
The Life of Prophet Muhammad By Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall

Taken, with some editorial changes, from Pickthall's introduction to his translation of the Qur'an.

The Life of Prophet
Muhammad

PART I

In Makkah

By Mohammed Marmaduke
Pickthall

The Prophet's Birth

The Ka`bah today

Muhammad, son of Abdullah, son of Abdul Muttalib, of the tribe of Quraysh, was born in Makkah fifty-three years before the Hijrah. His father died before he was born, and he was protected first by his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, and after his grandfather's death, by his uncle Abu Talib.

As a young boy he traveled with his uncle in the merchants' caravan to Syria, and some years afterwards made the same journey in the service of a wealthy widow named Khadijah. So faithfully did he transact the widow's business, and so excellent was the report of his behavior, which she received from her old servant who had accompanied him, that she soon afterwards married her young agent; and the marriage proved a very happy one, though she was fifteen years older than he was. Throughout the twenty-six years of their life together he remained devoted to her; and after her death, when he took other wives he always mentioned her with the greatest love and reverence. This marriage gave him rank among the notables of Makkah, while his conduct earned for him the surname Al-Amin, the "trustworthy."

The Hunafa
The

Makkans claimed descent from Abraham through Isma`il and tradition stated that their temple, the Ka`bah, had been built by Abraham for the worship of the One God. It was still called the House of Allah, but the chief objects of worship here were a number of idols, which were called "daughters" of Allah and intercessors. The few who felt disgust at this idolatry, which had prevailed for centuries, longed for the religion of Abraham and tried to find out what had been its teaching. Such seekers of the truth were known as Hunafa (sing. Hanif), a word originally meaning "those who turn away" (from the existing idol-worship), but coming in the end to have the sense of "upright" or "by nature upright," because such persons held the way of truth to be right conduct. These Hunafa did not form a community. They were the non-conformists of their day, each seeking truth by the light of his inner consciousness. Muhammad son of Abdullah became one of these.

The First Revelation

It was his

practice to retire often to a cave in the desert for meditation. His place of retreat was Hira', a cave in a mountain called the Mountain of Light not far from Makkah, and his chosen month was Ramadan, the month of heat. It was there one night toward the end of his quiet month that the first revelation came to him when he was forty years old.

He heard a

voice say: "Read!" He said: "I cannot read." The voice again said: "Read!" He said: "I cannot read." A third time the voice, more terrible, commanded: "Read!" He said: "What can I read?" The voice said:

"Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth.

"Createth man from a clot.

"Read: And it is thy Lord the Most Bountiful

"Who teacheth by the pen,

"Teacheth man that which he knew not."

The Vision of Cave Hira'

The

cave Hira' in the Mountain of Light (Jabal Al-Nur)

He went

out of the cave on to the hillside and heard the same awe-inspiring voice say: "O Muhammad! Thou art Allah's messenger, and I am Jibril (Gabriel)." Then he raised his eyes and saw the angel, in the likeness of a man, standing in the sky above the horizon. And again the dreadful voice said: "O Muhammad! Thou art Allah's messenger, and I am Jibril (Gabriel)." Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) stood quite still, turning away his face from the brightness of the vision, but wherever he turned his face, there stood the angel confronting him. He remained thus a long while till at length the angel vanished, when he returned in great distress of mind to his wife Khadijah. She did her

best to reassure him, saying that his conduct had been such that Allah would not let a harmful spirit come to him and that it was her hope that he was to become the Prophet of his people. On their return to Makkah she took him to her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a very old man, "who knew the Scriptures of the Jews and Christians," who declared his belief that the heavenly messenger who came to Moses of old had come to Muhammad, and that he was chosen as the Prophet of his people.

Muhammad eventually accepted the tremendous task imposed on him, becoming filled with enthusiasm of obedience

His Distress

To understand the reason of the Prophet's diffidence and his extreme distress of mind after the vision of Hira', it must be remembered that the Hunafa, of whom he had been one, sought true religion in the natural world and regarded with distrust the intercourse with spirits of which men "avid of the Unseen" sorcerers and soothsayers and even poets, boasted in those days. Moreover, he was a man of humble and devout intelligence, a lover of quiet and solitude and the very thought of being chosen out of all mankind to face mankind, alone, with such a message, appalled him at the first.

Recognition of the Divine nature of the call he had received involved a change in his whole mental outlook sufficiently disturbing to a sensitive and honest mind, and also the forsaking of his quiet, honored way of life. The early biographers tell how his wife Khadijah "tested the spirit" which came to him and proved it to be good, and how, with the continuance of the revelations and the conviction that they brought, he at length accepted the tremendous task imposed on him, becoming filled with enthusiasm of obedience which justifies his proudest title of "the Slave of Allah."

First Converts

For the

first three years, or rather less, of his mission, the Prophet preached to his family and his intimate friends, while the people of Makkah as a whole regarded him as one who had become a little mad. The first of all his converts was his wife Khadijah, the second his first cousin Ali, whom he had adopted, the third his servant Zayd, a former slave. His old friend Abu Bakr also was among those early converts.

Beginning of Persecution

At the end

of the third year the Prophet received the command to "arise and warn," whereupon he began to preach in public, pointing out the wretched folly of idolatry in face of the tremendous laws of day and night, of life and death, of growth and decay, which manifest the power of Allah and attest His sovereignty. It was then, when he began to speak against their gods, that Quraysh became actively hostile, persecuting his poorer disciples, mocking and insulting him. The one consideration which prevented them from killing him was fear of the blood-vengeance of the clan to which his family belonged. Strong in his inspiration, the Prophet went on warning, pleading, threatening, while Quraysh did all they could to ridicule his teaching, and deject his followers.

The Flight to Abyssinia

A

16th century map of Abyssinia – modern day Ethiopia

The

converts of the first four years were mostly humble folk unable to defend themselves against oppression. So cruel was the persecution they endured that the Prophet advised all who could possibly contrive to do so to immigrate to a Christian country, Abyssinia. And still in spite of persecution and emigration the little company of Muslims grew in number. Quraysh were seriously alarmed. The idol worship at the Ka`bah, the holy place to which all Arabia made pilgrimage, ranked for them, as guardians of the Ka`bah, as first among their vested interests. At the season of the pilgrimage they posted men on all the roads to warn the tribes against the "madman" who was preaching in their midst. They tried to bring the Prophet to a compromise offering to accept his religion if he would so modify it as to make room for their gods as intercessors with Allah, offering to make him their king if he would give up attacking idolatry; and, when their efforts at negotiation failed, they went to his uncle Abu Talib offering to give him the best of their young men in place of Muhammad, to give him all that he desired, if only he would let them kill Muhammad and have done with him. Abu Talib refused.

Conversion of Omar

The

exasperation of the idolaters was increased by the conversion of Omar, one of their stalwarts. They grew more and more embittered, till things came to such a pass that they decided to ostracize the Prophet's whole clan, idolaters who protected him as well as Muslims who believed in him. Their chief men caused a document to be drawn up to the effect that none of them or those belonging to them would hold any intercourse with that clan or sell to them or buy from them. This they all signed, and it was deposited in the Ka`bah. Then for three years, the Prophet was shut up with all his kinsfolk in their stronghold which was situated in one of the gorges which run down to Makkah. Only at the time of pilgrimage could he go out and preach, or did any of his kinsfolk dare to go into the city.

Destruction of the Document

At length

some kinder hearts among Quraysh grew weary of the boycott of old friends and neighbors. They managed to have the document which had been placed in the Ka`bah brought out for reconsideration; when it was found that all the writing had been destroyed by white ants, except the words Bismik Allahumma ("In thy name, O Allah"). When the elders saw that marvel the ban was removed, and the Prophet was again free to go about the city. But meanwhile the opposition to his preaching had grown rigid. He had little success among the Makkans, and an attempt which he made to preach in the city of Ta'if was a failure. His mission was a failure, judged by worldly standards, when, at the season of the yearly pilgrimage he came upon a little group of men who heard him gladly.

The Men from Yathrib

They came

from Yathrib, a city more than two hundred miles away, which has since become world-famous as al-Madinah, "the City" par excellence. At Yathrib

there were Jewish tribes with learned rabbis, who had often spoken to the pagans of a Prophet soon to come among the Arabs, with whom, when he came, the Jews would destroy the pagans as the tribes of 'Aad and Thamud had been destroyed of old for their idolatry. When the men from Yathrib saw Muhammad they recognized him as the Prophet whom the Jewish rabbis had described to them. On their return to Yathrib they told what they had seen and heard, with the result that the next season of pilgrimage a deputation came from Yathrib purposely to meet the Prophet.

Quraysh

dreaded what the Prophet might become if he escaped from them and so plotted to kill him

First Pact of al-'Aqabah

These

swore allegiance to him in the first pact of al-'Aqabah. They then returned to Yathrib with a Muslim teacher in their company and soon "there was not a house in Yathrib wherein there was not mention of the messenger of Allah."

Second pact of al-'Aqabah

In the

following year, at the time of pilgrimage, seventy-three Muslims from Yathrib came to Makkah to vow allegiance to the Prophet and invite him to their city. At al-'Aqabah, by night, they swore to defend him as they would defend their own wives and children. It was then that the Hijrah, the flight to Yathrib, was decided.

Plot to Murder the Prophet

Soon the

Muslims who were in a position to do so, began to sell their property and to leave Makkah unobtrusively. Quraysh had wind of what was going on. They hated Muhammad in their midst, but dreaded what he might become if he escaped from them. It would be better, they considered, to destroy him now. The death of Abu Talib had removed his chief protector; but still they had to reckon with the vengeance of his clan upon the clan of the murderer. They cast lot and chose a slayer out of every clan. All these were to attack the Prophet simultaneously and strike together, as one man. Thus his murder would be blamed on all Quraysh. It was at this time (Ibn Khaldun asserts, and it is the only satisfactory explanation of what happened afterwards) that the Prophet received the first revelation ordering him to make war upon his persecutors "until persecution is no more and religion is for Allah only."

The Hijrah (June 20th, 622 C.E.)

The last

of the able Muslims to remain in Makkah were Abu Bakr, Ali and the Prophet himself. Abu Bakr, a man of wealth, had bought two riding camels and retained a guide in readiness for the flight. The Prophet only waited for God's command. It came at last. It was the night appointed for his murder. The slayers were before his house. He gave his cloak to Ali, bidding him lie down on the bed so that anyone looking in might think Muhammad lay there. The slayers were to strike him as he came out of the house, whether in the night or early morning. He knew they would not injure Ali. Then he left the house and, it is said, blindness fell upon the would-be murderers so that he put dust on their heads as he passed by-without their knowing it.

The Hijrah
counts as the beginning of the Muslim era

He went to Abu Bakr's house and called to him, and they two went together to a cavern in the desert hill and hid there till the hue and cry was past, Abu Bakr's son and daughter and his herdsman bringing them food and tidings after nightfall. Once a search party came quite near them in their hiding-place, and Abu Bakr was afraid; but the Prophet said: "Fear not! Allah is with us." Then, when the coast was clear, Abu Bakr had the riding-camels and the guide brought to the cave one night, and they set out on the long ride to Yathrib.

After traveling for many days of unfrequented paths, the fugitives reached a suburb of Yathrib, whither, for weeks past, the people of the city had been going every morning, watching for the Prophet till the heat drove them to shelter. The travelers arrived in the heat of the day, after the watchers had retired. It was a Jew who called out to the Muslims in derisive tones that he whom they expected had at last arrived.

Such was the Hijrah, the Flight from Makkah to Yathrib, which counts as the beginning of the Muslim era. The thirteen years of humiliation, of persecution, of seeming failure, of prophecy still unfulfilled, were over.

The Life of Prophet
Muhammad

PART II

In Al-Madinah

By Mohammed
Marmaduke Pickthall

The Jews
and Hypocrites

The first Qiblah was
the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem

In the first year of his reign at Yathrib the Prophet made a solemn treaty with the Jewish tribes, which secured to them equal rights of citizenship and full religious liberty in return for their support of the new state. But their idea of a Prophet was one who would give them dominion, not one who made the Jews who followed him brothers of every Arab who might happen to believe as they did. When they found that they could not use the Prophet for their own ends, they tried to shake his faith in his Mission and to seduce his followers, behavior in which they were encouraged secretly by some professing Muslims who considered they had reason to resent the Prophet's coming, since it robbed them of their local influence. In the Madinah's surahs there is frequent mention of these Jews and Hypocrites.
The Qiblah

Till then the Qiblah (the place toward which the Muslims turn their face in prayer) had been Jerusalem . The Jews imagined that the choice implied a leaning toward Judaism and that the Prophet stood in need of their instruction. He received command to change the Qiblah from Jerusalem to the Ka'bah at Makkah. The whole first part of juz' 2, part of Surah II, relates to this Jewish controversy.

The First
Expeditions

The Prophet's first concern as ruler was to establish public worship and lay down the constitution of the State: but he did not forget that Quraysh had sworn to make an end of his religion, nor that he had received command to fight against them till they ceased from persecution. After he had been twelve months in Yathrib several small expeditions went out, led either by the Prophet himself or some other of the fugitives from Makkah for the purpose of reconnoitering and of dissuading other tribes from siding with Quraysh. These are generally represented as warlike but, considering their weakness and the fact that they did not result in fighting; they can hardly have been that, though it is certain that they went out ready to resist attack. It is noteworthy that in those expeditions only fugitives from Makkah were employed, never natives of Yathrib; the reason being (if we accept Ibn Khaldun's theory, and there is no other explanation) that the command to wage war had been revealed to the Prophet at Makkah after the Yathrib men had sworn their oath of allegiance at al-'Aqabah, and in their absence. Their oath foresaw fighting in mere defense not fighting in the field. Blood was shed and booty taken in only one of those early expeditions, and then it was against the Prophet's orders.

One purpose of those expeditions may have been to accustom the Makkah Muslims to going out in war like trim. For thirteen years they had been strict pacifists, and it is clear, from several passages of the Qur'an, that many of them, including, it may be, the Prophet himself, hated the idea of fighting even in self-defense and had to be inured to it.

The site of the campaign of Badr. The enclosed square is the opening of the well.

The

Campaign of Badr

In the second year

of the Hijrah the Makkahn merchants' caravan was returning from Syria as usual by a road which passed not far from Yathrib. As its leader Abu Sufyan approached the territory of Yathrib he heard of the Prophet's design to capture the caravan. At once he sent a camel-rider on to Makkah, who arrived in a worn-out state and shouted frantically from the valley to Quraysh to hasten to the rescue unless they wished to lose both wealth and honor. A force a thousand strong was soon on its way to Yathrib: less, it would seem, with the hope of saving the caravan than with the idea of punishing the raiders, since the Prophet might have taken the caravan before the relief force started from Makkah.

Did the Prophet

ever intend to raid the caravan? In Ibn Hisham, in the account of the Tabuk expedition, it is stated that the Prophet on that one occasion did not hide his real objective. The caravan was the pretext in the campaign of Badr; the real objective was the Makkan army.

He had received

command to fight his persecutors, and promise of victory, he was prepared to venture against any odds, as was well seen at Badr. But the Muslims, ill-equipped for war, would have despaired if they had known from the first that they were to face a well-armed force three times their number.

The victory of

Badr gave the Prophet new prestige among the Arab tribes

The army of Quraysh

had advanced more than half-way to Yathrib before the Prophet set out. All three parties – the army of Quraysh, the Muslim army and the caravan – were heading for the water of Badr. Abu Sufyan, the leader of the caravan, heard from one of his scouts that the Muslims were near the water, and turned back to the coast-plain. And the Muslims met the army of Quraysh by the water of Badr.

Before the battle

the Prophet was prepared still further to increase the odds against him. He gave leave to all the Ansar (natives of Yathrib) to return to their homes unreprieved, since their oath did not include the duty of fighting in the field; but the Ansar were only hurt by the suggestion that they could possibly desert him at a time of danger. The battle went at first against the Muslims, but ended in a signal victory for them.

The victory of Badr

gave the Prophet new prestige among the Arab tribes; but thenceforth there was the feud of blood between Quraysh and the Islamic State in addition to the old religious hatred. Those passages of the Qur'an which refer to the battle of Badr give warning of much greater struggles yet to come.

In fact in the

following year, an army of three thousand came from Makkah to destroy Yathrib. The Prophet's first idea was merely to defend the city, a plan of which Abdullah ibn Ubeyy, the leader of "the Hypocrites" (or lukewarm

Muslims), strongly approved. But the men who had fought at Badr and believed that God would help them against any odds thought it a shame that they should linger behind walls.

The Battle
on Mt. Uhud

The peak of Mt. Uhud

The

Prophet, approving of their faith and zeal, gave way to them, and set out with an army of one thousand men toward Mt. Uhud, where the enemy were encamped. Abdullah ibn Ubeyy was much offended by the change of plan. He thought it unlikely that the Prophet really meant to give battle in conditions so adverse to the Muslims, and was unwilling to take part in a mere demonstration designed to flatter the fanatical extremists. So he withdrew with his men, a fourth of the army.

Despite the heavy odds, the battle on Mt. Uhud would have been an even greater victory than that at Badr for the Muslims but for the disobedience of a band of fifty archers whom the Prophet set to guard a pass against the enemy cavalry. Seeing their comrades victorious, these men left their post, fearing to lose their share of the spoils. The cavalry of Quraysh rode through the gap and fell on the exultant Muslims.

The Prophet himself was wounded and the cry arose that he was slain, till someone recognized him and shouted that he was still living. a shout to which the Muslims rallied. Gathering round the Prophet, they retreated, leaving many dead on the hillside.

On the following day the Prophet again sallied forth with what remained of the army, that Quraysh might hear that he was in the field and so might perhaps be deterred from attacking the city. The stratagem succeeded, thanks to the behavior of a friendly Bedouin, who met the Muslims and conversed with them and afterwards met the army of Quraysh. Questioned by Abu Sufyan, he said that Muhammad was in the field, stronger than ever, and thirsting for revenge for yesterday's affair. On that information, Abu Sufyan decided to return to Makkah.

Massacre of
Muslims

The reverse which they had suffered on Mt. Uhud lowered the prestige of the Muslims with the Arab tribes and also with the Jews of Yathrib. Tribes which had inclined toward the Muslims now inclined toward Quraysh. The Prophet's followers were attacked and murdered when they went abroad in little companies. Khubayb, one of his envoys, was captured by a desert tribe and sold to Quraysh, who tortured him to death in Makkah publicly.

Expulsion
of Bani Nadhir

And the Jews, despite their treaty, now hardly concealed their hostility. They even went so far in flattery of Quraysh as to declare the religion of the pagan Arabs superior to Islam. The Prophet was obliged to take punitive action against some of them. The tribe of Bani Nadhir were besieged in

their strong towers, subdued and forced to emigrate. The Hypocrites had sympathized with the Jews and secretly egged them on.

The War of the Trench

The trench the Muslims dug was the first of its kind in Arab warfare

In the fifth year of the Hijrah the idolaters made a great effort to destroy Islam in the War of the Clans or War of the Trench, as it is variously called; when Quraysh with all their clans and the great desert tribe of Ghatafan with all their clans, an army of ten thousand men rode against Al-Madinah (Yathrib). The Prophet (by the advice of Salman the Persian, it is said) caused a deep trench to be dug before the city, and himself led the work of digging it.

The army of the clans was stopped by the trench, a novelty in Arab warfare. It seemed impassable for cavalry, which formed their strength. They camped in sight of it and daily showered their arrows on its defenders. While the Muslims were awaiting the assault, news came that Bani Qurayzah, a Jewish tribe of Yathrib which had till then been loyal, had gone over to the enemy. The case seemed desperate. But the delay caused by the trench had damped the ardor of the clans, and one who was secretly a Muslim managed to sow distrust between Quraysh and their Jewish allies, so that both hesitated to act. Then came a bitter wind from the sea, which blew for three days and nights so terribly that not a tent could be kept standing, not a fire lighted, not a pot boiled. The tribesmen were in utter misery. At length, one night the leader of Quraysh decided that the torment could be borne no longer and gave the order to retire. When Ghatafan awoke next morning they found Quraysh had gone and they too took up their baggage and retreated.

Punishment

of Bani Qurayzah

On the day of the return from the trench the Prophet ordered war on the treacherous Bani Qurayzah, who, conscious of their guilt, had already taken to their towers of refuge. After a siege of nearly a month they had to surrender unconditionally. They only begged that they might be judged by a member of the Arab tribe of which they were adherents. The Prophet granted their request. But the judge, upon whose favor they had counted, condemned their fighting men to death, their women and children to slavery.

Early in the sixth

year of the Hijrah the Prophet led a campaign against the Bani al-Mustaliq, a tribe who were preparing to attack the Muslims.

Al-Hudaybiyah

In the same year

the Prophet had a vision in which he found himself entering the holy place at Makkah unopposed, therefore he determined to attempt the pilgrimage. Besides a number of Muslims from Yathrib (which we shall henceforth call Al-Madinah) he called upon the friendly Arabs, whose numbers had increased since the miraculous (as it was considered) discomfiture of the clans to accompany him, but most of them did not respond. Attired as pilgrims, and taking with them the customary offerings, a company of fourteen hundred men journeyed to Makkah. As they drew near the holy valley they were met by a friend from the city, who warned the Prophet that Quraysh had put on their leopards-skins (the

badge of valor) and had sworn to prevent his entering the sanctuary; their cavalry was on the road before him. On that, the Prophet ordered a detour through mountain gorges and the Muslims were tired out when they came down at last into the valley of Makkah and encamped at a spot called Al-Hudaybiyah; from thence he tried to open negotiations with Quraysh, to explain that he came only as a pilgrim.

“Never have I seen a man honored as Muhammad is honored by his comrades.”

The first messenger he sent towards the city was maltreated and his camel hamstrung. He returned without delivering his message. Quraysh on their side sent an envoy which was threatening in tone, and very arrogant. Another of their envoys was too familiar and had to be reminded: sternly of the respect due to the Prophet. It was he who, on his return to the city, said: “I have seen Caesar and Chosroes in their pomp, but never have I seen a man honored as Muhammad is honored by his comrades.”

The Prophet sought some messenger who would impose respect. Othman was finally chosen because of his kinship with the powerful Umayyad family. While the Muslims were awaiting his return the news came that he had been murdered. It was then that the Prophet, sitting under a tree in Al-Hudaybiyah, took an oath from all his comrades that they would stand or fall together. After a while, however, it became known that Othman had not been murdered. A troop which came out from the city to molest the Muslims in their camp was captured before they could do any hurt and brought before the Prophet, who forgave them on their promise to renounce hostility.

Truce of
Al-Hudaybiyah

The Surah entitled “Victory” or “An-Nasr” was revealed during the return journey from Al-Hudaybiyah

Then proper envoys came from Quraysh. After some negotiation, the truce of Al-Hudaybiyah was signed. For ten years there were to be no hostilities between the parties. The Prophet was to return to Al-Madinah without visiting the Ka’bah, but in the following year he might perform the pilgrimage with his comrades, Quraysh promising to evacuate Makkah for three days to allow of his doing so. Deserters from Quraysh to the Muslims during the period of the truce were to be returned; not so deserters from the Muslims to Quraysh. Any tribe or clan who wished to share in, the treaty as allies of the Prophet might do so, and any tribe or clan who wished to share in the treaty as allies of Quraysh might do so.

There was dismay among the Muslims at these terms. They asked one another: “Where is the victory that we were promised?” It was during the return journey from Al-Hudaybiyah that the Surah entitled “Victory” was revealed. This truce

proved, in fact, to be the greatest victory that the Muslims had till then achieved. War had been a barrier between them and the idolaters, but now both parties met and talked together, and the new religion spread more rapidly. In the two years which elapsed between the signing of the truce and the fall of Makkah the number of converts was greater than the total number of all previous converts. The Prophet traveled to Al-Hudaybiyah with 1400 men. Two years later, when the Makkans broke the truce, he marched against them with an army of 10,000.

The
Campaign of Khaybar

One of the forts of
Khaybar, which is over 100 kms outside Madina

In the seventh year
or the Hijrah the Prophet led a campaign against Khaybar, the stronghold of the Jewish tribes in North Arabia, which had become a hornets' nest of his enemies. The forts of Khaybar were reduced one by one, and the Jews of Khaybar became thenceforth tenants of the Muslims until the expulsion of the Jews from Arabia in the 'Caliphate of Omar.' On the day when the last fort surrendered Ja'far son of Abu Talib, the Prophet's first cousin, arrived with all who remained of the Muslims who had fled to Abyssinia to escape from persecution in the early days.

They had been absent from Arabia fifteen years. It was at Khaybar that a Jewess prepared for the Prophet poisoned meat, of which he only tasted a morsel without swallowing it, and then warned his comrades that it was poisoned. One Muslim, who had already swallowed a mouthful, died immediately, and the Prophet himself, from the mere taste of it, derived the illness which eventually caused his death. The woman who had cooked the meat was brought before him. When she said that she had done it on account of the humiliation of her people, he forgave her.

Pilgrimage
to Makkah

In the same year
the Prophet's vision was fulfilled: he visited the holy place at Makkah unopposed. In accordance with the terms of the truce the idolaters evacuated the city, and from the surrounding heights watched the procedure of the Muslims. At the end of the stipulated three days the chiefs of Quraysh sent to remind the Prophet that the time was up. He then withdrew, and the idolaters reoccupied the city.

Mu'tah
Expedition

In the eighth year
of the Hijrah, hearing that the Byzantine emperor was gathering a force in Syria for the destruction of Islam, the Prophet sent three thousand men to Syria under the command of his freedman Zayd. The campaign was unsuccessful except that it impressed the Syrians with a notion of the reckless valor of the Muslims. The three thousand did not hesitate to join battle with a hundred thousand. When all the three leaders appointed by the Prophet had been killed, the survivors obeyed Khalid ibn al-Walid, who, by his strategy and courage, managed to preserve a remnant and return with them to Al-Madinah.

Truce
Broken by Quraysh
In the same year

Quraysh broke the truce by attacking a tribe that was in alliance with the Prophet and massacring them even in the sanctuary at Makkah. Afterwards they were afraid because of what they had done. They sent Abu Sufyan to Al-Madinah to ask for the existing treaty to be renewed and, its term prolonged. They hoped that he would arrive before the tidings of the massacre. But a messenger from the injured tribe had been before him, and his embassy was fruitless.

Conquest of

Makkah

Then the Prophet

summoned all the Muslims capable of bearing arms and marched to Makkah. Quraysh were overawed. Their cavalry put up a show of defence before the town, but were routed without bloodshed; and the Prophet entered his native city as conqueror. The inhabitants expected vengeance for their past misdeeds. The Prophet proclaimed a general amnesty. Only a few known criminals were proscribed, and most of those were in the end forgiven. In their relief and surprise, the whole population of Makkah hastened to swear allegiance. The Prophet caused all the idols which were in the sanctuary to be destroyed, saying: "Truth hath come; darkness hath vanished away;" and the Muslim call to prayer was heard in Makkah.

Battle of

Hunayn

In the same year

there was an angry gathering of pagan tribes eager to regain the Ka'bah. The Prophet led twelve thousand men against them. At Hunayn, in a deep ravine, his troops were ambushed by the enemy and almost put to flight. It was with difficulty that they were rallied to the Prophet and his bodyguard of faithful comrades who alone stood firm. But the victory, when it came, was complete and the booty enormous, for many of the hostile tribes had brought out with them everything that they possessed.

Conquest of

Ta'if

The

"Declaration of Immunity" marks the end of idol-worship in Arabia

The tribe of Thaqif

was among the enemy at Hunayn. After that victory their city of Ta'if was besieged by the Muslims, and finally reduced. Then the Prophet appointed a governor of Makkah, and himself returned to Al-Madinah to the boundless joy of the Ansar, who had feared lest, now that he had regained his native city, he might forsake them and make Makkah the capital.

The Tabuk

Expedition

In the ninth year

of the Hijrah, hearing that an army was again being mustered in Syria, the Prophet called on all the Muslims to support him in a great campaign. The far distance, the hot season, the fact that it was harvest time and the prestige of the enemy caused many to excuse themselves and many more to stay behind without excuse. Those defaulters are denounced in the Qur'an. But the campaign ended peacefully. The army advanced to Tabuk, on the confines of Syria, and there learnt that the enemy had not yet gathered.

Declaration

of Immunity

Although Makkah had

been conquered and its people were now Muslims, the official order of the pilgrimage had not been changed; the pagan Arabs performing it in

their manner, and the Muslims in their manner. It was only after the pilgrims' caravan had left Al-Madinah in the ninth year of the Hijrah, when Islam was dominant in North Arabia, that the Declaration of Immunity, as it is called, was revealed. The Prophet sent a copy of it by messenger to Abu Bakr, leader of the

pilgrimage, with the instruction that Ali was to read it to the multitudes at Makkah. Its purport was that after that year Muslims only were to make the pilgrimage, exception being made for such of the idolaters as had a treaty with the Muslims and had never broken their treaty nor supported anyone against them. Such were to enjoy the privileges of their treaty for the term thereof, but when their treaty expired they would be as other idolaters. That proclamation marks the end of

idol-worship in Arabia .

The Year of

Deputations

The ninth year of

the Hijrah is called the Year of Deputations, because from all parts of Arabia deputations came to Al-Madinah to swear allegiance to the Prophet and to hear the Qur'an. The Prophet had become, in fact, the emperor of Arabia, but his way of life remained as simple as before.

The number of the

campaigns which he led in person during the last ten years of his life is twenty-seven in nine of which there was hard fighting. The number of the expeditions which he planned and sent out under other leaders is thirty-eight. He personally controlled every detail of organization, judged every case and was accessible to every suppliant. In those ten years he destroyed idolatry in Arabia; raised women from the status of a cattle to legal equity with men; effectually stopped the drunkenness and immorality which had till then disgraced the Arabs; made men in love with faith, sincerity and honest dealing; transformed tribes who had been for centuries content with ignorance into a people with the greatest thirst for knowledge; and for the first time in history made universal human brotherhood a fact and principle of common law. And his support and guide in all that work was the Qur'an.

The Life of Prophet
Muhammad

PART III

The Final Days

By Mohammed Marmaduke
Pickthall

The Farewell Pilgrimage

A view of Mt. Arafat on which the Prophet gave his famous sermon

In the tenth year of the Hijrah the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) went to Makkah as a pilgrim for the last time – his “pilgrimage of farewell” it is called – when from Mt. ‘Arafat he preached to an enormous throng of pilgrims. He reminded them of all the duties Islam enjoined upon them, and that they would one day have to meet their Lord, who would judge each one of them according to his work. At the end of the discourse, he asked: “Have I not conveyed the Message?” And from that great multitude of men who a few months or years before had all been conscienceless idolaters the shout went up: “O Allah! Yes!” The Prophet said: “O Allah! Be Thou witness!”

Illness and Death of the Prophet

It was during that last pilgrimage that the surah entitled “Succor” was revealed, which he received as an announcement of approaching death. Soon after his return to Al-Madinah he fell ill. The tidings of his illness caused dismay throughout Arabia and anguish to the folk of Al-Madinah, Makkah and Ta’if, the hometowns. At early dawn on the last day of his earthly life he came out from his room beside the mosque at Al-Madinah and joined the public prayer, which Abu Bakr had been leading since his illness. And there was great relief among the people, who supposed him well again.

“For him who worshipped Muhammad, Muhammad is dead. But as for him who worships Allah, Allah is alive and dieth not.”

When, later in the day, the rumor grew that he was dead. Omar threatened those who spread the rumor with dire punishment, declaring it a crime to think that the Messenger of God could die. He was storming at the people in that strain when Abu Bakr came into the mosque and overheard him. Abu Bakr went to the chamber of his daughter Ayeshah, where the Prophet lay. Having ascertained the fact, and kissed the dead-man’s forehead, he went back into the mosque. The people were still listening to Omar, who was saying that the rumor was a wicked lie, that the Prophet who was all in all to them could not be dead. Abu Bakr went up to Omar and tried to stop him by a whispered word. Then, finding he would pay no heed, Abu Bakr called to the people, who, recognizing his voice, left Omar and came crowding round him. He first gave praise to Allah, and then said:

“O people! Lo! As for him who worshipped Muhammad, Muhammad is dead. But as for him who worships Allah, Allah is Alive and dieth not.” He then recited the verse of the Qur’an:

(And

Muhammad is but a messenger, messengers the like of whom have passed away before him. Will it be that, when he dieth or is slain, ye will turn back on your heels? He who turneth back doth no hurt to Allah, and Allah will reward the thankful.)

The Qur’an has
been very carefully preserved

“And,”

says the narrator: an eye-witness, “it was as if the people had not known that such a verse had been revealed till Abu Bakr recited it.” And another witness tells how Omar used to say: “Directly I heard Abu Bakr recite that verse my feet were cut from beneath me and I fell to the ground, for I knew that Allah’s messenger was dead, May Allah bless and keep him!”

All the

surahs of the Qur’an had been recorded in writing before the Prophet’s death, and many Muslims had committed the whole Qur’an to memory. But the written surahs were dispersed among the people; and when, in a battle which took place during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr – that is to say, within two years of the Prophet’s death – a large number of those who knew the whole Qur’an by heart were killed, a collection of the whole Qur’an was made and put in writing. In the Caliphate of Othman, all existing copies of surahs were called in, and an authoritative version, based on Abu Bakr’s collection and the testimony of those who had the whole Qur’an by heart, was compiled exactly in the present form and order, which is regarded as traditional and as the arrangement of the Prophet himself, the Caliph Othman and his helpers being Comrades of the Prophet and the most devout students of the Revelation. The Qur’an has thus been very carefully preserved.

Reference URL:

<http://www.islamonline.net/English/introducingislam/Prophet/Life/article01.shtml>
Taken, with some editorial
changes, from Pickthall’s introduction to his translation of the Qur’an.