

Salman the Persian, Zoroastrian, Persia

(part 1 of 2): From Zoroastrianism to Christianity



The blessed Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, Salman al-Farisi narrates^[1] his journey to Islam as follows:

“I was a Persian man from the people of Isfahaan^[2] from a town known as Jayi. My father was the town chief. To him, I was the most beloved creature of God. His love for me reached the point to which he trusted me to supervise the fire^[3] he lit. He would not let it die down.

My father owned a large area of fertile land. One day, while busy with his construction, he told me to go to his land and fulfill some chores he desired. On my way to his land, I came across a Christian church. I heard the sound of people praying inside. I did not know how people lived outside, for my father kept me confined to his house! So when I came across those people [in the church] and I heard their voices, I went inside to watch what they were doing.”

When I saw them, I liked their prayers and became interested in their religion. I said [to myself], “By God, this religion is better than that of ours.” By God, I did not leave them until sunset. I did not return to my father’s Land.

I asked [i.e., the people of the church]. “From where did this religion originate?”

“They said, ‘In Al-Shaam.’^[4]

I returned to my father who had become worried and sent [someone] after me. Upon my arrival, he said, ‘O son! Where have you been? Didn’t I entrust you with an assignment?’”

I said, “My father, I came across some people praying in their church and I liked their religion. By God I stayed with them until sunset.”

My father said, “My Son! There is no good in that religion; the religion of you and your forefathers’ is better.’ ”

“No, by God, it is better than our religion.”

He threatened me, chained me by my feet and kept me confined to his home. I sent a message to the Christians requesting them to inform me of the arrival of any Christian trade caravan coming from Al-Shaam. A trade caravan arrived and they informed me, so I then told [the Christians] to let me know once the people of the caravan finish their business and set off to return to their country. I [indeed] was informed [by them] when the people of Al-Shaam finished their business and were about to set off to their country, so I then let loose the chains from my feet and accompanied [the caravan] until we reached Al-Shaam.

Upon my arrival I asked, “Who is the best amongst the people of this religion [of yours]?”

They said, “The bishop. [He is] in the church.”

I went to him and said, “I like this religion, and I would love to be with you and serve you in your church, in order that I may learn from you and pray with you.”

He said, “You may enter and stay with me,” so I joined him.

After some time, Salman discovered something of the bishop. He was a bad man who ordered and motivated his people to pay charity, only to keep it for himself. He did not give it to the poor. He had heaped up seven jars of gold and silver! Salman continued:

I despised him because of his deeds.

He [the bishop] died. The Christians gathered to bury him. I informed them that he was a bad man who ordered and motivated people to give him their charity only to keep it for himself, and that he did not give any of it to the poor. They said, “How do you know this?”

I replied, “I can show you his treasure.”

They said, “Show us!”

I showed them the place [where he kept it] and they recovered from it seven jars heaped up with gold and silver. When they saw it they said, “By God we will never bury him.” So they crucified him and stoned him.^[5]

They replaced their bishop. I never saw anyone [from them] who prayed better than him [the new bishop]; nor a man more detached from this worldly life and attached to the Hereafter, nor a person more committed to working day and night. I loved him more than anyone else I loved before.

I stayed with him for sometime before his death. When his death approached I told him, “O [so and so], I stayed with you and loved you more than anything else I loved before. Now the Decree of God [i.e., death] has come, so who do you recommend for me [to keep to], and with what do you order me?”

The bishop said “By God! People are in total loss; they have altered and changed [the religion] they were upon. I do not know of anyone who is still holding to the religion I am upon except a man in al-Musil,^[6] so join him [and he gave me his name].”

When the man died, Salman moved to al-Musil and met the person he recommended...

I said to him, “[Such & such person] at the time of his death recommended me to join you. He told me that you are holding to the same [religion] as him.” I stayed with him and found him to be the best man holding on to the matter [religion] of his companion.

Soon he died. When death approached him, Salman requested of him [as he did earlier with his first companion] to recommend another person who was upon the same religion.

The man said, “By God! I don’t know of anyone on the same matter [religion] as ours except a man in Naseeben^[7] and his name is [such and such], so go and join him.”

Following his death, I traveled to the man of Naseeben.” Salman found the man and stayed with him for a while. The same incidents occurred. Death approached and before he died, Salman came to the man and asked for his advice as to whom and where to go. The man recommended that Salman join another man in Amuria^[8] who was also upon the same religion.

Salman moved to Amuria after his companion died. He found his new reference and joined him on his religion. Salman [at that time] worked and, “earned some cows and one sheep.”

Death approached the man of Amuria. Salman repeated his requests, but [this time] the answer was different.

The man said, “O son! I don’t know of anyone who is upon the same [religion] as we are. However, a Prophet will emerge in your lifetime, and this Prophet is on the same religion as Abraham.”

The man described this Prophet, saying, “He will be sent with the same religion as Abraham. He will come from the land of Arabia and will migrate to a place located in between two lands filled with black stones [as if burned by fire]. There are palm trees spread in the midst of these two lands. He can be recognized by certain signs. He [will accept] and eat [from] the [food] which has been given as a gift, but will not eat from

charity. The seal of Prophethood will be between his shoulders. If you can move to that land, then do so.”

Footnotes:

[1] Al-Haithami collected this narration in *Majma' Al-Zawa'id*.

[2] Isfahaan: A Region in northwest Iran.

[3] His father was a Magean who worshipped fire.

[4] Al-Shaam: It encompasses the areas known today as Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Jordan

[5] An important point to note here is that Salman did not turn away from what he thought was the truth at that time because of the actions of one person. He did not say, “Look at these Christians! The best of them is so evil!” Rather, he understood that he had to judge the religion by its beliefs, and not by its adherents.

[6] Al-Musil: A major city in northwest Iraq.

[7] Naseeben: A city on the road between Al-Musil and Al-Shaam.

[8] Amuria: A town that was part of the Eastern Region of the Roman Empire.

(part 2 of 2): From Christianity to Islam

The man died, and Salman stayed in Amuria. One day, “Some merchants from the tribe of Kalb^[1] passed by me,” Salman said, “I told them, ‘Take me to Arabia and I will give you my cows and the only sheep I have.’” They said, “Yes.” Salman gave them what he offered, and they took him with them. When they reached Waadi al-Quraa [close to Medinah], they sold him as a slave to a Jewish man. Salman stayed with the Jew, and he saw the Palm trees [his previous companion had described].

“I hoped that this would be the same place described by my companion.”

One day, a man who was a first cousin to Salman’s master from the Jewish tribe of Bani Quraidha in Medinah came visiting. He bought Salman from his Jewish master.

“He took me with him to Medina. By God! When I saw it, I knew it was the place my companion described.

Then God sent^[2] His Messenger [i.e., Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him]. He stayed in Mecca as long as he did.^[3] I did not hear anything about him because I was very busy with the work of slavery, and then he migrated to Medina.

[One day,] I was on a palm-tree on top of one of its date-clusters doing some work for my master. A first cousin of his came and stood in front of him [his master was sitting] and said, “Woe to Bani Qeelah [people of the tribe Qeelah], they are gathered in Qibaa”^[4] around a man who came today from Mecca claiming to be a Prophet!”

I trembled so fiercely when I heard him that I feared that I would fall on my master. I descended and said, ‘What are you saying!?! What are you saying!?!’

My master became angry and punched me hard saying, “What business do you have in this [matter]? Go and mind your business.”

I said, “Nothing! I just wanted to be sure of what he was saying.”

On that evening, I went to see the Messenger of God while he was in Qibaa. I took something with me which I had saved. I went in and said, “I was told that you are a righteous man and that your company [who] are strangers [here] are in need. I want to offer you something I saved as charity. I found that you deserve it more than anyone else.”

I offered it to him; he said to his companions, “Eat,” but he himself kept his hand away [i.e., did not eat]. I said to myself, “This is one [i.e., one of the signs of his Prophethood].”

Following this encounter with the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, Salman left to prepare for another test! This time he brought a gift to the Prophet in Medina.

“I saw that you do not eat from that given as charity, so here is a gift with which I wish to honor you.” The Prophet ate from it and ordered his companions to do the same, which they did. I said to myself, “Now there are two [i.e., two of the signs of Prophethood].”

On the third encounter, Salman came to Baqee-ul-Gharqad [a grave yard in Medina] where the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was attending the funeral of one of his companions. Salman said:

“I greeted him [with the greeting of Islam: ‘Peace be upon you’], and then moved towards his back attempting to see the seal [of Prophethood] which was described to me by my companion. When he saw me [doing so], he knew that I was trying to confirm something described to me. He took the garment off his back and I looked at the seal. I recognized it. I fell down upon it, kissing it and crying. The Messenger of God, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, told me to move around [i.e., to talk to him]. I told him my story as I did with you, Ibn ‘Abbaas [remember that Salman is telling his story to Ibn ‘Abbaas]. He [the Prophet] liked it so much he wanted me to tell my story to his companions.

He was still a slave owned by his master. The Prophet said to him, “Make a contract [with your master] for your freedom, O Salman.” Salman obeyed and made a contract [with his master] for his freedom. He reached an agreement with his master in which he would pay him forty ounces of gold and would plant and successfully raise three hundred new palm trees. The Prophet then said to his companions, “Help your brother.”

They helped him with the trees and gathered for him the specified quantity. The Prophet ordered Salman to dig the proper holes to plant the saplings, and then he planted each one with his own hands. Salman said, “By Him in Whose hands is my soul [i.e., God], not a single tree died.”

Salman gave the trees to his master. The Prophet gave Salman a piece of gold that was the size of a chicken egg and said, “Take this, O Salman, and pay [i.e., your master] what you owe.”

Salman said, “How much is this in regards to how much I owe!”

The Prophet said, “Take it! God will [make it] equal to what you owe.”^[5]

I took it and I weighed a part of it and it was forty ounces. Salman gave the gold to his master. He fulfilled the agreement and he was released.

From then on, Salman became one of the closest of companions to the Prophet.

The Search for the Truth

One of the great companions of the Prophet by the name of Abu Hurairah reported:

“We were sitting in the company of God’s Messenger when Surah al-Jumuah (Surah 62) was revealed. He recited these words:

“And [God has sent Muhammad also to] others who have not yet joined them (but they will come)...” (Quran 62:3)

A person amongst them said, ‘O God’s Messenger! Who are those who have not joined us?’

God’s Messenger made no reply. Salman the Persian was amongst us. The Messenger of God placed his hand on Salman and then said, ‘By the One in Whose Hands is my soul, even if faith were near Pleiades (the seven stars), men from amongst these [i.e. Salman’s folk] would surely attain it.’ (At-Tirmidhi)

Many in this world are like Salman, searching for the truth about the True and Only One God. This story of Salman is similar to stories of people in our own time. The search of some people took them from one church to another, from church to Buddhism or Passiveness, from Judaism to ‘Neutrality’, from religion to meditations to mental abuse. There are those who shifted from one idea to another, but don’t even think of wanting to know something about Islam! When they met some Muslims, however, they opened their minds. The story of Salman is that of a long search. You could make your search for truth shorter by benefiting from his.

Footnotes:

[1] An Arab tribe.

[2] Salman has arrived in Medinah before Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was commissioned as a prophet.

[3] Thirteen years after he received the revelation from God.

[4] The outskirts of Medinah.

[5] A miracle from God.