

Muhammad's Biography (part 1 of 12): The Conditions of Arabia Prior to Prophecy

Arabia in that period was divided into three areas of influence. The north lived under the shadow of two great empires, the Christian Byzantium and the Zoroastrian Persia, empires in perpetual war so evenly matched that neither could achieve definitive victory over the other. In the shadows of these powers lived the Arabs of the northern region with divided and shifting allegiances.

The south was the land of the Arabian perfumes, called by the Romans 'Arabia Felix.' (present day Yemen and Southern Saudi Arabia) It was desirable property. The conversion of the Ethiopian ruler, the Negus, to Christianity had brought his country into alliance with Byzantium, and it was with Byzantine approval that the Ethiopians took possession of this fertile territory early in the sixth century. Before their ruin at the hands of a ruthless conqueror, however, the southerners had opened up the deserts of central Arabia to trade, introducing a measure of organization into the life of the Bedouin who served as guides for their caravans and establishing trading-posts in the oases.

If the symbol of these sedentary people was the frankincense tree, that of the arid zone was the date-palm; on one hand the luxury of perfume, on the other necessary food. No one could have regarded the Hejaz - *'where no bird sings and no grass grows'* - according to a southern poet - as desirable property. The tribes of the Hejaz had never experienced either conquest or oppression; they had never been obliged to say 'Sir' to any man.

Poverty was their protection, but it is doubtful whether they felt poor. To feel poor one must envy the rich, and they envied no one. Their wealth was in their freedom, in their honor, in their noble ancestry, and in the pliant instrument of the only art they knew, the art of poetry. All that we would now call 'culture' was concentrated in this one medium. Their poetry would glorify courage and freedom, praise the friend and mock the adversary, extol the bravery of the fellow tribesmen and the beauty of women, in poems chanted at the fireside or in the infiniteness of the desert under the vast blue sky, bearing witness to the grandeur of this little human creature forever traveling across the barren spaces of the earth.

For the Bedouin the word was as powerful as the sword. When hostile tribes met for trial in battle it was usual for each side to put up its finest poet to praise the courage and nobility of his own people and heap contempt upon the ignoble foe. Such battles, in which combat between rival champions was a major feature, were more a sport of honor than warfare as we now understand the term; affairs of tumult, boasting and display, with much fewer casualties than those produced by modern warfare. They served a clear economic purpose through the distribution of booty, and for the victor to press his advantage too far would have been contrary to the concept of honor. When one

side or the other acknowledged defeat the dead on both sides were counted and the victors would pay blood-money - in effect reparations - to the vanquished, so that the relative strength of the tribes was maintained in healthy balance. The contrast between this and the practices of civilized warfare is striking.

However, Mecca was, and remains, important for an altogether different reason. For here lies the Kaaba, the first House' ever set up for humanity to worship their only God. The ancient Kaaba had long been the center of this little world. More than 1,000 years before Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, his ancestor, Abraham, aided by Ishmael, his elder son, raised its walls on ancient foundations. A certain Qusayy, chieftain of the powerful tribe of Quraysh, had established a permanent settlement there. This was the city of Mecca (or 'Bakka'). Close by the Kaaba ran the well of Zam Zam. Its origin, too, goes back to Abraham's time. It was this well which saved the life of the infant Ishmael. As the Bible says:

“ And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her: ‘What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Arise, lift up the boy, and hold him in your hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.” (Genesis 21:17-20)

Or, as the Psalmist sings:

“As they pass through the dry Valley of Baca, it becomes a place of springs; the early rain fills it with pools.” (Psalms 84:6)

The circumstances of the time favored the development of Mecca as a major commercial center. The wars between Persia and Byzantium had closed the more northerly trading routes between east and west, while the influence and prosperity of southern Arabia had been destroyed by the Ethiopians. Moreover, the city's prestige was enhanced by its role as a centre of pilgrimage, as was that of Quraysh as custodians of the Kaaba, enjoying the best of both worlds. The combination of nobility – the Arab descent from Abraham through Ishmael - with wealth and spiritual authority gave them grounds for believing that their splendor, compared with that of any other people on earth, was as the splendor of the sun compared with the twinkling of the stars.

But the distance of time from the great patriarchs and prophets as well as their isolation in the arid deserts of the peninsula had given rise to idolatry. Having faith in the intercession of lesser gods with the Supreme Being in their rites of worship, they held the belief that their deities possessed the power to carry their prayers to the Supreme God. Every region and clan, indeed every house, had a separate little 'god' of its own. Three hundred and sixty idols had been installed within the Kaaba and its courtyard - the house built by Abraham

for the worship of the One and only God. The Arabs actually paid divine honors not merely to sculptured idols but venerated everything supernatural. They believed that the angels were daughters of God. Drunkenness and gambling were rife. Female infanticide was common where newborn girls were buried alive.

(part 2 of 12): From Birth to Adulthood

The Prophet's Birth

It was in the year 570 of the Christian Era that Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was born in Mecca, a city in present day Saudi Arabia. His father, Abdullah, was a great-great-grandson of Qusayy, the founder of Mecca, and belonged to the Hashimite family of Quraish. His mother, Aameena, was descended from Qusayy's brother. Returning with a caravan from Syria and Palestine, Abdullah stopped to visit relatives in an oasis to the north of Mecca, fell ill there and died several months before his son's birth.

It was customary to send the sons of Quraysh into the desert to be suckled by a wet-nurse and spend their early childhood with a Bedouin tribe. Apart from considerations of health, this represented a return to their roots, an opportunity to experience the freedom that accompanies the vastness of the desert. Prophet Muhammad was taken by Halima, and spent four or five years with this Bedouin family, tending the sheep as soon as he was old enough to walk, learning the ways of the desert.

When he was six, not long after he had rejoined his mother, she took him on a visit to Yathrib, where his father had died, and she herself fell ill with one of the fevers prevalent in the oasis, dying on the journey home. Muhammad now came under the guardianship of his grandfather, Abdul-Muttalib, chief of the Hashimite clan. When the boy was eight years old, Abdul-Muttalib died, and thus he entered the care of the new Hashimite chieftain, his uncle Abu Talib. Prophet Muhammad tended sheep, and when he reached the age of nine, he was taken by his uncle on the caravan journey to Syria so that he could learn the art of trade.

He continued working as a merchant, and soon he made a reputation for himself. Among the substantial fortunes of Mecca was that of the twice widowed Khadeeja. Impressed by what she heard of Muhammad, who was now commonly known as al-Ameen, 'the trustworthy', she employed him to take her merchandise to Syria. Even more impressed by his competence, when this task was completed, than by his personal charm, she sent a proposal for marriage. By this time Prophet Muhammad was twenty-five, and Khadeeja was the age of forty. Khadeeja presented her husband with a young slave, Zayd, who was then freed by Muhammad. When Zaid's relatives came to ransom him, his affection ran so deep for his benefactor that he chose to remain

with Prophet Muhammad. Khadeeja bore Muhammad six children, including one boy, Qasim, who died before his second birthday.

Prophet Muhammad was by now a man of substance, respected in the community, admired both for his generosity and his good sense. His future seemed assured. In due course, having re-established the prosperity of his clan, he would become one of the more influential elders of the city and end his life, perhaps, as his grandfather had done, reclining in the shade of the Kaaba and recollecting long years well spent in worldly terms. Yet his spirit was uneasy and became increasingly so as he approached middle age.

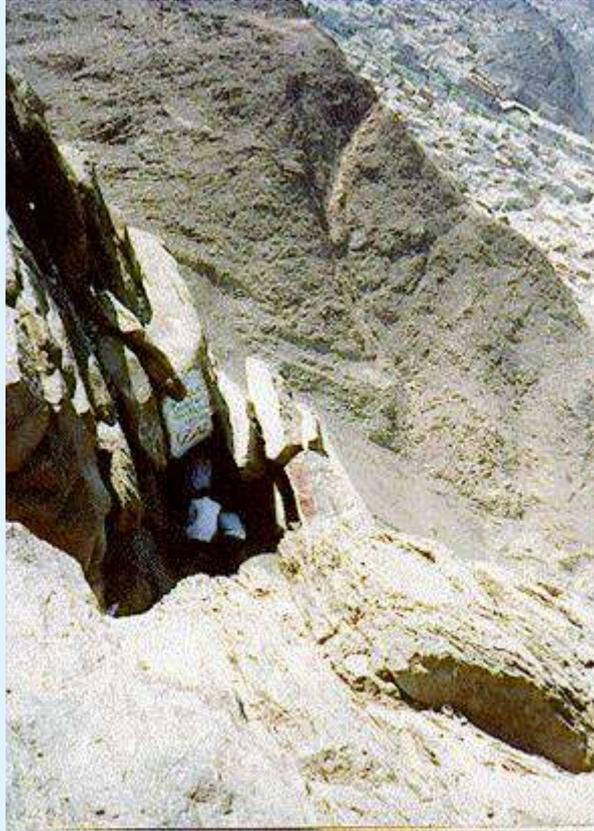
The Hunafa

The Meccans claimed descent from Abraham through Ishmael, and their temple, the Kaaba, had been built by Abraham for the worship of the One God. It was still called the House of God, but the chief objects of worship came to be a number of idols placed inside, sculptural depictions of deities they believed to be the daughters of God which acted as intercessors. The few who felt disgust at this idolatry which had prevailed for centuries longed for the religion of Abraham. Such seekers of the truth were known as Hunafaa, a word originally meaning “those who turn away” from idol-worship. These Hunafaa did not form a community, but rather each sought the truth by the light of their own inner consciousness. Muhammad son of Abdullah was one of these.

(part 3 of 12): The First Revelations

It was during this time when the Prophet began to see pleasant dreams which in turn proved true. He also felt an increasing need for solitude, and this led him to seek seclusion and meditation in the rocky hills which surrounded Mecca. There he would retreat for days, taking provisions along with him, and would return to his family for more provisions. In the blaze of day and during the clear desert nights, when the stars seem sharp enough to penetrate the eye, his very substance was becoming saturated with the ‘signs’ in the heavens, so that he might serve as an entirely adequate instrument for a revelation already inherent in these ‘signs.’ It was then that he was undergoing a preparation for the enormous task which would be placed upon his shoulders, the task of prophethood and conveying the true religion of God to his people and the rest of humanity.

It came on a night late in the sacred month of Ramadan, the night known to Muslims as Laylat-ul-Qadr, the ‘Night of Decree.’



Cave of Hira (aerial view). Prophet Muhammad used to meditate in this cave frequently. The first revelations of the Quran came to him here.

Prophet Muhammad was in solitude in the cave on Mount Hira. He was startled by the Angel of Revelation, Gabriel, the same who had come to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who seized him in a close embrace. A single word of command burst upon him: '*Iqra*' - 'Read![\[1\]](#)' He said: 'I am not able to read!' but the command was issued twice more, each with the same response from the Prophet. Finally, he was grasped with overwhelming force by the angel. Gabriel released him, and the first 'recitation' of the Quran was revealed to him:

**“Read in the name of your Lord who created -created man from a clot. Read: for your Lord is Most Bountiful, who teaches by the pen, teaches man that which he knew not.”
(Quran 96:1-5)**

Thus began the magnificent story of God's final revelation to humanity until the end of times. The encounter of an Arab, fourteen centuries ago, with a being from the realm of the Unseen was an event of such momentous significance that it would move whole peoples across the earth and affect the lives of hundreds of millions of men and women, building great cities and great civilizations, provoking the clash of mighty armies and raising from the dust

beauty and splendor unknown previously. It would also bring teeming multitudes to the Gates of Paradise and, beyond, to the beatific vision. The word *Iqra'*, echoing around the valleys of the Hejaz, broke the mould in which the known world was cast; and this man, alone among the rocks, took upon his shoulders a burden which would have crushed the mountains had it descended upon them.

Prophet Muhammad was forty years old and he had reached an age of maturity. The impact of this tremendous encounter may be said to have melted his substance. The person he had been was like a skin scorched by light and burnt away, and the man who descended from the mountain and sought refuge in the arms of his wife Khadeeja was not the same man who had ascended it.

For the moment, however, he was as if a man pursued. As he descended, he heard a great voice crying: 'Muhammad, thou art the Messenger of God and I am Gabriel.' He looked upwards, and the angel filled the horizon. Wherever he turned, the figure was there, inescapably present. He hastened home and cried to Khadija: 'Cover me! Cover me!' She laid him down, placing a cloak over him, and as soon as he had recovered himself a little he told her what had happened. The Prophet was in fear for himself. She held him close and solaced him:

“Never! By God, God will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your relatives, help the poor, serve your guests generously, and assist those hit with calamities.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

She saw in her husband a man God would not humiliate because of his virtues of honesty, justice, and helping the poor. The first person on the face of earth to believe in him was his own wife, Khadija. At once, she went to see her uncle Waraqa, a biblical scholar. After listening to the account of her husband's experience, Waraqa recognized him from the prophecies of the Bible to be the awaited prophet, and he confirmed that what had appeared to him in the cave was the indeed the angel Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation:

“This is the Keeper of Secrets (Gabriel) who came to Moses.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

The Prophet continued to receive revelations for the remainder of his life, memorized and written down by his companions on pieces of sheepskin and whatever else was at hand.

The Quran or “Recitation”

The words brought to him from Gabriel are held sacred by the Muslims and are never confused with those which he uttered himself. The former are the Sacred Book, the Quran; the latter the Hadith or Sunna of the Prophet. Because the angel Gabriel would recite the Quran orally to the Prophet, the Sacred Book is known as Al-Quran, “The Recitation,” the recitation of the man who knew not how to read.

Footnotes:

[1] The word 'read' in Arabic has connotations of both reading and reciting.

(part 4 of 12): Persecution in Mecca

First Converts



For the first few years of his Mission, the Prophet preached to his family and his intimate friends. The first women to convert was his wife Khadija, the first child his first cousin Ali, whom he had taken under his care, and the first bondsman was his servant Zayd, a former slave. His old friend Abu Bakr was the first adult free male to convert. Many years later the Prophet said of him: 'I have never called anyone to Islam who was not at first hesitant, with the exception of Abu Bakr.'

Later, the command came to him to preach openly and to speak out against idolatry. At first, the elders of Quraysh had been able to ignore this strange little group, treating Muhammad as a sad case of self-deception, but now they began to realize that his preaching, which was attracting adherents among the poor and the dispossessed (and could therefore be seen as subversive), presented a threat both to the religion and the prosperity of Mecca. Open conflict, however, would have been against their interests. Their power depended upon their unity, and with the example of Yathrib - torn asunder by tribal conflict - as a grim warning of what could happen in their own city, they were obliged to bide their time. Moreover, the clan Hashim, whatever it might think privately of its rogue member, was bound by custom to defend him if he was attacked. They confined themselves for the time to mockery, perhaps the most effective weapon in the common man's defense against the in break of truth, since it does not involve the degree of commitment inherent in violence. His former guardian Abu Talib give up his call so not as to jeopardize his safety and the safety of the clan. 'O my uncle,' he said, 'even if they set against me the sun on my right and the moon on my left, I will not abandon my purpose until God grants me success or until I die.' Abu Talib answered with a sigh: 'O my brother's son, I will not forsake you.'

Tension in the city increased gradually, month by month, as Muhammad's spiritual influence spread, undermining the hegemony of the elders of Quraysh and bringing division into their families. This influence became even more dangerous to the established order when the content of the successive revelations was broadened to include denunciation of the callousness of the Meccan plutocracy, their greed for 'more and more' and their avarice. The opposition was now led by a certain Abu Jahl, together with Abu Lahab and the latter's brother-in-law, a younger man who was more subtle and more talented than either of them, Abu Sufyan. Returning one day from the hunt, Muhammad's uncle Hamza, who had so far remained neutral, was so angered on being told of the insults heaped upon his nephew that he sought out Abu Jahl, struck him on the head with his bow and announced then and there his conversion to Islam.

Beginning of Persecution

At the end of the third year, the Prophet received the command to "arise and warn," whereupon he began to preach in public, pointing out the wretched folly of idolatry in face of the marvelous laws of day and night, of life and death, of growth and decay, which manifest the power of God and attest to His Oneness. It was then, when he began to speak against their gods, that Qureysh became actively hostile, persecuting his poorer disciples, mocking and insulting him. The one consideration which prevented them from killing him was fear of the blood-vengeance of the clan to which his family belonged. Strong in his inspiration, the Prophet went on warning, pleading, and threatening, while Quraish did all they could to ridicule his teaching and deject his followers.

The Flight to Abyssinia

The converts of the first four years were mostly humble folk unable to defend themselves against oppression. So cruel was the persecution they endured that the Prophet advised all who could possibly contrive to do so to emigrate, at least temporarily, to Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), where they would be well received by the Christian Negus, 'an upright King.' About eighty converts fled there in 614 CE to the Christian country.

This apparent alliance with a foreign power further infuriated the Meccans, and they sent envoys to the Negus demanding the Muslims' extradition. A great debate was held at Court and the Muslims won the day, first by demonstrating that they worshipped the same God as the Christians, and then by reciting one of the Quranic passages concerning the Virgin Mary, whereupon the Negus wept and said: 'Truly this has come from the same source as that which Jesus brought.'

Still in spite of persecution and emigration, the little company of Muslims grew in number. The Quraish were seriously alarmed. Idol worship at the Kaaba, the holy place to which all Arabia made pilgrimage, ranked for them as

its guardians, as first among their vested interests. At the season of the pilgrimage, they posted men on all the roads to warn the tribes against the madman who was preaching in their midst. They tried to bring the Prophet to a compromise, offering to accept his religion if he would so modify it as to make room for their gods as intercessors with God. In return, they offered to make him their king if he would give up attacking idolatry. Prophet Muhammad's constant refusal frustrated their efforts at negotiation.

Conversion of Umar

More important still was the conversion of one of the most formidable young men in the city, Umar ibn al-Khattab. Infuriated by the increasing success of the new religion - so contrary to all that he had been brought up to believe - he swore to kill Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, regardless of the consequences. He was instructed that, before doing so, he had better look into the affairs of his own family, for his sister and her husband had become Muslims. Bursting into their home he found them reading a Chapter called 'Ta-Ha', and when his sister acknowledged that they had indeed embraced Islam, he struck her a harsh blow. More than a little ashamed of himself, he then asked to see what they had been reading. She handed him the text after insisting he made ablution before handling it, and as he read these verses of the Quran, he underwent a sudden and total transformation. The sweet potency of the words of Quran changed him forever! He went directly to Muhammad and accepted Islam.

Men such as these were too important in the social hierarchy to be attacked, but most of the new Muslims were either poor or in slavery. The poor were beaten and the slaves tortured to make them renounce their faith, and there was little Muhammad could do to protect them.

A black slave named Bilal was pegged down naked under the scorching sun with a heavy stone on his chest and left to die of thirst. He was taunted by the pagans to renounce his religion in return for remission of torture, but his only reply was '*Ahad! Ahad!*' ('God is One! God is One!'). It was in this state, on the point of death, that Abu Bakr found him and ransomed him for an exorbitant fee. He was nursed back to health in Muhammad's home and became one of the closest and best-loved of the companions. When, much later, the question arose as to how the faithful should be summoned to prayer, Bilal became the first *mu'ezzin* (the call to prayer announced with a loud voice from the Muslim place of worship, called *masjid*) of Islam: a tall, thin black man with a powerful voice and, so it is said, the face of a crow under a thatch of grey hair; a man from whom the sun had burned out, during his torment, everything but love of the One and of the messenger of the One.

Destruction of the Saheefah

Frustrated on every side, the Meccan oligarchy, under the leadership of Abu Jahl, now drew up a formal document declaring a ban or boycott against

the Hashim clan as a whole; there were to be no commercial dealings with them until they outlawed Muhammad, and no one was to marry a woman of Hashim or give their daughter to a man of the clan. Then, for three years, the Prophet was constrained with all his kinsfolk in their stronghold, which was situated in one of the gorges which ran down to Mecca.

At length some kinder hearts among Qureysh grew weary of the boycott of old friends and neighbors. They managed to have the document, which had been placed in the Kaaba, brought out for reconsideration. When it was found that all the writing had been destroyed by white ants, except the words Bismika Allahumma (“In thy name, O God”). When the elders saw that marvel, the ban was removed, and the Prophet was again free to go about the city. Meanwhile, the opposition to his preaching had grown rigid. He had little success among the Meccans, and an attempt which he had once made to preach in the city of Taif was a failure. His mission was not proceeding how he expected, when, at the season of the yearly pilgrimage, he came upon a little group of men who heard him gladly.

(part 5 of 12): Setting the Stage for Migration

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 'Umair, 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 whether 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.

(part 6 of 12): The Hijrah of the Prophet

The Hijrah (23 September, 622 C.E.)

Meanwhile, the Prophet, with a few intimates, had been awaiting the divine command to join the other Muslims in Yathrib. He was not free to emigrate until this command came to him. At last the command came. He gave his cloak to Ali, bidding him lie down on the bed so that anyone looking in might think Muhammad lay there. The slayers were to strike him as he came out of the house, whether in the night or early morning. He knew they would not injure Ali. The assassins were already surrounding his house when Prophet Muhammad slipped out unseen. He went to Abu Bakr’s house and called to him, and they both went together to a cavern in a desert hill, hiding there until

the hue and cry was past. Abu Bakr's son and daughter and his herdsman brought them food and tidings after nightfall. Once, a search party came so near to them in their hiding-place that they could hear their words. Abu Bakr was afraid and said, "O Messenger of God, Were one of them to look down towards his feet, he would see us!" The Prophet replied:

“What do you think of two people with whom God is the Third? Do not be sad, for indeed God is with us.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

When the search party had departed their presence, , Abu Bakr had the riding-camels and the guide brought to the cave at night, and they set out on the long ride to Yathrib.

After traveling for many days on unfrequented paths, the fugitives reached a suburb of Yathrib called Qubaa, where, for weeks past, the people of the city heard that the Prophet had left Mecca, and hence they been setting out to the local hills every morning, watching for the Prophet until heat drove them to shelter. The travelers arrived in the heat of the day, after the watchers had retired. A Jew who was out and about saw him approaching and called out to the Muslims that he whom they expected had at last arrived, and the Muslims set out to the hills before Qubaa to greet him.

The Prophet stayed in Qubaa for some days, and there he built the first mosque of Islam. By that time, Ali, who had left Mecca by foot three days after the Prophet, has also arrived. The Prophet, his companions from Mecca, and the "Helpers" of Qubaa led him to Medina, where they had been eagerly anticipating his arrival.

The inhabitants of Medina never saw a brighter day in their history. Anas, a close companion of the Prophet, said:

I was present the day he entered Medina and I have never seen a better or brighter day than the day on which he came to us in Medina, and I was present on the day he died, and I have never seen a day worse or darker than the day on which he died" (Ahmed)

Every house in Medina wished that the Prophet would stay with them, and some tried to lead his camel to their home. The Prophet stopped them and said:

“Leave her, for she is under (Divine) Command.”

It passed many houses until it cam to a halt and knelt at the land of Banu Najjaar. The Prophet did not descend until the camel had risen and gone on a little, then it turned and went back to its original place and knelt again. Upon that, the Prophet descended from it. He was pleased with its choice, for Banu Najjaar were his maternal uncles, and he also desired to honor them. When individuals from the family has were soliciting him to enter their houses, a certain Abu Ayyoub stepped for ward to his saddle and took it into his house. The Prophet said:

“A man goes with his saddle.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)

The first task he undertook in Medina was to build a Mosque. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, sent for the two boys who owned the date-store and asked them to name the price of the yard. They answered, "Nay, but we shall make thee a gift of it, O Prophet of God!" The Prophet however, refused their offer, paid them its price and built a mosque from there, he himself taking part in its erection. While working, he was heard saying:

“O God! There is no goodness except that of the Hereafter, so please forgive the Helpers and the Emigrants.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

The mosque served as a place of worship for Muslims. The prayer which was previously an individual act performed in secret now became a public affair, one which epitomizes a Muslim society. The period in which Muslims and Islam was subordinate and oppressed was over, now the adthaan, the call to prayer, would be called aloud, booming and penetrating the walls of every house, calling and reminding Muslims to fulfill their obligation to their Creator.

The mosque was a symbol of the Islamic society. It was a place of worship, a school where Muslims would enlighten themselves about the truths of the religion, a meeting place where the differences of various warring parties would be resolved, and an administration building from which all matters concerning the society would emanate, a true example of how Islam incorporates all aspects of life into the religion. All these tasks were undertaken in a place built upon the trunks of date-palm trunks roofed with its leaves.

When the first and most important task was complete, he also made houses on both sides of the mosque for his family, also from the same materials. The Prophet's Mosque and house in Medina stands today in that very place.

The Hijrah had been completed. It was 23 September 622, and the Islamic era, the Muslim calendar, begins the day on which this event took place. And from this day on Yathrib had a new name, a name of glory: Madinat-un-Nabi, the City of the Prophet, in brief, Medina.

Such was the Hijrah, the emigration from Mecca to Yathrib. The thirteen years of humiliation, of persecution, of limited success, and of prophecy still unfulfilled were over.

The ten years of success, the fullest that has ever crowned one man's endeavor, had begun. The Hijrah makes a clear division in the story of the Prophet's Mission, which is evident from the Quran. Till then he had only been a preacher. Thenceforth he was the ruler of a State, at first a very small one, but which grew in ten years to become the empire of Arabia. The kind of guidance which he and his people needed after the Hijrah was not the same as that which they had needed before. The Medina chapters differ, therefore, from the Meccan chapters. The latter give guidance to the individual soul and to the Prophet as Warner: the former give guidance to a growing social and political community and to the Prophet as example, lawgiver, and reformer.

(part 7 of 12): A New Stage in Medina

Prophet Muhammad's main meal was usually a boiled gruel, with dates and milk, his only other meal of the day being dates and water; but he frequently went hungry, sometimes even binding a flat stone against his belly to alleviate his discomfort. One day a woman gave him a cloak - something he badly needed - but the same evening someone asked for it to make a shroud, and he promptly gave it as charity. He was brought food by those who had a small surplus, but he never seemed to keep it long enough to taste it, as there was always someone in greater need. With diminished physical strength - now fifty-two years old - he struggled to build a nation based upon the true religion of Islam out of the varied assortment of people God had given him as his raw material.

By force of character combined with extraordinary diplomatic skill, Prophet Muhammad began to reconcile the warring factions of Medina. With his other companions also emigrating, a support system for the newcomers was of essential importance. To unite the 'emigrants' (*Muhājirūn*) with the local Muslims, the 'helpers' (*Ansār*), he established a system of personal relationships: each 'helper' took an 'emigrant' as his brother, to be treated as such under all circumstances and to stand in order of inheritance along with members of the natural family. With a few exceptions, the 'emigrants' had lost everything they possessed and were completely dependent upon their new brothers. The Helpers sometimes went so far as to give their Emigrant brothers half of whatever they possessed in the form of houses, assets, lands and groves. Such was the enthusiasm of the Helpers to share everything with their brothers-in-faith that they divided everything into two parts to draw lots for allocating their share. In most cases, they tried to give the Emigrants the fairer portion of their property.

One is tempted to describe as a 'miracle' the fact that this situation seems to have caused no resentment whatever among those who were so suddenly obliged to take complete strangers into their families. This bond of brotherhood broke all ties of ancestry, color, nationality and other factors previously regarded as a standard of honor. The only ties which now mattered were religious. Seldom has the power of religious faith to change men been more clearly demonstrated.

The Meccan Muslims, however, had not forgotten their old skills. An 'emigrant' who when his new brother said to him, 'O poorest of the poor, how can I help you? My house and my funds are at your disposal!' replied: 'O kindest of kind friends, just show me the way to the local market. The rest will take care of itself.' This man, it is said, started by selling cheese and clarified butter, and soon became rich enough to pay the dower of a local girl and, in due course, was able to equip a caravan of 700 camels.

Such enterprise was encouraged, but there were also those who had neither the ability to do so nor did they have family or property. They would spend the

day in the Mosque and at night, the Prophet would place them with various individuals of the Helpers. They came to be known as *'Ahl us-Suffa.'* Some were fed at the Prophet's own table, when there was any to spare, and with roasted barley from the community chest.

In the first year of his reign at Yathrib, the Prophet made a solemn covenant of mutual obligation between his people and the Jews tribes of Medina and its surrounding areas, in which it was agreed that they would have equal status as citizens of a state and full religious liberty, and that each would defend the other if attacked.

But their idea of a Prophet was one who would give them dominion, and a Jewish prophet, not an Arabian one. The Jews had also profited greatly from the infighting between Arab tribes, as it was through this instability of the region that they had gained the upper hand in trade and commodities. Peace among the tribes of Medina and its surrounding areas was a threat to the Jews.

Also, from among the inhabitants of Medina were those who resented the newcomers, but held their peace for the time being. The most powerful of them, Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salool, was extremely resentful of the arrival of the Prophet, as it was he who was the de facto the leader of Yathrib prior to the Prophet. He accepted Islam as a matter of formality, though he would later betray the Muslims as the leader of the 'hypocrites.'

Due to this common hatred of the Prophet, the Muslims, and the new state of affairs of Yathrib, the alliance between the Jews and the 'hypocrites' of Medina was almost inevitable. Throughout the history of Muslims in Medina, they tried to seduce the followers of the new religion, constantly plotting and planning against them. Due to this, there is frequent mention of the Jews and hypocrites in the Medina chapters of the Quran.

The Qiblah

The Qiblah (the direction toward which the Muslims pray) until this point had been Jerusalem. The Jews imagined that the choice implied a leaning toward Judaism and that the Prophet stood in need of their instruction. The Prophet longed for the Qiblah to be changed to the Kaaba. The first place on earth built for the worship of God, and rebuilt by Abraham. In the second year after the migration, The Prophet received command to change the Qiblah from Jerusalem to the Kaaba at Mecca. A whole portion of Surah al-Baqara relates to this Jewish controversy.

The First Expeditions

The Prophet's first concern as ruler was to establish public worship and lay down the constitution of the State: but he did not forget that the Quraish had sworn to make an end of his religion. Enraged that the Prophet had succeeded in migrating to Medina, they increased their torture and persecution of the Muslims who stayed behind in Mecca. Their evil plots did not stop their. They

also tried to make secret alliances with some polytheists of Medina, such as Abdullah ibn Ubayy previously mentioned, ordering him to kill or expel the Prophet. The Quraish often sent threatening messages to Muslims of Medina warning of their annihilation, and so much news of the plots and plans of the polytheists reached the Prophet himself that he requested the positioning of security guards around his house. It was at this time that God had given the Muslims permission to take arms against the disbelievers.

For thirteen years they had been strict pacifists. Now, however, several small expeditions were sent, led either by the Prophet himself or some other of the emigrants from Mecca for the purpose of reconnoitering the routes which led to Mecca, as well as forming alliances with other tribes. Other expeditions were led in order to intercept some caravans returning from Syria en route to Mecca, a way that Muslims could place economic pressure of the Quraish in order to quit their harassment of the Muslims, both in Mecca and Medina. Few of these expeditions ever saw actual battle, but through them, the Muslims established their new position in the Arabian Peninsula, that they were no longer an oppressed and weak people, but rather their strength had grown and were now a formidable force not easily reckoned with.

(part 8 of 12): The Campaign of Badr

The Campaign of Badr

On one expedition, the Quraishite caravan on route to Syria had escaped the Muslims. The Muslims were in wait for its return. Some scouts of the Muslims saw the caravan, led by Abu Sufyan himself, pass by them, and hurriedly informed the Prophet of it and its size. If this caravan were intercepted, it would have an economic impact of great measure, one which would shake the entire society of the Meccans. The Muslim scouts reported that the caravan would be halting at the wells of Badr, and the Muslims now prepared themselves to intercept it.

News of these preparations reached Abu Sufyan on his southward journey, and he sent an urgent message to Mecca that an army should be dispatched to deal with the Muslims. Grasping the catastrophic consequences if the caravan were intercepted, they immediately rounded as much power as possible and departed to encounter the Muslims. On way to Badr, the army received news that Abu Sufyan managed to escape the Muslims by driving the caravan to an alternative route along the seashore. The Meccan army, numbering about a thousand men, persisted to Badr in order to teach a lesson to the Muslims, dissuading them from attacking any caravans in the future.

When the Muslims came to know of the advance of the Meccan army, they knew that a daring step must be taken in the matter. If the Muslims did not encounter them at Badr, the Meccans would continue undermine the cause of Islam with all their ability, possibly even proceeding to Medina desecrating lives property and wealth there. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of

God be upon him, held an advisory meeting to determine the course of action. The Prophet did not want to lead the Muslims, especially the Helpers who were the far majority of the army and were not even bound by the Pledge of Aqaba to fight beyond their territories, into something they did not agree to.

A man from the Helpers, Sa'd ibn Mu'adh stood reaffirmed their devotion to the Prophet and the cause of Islam. From his words were the following:

“O Prophet of God! We believe in you and we bear witness to what you have vouchsafed to us, and we declare in unequivocal terms that what you have brought is the Truth. We give you our firm pledge of obedience and sacrifice. We obey you most willingly in whatever you command us, and by God Who has sent you with the Truth, if you were to ask us to plunge into the sea, we will do that most readily, and not a man of us will stay behind. We do not grudge the idea of encounter with the enemy. We are experienced in war and we are trustworthy in combat. We hope that God will show you through our hands those deeds of valor which will please your eyes. Kindly lead us to the battlefield in the Name of God.

After this show of extreme support and love for the Prophet and Islam by both the Emigrants and the Helpers, the Muslims, numbering a little over 300, made their way as best they could to Badr. They had only seventy camels and three horses between them, so the men rode by turns. They went forward to what is known in history as *al- Yawm al-Furqan*, the Day of Discrimination; discrimination between light and darkness, good and evil, right and wrong.

Preceding the Day of the battle, the Prophet spent the whole night in prayer and supplication. The battle was fought on 17 Ramadan in the second year of the Hijra; 624 C.E. It was customary for the Arabs to start the battles with individual duels. The Muslims gained an advantage in the duels, and some notaries of the Quraish had been killed. The Quraish enraged, fell upon the Muslims in order to exterminate them once and for all. The Muslims kept a strategic defensive position, which in turn produced heavy losses for the Meccans. The Prophet was beseeching His Lord with all his might by this time, extending his hands so high that his cloak fell off his shoulders. At that point, he received a revelation promising of the help of God:

“...I will help you with a thousand of the angels one behind another in succession.” (Quran 8:9)

Upon hearing the good news, the Prophet ordered the Muslims to take an offensive. The great army of Quraish was overwhelmed by the zeal, valor and faith of the Muslims, and after facing heavy losses, they could do nothing but flee. The Muslims were left alone on the field with a few doomed Meccans, amongst them the arch-enemy of Islam, Abu Jahl. The Quraish were defeated and Abu Jahl was killed. The promise of God came true:

“Their multitude will be defeated, and they will turn their backs (in flee).” (Quran 54:45)

In this, one of the most decisive battles in human history, the total casualties were between only between seventy and eighty.

Mecca reeled under the shock, where Abu Sufyan was left as the dominant figure in the city, and he knew better than anyone that the matter could not be allowed to rest there. Success breeds success, and the bedouin tribes, never slow to assess the balance of power, were increasingly inclined towards alliance with the Muslims, and Islam gained many new converts in Medina.

(part 9 of 12): The Treason of Former Allies

The Battle on Mt. Uhud

In fact, in the following year, an army of three thousand men came from Mecca to destroy Yathrib. The Prophet's first idea was merely to defend the city, a plan of which Ibn Ubayy, the leader of "the Hypocrites", strongly approved. But the men who had fought at Badr, believing that God would help them against any odds, thought it a shame that they should linger behind walls.

The Prophet, approving of their faith and zeal, gave way to them, and set out with an army of one thousand men toward Mt. Uhud, where the enemy were encamped. Ibn Ubayy withdrew with his men, who were a third of the army, in retaliation. Despite the heavy odds, the battle on Mt. Uhud would have been an even greater victory than that at Badr for the Muslims, but for the disobedience of a band of fifty archers whom the Prophet had set to guard a pass against the enemy cavalry. Seeing their comrades victorious, these men left their post, fearing to lose their share of the spoils. The cavalry of Quraish rode through the gap and fell on the exultant Muslims. The Prophet himself was wounded and the cry arose that he was slain, until someone recognized him and shouted that he was still living: a shout to which the Muslims rallied. Gathering round the Prophet, they retreated, leaving many dead on the hillside. The field belonged to the Meccans, and now the women of Quraish moved among the corpses, lamenting the slain from amongst their own people and mutilating the Muslim dead. Hamzah, the Prophet's young uncle and childhood friend, was among the latter, and the abominable Hind, Abu Sufyan's wife, who bore Hamzah a particular grudge and had offered a reward to the man who killed him, ate his liver, plucked from the still warm body. On the following day, the Prophet again sallied forth with what remained of the army, that Quraish might hear that he was in the field and so might perhaps be deterred from attacking the city. The stratagem succeeded, thanks to the behavior of a friendly bedouin who met the Muslims, conversed with them and afterwards met the army of Quraish. Questioned by Abu Sufyan, he said that Muhammad was in the field, stronger than ever, and thirsting for revenge for yesterday's affair. On that information, Abu Sufyan decided to return to Mecca.

Massacre of Muslims

The reverse which they had suffered on Mt. Uhud lowered the prestige of the Muslims with the Arab tribes and also with the Jews of Yathrib. Tribes which had inclined toward the Muslims now inclined toward the Quraish. The Prophet's followers were attacked and murdered when they went abroad in little companies. Khubaib, one of his envoys, was captured by a desert tribe and sold to the Quraish, who tortured him to death in Mecca publicly.

Expulsion of Bani Nadhir

The Jews, despite their treaty with the Muslims, now hardly concealed their hostility. They began negotiating alliances with Quraish and the 'hypocrites,' and even attempted to assassinate the Prophet. The Prophet was obliged to take punitive action against some of them. The tribe of Bani Nadheer were besieged in their strong towers, subdued and forced to emigrate.

The War of the Trench

Abu Sufyan must have understood very well that the old game of tit for tat was no longer valid. Either the Muslims must be destroyed or the game was lost for ever. With great diplomatic skill he set about forming a confederacy of bedouin tribes, some, no doubt, opposed to the Muslims, but others merely eager for plunder, and at the same time he began quietly to sound out the Jews in Medina regarding a possible alliance. In the fifth year of the Hijrah (early in 627 C.E.) he set out with 10,000 men, the greatest army ever seen in the Hijaz (the western region of the Arabian Peninsula). Medina could raise at most 3,000 to oppose him.

The Prophet presided over a council of war, and this time no one suggested going out to meet the enemy. The only question was how the town could best be defended. At this point Salman the Persian, a former slave who had become one of the closest of the companions, suggested the digging of a deep ditch to join the defensive strong points formed by the lava fields and by fortified buildings. This was something unheard of in Arab warfare, but the Prophet immediately appreciated the merits of the plan and work began at once, he himself carrying rubble from the diggings on his back.

The work was barely finished when the confederate army appeared on the horizon. While the Muslims were awaiting the assault, news came that Bani Quraidhah, a Jewish tribe of Yathrib which had, until then, been loyal, had defected to the enemy. The case seemed desperate. The Prophet brought every available man to the ditch, leaving the town itself under the command of a blind companion, and the enemy was met with a hail of arrows as they came up to the unexpected obstacle. They never crossed it, but remained in position for three or four weeks, exchanging arrows and insults with the defenders. The weather turned severe, with icy winds and a tremendous downpour, and this proved too much for the bedouin confederates. They had come in the

expectation of easy plunder and saw nothing to be gained from squatting beside a muddy ditch in appalling weather and watching their beasts die for lack of fodder. They faded away without so much as a farewell to Abu Sufyan. The army disintegrated and he himself was forced to withdraw. The game was over. He had lost.

(part 10 of 12): The Treaty of Hudaibiyah

Punishment of Bani Quraidhah

Nothing is worse, in Arab eyes, than the betrayal of trust and the breaking of a solemn pledge. It was time now to deal with Bani Quraidhah. On the day of the return from the trench the Prophet ordered war on the treacherous Bani Quraidhah, who, conscious of their guilt, had already taken to their towers of refuge. After a siege of nearly a month they had to surrender unconditionally. They only begged that they might be judged by a member of the Arab tribe of which they were adherents. They chose the head of the clan with which they had long been in alliance, Sa'd ibn Mu'adh of Aws, who was dying from wounds received at Uhud and had to be propped up to give judgment. Without hesitation, he condemned the men of the tribe to death.

Hudaibiyah

In the same year the Prophet had a vision in which he found himself entering Mecca unopposed, therefore he determined to attempt the pilgrimage. Besides a number of Muslims from Medina, he called upon the friendly Arabs to accompany him, whose numbers had increased since the miraculous discomfiture of the clans at the Battle of the Ditch, but most of them did not respond. Attired as pilgrims, and taking with them the customary offerings, a company of fourteen hundred men journeyed to Mecca. As they drew near the valley they were met by a friend from the city, who warned the Prophet that the Quraish had had sworn to prevent his entering the sanctuary; their cavalry was on the road before him. On that, the Prophet ordered a detour through mountain gorges, so the Muslims were tired out when they came down at last into the valley of Mecca and encamped at a spot called Hudaibiyah; from thence he tried to open negotiations with the Quraish, to explain that he came only as a pilgrim. The first messenger he sent towards the city was maltreated and his camel hamstrung. He returned without delivering his message. The Quraish, on their side, sent an envoy who was threatening in tone, and very arrogant. Another of their envoys was too familiar in the way he spoke to the Prophet, and had to be reminded sternly of the respect due to him. It was he who consequently said, on his return to the city of Mecca: "I have seen Caesar and Chosroes in their pomp, but never have I seen a man honored as Muhammad is honored by his comrades."

The Prophet sought to send some messenger who would impose respect. Uthman was finally chosen because of his kinship with the powerful Umayyad family. While the Muslims were awaiting his return the news came that he had been murdered. It was then that the Prophet, sitting under a tree in Hudaibiyyah, took an oath from all his comrades that they would stand or fall together. After a while, however, it became known that Uthman had not been murdered. Then a troop that came out from the city to molest the Muslims in their camp was captured before they could do any hurt and brought before the Prophet, who forgave them on their promise to renounce hostility.

Truce of Hudaibiyyah

Eventually proper envoys came from the Quraish. After some negotiation, the truce of Hudaibiyyah was signed. It stipulated that for ten years there were to be no hostilities between the parties. The Prophet was to return to Medina without visiting the Kaaba, but he would be able to perform the pilgrimage with his comrades in the following year. The Quraish promised they would evacuate Mecca to allow him to do so. Deserters from the Quraish to the Muslims during the period of the truce were to be returned; not so deserters from the Muslims to the Quraish. Any tribe or clan who wished to share in the treaty as allies of the Prophet might do so, and any tribe or clan who wished to share in the treaty as allies of the Quraish might do so. There was dismay among the Muslims at these terms. They asked one another: “Where is the victory that we were promised?”

It was during the return journey from Hudaibiyyah that the surah entitled “Victory” was revealed. This truce proved, in fact, to be the greatest victory that the Muslims had till then achieved. War had been a barrier between them and the idolaters, but now both parties met and talked together, and the new religion spread more rapidly. In the two years which elapsed between the signing of the truce and the fall of Mecca the number of converts was greater than the total number of all previous converts. The Prophet traveled to Hudaibiyyah with 1400 men. Two years later, when the Meccans broke the truce, he marched against them with an army of 10,000.

(part 11 of 12): The Return to Mecca

The Campaign of Khyber

In the seventh year or the Hijrah the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, led a campaign against Khyber, the stronghold of the Jewish tribes in North Arabia, which had become a hornets’ nest of his enemies. The Jews of Khyber thenceforth became tenants of the Muslims. It was at Khyber that a Jewish woman prepared poisoned meat for the Prophet, of which he only tasted a morsel. Hardly had the morsel touched his lips than he became aware that it was poisoned. Without swallowing it, he warned his

companions of the poison, but one Muslim, who had already swallowed a mouthful, died later. The woman who had cooked the meat was put to death.

Pilgrimage to Mecca

In the same year the Prophet's vision was fulfilled: he visited Mecca unopposed. In accordance with the terms of the truce the idolaters evacuated the city, and from the surrounding heights watched the procedure of the Muslims.

Truce broken by the Quraish

A little later, a tribe allied to the Quraish broke the truce by attacking a tribe that was in alliance with the Prophet and massacring them even in the sanctuary at Mecca. Afterwards they were afraid because of what they had done. They sent Abu Sufyan to Medina to ask for the existing treaty to be renewed and, its term prolonged. They hoped that he would arrive before the tidings of the massacre. But a messenger from the injured tribe had been before him and Abu Sufyan failed again.

Conquest of Mecca

Then the Prophet summoned all the Muslims capable of bearing arms and marched to Mecca. The Quraish were overawed. Their cavalry put up a show of defense before the town, but were routed without bloodshed; and the Prophet entered his native city as conqueror.

The inhabitants expected vengeance for their past misdeeds, but the Prophet proclaimed a general amnesty. In their relief and surprise, the whole population of Mecca hastened to swear allegiance. The Prophet ordered all the idols which were in the sanctuary to be destroyed, saying: "Truth hath come; darkness hath vanished away;" and the Muslim call to prayer was heard in Mecca.

Battle of Hunain

In the same year there was an angry gathering of pagan tribes eager to regain the Kaaba. The Prophet led twelve thousand men against them. At Hunain, in a deep ravine, his troops were ambushed by the enemy and almost put to flight. It was with difficulty that they were rallied to the Prophet and his bodyguard of faithful comrades who alone stood firm. But the victory, when it came, was complete and the booty enormous, for many of the hostile tribes had brought out with them everything that they possessed.

Conquest of Taif

The tribe of Thaqeef were among the enemy at Hunain. After that victory their city of Taif was besieged by the Muslims, and finally reduced. Then the Prophet appointed a governor of Mecca, and himself returned to Medina to the

boundless joy of the Ansar, who had feared lest, now that he had regained his native city, he might forsake them and make Mecca the capital.

The Tabook Expedition

In the ninth year of the Hijrah, hearing that an army was again being mustered in Syria, the Prophet called on all the Muslims to support him in a great campaign. In spite of infirmity, the Prophet led an army against the Syrian frontier in midsummer. The far distance, the hot season, and the fact that it was harvest time and the prestige of the enemy caused many to excuse themselves and many more to stay behind without excuse. They camped that night without food or drink, sheltering behind their camels; and so they reached the oasis of Tabuk, finally returning to Mecca after converting several tribes. But the campaign ended peacefully. The army advanced to Tabuk, on the border of Syria, but there they learnt that the enemy had not yet gathered.

Declaration of Immunity

Although Mecca had been conquered and its people were now Muslims, the official order of the pilgrimage had not been changed; the pagan Arabs performing it in their manner, and the Muslims in their manner. It was only after the pilgrims' caravan had left Medina in the ninth year of the Hijrah, when Islam was dominant in North Arabia, that the Declaration of Immunity, as it is called, was revealed. Its purport was that after that year Muslims only were to make the pilgrimage, exception being made for such of the idolaters as had an ongoing treaty with the Muslims and had never broken their treaties nor supported anyone against those they had treaties with. Such, then, were to enjoy the privileges of their treaty for the term thereof, but when their treaty had expired they would be as other idolaters. This proclamation marked the end of idol-worship in Arabia.

(part 12 of 12): Bidding Farewell

The Farewell Pilgrimage

The end, however, was drawing closer, and in the tenth year of the Hijra he set off from Medina with some 90,000 Muslims from every part of Arabia to perform Hajj, the pilgrimage. This triumphal journey of the aging man, worn by years of persecution and then by unceasing struggle, is surrounded by a kind of twilight splendor, as though a great ring of light had finally closed, encompassing the mortal world in its calm radiance.

In the tenth year of the Hijrah he went to Mecca as a pilgrim for the last time, referred to as his "pilgrimage of farewell" when from the plain of Arafat he preached to an enormous throng of pilgrims. He reminded them of all the duties Islam enjoined upon them, and that they would one day have to meet their Lord, who would judge each one of them according to his work. At the

end of the discourse, he asked: "Have I not conveyed the Message?" And from that great multitude of men who a few months or years before had all been conscienceless idolaters the shout went up: "O God! Yes!" The Prophet said: "O God! You be witness!" Islam had been established and would grow into a great tree sheltering far greater multitudes. His work was done and he was ready, to lay down his burden and depart.

Illness and Death of the Prophet

The Prophet returned to Medina. There was still work to be done; but one day he was seized by a painful illness. He came to the mosque wrapped in a blanket and there were those who saw the signs of death in his face.

"If there is anyone among you," he said, "whom I have caused to be flogged unjustly, here is my back. Strike in your turn. If I have damaged the reputation of any among you, may he do likewise to mine."

He had said once:

"What have I to do with this world? I and this world are as a rider and a tree beneath which he shelters. Then he goes on his way and leaves it behind him."

And now he said:

"There is a slave among the slaves of God who has been offered the choice between this world and that which is with Him, and the slave has chosen that which is with God."

On 12 Rabi'ul-Awwal in the eleventh year of the Hijrah, which in the Christian calendar is 8 June 632, he entered the mosque for the last time. Abu Bakr was leading the prayer, and he motioned to him to continue. As he watched the people, his face became radiant. 'I never saw the Prophet's face more beautiful than it was at that hour,' said his companion Anas. Returning to Aisha's apartment he laid his head on her lap. He opened his eyes and she heard him murmur: 'With the highest companion in Paradise . . .' These were his last words. When, later in the day, the rumor grew that he was dead. Umar threatened those who spread the rumor with dire punishment, declaring it a crime to think that the Messenger of God could die. He was storming at the people in that strain when Abu Bakr came into the mosque and overheard him. Abu Bakr went to the chamber of his daughter Aisha, where the Prophet lay. Having ascertained the fact, and kissed the dead-man's forehead, he went back into the mosque. The people were still listening to Umar, who was saying that the rumor was a wicked lie, that the Prophet, who was their life blood, could not be dead. Abu Bakr went up to Umar and tried to stop him by a whispered word. Then, finding he would pay no heed, Abu Bakr called to the people, who, recognizing his voice, left Umar and came crowding round him. He first gave praise to God, and then said those words which epitomize the creed of Islam: "O people! Lo! As for him who used to worship Muhammad,

Muhammad is dead. But as for him who used to worship God, God is alive and dies not.” He then recited the verse of the Quran:

“And Muhammad is but a messenger; messengers the like of whom have passed away before him. Will it be that, when he dies or is slain, you will turn back on your heels? He who turneth back doth no hurt to God, and God will reward the thankful.”