

Life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): A Christian King Helps Out

In 615 A.D., five years after the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an, a group of the Prophet's Companions, weary of daily torture and hardship, left Makkah on the Prophet's advice to seek shelter in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) with the Christian ruler, King Najashi (Negus).

Under cover of nightfall 16 of them slipped away, to be followed later by another 83 men and women. When the Makkans discovered this, they were enraged, particularly because the children of many leading families were among them.

The Quraysh leaders sent two of their cleverest men to persuade King Najashi to send the Muslims back. On arrival, they first gave gifts to the King's advisers, saying that some "foolish Makkans" had recently migrated to Abyssinia and that they intended to ask the king for their return.

Then they went to the King, and said, "Your Majesty, these people have abandoned the religion of Makkah, but they have not even become Christians like you." The King's advisers promptly urged him to hand them over straight away.

But the King, unconvinced, became angry, saying, "No, by God, they came to me for protection and I will hear what they have to say." The Makkans were dismayed at this, realizing that the King would immediately sense the migrants' sincerity. When the Muslims entered, they did not bow before King Najashi and were thereupon rebuked by the advisers. But the Muslims simply said, "We kneel only to Allah (God)." Then King Najashi asked them about their religion.

The Muslims' spokesman, Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, 'Ali's brother (may Allah be pleased with them) and the Prophet's cousin, said: "O King, we and our ancestors turned away in ignorance from the faith of the Prophet Ibrahim (AS), who with Ismail (AS), built the Kabah and worshipped only Allah (SWT).

We did quite unspeakable things, worshipping idols, treating our neighbors unfairly, oppressing the weak and so on. This was our life until Allah (SWT) sent a Messenger from among us, one of our own relatives, known always to have been honest, innocent and faithful.

He asked us to worship only Allah (SWT), to give up the bad customs of our forefathers, to be truthful and trustworthy, to respect and help our neighbors, to honor our families and look after orphans, and to put an end to misdeeds and fighting.

He ordered us to slander neither men nor women. He bade us worship none other than Allah (SWT), to pray, to give alms and to fast. We believe in him and follow his lead.

The Makkans began to come between us and our religion, so we left our homes and came to you, hoping to find justice."

Hearing this, Najashi said, "Tell me some of the revelations which your Prophet claims to have received from God." Ja'far then recited some Qur'anic verses in which Maryam, the pure and devoted mother of the Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) [AS], has to face angry and disbelieving family members. She points to the baby 'Isa (AS), but they say they cannot speak to a mere baby. Then 'Isa (AS), himself astonishes them by uttering words of great wisdom.

Overwhelmed at this, the King exclaimed: "The messages of 'Isa and Muhammad come from the same source!" And drawing a line with his cane on the floor, he said joyfully, between your religion and ours there is really no more difference than this line." King Najashi gave the Muslims permission to live peacefully in his realm. The 'clever' Makkans were sent home bitterly disappointed.

The Year of Sorrow

In the meantime the Quraysh had imposed a social ban on the Prophet Muhammad's family in Makkah. No one was to talk to them or conduct business with them. This ban lasted for three years, and caused the family great suffering. During this period, the Prophet's faithful wife and greatest help, Khadijah, died. Then, Abu Talib, the Prophet's loving uncle and guardian, also died.

These were harsh blows. Abu Talib was a respected elder of the Quraysh. Though not a follower of Islam, he had protected the Prophet (SAWS) against his enemies. It is an Arab custom that someone under the protection of another is safe as long as the protector lives. Now, with the death of his uncle, the Prophet (SAWS) was without protection. His enemies cheered, and redoubled their brutalities.

In 619 A.D., nine years now after the beginning of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, and despairing of his work in Makkah, the Prophet (SAWS), went to Ta'if, a nearby city, to spread his message and seek help. But the people of Ta'if refused to listen to the Prophet (SAWS). They jeered at him and drove him out of town, setting the street urchins to pelting him with stones. The Prophet's body was covered with wounds, and he was bleeding from head to toe.

Suddenly, the Archangel Gabriel appeared along with the Angel of mountains. The latter asked if he should crush the people of Ta'if between two mountains. "No," said the noble Prophet (SAWS), and he raised his hands instead to pray for the people of Ta'if: "Lord, guide them, I am hopeful for their descendants, who will one day serve Your cause." Then he returned to Makkah.