

ABDULLAH IBN SALAM, JEWISH RABBI, MEDINA

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Al-Husayn ibn Salam was a Jewish rabbi in Yathrib [Medina] who was widely respected and honored by the people of the city, even by those who were not Jewish. He was known for his piety and goodness, his upright conduct, and his truthfulness.

Al-Husayn lived a peaceful and gentle life but he was serious, purposeful and organized in the way he spent his time. For a fixed period each day, he would worship, teach and preach in the temple.

Then he would spend some time in his orchard, looking after date palms, pruning and pollinating. Thereafter, to increase his understanding and knowledge of his religion, he would devote himself to the study of the Torah.

In this study, it is said he was particularly struck by some verses of the Torah which dealt with the coming of a Prophet who would complete the message of previous Prophets. Al-Husayn therefore took an immediate and keen interest when he heard reports of the appearance of a Prophet in Makkah.

What follows is his story, in his own words:

When I heard of the appearance of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) I began to make enquiries about his name, his genealogy, his characteristics, his time and place and I began to compare this information with what is contained in our books.

From these enquiries, I became convinced about the authenticity of his prophethood and I affirmed the truth of his mission. However, I concealed my conclusions from the Jews. I held my tongue.

Then came the day when the Prophet, peace be upon him, left Makkah and headed for Yathrib. When he reached Yathrib and stopped at Quba, a man came rushing into the city, calling out to people and announcing the arrival of the Prophet.

At that moment, I was at the top of a palm tree doing some work. My aunt, Khalidah bint Al-Harith, was sitting under the tree. On hearing the news, I shouted: "Allahu

Akbar! Allahu Akbar!" (God is Great! God is Great!)

When my aunt heard me, she remonstrated with me: "May God frustrate you... By God, if you had heard that Moses was coming you would not have been more enthusiastic."

"Auntie, he is really, by God, the 'brother' of Moses and follows his religion. He was sent with the same mission as Moses." She was silent for a while and then said: "Is he the Prophet about whom you spoke to us who would be sent to confirm the truth preached by previous (Prophets) and complete the message of his Lord?"

"Yes," I replied.

Without any delay or hesitation, I went out to meet the Prophet. I saw crowds of people at his door. I moved about in the crowds until I reached close to him.

The first words I heard him say were: "O people! Spread peace... Share food... Pray during the night while people (normally) sleep... and you will enter Paradise in peace."

I looked at him closely. I scrutinized him and was convinced that his face was not that of an imposter. I went closer to him and made the declaration of faith that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

The Prophet turned to me and asked: "What is your name?" "Al-Husayn ibn Salam," I replied. "Instead, it is now Abdullah ibn Sallam," he said (giving me a new name). "Yes" I agreed. "Abdullah ibn Salam it shall be. By Him who has sent you with the Truth, I do not wish to have another name after this day."

I returned home and introduced Islam to my wife, my children and the rest of my household. They all accepted Islam including my aunt Khalidah who was then an old lady. However, I advised them then to conceal our acceptance of Islam from the Jews until I gave them permission. They agreed.

Subsequently, I went back to the Prophet (peace be upon him), and said: "O Messenger of God! The Jews are a people (inclined to) slander and falsehood. I want you to invite their most prominent men to meet you. (During the meeting however), you should keep me concealed from them in one of your rooms. Ask them then about my status among them before they find out of my acceptance of Islam. Then invite them to Islam. If they were to know that I have become a Muslim, they would denounce me and accuse me of everything base and slander me."

The Prophet kept me in one of his rooms and invited the prominent Jewish personalities to visit him. He introduced Islam to them and urged them to have faith in God.

They began to dispute and argue with him about the Truth. When he realized that they were not inclined to accept Islam, he put the question to them:

“What is the status of Al-Husayn ibn Salam among you?”

“He is our *sayyid* (leader) and the son of our *sayyid*. He is our rabbi and our *alim* (scholar), the son of our rabbi and *alim*.”

“If you come to know that he has accepted Islam, would you accept Islam also?” asked the Prophet.

“God forbid! He would not accept Islam. May God protect him from accepting Islam,” they said, horrified.

At this point I came out in full view of them and announced: “O assembly of Jews! Be conscious of God and accept what Muhammad has brought. By God, you certainly know that he is the Messenger of God and you can find prophecies about him and mention of his name and characteristics in your Torah. I for my part declare that he is the Messenger of God. I have faith in him and believe that he is true. I know him.”

“You are a liar,” they shouted. “By God, you are evil and ignorant, the son of an evil and ignorant person.” And they continued to heap every conceivable abuse on me.

Here ends his own narration.

Abdullah ibn Salam approached Islam with a soul thirsty for knowledge. He was passionately devoted to the Quran and spent much time reciting and studying its beautiful and sublime verses. He was deeply attached to the noble Prophet and was constantly in his company.

He spent much of his time in the masjid, engaged in worship, in learning and in teaching. He was known for his sweet, moving and effective way of teaching study circles of Sahabah who assembled regularly in the Prophet’s mosque.

Abdullah ibn Salam was known among the Sahabah as a man from the people of Paradise. This was because of his determination on the advice of the Prophet to hold steadfastly to the ‘most trustworthy handhold’ that is belief in and total submission to God.

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