

MUHAMMAD'S BIOGRAPHY (PART 5 OF 12): SETTING THE STAGE FOR MIGRATION

Rating: 4.0

Description: The major events which led to the emigration of the Muslims to Medina.

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Men from Yathrib

They came performing the pilgrimage (Hajj) from Yathrib, a city more than two hundred miles away, which has since become world-famous as al-Medina, "the City" par excellence. Yathrib was fortunate in its location in a pleasant oasis, famous even to this day for the excellence of its dates, but unfortunate in every other way. The oasis had been the scene of almost unceasing tribal strife. Jews fought Jews and Arabs fought Arabs; Arabs allied themselves with Jews and fought other Arabs allied with a different Jewish community. While Mecca prospered, Yathrib lived in wretchedness. It was in need of a leader capable of uniting its people.

At Yathrib, there were Jewish tribes with learned rabbis who had often spoken to the pagans of a Prophet soon to come among the Jews, with whom, when he came, the Jews would destroy the Arabs as the tribes of 'Aad and Thamud had been destroyed of old for their idolatry.

The Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, at that stage in his call was secretly visiting different tribes in the outskirts of Mecca to convey them the message of Islam. Once, he overheard a group of men at Aqaba, a place outside Mecca, and he asked to sit with them to which they gladly welcomed. When the men from the tribe of Khazraj from Yathrib heard what Muhammad had to say, they recognized him as the Prophet whom the Jews had described to them, and all six men accepted Islam. They also hoped that Muhammad, through this new religion, could be the man who would unite them with their brother tribe, the Aws, a tribe in Yathrib with whom they shared common ancestry, but distraught with years of war and animosity. They determined to return to Yathrib and spread the religion of Muhammad. As a result, not a house existed in Yathrib except that it heard the message Islam, and the next season of pilgrimage, in the year 621, a deputation came from Yathrib purposely to meet the Prophet.

First Pact of Aqaba

This deputation was composed of twelve men, five of those present the previous year, and two members of the Aws. They met the Prophet again at Aqaba and pledged in their own names and in those of their wives, to associate no other creation with God (to become Muslim), neither to steal nor to commit adultery nor to kill their infants, even in dire poverty; and they undertook to obey this man in all things just. This is known as the First Pledge of Aqaba. When they returned to Yathrib, the Prophet sent with them his first ambassador, Mus'ab ibn 'Umar, to teach the new converts the rudiments of the faith and further spread the religion to those who had not yet embraced Islam.

Mus'ab preached the message of Islam until almost every family in Yathrib had a Muslim in their midst, and before the Hajj of the following year, 622, Mus'ab returned to the Prophet and told him the good news of his mission, and of the goodness and strength of Yathrib and its people.

Second Pact of Aqaba

In 622, pilgrims from Yathrib, seventy-five of them Muslims, from them two women, came to perform the Hajj. During the latter part of one night, while all were asleep, the Muslims from amongst the Yathribite pilgrims secretly crept into the place where they had previously arranged to meet the Prophet, at the rocks at Aqaba, to vow allegiance to the Prophet and invite him to their city. At Aqaba, they met the Prophet, and with him was his uncle, then still a pagan but one who defended his nephew due to familial bonds. He spoke and warned the Muslims about the dangers of their task, and against proving untrue to their commitment if they undertook it. Another person from the pilgrims who was present the previous two years also stood and warned against the danger of their commitment and their preparedness to uphold it. In their staunch determination and love of the Prophet, they swore to defend him as they would defend their own selves, their wives and children. It was then that the Hijrah, the emigration to Yathrib, was decided.

This is known as the Pledge of War, because it involved protecting the person of the Prophet, by arms if necessary; and soon after the emigration to Yathrib, the Quranic verses permitting war in defense of the religion were revealed. These verses are crucial in the history of Islam:

“Permission is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged, and God is indeed able to give them victory; those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said -- Our Lord is God! For were it not that God repels some people by means of others, monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques in which the name of God is extolled would surely have been destroyed...”
(Quran 22:39-40)

A turning-point had come for Prophet Muhammad, for the Muslims, and for the world. It was Prophet Muhammad's destiny, and an aspect of his prophetic function, that he should demonstrate the alternatives open to the persecuted and the oppressed; on the one hand, forbearance; on the other, what is called by Christians the 'just war', but for which, in the words of a later Quranic revelation – "corruption would surely overwhelm the earth" (Quran 2:251). For almost thirteen years, he and his followers had suffered persecution, threats and insults without raising a hand in self-defense. They had proved that this was humanly possible. Circumstances were now changing and called for a very different response if the religion of Islam was to survive in the world. Peace has its seasons, but so has war, and the Muslim never forgets that every man born is born to struggle in one form or another, at one level or another; if not physically, then spiritually. Those who try to ignore this fact are, sooner or later, enslaved.

Plot to Murder the Prophet

In small groups, the Muslims slipped out of Mecca and took the road to Yathrib. The Hijrah ('emigration') had begun.

For Quraish the limits of what was bearable had been passed. Enemies within the city were bad enough, but now these enemies were setting up a rival centre to the north. The death of Abu Talib had removed Muhammad's chief protector. Restrained hitherto by principles inherited from their bedouin forefathers and by the fear of causing a troublesome blood feud, the leaders finally decided that Muhammad must die. Abu Jahl proposed a simple plan. Young men should be chosen from different clans, each one to strike a mortal blow, so that Muhammad's blood would be upon all of them. Hashim could not seek retribution from all the other clans.

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