


 CHAPTER
10

 HISTORYMAKERS **Muhammad**
The Messenger of Allah

Section 1

"Believers, if you help Allah, Allah will help you and make you strong. But the unbelievers shall be [sent to eternal damnation]. He will bring their deeds to nothing. Because they have opposed His revelations, He will frustrate their works."—Qur'an, Surah 47

Muhammad loved spending afternoons meditating in the caves around his hometown of Mecca, which is located in modern Saudi Arabia. In A.D. 610, his normal routine was interrupted when he saw a vision of the archangel Gabriel. Gabriel told Muhammad to preach the word of Allah, the one God, to the world. As a result, Muhammad formed the beginnings of a unified state for his people and founded one of the great religions of the world.

Muhammad had had a difficult childhood. His father passed away around the time he was born, and six years later his mother died. He was then raised by a grandfather and later by an uncle. Muhammad suffered financially from these personal tragedies and was left to make his own way in the world.

However, Muhammad possessed both an intelligent mind and leadership ability. When he was in his twenties, a wealthy widow named Khadijah hired him to conduct some business for her in Syria. Pleased with his work, she married Muhammad. From then on, he was comfortable materially.

Muhammad had a deeply spiritual nature. It was about this time, at the age of 40, when he saw the vision of Gabriel, the messenger for Allah. This experience led to a profound turning point for Muhammad and the world. These visions recurred intermittently for the rest of his life.

For two or three years, Muhammad told only his wife and closest friends of these visitations and the message. They became the first followers of the new religion of Islam. In 612 or 613, Muhammad began to spread his message in public. He quickly won converts from among the young men of Mecca—and opponents from among the wealthy merchants of the town. These merchants thought Muhammad was crazy and disliked his call to end differences in status between rich and poor. The merchants and others harassed Muhammad and his followers, now called Muslims. The merchants threw stones and thorns at Muhammad as he walked through the town and boycotted Islamic businesses.

Two factors protected the Muslims in these difficult times. One was the support of Abu Bakr, a

local merchant who was a believer. The other was the protection given Muhammad by Abu-Talib, his uncle and the head of their clan. In 619, though, his uncle died, and the new head of the clan was unwilling to continue this protection.

The situation grew worse for the small Islamic community. Muhammad carried on secret talks with the people of a nearby town where some of his followers had settled. That place was Yathrib, which was later renamed Medina. In 622, Muhammad moved to the town, whose people agreed to accept him as their political leader. Many of them also converted to Islam.

Muslims soon began to raid trading caravans from Mecca—a common practice at the time. In 624, Muhammad led an attack on Meccan soldiers. The Meccans tried to punish Muhammad with an assault the next year, but the Muslims retained control of Yathrib. Two years later, the Meccans sent 10,000 soldiers to attack. Muhammad arranged a strong defense and the Meccans eventually withdrew. Within three years, the tide had turned completely. This time Muhammad led a force of 10,000 into Mecca and took control of the city.

Muhammad lived only two more years. During that time, he consolidated his power. He forged alliances with leaders of local nomadic peoples and sometimes arranged political marriages. When he died, he had created a strong political structure that was ready to expand in power. He had also founded one of the world's major religions.

Questions

1. **Recognizing Facts and Details** Why was Muhammad's early life difficult?
2. **Making Inferences** What evidence is there that Muhammad was a good businessman and a shrewd leader?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** Why did the Meccan merchants object to Muhammad's message?