

TALES OF PERSIA

MISSIONARY STORIES FROM ISLAMIC IRAN

WILLIAM MCELWEE MILLER

ILLUSTRATED BY BRUCE VAN PATER



P U B L I S H I N G

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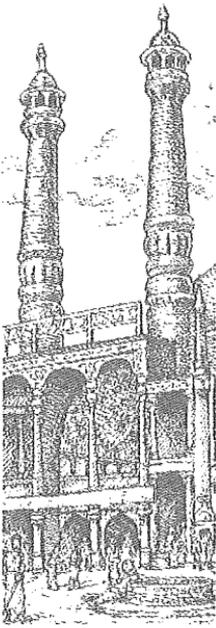
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1

THE STORY OF MUHAMMAD AND THE RELIGION OF ISLAM

You remember that I promised to tell you about the religion of the Muslims and about their prophet Muhammad. It is a most interesting story. Muhammad was born in A.D. 570, in the city of Mecca in Arabia. Most of the people of Arabia at that time worshiped idols, and there was a famous idol temple in Mecca. They knew that there was a great God, whom they called *Allah*, but few of the Arabians worshiped him. When Muhammad was a young man, he met some Jews and Christians who did not worship idols but were worshipers of the unseen God. Then, when he was forty years of age, he thought he saw an angel who told him that Allah had appointed him to be a prophet and that he must tell the people to worship only Allah, not idols. So Muhammad began to



preach. He told the Arabs that one day Allah would raise all the dead people to life. He would take all who had worshiped him and done good deeds to heaven, and he would send those who did not worship him to hell.

A few people believed in Muhammad, but most of the people of Mecca would not listen to him. However, he continued to preach for thirteen years in Mecca. Finally, there was so much opposition to him and his preaching against the idols Muhammad and his followers left Mecca in A.D. 622. They went to Medina, another city in Arabia, about two hundred miles north of Mecca. There the people received Muham-

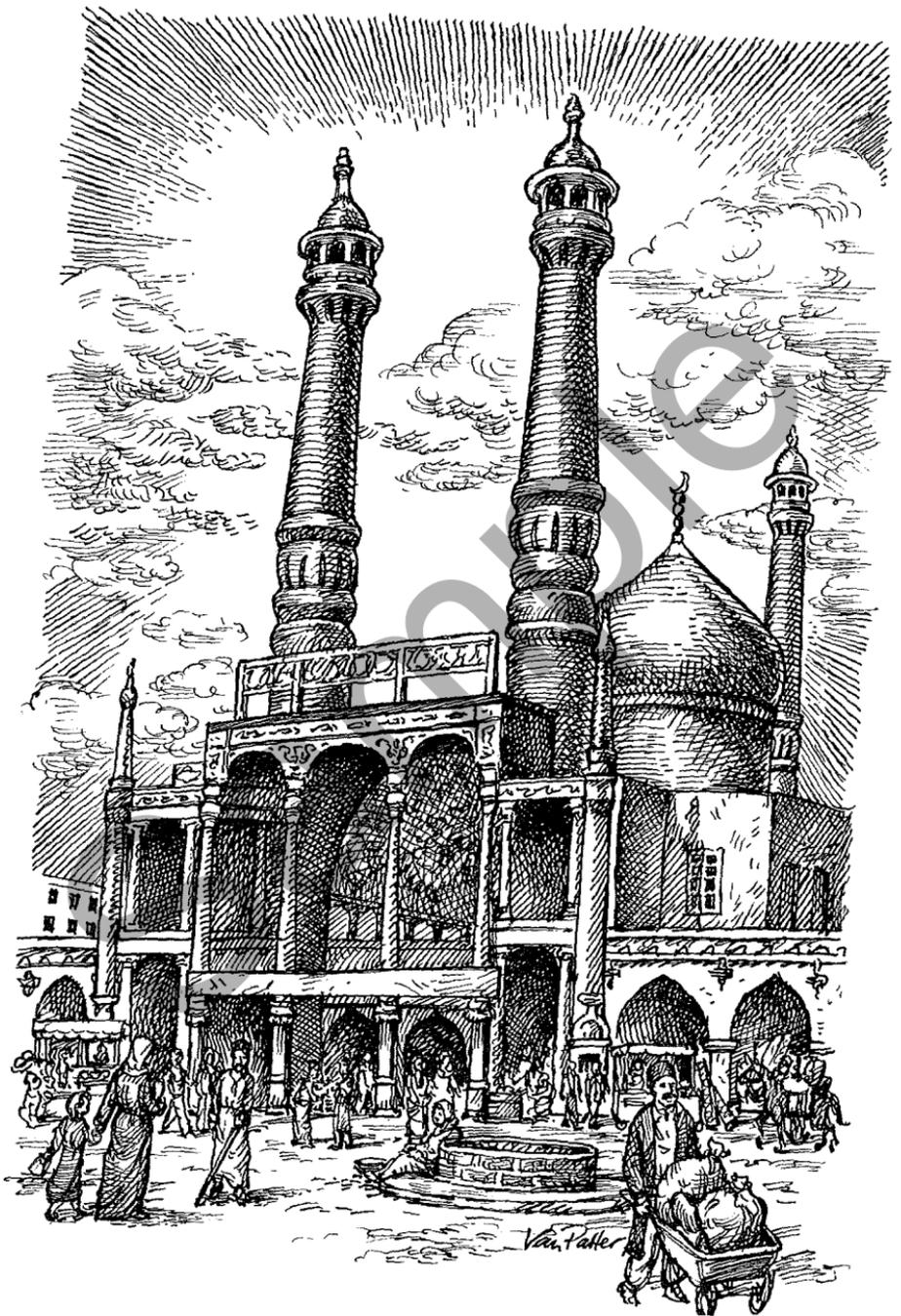
mad and made him their chief, and many believed him to be the prophet of Allah. Before long he began to fight with his enemies in Mecca, and he defeated them. At last he was able to capture their city. When he entered Mecca without a battle, he threw out the idols from the idol temple and made it the center of the religion of Islam.

After that, most of the people of Arabia quickly submitted to Muhammad, and he became their political and their religious ruler. His followers were called *Muslims*, because in the Arabic language the word *muslim* means "one who submits," and they had submitted to Muhammad and to Allah, who they believed had sent Muhammad. After the death of Muhammad in A.D. 632, the Muslim armies soon conquered most of the nearby countries. Later this religion spread westward to Spain, eastward to India, and southward to Africa.

Now let me tell you what the Muslims believe. They believe that God, whom they call Allah, is the one true God who made all things and who has all knowledge and power. He made man to obey and serve him; and when people disobeyed, he sent prophets to tell them what to do and what not to do. Muslims think that there were many prophets, perhaps 124,000 of them, but they do not know the names of most of them. They say that there were five very great prophets: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. They believe that Muhammad is the last and the greatest of God's prophets. They think that God gave books to each of the great prophets, as well as to some other prophets. They call the book that they say was given to Jesus *Injil*. They believe that God sent messages in the Arabic language to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Muhammad told the people these messages, which were written down by those who heard them. Later they were collected in a book called the *Koran*. Muslims believe that the *Koran* is the very Word of God and that it should be read in the Arabic language.

What do Muslims know about Jesus Christ? The *Koran* says that Jesus was a very great prophet, born of the Virgin Mary, but that he was not the Son of God. It also says that Jesus performed wonderful miracles, that he healed the sick people and even raised the dead to life. But it says that he did not die on the cross, for God performed a miracle to save Jesus from death. They say that God changed one of Jesus' enemies to look like Jesus and that this man was crucified in place of Jesus. Then, they say, God took Jesus to heaven, where he is now. They believe that Jesus is alive and that he





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will come to earth again and will punish all who do not accept Muhammad. So you see that though Muslims think highly of our Savior Jesus Christ, they do not really know him. They do not know that he is the Son of God and that he loved us so much that he died on the cross to save us from sin and that he rose from the grave alive. They wrongly think that Muhammad took the place of Jesus. They say that people no longer need Jesus and his teachings—all must now submit to Muhammad and the Koran.

Muslims believe that there will be a day of resurrection, when God will raise all the dead people to life, judge them, and send some of them to heaven and some to hell. If people want to get to heaven, they must do certain things. First, they must say the creed of Islam, which is “There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is Allah’s Messenger.” Then they must worship Allah every day. To do this, they must put some water on their hands and feet, stand facing the city of Mecca, and recite some Arabic sentences. As they do this, they must bow, kneel, touch their foreheads to the ground, rise again, and repeat this ritual several times. This must be done early in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Many Muslims perform these acts of worship five times each day.

Muslims must also keep the fast of Ramadan. From the time when they first see the new moon in the Muslim month of Ramadan to the next new moon, about twenty-nine days, they are not permitted to eat any food or taste any drink from daylight in the morning till after sunset at night. But all during the night they are allowed to eat and drink. It is hard for working people to keep the fast, especially in hot weather. Muslims also must give money to poor people. Some give pennies to beg-

gars, and others sometimes give large sums for hospitals or schools.

Once in his life, every Muslim who has the money should make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Those who do this gain the title of *Hajji*. Many people in Iran who can't go all the way to Mecca make pilgrimages to Meshed or other cities in which the tombs of descendants of Muhammad are located. Since the followers of the religion of Islam do not have a savior, they hope that by making pilgrimages and doing the other things I have told you about they may please God and get him to forgive their sins and take them to heaven when they die. But they are never sure whether they will go to heaven or to hell when they die.

Many of the Muslim people in Iran were very kind to me. I love them, and I long for them to know and love the Savior Jesus Christ, who died to save them. While I was in Iran, I was happy to know devoted Christians who had been Muslims. The stories of some of these Christians have been told in *Ten Muslims Meet Christ*.¹ But in this little book I want to tell my grandchildren, and other children who love Jesus, some stories about other people in Iran and about interesting experiences I had there. In several stories the names I give to my Iranian friends are not their real names.

Remember that I first went to Iran many years ago, and the conditions in that country as described in some of my stories were then very different from what they are now. Today fine highways have been built, and one can travel all over Iran by bus, train, or plane. Iran has become one of the great oil-

1. William M. Miller, *Ten Muslims Meet Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969).