

# Medieval Sourcebook:

## Ibn Ishaq (d. c. 773 CE):

### Selections from the *Life of Muhammad*

*This biography of Muhammad - a Sira - was written by Ibn Ishaq, an Arab who lived in the century after Muhammad did, dying around 151 AH (that is, about 773 CE). It is one of the few full biographies of the Prophet.*

Questions:

1. Why are the stories significant?
2. Why does Muhammad call Jesus his brother?

It is alleged in popular stories (and only God knows the truth) that Amina d. Wahn, the mother of God's apostle, used to say when she was pregnant with God's apostle that a voice said to her, "You are pregnant with the lord of this people and when he is born say, 'I put him in the care of the One from the evil of every envier; then call him Muhammad.'" As she was pregnant with him she saw a light come forth from her by which she could see the castles of Busra in Syria....

Halima the apostle's foster mother used to say that she went forth from her country with her husband and little son whom she was nursing, among the women of her tribe, in search of other babies to nurse. This was a year of famine when they were destitute.... They could not sleep the whole night because of the weeping of her hungry child. She had no milk to give him, not could their she-camel provide a morning draught, but we were hoping for rain and relief. 'I rode upon my donkey which had kept back the other riders through its weakness and emaciation so that it was a nuisance to them. When we reached Mecca, we looked out for foster children, and the apostle of God was offered to everyone of us, and each woman refused him when she was told he was an orphan, because we hoped to get payment from the child's father. We said, "An orphan! and what will his mother and grandfather do?" and so we spurned him because of that. Every woman who came with me got a suckling except me, and when we decided to depart I said to my husband: "By God, I do not like the idea of returning with my friends without a suckling; I will go and take that orphan." He replied, "Do as you please; perhaps God will bless us on his account." So I went and took him for the sole reason that I could not find anyone else. I took him back to my baggage, and as soon as I put him in my bosom, my breasts overflowed with milk which he drank until he was satisfied, as also did his foster-brother....

When we used to have him with us my flock used to yield milk in abundance. We milked them and drank while other people had not a drop, nor could they find anything in their animals' udders....

[A learned man] told me that some of the apostle's companions asked him to tell them about himself. He said: "I am what Abraham my father prayed for and the good news of [my brother] Jesus. When my mother was carrying me she saw a light proceeding from her which showed her the castles of Syria. I was suckled among the B. Sa'd b. Bakr, and while I was with a brother of mine behind our tents shepherding the lambs, two men in white raiment came to me with a gold basin full of snow. Then they seized me and opened up my belly, extracted my heart and split it; then they extracted a black drop from it and threw it away; then they washed my heart and my belly with that snow until they had thoroughly cleansed them. Then one said to the other, weigh him against ten of his people; they did so and I outweighed them. Then they weighed me against a hundred and then a thousand, and I outweighed them. He said, 'Leave him alone, for by God, if you weighed him against all his people he would outweigh them.'"...

**Source:**

<http://www.juniata.edu/~tuten/muhammad.html>

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