PORTRAITS OF MOHAMMED:

ALLAH’S PROPHET

***ORPHAN AND SHEPHERD*** – Mohammed was born into a reputable family of the Koreish tribe in Mecca (now part of Saudi Arabia) around 570-571 CE. At the time, Mecca was the trading capital of the Arab world.

Mohammed’s early life was marked by poverty. His father died just before he was born and his mother died when he was 6 years old. Mohammed was raised initially by his grandfather and later by his uncle who was a merchant. Mohammed worked for his uncle as a camel and sheep herder. Mohammed showed an early interest in religion: his aunt described him as, “a child of visions”.

QUESTIONS

1. When and where was Mohammed born?

2. Describe the early life of Mohammed?

*C****ARAVAN DRIVER*** – As a teenager, Mohammed worked for his uncle as a caravan driver. He transported his uncle’s spices to Syria and Palestine. His honest dealings earned him the title, “Al-Amin” which means trustworthy. On his journeys, he camped out with Christians and Jews who shared their religious stories with him. Mohammed had grown up in a city where idol worship was widely practiced. He considered all religions to be corrupt and ineffective, but he also concluded that underlying all religions was a common belief in the same God.

QUESTIONS

1. What did Mohammed do for a living? How did this help him to learn about other religions?

2. What did Mohammed believe all religions have in common?

***MARRIAGE TO KHADIJAH*** – In his early twenties Mohammed went to work as a trader for a rich widow named Khadijah. She was so impressed with Mohammed that she asked him to marry her. Despite the difference in their ages, he was 25 years old and she was forty, it was a happy marriage that lasted 26 years until the death of Khadijah. Through the marriage, Mohammed was able to join a rich trading family with valuable connections. They traded with Christian merchants in Ethiopia and Jewish merchants in North Arabia.

Mohammed and Khadijah had 6 children: all but one daughter (Fatima) died. Mohammed could have had an easy life, but he was troubled by the death of his children and the religious conditions of Mecca. Many Meccans spent their time gambling, drinking, and sacrificing animals to idols of many gods. Mohammed was worried that they would be punished on the final day of judgement.

Mohammed often went away to the caves outside of Mecca to meditate on these problems. Khadijah was very supportive of her husband and encouraged him in his religious pursuits.

QUESTIONS

1. Who was Khadijah?

2. In what ways did Mohammed’s marriage influence his religious life?

***THE NIGHT OF POWER AND EXCELLENCE*** – Mohammed would often go to the caves outside the city of Mecca to meditate on religious issues. In the year 610 CE during a visit to a cave on Mount Hira, Mohammed had an experience that changed his life forever. While he was sleeping, the Angel Gabriel (pronounced Jibreel in Arabic) appeared to him with a message from Allah. Mohammed was to act as God’s prophet. He was to tell the people of Mecca that there is only one God and that he was God’s messenger. This night is known to Muslims as, “The Night of Power and Excellence.”

Over the next 23 years Mohammed received revelations from the Angel Gabriel. Since Mohammed could not read or write, he memorized the Angel’s messages and recited them to his close friend Abu Bakr who wrote them down in a book which later was called “the readings” or AL KORAN.

QUESTIONS

1. Where did Mohammed like to go to meditate?

2. What happened on the NIGHT OF POWER AND EXCELLENCE? (2 things)

3. Where were these events recorded?

***THE HEGIRA (HIJRAH)*** – For three years Mohammed visited the cave on Mount Hira and listened to the revelations about Allah from the Angel Gabriel. At this time, Mohammed was instructed to warn the people of Mecca about their evil ways. They were to stop worshipping false gods. Mohammed told the Meccans that Allah was the only God, that He was the creator of the world and that there would be a day of judgement when every man and woman would be sent to Heaven or Hell.

Some of the Meccans became his followers, but many thought that Mohammed was either lying or crazy. Many followers were beaten and tortured. The merchants in Mecca were threatened by Mohammed’s revelations because they profited by selling religious idols to Meccans and pilgrims who came to Mecca to worship false gods. Death threats were made against Mohammed.

People from the nearby community of Medina who had heard Mohammed’s message asked him to go and live with them. This event in Mohammed’s life is known as the HEGIRA, meaning flight or departure. It occurred in the year 622CE. It marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar because the first Islamic community was established in Medina.

QUESTIONS

1. What was Mohammed’s message to the Meccans? How was it received?

2. Where did Mohammed go when he left Mecca? Why is this event important to Muslims? (two reasons)