

A Life of Prophet Muhammad In Twenty Tales

By Abd-El-Tawab Youssef

English Translation by Mohamed Enani

A bibliography of the Prophet Muhammad, told by various unusual speakers—animals, plants, rocks etc. and the book is addressed primarily to young Muslim readers. However, the literary quality and the novel presentation of the biography, as well as meticulous commitment to historical fact, recommended to older audiences, regardless of religious creed. A bestseller, repeatedly printed and admired by readers of all types throughout the Arab world, the book is a contribution to the new wave of children's literature designed to stimulate the imagination of the young and encourage them to respond positively to fresh reinterpretations of history.

I AM A BOOK

--which makes me very happy.

I feel that I am the most precious thing on earth, that my paper is more precious than securities and banknotes! The reason is simple:

- When God wanted to guide people to the right path, He sent them a book! A sacred book! All revelations are books—the Torah, the Gospel, the Quran.
- I am a book about Mohammad, the last of God's prophets and messengers, sent to all people, advocating Right, Goodness, Love and peace to everybody everywhere.
- I am a book addressed to the young, who are innocent and pure of heart, beloved by God and Mohammad, God's noble messenger.

Being so pleased with my name, my title and my readers, I had to say these words by way of introducing myself, as well as the tales printed on my pages. They are all real and true ones; they have all taken place, and all are truthful, though told by animals and inanimate things. I am sure, dear readers, that you like to hear these tales as told by them!

All that the tales includes is reported by the Holy Quran, the Prophet's Tradition and his biography. These are many and varied, and you shall read them all when you grow up and become righteous believers. Author Abdel-Tawab Youssef has read them and now presents the Prophet in this novel way.

I am sure you will read them all with great interest and pleasure; that you will enjoy the lovely incidents recorded, and the lofty ideals dealt with; and that read them over again and again. You will, I am sure, always, remember those incidents and ideals, that you will love the noble Prophet with all your hearts, and that you will always try to follow such a great example of morality.

You must be now eager to learn about these 'incidents'! Well, turn over the page, and read on!

I AM AN ELEPHANT

I have a big long trunk. But I do not live in a jungle or in the zoo. In fact, I lived in times long gone. I enjoyed a vast reputation, and had a strange tale which I would like you to hear.

The tale begins in Abyssinia, which is modern Ethiopia. I had been a wild elephant until captured by the hunters there. Being huge and strong, I was enlisted to serve in the army. And with the army, I left for Yemen.

People feared me, and trembled to hear of my advance. The fact is I spelt destruction wherever I went. If I stepped on anything, I simply crushed it! Thus I helped my people, the Abyssinians, in their conquest of Yemen.

Leader Abrahah bestowed on me the honour of making me his private elephant. He refused to let me share in transporting stones and timber to the new temple being built. You see, he had ordered that a huge temple be built so as to surpass the old temple in Mecca, visited by all people from the four corners of the earth. Inside the new temple, a shrine of gold was built to which people, he hoped, would make pilgrimage rather than to the shrine in Mecca—the *Ka'bah*. However, people never came to Abrahah's shrine, but continued to visit Mecca.

Abrahah was livid with rage. He decided to pull down the Mecca shrine, so that only one would be available—the shrine he built of gold.

Abrahah mustered a huge army for his campaign against Mecca and the Meccans. Naturally, I marched at the forefront of that army, carrying the army commander, Abrahah. He wanted me to take him to the *Ka'bah*, in Mecca, to lean against it with my huge body until flattened out. Indeed, I had done that many times with the houses of Abrahah's enemies.

Though hardly happy with the task, I had no choice and still marched along. About me members of the army spoke of Mecca and the Meccans, of the *Ka'bah* and its history. I listened intently and learned that it was built by Prophet Abraham, that his son Ismail took part in the work, that Abraham was well known for a few miracles, as his people had thrown him into a pit of fire but he emerged perfectly unscathed.

I also learnt that at the *Ka'bah* was a noble shrine, located in God's Holy Mosque, called the 'Inviolable House of God.' It is indeed inviolable, where everybody is safe inside. I heard of the shrine's doves, which are equally inviolate. It is a quiet, safe, and sacred place—beloved by all, where people pray and take refuge.

From the soldiers I learnt that the Meccans were afraid to hear of my advance on them, having heard of my strength, and my ability to crush anything standing in my way.

Mecca was barely one-night's journey away. There was no army to stop our march or delay our advance! The road lay ahead quite open, and Mecca stood no chance and the *Ka'bah* was as good as smashed to smithereens! Everybody in the army looked admiringly at me; some cried: 'March on, Abrahah's elephant! There's no elephant like you, ever!'

Intent on getting to Mecca as soon as possible, we received a report of an incident involving Abdul-Muttalib, Mecca's potentate, whose implications made us all pause and ponder; indeed, we were quite shaken to hear it. It said that, learning of the advance by Abrahah's army on the *Ka'bah*, he was not in the least afraid, but simply said:

"The House has a Lord, who protects it."

The weighty words of Abdul-Muttalib made me afraid—*me*, the awesome elephant who strikes fear in everybody's heart! I could raze to the ground the houses of any city I pass through, but was now afraid. I suddenly felt weary, too weary to march on. Nor was I alone in this—all felt it, all the elephants, horses, camels and even soldiers. The march ground to a halt!

I stood shock still, inexplicably. I could not move at all, as simple as that! It was as though I had my feet glued to the ground, unable to take a single step on the road to Mecca!

Abraham was, understandably, alarmed; and so were the soldiers. Turned backward, I was able to move; to the right, to the left—all was easy! But returned to the direction of Mecca, I was yet again frozen! They hit me, pulled me, pushed me, scolded me with a firebrand—I still stood as though benumbed, feeling no pain! I won't go to Mecca! I won't demolish the *Ka'bah*, no matter what you do to me! They obviously wouldn't allow me to turn back until I have rid them of the burden of Mecca, the *Ka'bah*, and, perhaps, the Meccans too!

Suddenly, a miraculous thing took place. I looked up at the sky to find birds gathering in such numbers as to occlude the light of day! It was soon quite dark, and I was left in amazement: was I asleep, having a bad dream, or fully awake, witnessing a day-time occurrence?

I heard the soldiers cry out: "look at the huge flights of birds, dropping stones of baked clay!"

The stones were mere pebbles, perhaps no larger than beans or grains of wheat or corn, but if one fell on the biggest elephant in our army, the animal simply fell senseless to the ground! If one hit the biggest camel, the animal fell too on the sand; if on the sturdiest man, his death was certain! For an eminent elephant like me, who has been through a great deal, the scene was astounding—exceedingly terrifying! I trembled in trepidation, as I have never seen anything like it before, and, almost involuntarily, fell down on my knees in awe as a strange beam of celestial light shone brilliantly, extending from the heavens to the earth, but centering around Mecca. In the distance I saw Abdul-Muttalib, chief of the Quraish tribe, rejoicing in the joy of Meccans who flocked to congratulate him, now that Abraham's army was decimated, and was unable to conquer Mecca or abolish the *Ka'bah*!

Abdul-Muttalib was at the time recounting a vision he had in his sleep the previous night. He had seen something that looked like a chain of silver come out of his loins, with one end in the earth, the other in the sky! The silver chain soon turned into a tree, with one leaf radiating a light to which all people clung!

Expert dream-interpreters said that Abdul-Muttalib's son, Abdullah, would have a son to whom all people, east and west, would cling! The listener rejoiced, congratulated him and said: "What would you like to call him?"

"I shall call him," he said, "Muhammad! It means 'the praised one', and, perhaps, he will be praised by all those on earth and in the heaven!"

With the glad tidings of Muhammad's birth came my end; the end of the far-famed elephant, and the end of Abraham and his huge army. Mecca, of course, has survived; and so has the *Ka'bah*, for ever and ever. It will remain, immortal and immune. It is the direction of the *Ka'bah* that Muslims turn their faces five times a day in prayer. They all worship God who has sent the Prophet of Guidance, may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him:

Seest thou not how thy Lord dealt with the Companions of the elephant?

Did he not make their treacherous plan go astray?

And He sent against them flights of birds, striking them with stones of baked clay.

Then did He make them like an empty field of stalks and straws (of which the

corn) has been eaten up.

Holy Quran