

# The Beginning of the Beginning

Hijrah

By [AElfwine Mischler](#)

Although Muslims do not actually celebrate the Muslim new year in the way other people celebrate their respective new year, the first day of the lunar month of Muharram is a legal holiday in many Muslim countries.

The Islamic calendar is counted from the year of Prophet Muhammad's flight from Makkah to Madinah in September 622 CE, known as the Hijrah (or hegira in English from Latin from Arabic). This journey is one of the most important events in Islamic history.

The early Muslims in Makkah were harshly persecuted and tortured by the ruling pagan Quraysh tribe. The Muslims were few in number and many of them were slaves. With no power to repel their persecutors, they could only wait patiently until Allah (God) opened a way for them.

In the twelfth year of the Prophet's mission, 12 men from the city of Yathrib (later to be known as Madinah) came to Makkah during the Hajj season and met with Muhammad at Al-`Aqabah. Having heard of his mission, they became Muslim and pledged their faith in the first covenant of Al-`Aqabah. The Prophet sent Mus`ab ibn `Umayr back to Yathrib with them to teach them the religion. Mus`ab succeeded in converting many of the people of Yathrib to Islam. The following year, in June 622 CE, 73 men and 2 women from Yathrib came to the Prophet during the Hajj and pledged allegiance to him in the second covenant of Al-`Aqabah. They promised to protect him and help the Muslims of Makkah to resettle in their city.

This delegation was the core of what came to be known as Al-Ansar, the Helpers, the Muslims who were natives of Yathrib, later known as Al-Madinah Al-Munawwara—the Illuminated City—or Madinah. The Muslims gradually left Makkah a few at a time so as not to attract the attention of the Quraysh. Eventually the Quraysh realized what was happening and tried to stop many of them from leaving. History tells many stories of these men and women who gave up their homes, wealth, and families to be able to freely practice their religion in Madinah.

---

It is significant that when the second caliph standardized the Muslim chronology,

---

Only after several months did Allah grant the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) permission to leave Makkah. Shortly before his departure, Jibreel (Angel Gabriel) told Muhammad that the Quraysh had devised a plot to stab him while he was sleeping. On the night of the

---

he chose the Hijrah as the starting point.

---

planned assassination, his cousin `Ali ibn Abi Talib slept in Muhammad's bed while the latter escaped with his friend Abu Bakr As-Siddiq to a cave south of Makkah, opposite the direction to Madinah. Fortunately for `Ali, the assassins looked at his face before stabbing him and left him alone when they realized they had been outwitted.

Muhammad and Abu Bakr hid in the cave for three days while the Quraysh searched all around Makkah. At one point, their enemies were only a few feet away outside the cave, but Allah protected them by simple everyday "miracles." A spider spun its web across the mouth of the cave, pigeons nested and laid eggs in front of it, and the branches of a small tree blocked it. Thus the pursuers assumed no one had entered the cave recently and did not search it.

The two then made their way, led by a pagan guide, to Madinah via a coastal route to throw off the pursuit. When they finally arrived in Madinah, Muhammad let his camel wander where it willed until it sat in one place. The owners of the land where the camel sat were paid, and the Prophet's mosque and living quarters were built on the site while the Prophet and Abu Bakr lived as guests of the Ansar.

---

The Hijrah was also significant for the unselfish brotherhood demonstrated by the Ansar towards the Muhajirun

---

The Hijrah, at last, gave the Muslims a place where they could openly declare their Islam and worship in peace. It was the beginning of the Islamic state. The Qur'anic verses revealed in Makkah had dealt mainly with the nature of Allah and man's relationship to Him. In Makkah, there had been very few households in which all of the members were Muslims. At the time, Islam appeared to be concerned only with the individual and the hereafter. In contrast, the verses revealed in Madinah dealt more with man's relationships with others—the social, political, and economic aspects of Islam that could not be developed under persecution.

The Hijrah was also significant for the unselfish brotherhood demonstrated by the Ansar towards the Muhajirun (immigrants from Makkah). The Ansar were not wealthy, yet they took in the Muhajirun, shared their food and homes with them, and helped to establish them in trade or work. Further, the Ansar were well aware that by doing so they were challenging the Quraysh and all the pagan tribes of the whole Arabian Peninsula. Indeed, the pagans did launch several battles in an attempt to snuff out the nascent Muslim state. But the Ansar remained faithful

followers of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and were always loved and praised by him.

It was the second caliph, `Umar ibn Al-Khattab, who chose the year of Hijrah to be the starting point of the Muslim calendar. Before that, each province marked the years as the nth year in the reign of so-and-so, or the year when such-and-such happened. `Umar standardized the chronology, and it is significant that he chose the Hijrah—rather than the birth or death of Muhammad or the first revelation of the Qur'an—as the starting point. The Hijrah was the beginning of Islam as a complete way of life affecting all aspects of Man's existence.

Sources:

- Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, Isma`il Ragi A. al-Faruqi, trans. (North American Trust Publications, 1976)
- Saifur Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, [\*Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum \(The Sealed Nectar\): Memoirs of the Noble Prophet \(pbuh\)\*](#), Issam Diab, trans. (Dar-us-Salam Publishers)

---

**AElfwine Mischler** is an American revert to Islam. She has undergraduate degrees in physics and English, and a master's degree in linguistics and teaching English as a foreign language. She is the Copyediting Unit Head in IslamOnline.net.

### Related Links

- [The Life of Prophet Muhammad - Part III](#)
- [The Beginning of the Beginning](#)
- [The Prophet's Life - Part I](#)
- [The Life of Prophet Muhammad - Part II](#)