idols in the Kaaba (17:82). Very little punitive action on the Meccans. There was another battle – Hunain – that Muhammad won and all the booty was given to the Meccans.

631 Muhammad went on a pilgrimage to Mecca (5:4) and returned to Medina. Many delegations from the Arab tribes of Arabia came to Medina to offer Muhammad allegiance.

632 Muhammad fell ill and died (110:2-4). He is buried in Medina.