The Islamic Empire
By Cory

Long ago, almost one and a half centuries ago, the lands of Arabia were about to witness a spectacular event. The country was one in terrible turmoil; war followed war, brother fought brother, tribe fought tribe. It was at this time that a great man founded the religion that today has more followers than any other. He founded, also, a great new empire that spanned from Spain to India. This man was none other than Muhammad, his religion, Islam, and his legacy, great. Muhammad put an end to this troubled epoch of terror in Arabia and united these people as one. His followers spread his glory after his death and in one hundred years built a great empire. The Islamic Empire was one of the most important influential and cultural events in history.

The Prophet

In the sixth century Arabia was "a country of gross idolatry, superstition, ignorance, and intemperance" (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 185). "At that time, many of the people of the Arabian Peninsula worshiped many gods" (Saudi-Arabia, 1999 World Book Encyclopedia PC CD-ROM) and many lived in poverty.

Not all of the Arabs were involved in the warfare of these troubled times. One of these was Muhammad who "worshiped one God" (Saudi-Arabia, 1999 World Book Encyclopedia PC CD-ROM). In an amazingly rapid time, "one man, Mohammed, by the force of his tremendous personality, completely transformed the life of this people; in the incredibly short space of twenty odd years he united them in the bonds of a lasting faith and laid the foundations of a mighty empire" (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 185).

In about the year 570, "Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was born in Mecca about A.D. 570" (Saudi-Arabia, 1999 World Book Encyclopedia PC CD-ROM). Muhammad's clan was "the powerful Koreish to which all the Meccan notables belonged" (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 185).

Both of his parents had died while he was very young. His father had died before Muhammad was even born and his mother when he was six. Muhammad, therefore, was raised by his kindhearted uncle, Abu Taleb. (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 185). Abu Taleb, a merchant, strongly believed in people working very hard for what they needed or wanted, as did many people of the time, and soon Muhammad had become the head of his uncle's caravans (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 185).

Muhammad traveled to far off lands in his trading journeys. He learned much of these exotic places from the people there. He was very interested in these people, their cultures, and most of all, their religions. Muhammad learned of these religions and often thought about them, though there was not much time for him to stop in rest in his busy working schedule.

Muhammad was an excellent worker who obediently brought the profits gained back to his employer. A rich widow, Khadija, who's late husband was in the trading business, and, when he died, she took over his business, heard of Muhammad and how highly regarded a worker he was, and offered him a job. Muhammad accepted and later he and Khadija were married. They had seven children but only one girl, Fatima, lived to grow up.
Muhammad, now that he was part of a rich family, had more time to rest and think about the religions that he had learned about in his travels, and had interested him so much. He would sit at Mount Hira for very long amounts of time thinking. Sometimes he would doze off. One time, Muhammad had a revelation where an angel named Gabriel told him that he had been sent by Allah, the one God, to tell Muhammad that he was the prophet of Allah. Muhammad hurried back to the town and told Khadija, who believed him immediately and became his first convert, and then told others in his family and those who were his close friends. Many of them converted to this new faith and began to worship Allah and listen to Muhammad's teachings of the word of Allah, which Muhammad learned from Gabriel in more visions.

Some of the most important people in Muhammad's early, rather small group of followers were Abu Bekr, who was a rich merchant and a very good friend of Muhammad, (Abu Bekr was to become the first Caliph) and his uncle, Abu Taleb's, young son, Ali, whom Muhammad had brought into his home to be taken care of (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 187). Many people in Mecca began to suspect and be against Muhammad and his followers and many of these Muslims, as the followers of Muhammad's faith, Islam, are called, fled from Mecca to places where the people welcomed them and some of these friendly people even converted when Muhammad's followers told them about Islam. In the year of 622, Muhammad himself and his remaining followers escaped to the city of Medina (Saudi-Arabia, 1999 World Book Encyclopedia PC CD-ROM).

The year 622 is known as the "Hegira", or the "Year of the Flight or Emigration" and marks the beginning of the Muslim Calendar (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 188). In Medina, Muhammad converted the city to the Islamic faith and later he, and his successors, expanded from Medina and built an advanced and powerful Islamic Empire. "Only a man of burning sincerity, utter integrity, could have established a Faith which today draws more converts than any other religion" (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 191).

Unification of Arabia

Shortly after Muhammad's journey to Medina, the town rose up in support for him and it soon became the first Islamic city. During "the Fourth Year of the Flight, news reached Mohammed that Abu Jahl with an army of a thousand men was marching towards Medina" (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 189). Muhammad was in a tough position, for he was strongly against any fighting or bloodshed, but, he had to fight these enemies to defend Islam and it's followers (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 189).

Unfortunately, "Mohammed could only muster some three hundred ill-trained, poorly armed men, but undaunted he led them out of the city and decided to make his stand at Jadr, a sandy plain crossed by a brook which had been dammed here and there to form reservoirs" (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 189). Muhammad had to think fast and eventually devised a strategy in which he had his troops defending the reservoir that was closest to where the enemy was coming from and they would also be blocking the others, giving his army the heavy advantage of possessing all of the water in the battlefield (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 189). The battle soon ensued and "Mohammed, watching the progress of the battle from a hill, saw that the Meccan troops, forced to fight in the
blazing heat, unable to quench their thirst, were nevertheless gaining the upper hand" (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 189-190).

In his frustration, Muhammad scooped up a handful of sand and threw it at Abu Jahl's men, yelling "Confusion on your faces!" (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 190). To everyone's surprise, a large sandstorm seemed to just appear out of nowhere and the burning grains of sand made the enemy's lines fall back. (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 190).

Muhammad's rival was enraged at seeing his army falling back. "On, on!" Abu Jahl yelled, and he charged forward on his horse and engaged in deadly combat with a Muslim officer and, after furious fighting, was knocked off of his horse and then his foe smote off his head with his scimitar (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 190). Now, Abu Sofian became the new Meccan leader in Abu Jahl's place.

Muhammad and his army advanced across the desert from Medina to Mecca and, on the way, many Bedouin warriors joined him and Muhammad led an army of about ten thousand men on Mecca. (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 191). The Meccans and their leader, Abu Sofian, quickly, but unhappily, surrendered and Muhammad and his followers entered the city. (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 191). The Prophet captured the city of Mecca in the year 630 (Saudi-Arabia, 1999 World Book Encyclopedia PC CD-ROM). Muhammad acted honorably to his enemies: There was no fighting or bloodshed and Muhammad even spared the life of his foe, Abu Sofian. (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 191).

"Abu Sofian and all the Meccans professed Islam" (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 191). Muhammad had returned the city which had once rejected him and now, he and his religion were accepted. With the capture of Mecca "Mohammed, now virtually ruler of Arabia, dispatched ambassadors to Rome, Egypt, Persia, Abyssinia to spread the Faith". (Cummins, 100 Great Kings, Queens and Rulers of the World, 191). "The power of Muhammad and his followers meant that Arabia had become the first Islamic country" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12).

**War Against the Byzantine Empire**

North of Arabia lay the powerful Byzantine Empire which was the surviving half of the ancient Roman Empire and, not too long ago, under their great Emperor Justinian, they had captured much territory which stretched "from North Africa, Egypt and Syria, to Asia Minor" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12). After Muhammad had died, his followers made war against this foreign power (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12). Around the middle of the seventh century, the caliphs, who were Muhammad's successors, led the Islamic armies to almost constant victories against the surrounding empires and carved out a powerful empire of their own (Saudi-Arabia, 1999 World Book Encyclopedia PC CD-ROM).

In the earlier part of the year 634, "the Muslim leader, Abu Bakr, called for a jihad, or holy war" (Ed. Zevin, King Fisher Illustrated History of the World, 176). The fierce and powerful Muslim warriors, riding on their camels and horses, attacked vast areas of the Byzantine Empire (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12). In an extremely
fast amount of time, vast areas of the Byzantine Empire surrendered to these powerful Islamic Armies (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12). Before the close of the year 635, the Muslim armies captured most of Syria and Palestine and in 636 they had won the decisive Battle of Yarmuk near the Yarmuk River, where about 25,000 Muslim troops, defeated the 50,000 heavily trained and armored Byzantine troops (Ed. Zevin, King Fisher Illustrated History of the World, 176). "By 642, only 10 years after the Prophet's death, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt had been conquered" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12).

"Another army headed west to capture Egypt from the Byzantines by 642" (Ed. Zevin, King Fisher Illustrated History of the World, 176). In about the year 661, most of the Byzantine territory in North Africa was under Arab control" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12). The people in these areas, "although Christians, often welcomed the Muslims" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12). The Byzantine rulers demanded extremely heavy taxes and "had been unpopular" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12). The Muslim armies attacked the Byzantine capitol of Constantinople but were beaten off in the year 747

**Conquests in Lands North, West, and East of Arabia**

Around the year 700 marks that "most of the north coast of Africa was under Muslim control" (Ed. Zevin, King Fisher Illustrated History of the World, 176). "Berbers and Arabs from Morocco invaded Spain in 711" (Ed. Zevin, King Fisher Illustrated History of the World, 176). "Far away in the west, Muslim forces from North Africa crossed the Mediterranean in 710, and quickly conquered much of Spain. France was their next target, but here at last the Muslim advance stopped at Poitiers when their armies were defeated by the Franks in 732" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12-13).

Traveling Eastward from Syria and Palestine, "the Muslim armies moved through lands which had belonged to the Sassanid rulers, enemies of the Byzantines" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12). Soon, "Iraq, Persia, and Afghanistan were conquered" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 12). These Islamic Armies then "pushed east into Afghanistan and reached India early in the 8th century" (Ed. Zevin, King Fisher Illustrated History of the World, 176).

**The Future of the Empire**

Medina remained the capital of the Empire until about 660 when Caliph Muawiya moved the capital to Damascus, in Syria (Saudi-Arabia, 1999 World Book Encyclopedia PC CD-ROM). By the early 700's "a massive area of Islamic rule had already been formed, stretching from Spain in the west to the borders of India in the east" (Powell, Modern Knowledge Library: The Rise of Islam, 13). "Most conquered peoples became Muslims and Arabic became the most important language in all parts of the Islamic Empire except for Persia" (Ed. Zevin, King Fisher Illustrated History of the World, 176).
Many people in this modern era don't understand the Muslim religion and lands. Many people come to false conclusions about many things about Islam without understanding it at all! During Muhammad's lifetime, many of the Arabians were fighting each other to settle their differences, but Muhammad stepped up and brought peace and unification to the lands. He and his followers were even attacked for having different beliefs than the other Arabs. After Muhammad's death his followers conquered much territory and brought peace to these lands too. The Islamic Empire was the inventing site of many things that influence our lives today; it was the Arabs who even brought mail delivery into such use as we know of today. The Europeans were also greatly influenced by the Muslims, of whom gave them many ancient Roman and Greek artifacts which the Arabs rescued from destruction which could have befallen these precious items of the past in almost constant warfare between the fiefdoms of Europe. We owe much today to Muhammad, Islam, and the Islamic Empire.