

Beginnings of Bitter Struggle

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The reaction of the pre-Islamic Arabs towards the call of the Prophet (pbuh) took many forms:

Attacking the Prophet (saw) in Person

At the beginning of the Prophet's divine mission, the Quraish looked at him as a monk or a sage, whose influence would soon wane, and the people, accordingly, would return to the religion of their fathers and ancestors. But, contrarily, the new faith swept through the community, scoring victories on the social level. The Qur'anic verses condemned the idols and idolatry, calling for the worship of the only God and warning the infidels of a terribly severe punishment in the hereafter. At that point the Quraish felt the dangerous reverberations of this call, and so they publicly proclaimed their hostility towards it. Their animosity, was, however, peaceful at first.

It was expressed in degrading the Prophet and slandering him. They challenged him to perform miracles. Could he change the hills of al-Safa and al-Marwa into gold? Could he make a spring to flow in the earth more limped than the well of Zamzam? Could he move the mountains from their places or return the dead to life?

Seeing that this method was fruitless and could not dissuade him from carrying on his divine call, they resorted to wildly slanderous propaganda and spreading of rumours. They accused him of being a liar, then a poet, and another time, a sorcerer. They left no stone unturned to distort his image, seizing every chance to do so. Even in Yathrib (Medinah) and Abyssinia (Ethiopia), their lies were intensely spread.

One day, they gathered at the house of al-Walid bin al-Mughirah, one of the widely known and shrewd men of among the Arabs and one who used to bitterly mock the Prophet (pbuh) and Islam.

"O Abu Abd-Shams?," they asked him. "What is Muhammad saying? Is it poetry, soothsaying or sermonizing?"

"Let me," he suggested, "hear his talks".

He came near the Messenger of Allah (pbuh), who was near the Black Stone reciting verses from the Qur'an.

He asked the Prophet (pbuh), "O Muhammad, recite some of your poetry to me!" "It is not

poetry," the Prophet (pbuh) replied, "It is the discourse of Allah, which He has conveyed to his angels, prophets and messengers."

"Recite something of it to me," persisted al-Walid.

The Prophet (pbuh) recited the chapter (surah) of "Ha' Mim al-Sajdah". When he read "But if they turn aside, then say. I have warned you of a Scourge like the scourge of Ad and Thamood."

Al-Walid shivered, and a shudder seized hold of him. He ran away and did not return to his companions who were waiting for him.

The Quraishis reported that Abu-Jahl, saying: "O Abu al-Hakam! Abu-Shams inclined to the religion of Muhammad. Did you not see that he did not return to us?" Abu-Jahl hastened to meet al-Walid and said to him: "O uncle! You have lowered our heads and disgraced us, you made our enemy rejoice at our affliction by inclining to the religion of Muhammad."

"I did not incline to his religion," al-Walid explained, "but I have heard hard words that made my skin creep."

"Was it a sermon?" Abu-Jahl inquired.

"No," al-Walid. "A sermon is composed of uninterrupted sentences. This is prose, parts of which are unlike the others".

"Did you see him shudder at it?" asked Abu-Jahl.

"No," al-Walid replied. "I heard Arabic poetry of all rhythms: The basit, madid, ramal and rajz. It is not poetry". "Then, what is it?" Abu-Jahl wanted to know "Let me think," said al-Walid.

The next day, the Quraishis asked al-Walid, "O Abu Abd-Shams! What should we call it?" "Say, it is sorcery, for it attracts the hearts of the people" he advised them.

About that, Allah, the Exalted, revealed to His Messenger (pbuh) the following verses:

"Leave Me and him whom I created alone, And gave him vast riches, And sons dwelling in his presence, And I adjusted affairs for him adjustably; And yet he desires that I should add more! By no means! surely he offers opposition to Our signs. I will make a distressing punishment overtake him. Surely he reflected and guessed, But may he be cursed how he plotted; Again, may he be cursed how he plotted; Then he looked, Then he frowned and scowled, Then turned back and was big with pride, Then he said: This is naught but enchantment, narrated (from others); This is naught but the word of mortal. I will cast him into hell. And what will make you realize what hell is? It leaves naught nor does it spare aught." - Holy Qur'an (73:21-28)

Apart from this widespread slanderous propaganda, they moved to make bargains with him in a bid to lure him away from his message. With this in mind, they sent, one day, Utba bin Rabi'a, one of their prominent leaders, to the Prophet (pbuh) to strike a deal with him. He said to him:

"...O my nephew! if you desire money and wealth, by preaching what you are preaching, we will collect enough for you from our own. We will make you the wealthiest of all of us. If it is chieftainship that you desire we are ready to make you our paramount chief, so that we will never decide on matter without you. If you desire rulership, we will make you our ruler. And if this condition that you call revelation is a jinn that you cannot escape from his grip, we are ready to call the most distinguished physicians of our time to examine you, and spend generously, till you are completely cured. For, sometimes, the jinn seizes hold of victim totally till the latter is exorcised."

"Is that all, O Abu al-Walid?," the Prophet asked.

"Yes" , he replied.

"Then, listen to me," the Prophet said to him.

"I will," agreed Utba.

The Prophet (pbuh) recited the chapter (surah) of Fussilat:

"Ha Mim! A revelation from the Beneficent, the Merciful God. A Book of which the verses are made plain, an Arabic Qur'an for a people who know: A herald of good news and a warner, but most of them turn aside so they hear not. And they say: Our hearts are made under coverings from that to which you call us, and there is a heaviness in our ears, and a veil hangs between us and you, so work, we too are working. Say: I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me that your God is one God, therefore follow the right way to Him and ask His forgiveness; and woe to the polytheists. (To) those who do not give poor-rates and they are unbelievers in the hereafter. (As for) those who believe and do good, they shall surely have a reward never to be cut off..." - Holy Qur'an (41:1-8)

Till he recited the verse where prostration is obligatory on whoever recites or hears it, and the Prophet (pbuh) prostrated himself while Utba was still listening to him. Then he said to Utba,

"O Abu al-Walid! You have heard what I have just recited. You can now decide."

Utba got to his feet. He was bewildered so much so that his companions said, "We swear by Allah that Abu al-Walid has returned in a different mood." He had hardly took his place among them when he said to them, "By Allah, I have heard something I have never heard before. By Allah, it is neither poetry, sorcery nor soothsaying."

"O son of the Quraish! Leave the man to himself. Boycott him. By Allah, he will be widely known. Should Arabs kill him then you are spared the task of checking him. And if he reigns over them, his rulership is yours and his power is yours. You will be the happiest people with him."

"Abu al-Walid," they protested, "he has by Allah, cast a spell on you with his tongue!"

"That is what I think of him." He told them. "You are free to do what you think suitable..."

Once again, they sent another delegation to the Prophet. They brought forward the same previous proposal, and he said to them:

"...I have not brought to you what I have brought for the sake of your wealth. Nor was it to seek honour or rulership over you. Allah has sent me to you a Messenger and revealed a book to me. He ordered me to give you the good news of Paradise and to warn you of the fire of hell. I have conveyed to you the message of my lord and advised you. If you accept what I have brought you, then, it is your lot in this life and the hereafter. Should you refuse it, then I resign myself to Allah's will, till Allah judges between me and you..."

Then the Quraishis attempted to make the Prophet (pbuh) turn aside from his message by contacting his family. They went to his uncle Abu-Talib and complained to him about Muhammad (pbuh). They told him that his nephew had cursed the idols, spoken evil of their gods and, created tensions among them. So he had either to stop preaching his message or face the whole of the Quraish, if Abu-Talib was to leave him unprotected. Abu-Talib could mitigate their worries and put the question aside.

Once again they called on Abu-Talib. They repeated their previous proposals. But they added something new. They asked Abu-Talib to hand Muhammad (pbuh) over to them in return for Umara bin al-Walid bin al-Mughirah, whom they would give to him. They said to him: "We offer you the well-known young man of the Quraish who is matchless in his beauty, lineage, freighting ability and in reciting poetry."

"By Allah," Abu-Talib told them, "You are very unfair. You give me your son to take care of, whereas I give you mine so that you kill him! Do you not know that the she-camel that loses its baby will not yearn for another one?..."

For the third time they returned to talk with Abu-Talib. But, this time, they were enraged beyond endurance. They said to Abu-Talib:

"By Allah, we can no longer be patient while Muhammad insults our fathers, speaks evil of our gods and finds wrong with our gods. You should either stop his activities or be ready, both of you to fight us, till one of the parties perishes."

Abu-Talib was very distressed at that. He took the Prophet (pbuh) aside and told him all that the Quraish had said. He made it clear to him that he could not, due to a lack of means, resist and fight them. Nor could he withdraw his protection from him. The Prophet (pbuh) fell into deep thought, then said:

"O My dear uncle. By Allah, even if they were to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in

my left hand so that I abandon this mission, I will never do that till Allah makes it prevail or I
perish in carrying it out..."

Saddened at what he had heard, the Prophet (pbuh) left his uncle. But Abu Talib called him and said to him bravely: "Go, my nephew. Say what you want to. By Allah, I will never abandon you."

Then he recited these lines of verses:

"By Allah , never can they treat you as they wish, Not until I am laid to rest in my grave.

Proceed with your mission unblamed, Of that I give you the good news. Be assured of that.
You have invited me. Surely, I know you are advising me, You are still the trustworthy even if
you carry out this mission.

I know, for sure, that the religion of Muhammad, Is the best one revealed to mankind."

The clan of Bani Hashim sided with the Messenger (pbuh) and unanimously decided to protect him. But Abu-Lahab was a prey to the grudge burning inside him, as he saw the Messenger of

Allah enjoying so much support from his clan.

With the peaceful negotiations failing, the Quraish resorted to physical persecution of the
Prophet (s.a.w). That took many forms:

"They hurled stones at his house.

They threw the carcass of a newly slaughtered ewe at him.

They threw filth in front of his house.

They scattered thorns in his way.

They poured dust on his head.

They placed the wombs of a slaughtered lamb on his head, while he was prostrating himself in
prayer.

Aqaba bin Abi-Mu'it, accompanied by some men from the Quraish, pressed the Prophet's neck so hard that he was at the point of death" They urged the children to stone him, and similar annoying things to him. Without complaining, he used to receive all that bad treatments patiently and imperturbably, he expressed that fact in the following words: "Never before me
was a Prophet harmed as was I."

Prosecution of the Early Converts If the idolaters negotiated with the Prophet (pbuh), and complained about him to his uncle, trying to settle a bargain with him before oppressing him, they did not show much patience in respect to the first-converts to Islam. From the very beginning they were subjected to terror, persecution, harassment and pressures to make them
leave their houses.

No sooner had the followers of the Prophet (pbuh) become known, then they were severely and cruelly punished. Bilal al-Habashi, may Allah have mercy on him, was tortured at the hands of

Ummaiyah bin Khalafal-Jumahi. He would take him, at noon, to the desert and fling him to the ground face downwards or on his back. Then he would threaten him: "No, by Allah. You will remain as you are till perish, or renounce Muhammad, and worship al-Lat and al-Uzzah". Bilal

would only cry out in pain: "Only one God, only one God..."

The Banu-Makhzum tortured Yasir along with his son Ammar and Summayyah, his wife. They would take them to the Abta, a wide area covered with pebbles, and torture them there when the place became unbearably hot. After being subjected to this kind of savage treatment, Yasir was martyred. Abu-Jahl stabbed Summayyah with a lance he was carrying, and so she attained martyrdom.

Ammar, though severely tortured, was steadfast and firm in his faith.

It is related that the Messenger of Allah, one day, passed before the family of Yasir while they were being tortured, and he gave them the good news of Paradise:

"Be patient, o family of Yasir, for your meeting will be in Paradise..."

Khabbab bin al-Arat would be stripped of his clothes and flung him on the ground, on the burning sand. They would, often heat stones for him and place them on his bare body. They even twisted his neck, but he never turned away from his faith.

Other than these young converts, there were many who suffered much at the hands of their tormentors.

Torture and persecution were not confined to the weak among the faithful, but even those who enjoyed prominent social and economic status, who had influence and wealth, could not escape the harassment of the Quraish, Ibn Abbas described the severity and cruelty of the torture in these words:

"...By Allah, they would beat the faithful and keep them hungry and thirsty, so much so that one could not sit because of the cruelty of the punishment he suffered."

To allay the faithfuls' sufferings, the Messenger of Allah, exhorted them to have patience and fortitude. He encouraged them to be steadfast till Allah gave them victory over the idolaters.

Al-Khabbah related: "One day, I went to the Prophet (pbuh), who was wrapped in his cloak and was seated in the shade of Ka'ba. We being were unendurably assailed.

I said to him, "Won't you pray for us?"

He said:

"Those who were before you did not turn aside from their faith even though their bodies were combed with iron, so that their flesh and tendons would be separated from the bones. They would never turn aside from their faith even though saws were placed on the middle of their heads which were cut into two. Allah will certainly make His faith prevail so that a rider will

travel from San'a to Hadramout and will fear nobody but Allah the Mighty and High, and the wolves lest they eat his sheep. But, certainly, you have no patience."

Immigration to Abyssinia

When things in Mecca were brought to a head, the Prophet (pbuh) allowed some of his followers to immigrate to Abyssinia, where they could find a refuge and safe haven. The number of the first batch of immigrants was 11 men and four women. They stole out of Mecca secretly. When they reached the coast of the sea, they found ships owned by merchants. They chartered them and sailed to Abyssinia. The Quraish got word that some of the Muslims had set out for the sea. They sent a group of men to pursue them, but they found that the Muslims had already sailed to Abyssinia. The new converts arrived in Abyssinia. For three months they remained there, but soon they returned to Mecca after they heard that the whole of the Quraish had entered Islam. But, to their disappointment, that was only a rumour. The Quraish did not cease torturing and persecuting them.

Once again, the Prophet (pbuh) ordered them to immigrate to Abyssinia. They were 80 men and 18 women. At the head of them were Ja'far bin Abi-Talib and Asma' his wife. The Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia, received them with hospitality. They felt comfortable and secure there after the long period of harassment in Mecca.

The Quraish felt the danger of the migration of the Muslims. The consequences might be grave for the idolaters. As a measure to preempt the Muslims' future plans, the Quraish sent Amru bin al-Aas and 'Imara bin al-Walid, loaded with precious gifts to the Negus and his courtiers. This was a bid to persuade him to withdraw his protection from the converts and return them to Mecca. When the two envoys arrived at the Negus's court they said to him, "These are among our ignorant people who have parted with the faith of their people and did not enter your faith.. They brought forth a newly created faith, neither we know it nor you. The honourable chiefs of their people have sent us to return them".

A true Christian at heart, and a just and noble man, the Negus thought it was unjust to listen to one party only. He sent for the immigrants to examine the matter closely. When the immigrants were admitted into the court, Ja'far bin Abi-Talib talked on behalf of them:

"O King! For centuries we were living in blind ignorance. We worshipped idols, ate carrion, did the most vicious of deeds, broke off relations with our relatives, troubled our neighbours and the strong among us ruled over the weak...until one day, Allah sent us a Prophet from among

us, whose lineage, truthfulness, trustworthiness and chastity we know. He called us to acknowledge the unity of Allah and not to set any god parallel to Him and to renounce what we used to worship of stones and idols.

He enjoined us to pray, pay the poor-rate and fast. He exhorted us to be truthful, return the things trusts entrusted to us by other people, keep our relations warm with our relatives, be kind with our neighbours, refrain from doing what is forbidden by Allah, and from shedding blood. He forbade us to do evil and, speak falsehoods, to swallow the property of the orphans and kept us from charging chaste women of committing adultery. We believed in him and in his message. Our people, as a result, turned against us to force us to the worship of idols and the doing of evils. When they harassed us and wronged us, we set out for your country. We chose you, from among the others, hoping that we will not be wronged under your rule."

"Do you remember", said the Negus, "any of the sayings your Prophet brought? Will you recite some of them?"

"Yes", replied Ja'far and he recited the chapter of Maryam (Mary), when he read out the part of the chapter dealing with Jesus (a.s.) the Prophet of Allah, the Negus and his courtiers were greatly moved and tears coursed down their cheeks.

'This", said the Negus, "and what Jesus had brought emerge from one niche". Seeing that the matter had slipped out of their hands, the envoys of the Quraish resorted to another scheme, trying to divide the Negus and the Muslims.

The next day Ibn al-Aas returned to the court of the Negus and told him that the Muslims had said something about Jesus slanderous and degrading. The Negus sent for the Muslims and asked for an explanation.

Ja'far in reply said, "We say about him what our Prophet says about him. He is the slave of Allah and His Messenger and Spirit, and the word He implanted in Maryam, the Virgin and the Chaste."

The Negus picked up a stick and drew a line on the ground. He looked up at Ja'far and said, "Between our faith and yours, there is a difference no thicker than this line".

The Negus, then, dismissed the envoys of the Quraish and handed them back their gifts. The plan of the Quraish was thus brought to naught. The immigrants remained in Abyssinia. They were secure and kindly treated as a result of the high-mindedness and the morality they showed to the Abyssinians.

Hard Times for Muslims - The Siege

As the chiefs of the Quraish had failed in their attempt to get back the immigrants, they

malevolently poured their ill-will on the Muslims in Mecca. They arrived at a decision which was that the Quraish would boycott the clan of Bani Hashim if Abu-Talib did not withdraw his protection from the Prophet.

At any cost, Abu-Talib would protect the Prophet (pbuh). He turned down the demands of the Quraish. Consequently, the chiefs of the Quraish drew up an agreement and hung it on the wall inside the Ka'ba. The clauses of the agreement announced a total boycott against the Bani Hashim regarding selling and buying, social relations and marriage. It was signed by 40 of the Quraish chiefs. All of Bani Hashim, except Abu Lahab due to his great animosity to the message and Messenger of Allah, were besieged in the defile of Abu-Talib.

Abu-Talib fortified their surroundings. It was guarded by day and night. Bani Hashim could not, after that, leave the defile, except on some occasions, like that of Umrah (the lesser pilgrimage) during the month of Rajab and the Hajj (pilgrimage) during the month of Dhul-Hijjah due to the strained relations between them and the Quraish.

The Quraish cut off all provisions of food to their area. But secretly some sympathizers carried food to them, though it hardly satisfied them.

They were in great trouble and stress because of that, After the passage of three years of the boycott, Allah made a worm eat the agreement leaving only the words, "In the name of Allah". Allah revealed that to His Messenger, and he, in turn, informed his uncle Abu-Talib about it.

Abu-Talib sought out the chiefs of the Quraish. He said to them, "...my nephew told me that Allah has sent a worm to your agreement and eaten it except the name of Allah, If he has said the truth you should change your ill intentions against him, but if he has lied, I will hand him over to you.. "

"It is a fair deal," they said.

When they went up to the agreement which was hung inside the Ka'ba, they found it as the Prophet had said. Now division arose between the chiefs of the Quraish, but then they agreed on tearing the remains of the agreement into small bits. That meant the end of the boycott. Due to the failure of the Quraishi boycott of the faithful, new converts were won to Islam inside .Mecca