



Stories from the Hijaz

THE MAKKAH CHRONICLES



The Cave of Hira: the site of first revelation



The Cave of Hira with Makkah in the background. Here we get some idea of how far Nabi Muhammad (SAW) went to spend time in seclusion in the Cave of Hira, on Jabal Noor, about three kilometres from Makkah. Nabi Muhammad (SAW) spent many days in the cave before he received the first revelation.

Photo SALIM PARKER

SALIM PARKER

THE Cave of Hira, situated about 1 200 climbing steps up the isolated Jabal Noor, was both without water and vegetation – other than a few thorns – during the time of Nabi Muhammad (SAW).

The top of this mountain in the mountainous desert used to be one of the loneliest places back then, and the cave, which is about four metres long and 1, 6 metres wide, was even more isolated. It was in this cave that our Prophet (SAW) used to seek solace. It was in this cave where the first direct message from Allah to Muhammad (SAW) was delivered.

The Prophet (SAW) first began to have revelations in the form of good dreams, which later materialised. He appreciated the solitude of the mountain and would go to the Cave of Hira and meditate there several days and nights. After his seclusion, he would return to Makkah and circumambulate the Kaabah seven times before heading home.

Some years, he would stay for extended periods (some say up to a month) and would take adequate provisions with him. He would, on occasion, return to his home and his wife, Khadija (RA), would ensure that he was well stocked before he returned to the cave.

This was his practice until Truth was revealed to him by an angel while he was in this very

cave. The Quran tells us that the first revelation descended in Ramadan, on the 'Night of Power' (Lailatul Qadr).

The Quran states: 'Ramadaan is the month in which the Quran was revealed.' (2:185) and 'We have indeed revealed this message during the Night of Power.' (97:1)

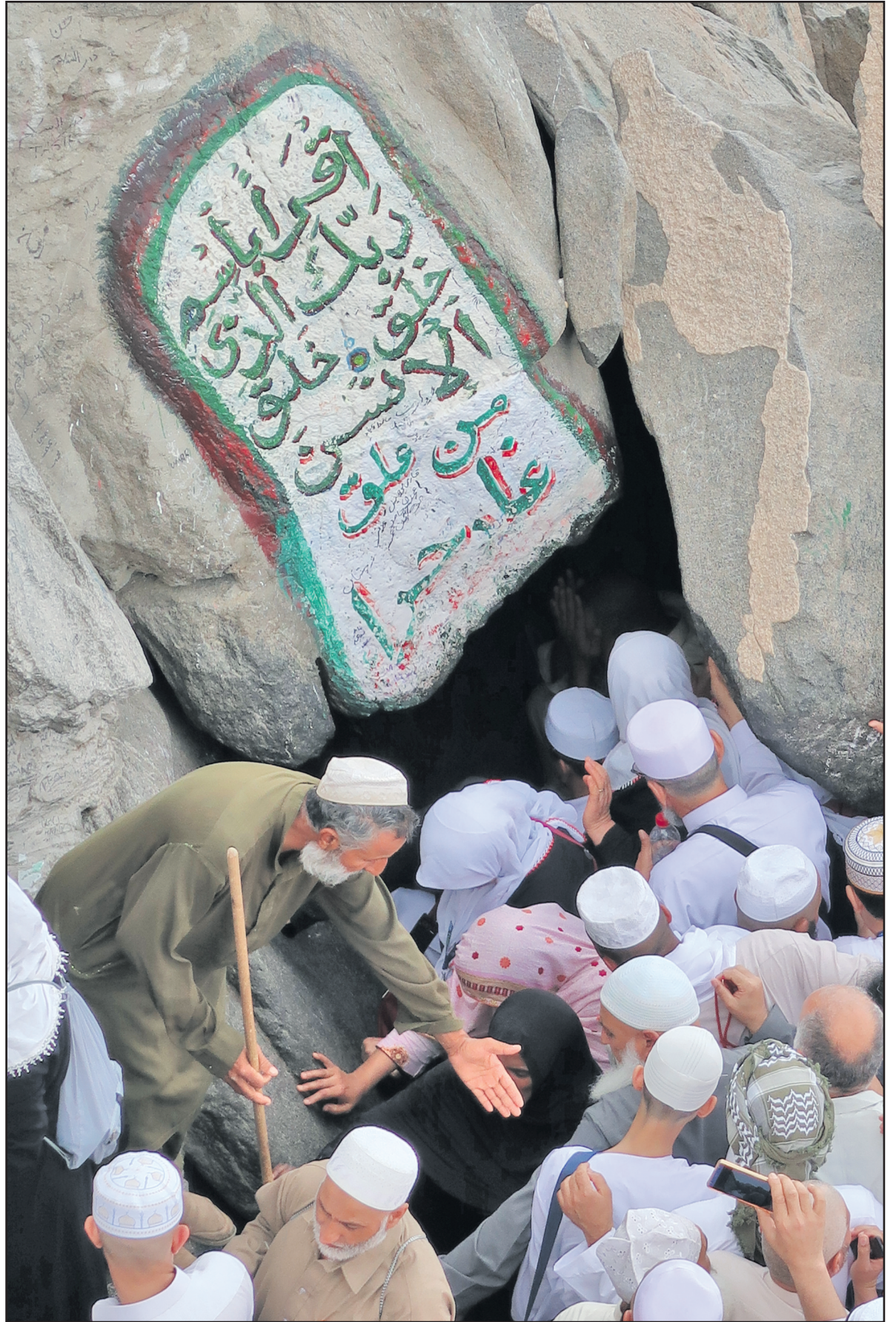
On that night, according to Bukhari, the angel Jibreel came to Nabi Muhammad (SAW) and asked him to read. The Prophet (SAW) replied: 'I do not know how to read.'

Nabi Muhammad (SAW) then related: 'The angel caught me [forcefully] and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read and I replied: "I do not know how to read."

'So he caught me again and pressed me a second time till I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read but again I replied: "I do not know how to read." So he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me.'

Jibreel then said: 'Read in the name of your Lord, the Creator. He who created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Bounteous. Who taught by the pen, taught man what he knew not.' (96:1-5)

This day heralded the first day of his prophethood and these were the first verses of the Quran revealed to him, though there are some scholars who disagree. He



A close-up of pilgrims queuing to get into the narrow Cave of Hira, on Jabal Noor, where Nabi Muhammad (SAW) received the first revelations of the Quran.

Photo SALIM PARKER

recited these words after Jibreel, who then departed. Nabi Muhammad (SAW) said: 'It was as though the words were written on my heart.'

He was extremely shaken by the experience and feared that he had become possessed. The Prophet (SAW) fled from the cave. When He was about halfway down the slope of Jabal Noor, he heard a voice saying: 'O Muhammad, you are the Messenger of Allah, and I am Jibreel (Gabriel).'

The Prophet (SAW) stood gazing at Jibreel and tried to turn away from him. However, whichever way he looked, Jibreel was always there on the horizon. It did not matter which way he faced, Jibreel was there until, finally, he left.

The Prophet (SAW) was terrified and his heart was pounding

hard. He returned home to Khadija (RA) and said: 'Cover me and pour cold water over me!' Khadija covered him and helped him calm down.

He then told her everything that had happened. 'I fear that something may happen to me,' He said, fearing that he might be possessed.

Khadija replied: 'Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, carry the weak, help the poor, serve your guests generously and assist the calamity-afflicted ones.'

The following verses were then revealed: 'O you who are wrapped up! Arise and warn! And your Lord do magnify.' (74:1-3)

Khadija knew that Allah would not humiliate Muhammad (SAW) because of his virtues of honesty,

justice and helping the poor. She was the first person to believe him. She immediately went to see her uncle, Waraqa, who was a biblical scholar.

After listening to the account of her husband's experience, Waraqa recognised him from the prophecies of the Bible to be the awaited prophet. According to Bukhari, he confirmed that what had appeared to him in the cave was indeed the angel Jibreel, the Angel of Revelation: 'This is the Keeper of Secrets (Jibreel) who came to Moses.'

The Cave of Hira was where Nabi Muhammad (SAW) was revealed to be the future prophet. It is reported that there was one occasion when he and the Companions were in the cave and Jabal Noor shook. On another occasion the Prophet (SAW) was in contact with jinn on the mountain.