

THE JEWS (YAHUD) AND “ASHAB AL-UKHDOOD”

اليهود
و
أصحاب الأخدود

By
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This article/essay takes you back to the time when Arabia was bracing itself for the advent of the Islamic message brought by Prophet Muhammed, peace and blessings of Allah with him, his Progeny and righteous companions.



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Saudis accompany German tourists examining ruins of the Ukhdood in Najran

During and prior to the advent of Islam, Jews in Hijaz, northern part of today's Saudi Arabia, were concentrated mostly in Medina and Mecca, the first contained a much larger population of them perhaps due to its better climate, robust trade and thriving businesses which all awarded the Jews opportunities to do business and to enjoy a measure of prosperity.

Medina's Jews had migrated from Palestine and Yemen and settled there waiting for the coming of a new Prophet from the seed of Abraham in whom they said they would believe and to be the foremost in following, something which unfortunately did not materialize; on the contrary, they joined ranks with the Pagans to fight the spread of Islam. Only a handful of them embraced Islam, including one man who was a neighbor of Muhammed (ص); he lived in the same alley in Mecca where Khadija's house stood; his wife, also Jewish, used to collect dry thorny bushes from the desert just to throw them in the Prophet's way.

The Arabs during the Prophet's lifetime belonged to one ethnic race, but history does not record that they were ever united as one nation. They were divided into tribes and clans, each having its own chief or chieftain. They, no doubt, spoke the same language, but each tribe followed a different dialect. Indeed, even religion was not a binding force. Almost every house had its own god; tribes had their own supreme deities. In the south were the small principalities of Himyar, Awza and Aqyal. In the middle and northern Arabia lived the tribes of Bakr, Taghlib, Shaiban, Azd, Quza`ah, Kandaf, Lakhm, Juzam, Banu Hanifa, Tay, Assad, Hawazin, Ghatfan, and Aws. Khazraj, Thaqif, Quraish and others were frequently engaged in intensive warfare. The Aws and the Khazraj belonged to Banu Qayla. Shortly before Muhammed's arrival, the Battle of Bu`ath, which broke out during the seventh year of the Prophet's mission, between these two clans, had shattered the power of the Khazraj who were now considering making Ibn Ubay, namely Abdullah ibn Ubay Salool, king of Medina. They hoped, by doing so, that they would be guided by him in consolidating their power, especially since they were more numerous than the other clan. But the appearance of the Prophet and the conversion of the majority of the Aws to Islam turned the tide in favor of the Prophet. He proved himself to be the right man who came to the right place at the right time to put an end to the senseless bloodshed. Bakr and Taghlib, too, had been fighting each other for forty years. Blood engagements had ruined many a tribe of Hadramaut. And the Battle of Fijar between Banu Qais and Quraish had not yet ended. If any member of a tribe was killed, the tribe considered itself duty bound to seek revenge not merely on the murderer but also on the tribe to which he belonged.

Since there was no effective machinery to settle such disputes, this invariably touched off furious wars which lasted for generations. Tribal might, dash and alacrity, were the only guarantee of a precarious security. The desert and the hills were home to fierce nomadic tribes that lived largely on plunder and depredation, but trade was also a major source of livelihood. Only a few months of the year were regarded as sacred. It was only then that bloodshed was stopped in order to facilitate the performance of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca or to trade at `Okaz. But even this convention was at times relaxed to suit the convenience of individual tribes. Only the precincts of the Ka`ba were considered sacred and were free from bloodshed. It is to this state of affairs that the Qur'an has drawn attention:

Do they not see that we have made a sacred territory secure for them, while men are carried off by force all around them? (Qur'an, 29:67)

The conditions in the country were so insecure that till 5 A.H./626 A.D., the powerful tribe of Abdul-Qais of Bahrain could not think of going to Hijaz outside the sacred months. Even the caravans going to or returning from Syria were sometimes plundered in open daylight.

Muslims' pasture lands were at times raided. Although conditions had considerably improved by then, the route to Mecca from Medina was not altogether safe till the fall of Mecca in 630 A.D.

While the country was so strife-ridden internally, dangers from outside were no less. The Roman and Persian empires had extended their domain to the fertile provinces of Yemen, Oman and Bahrain, extending their sovereignty to their land. The Romans had occupied Syria. Ghassan and some other Arab tribes, who had embraced Christianity, had been set up as the latter's feudatories. The Romans had expelled the Jews from Syria and Palestine in the second Century B.C. These Jews had migrated to Medina and its suburbs and built strong fortresses at Medina, Khaibar, Taima, Fadak and other places. Prospering themselves, the Jews were extremely jealous of prosperity in other races and strongly resented rivalry in trade business. They believed themselves to be God's "chosen people and their conduct was characterized by pride and arrogance intensified by the feeling of being secure inside their formidable fortresses. Only a few of them, including Abdullah ibn Salam, one of their rabbis, embraced Islam. The majority did not believe in Muhammed, the prophet prophecized in their Scriptures, because they expected the Promised One to be one of the Israelites, one who would rise in Syria, not in Arabia, with

Hebrew as his language.

It was during such times that the Prophet started his great mission. For preparing the ground and the proper climate, the first step that he took was to unite the Ansar and the Muhajirun.

PROPHET (ص) SIGNS A PACT WITH THE JEWS (624 A.D.)

Having thus welded the Ansar and the Muhajirun into one Brotherhood, the Prophet now set himself to the task of establishing a stable society, a commonwealth based on equality of rights and on the concept of universal humanity. Granting equality of status and rights as well as full freedom of religion and of conscience to the Jews, he invited them to enter into a pact with the Muslims. He drew up a charter which has been reproduced by the historian Ibn Hashim thus:

In the Name of the Most Merciful and Compassionate God. Granted by Mohammed, the Prophet, to the Believers, whether of Quraish or of Yathrib, and all individuals of whatever origin who have made common cause with them, all these shall constitute one nation.

Then, after regulating the payment of the *diyya* (blood money) by the various clans and fixing some wise rules regarding the private duties of Muslims among themselves, the document proceeds thus:

The state of peace and war shall be common to all Muslims; none among them shall have the right of concluding peace with, or declaring war against, the enemies of his co-religionists. The Jews who enter into this covenant shall be protected from all insults and vexations; they shall have an equal right with our own people to our assistance and good offices. The Jews of the various branches of `Awf, Najjar, al-Harith, Jashm, Tha`labah, Aws, and all others domiciled in Yathrib shall form with the Muslims one composite nation. They shall practice their religion as freely as the Muslims. The clients and allies of the Jews shall enjoy the same security and freedom. The guilty shall be pursued and punished. The Jews shall join the Muslims in defending Yathrib against all enemies. The interior of Yathrib shall be a sacred place for all those who accept this Charter. The clients and allies of the Muslims and of the Jews shall be as respected as the principals. All Muslims shall hold in abhorrence anyone found guilty of a crime, injustice, or disorder. None shall uphold the culpable, even if he may be his nearest in kinship.

Then, after some other provisions regarding the internal management of the State, this extraordinary document concluded thus:

All future disputes between those who accept this Charter shall be finally referred, after God, to the Prophet.

The Jews of Medina accepted this Pact. After some time, the neighbouring Jewish tribes of Banu Nadir and Banu Quraizah signed it, too. But, as later events proved, it was only expediency that had dictated this course of action to the Jews. There was no change of heart on their part and they secretly nursed the same hostile feelings against the Aws and the Khazraj as before and viewed the growing confederation of the Muslims with grave concern and animosity. In the course of time, they started taunting and abusing the Muslims, frequently quarrelling with them and resorting to treachery and sedition. They were assisted by some people of the Aws and the Khazraj who had become lukewarm converts: the *Munafiqun* (hypocrites). These were headed by Abdullah ibn Ubay who had his own designs to become the king of Medina and, together with the Jews, they became a constant source of danger to the newborn religion and to its adherents.

The Jews, who had thriving business deals with Quraish of Mecca, conspired with them to eradicate the infant religion before it assumed formidable proportions. As the head of the religion, and a general in a time of almost continuous warfare, Muhammed (ﷺ) was the guardian of the lives and liberty of the people. The very existence of the nascent religion was in serious peril. Islam preaches the brotherhood of mankind; it insists on toleration of all religions and creeds; it enjoins kindness and compassion, but it does not permit its followers to submit to the forces of disintegration.

Being in league with the Jews and the *Munafiqun*, the Meccans started harassing the Muslims. Under the leadership of Karz ibn Jabir al-Fahri, they started raiding up to the very outskirts of Medina, destroying fruit-bearing trees and carrying away flocks. News began pouring into Medina that the Meccans were allying with other tribes to launch a massive attack against the Muslims. Muhammed sent out small ambassadorial missions to these tribes to contract alliances and treaties. One of those missions entered into a treaty with Banu Zamra. The terms of the treaty were as follows:

This is the document of Muhammed, Messenger of God, for Banu

Zamra. Their lives and property are safe. If they are attacked by anyone, they will be assisted except when they themselves fight against the religion (Islam). In return, they will come to the help of the Prophet when called on by him.

A similar pact was made with Banu Madlaj at Dhul-`Ashira place. Quraish had sent a threatening letter to Abdullah ibn Ubay who was the chief of his tribe prior to the arrival of the Prophet: "You have given shelter to our man (Muhammed). You should either kill him or turn him out of Medina or else we swear that we will attack you and, killing all the males, we will capture and enjoy your women.

The attack was considered so imminent, and the small band of Muslims was in such peril, that the Prophet used to remain awake throughout the night. Al-Darmi and al-Hakim have recorded that "When the Prophet and his companions came to Medina and the Ansar sheltered them, the Arabs decided to attack them. The Prophet's companions used to sleep holding to their weapons."

This was the prelude for the Battle of the Khandaq, moat, which took place in the month of Shawwal of 5 A.H./February of 627 A.D.

WHERE DID THE JEWS COME FROM?

One may wonder what brought those Jews to Medina to live among people whom they regarded as their inferior, polytheist pagans who regarded as profession other than trade to be beneath their status. There are two theories. One says that those Jews were motivated by the desire to be the first to believe in the new Arabian Prophet whose name was written in their religious books and whose mission was about to start, so they made a mass immigration to Medina.

Their high rabbis had told them that Medina would be the place where the new Prophet, Muhammad (ص), would be preaching the divine message. This view is supported by verses 40 – 103 of Surat al-Baqara (Chapter of the Cow, i.e. Ch. 2) which repeatedly admonishes the Israelites and strongly rebukes them for seeing the truth but turning away from it. According to this theory, those Jews with religious fervor had come from Jerusalem in particular and Greater Syria (Sham) in particular.

The other theory seeks an explanation from the historic events that took place in southern Arabia, particularly Yemen, concluding that those Jews had migrated

from there seeking religious freedom and better economic conditions. This is how advocates of this theory reason: The immigration of the majority of Jews into Yemen from abroad appears to have taken place about the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. But Yemen province is mentioned neither by Josephus, better known as Yoseph ben (ibn, i.e. son of) Mattithyahu (37 – cir. 100 A.D.), a Romano-Jewish historian and hagiographer, nor by the main books of the Jewish oral law, namely the Mishnah and Talmud.

According to some sources, the Jews of Yemen enjoyed prosperity until the 6th century A.D. The Himyarite King, Abu-Karib Asad Toban, converted to Judaism at the end of the 5th century, while laying siege to Medina. It is likely some of his soldiers preferred to stay there for economic and perhaps other reasons. His army had marched north to battle the Aksumites who had been fighting for control of Yemen for a hundred years. The Aksumites were only expelled from the region when the newly Jewish king rallied the Jews from all over Arabia, together with pagan allies. But this victory was short-lived.

In 518 A.D., the kingdom of Yemen was taken over by Zar'a Yousuf, who was of “royal descent” but was not the son of his predecessor, Ma'di Karib Ya'fur. Yousuf converted to Judaism and instigated wars to drive the Aksumite Ethiopians from Arabia. Zar'a Yousuf is chiefly known by his cognomen “Thu Nuwas”, in reference to his curly hair. The Jewish rule lasted till 525 A.D., only 85 years before the inception of the Islamic Prophetic mission. Some historians, however, date it later, to 530, when Christians from the Aksumite Kingdom of Ethiopia defeated and killed Thu Nuwas, taking power in Yemen. According to a number of medieval historians, Thu Nuwas announced that he would persecute the Christians living in his kingdom, mostly in Najran, because Christian states had persecuted his fellow co-religionists (the Jews) in their realms. This persecution, which took place in the year 524 A.D., is blamed on one Dimnon in Najran, that is, modern al-Ukhdoon area of Saudi Arabia.



Road sign marking the Ukhdoon area

Najran is a city now located in southwestern Saudi Arabia near the border with

Yemen, whereas Yemenis have always claimed it as their own area which the Saudis seized by force and annexed to their kingdom in May of 1934. It is the capital of the Najran Province. Local tradition says that the land derived its name from the first man to settle in the area, Najran ibn Zaydan ibn Saba ibn Yahjub ibn Ya`rub ibn Qahtan قحطان (Joctan).

Najran was the Yemeni centre of cloth making. Originally, the *kiswa* or the cloth of the Ka`ba was made there. The tradition of clothing the Ka`ba was first started by the Yemeni kings of Saba (Sheba). There used to be a Jewish community at Najran renowned for the garments they manufactured. According to Yemenite Jewish tradition, the Jews of Najran traced their origin to the Ten Tribes of Israel.



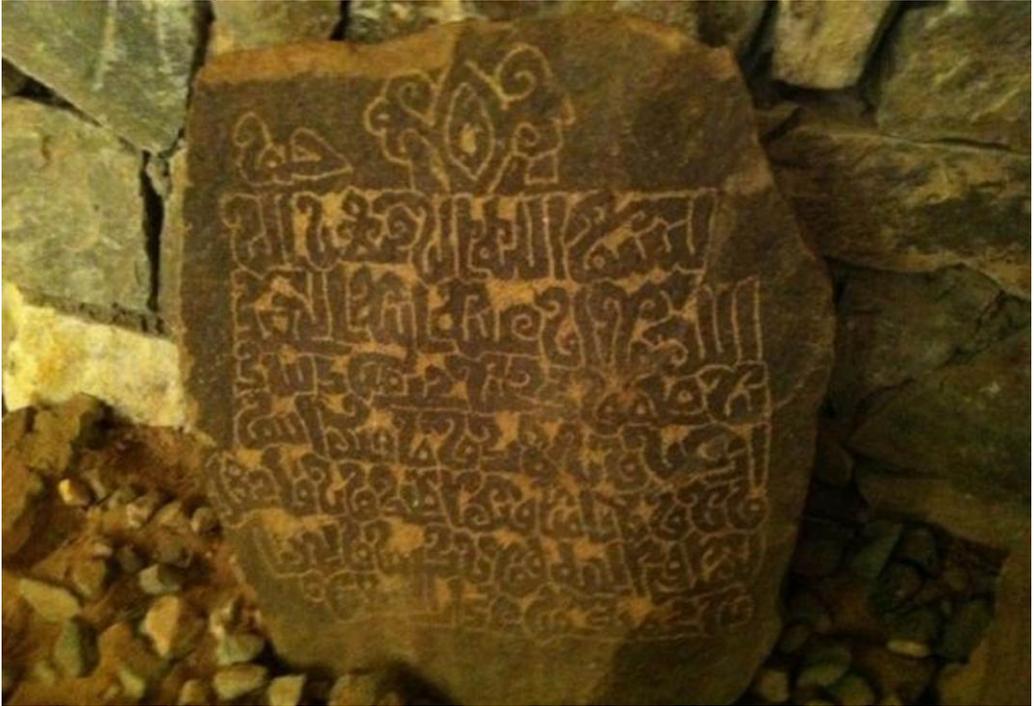
Aerial view of the Ukhdood

Any reader of the Holy Qur'an must have come across verse 4 of Surat al-Buruj (Chapter 85) of the Holy Qur'an which refers to أَصْحَابُ الْأُخْدُودِ, fellows of the Ukhdood, which is imprecisely translated as "the ditch self-destructed" in some English translations of the Holy Qur'an. To the author of this book, who speaks Arabic as his mother tongue, my dear reader, "the ditch self-destructed" does not make much sense at all.

Actually, this "Ukhdood" was a long ditch filled with firewood. It was lit and the believers were thrown into it if they refused to abandon their faith. Some ran away from this inferno, which may remind one of a similar situation which took place with Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) at the hands of Nimrud of 13th Century B.C. Assyria. The survivors, most likely Christians and Jews, fled up north in the direction of Medina which they made home. The Almighty in 85:4 condemns this massacre in the strongest of terms, and Christians and Jews ought to appreciate this fact.

According to some sources, after seizing the throne of the Himyarites, in 518 or 523 A.D., Thu Nuwas attacked the Aksumite (mainly Christian) garrison at Zafar, capturing them and burning their churches. He then moved against Najran, a Christian and Aksumite stronghold. After accepting the city's

capitulation, he massacred those inhabitants who would not renounce Christianity in this *Ukhdood* incident. Estimates of the death toll from this event range up to 20,000 in some sources. So, believers in God, Christians and Jews, had reasons to go somewhere else where they would practice their religion freely while enjoying better business opportunities among Arabs who, at the time, were mostly nomads.



Stone with inscriptions dating back to the Ukhdood incident

The Jews of Medina who were contemporary of the Prophet of Islam and who had thriving business deals with Quraish of Mecca conspired with the latter to eradicate the infant religion before it assumed formidable proportions. As the head of the religion, and a general in a time of almost continuous warfare, Muhammed (ص) was the guardian of the lives and liberty of the people. The very existence of the nascent religion was in serious peril. Islam preaches the brotherhood of mankind; it insists on toleration of all religions and creeds; it enjoins kindness and compassion, but it does not permit its followers to submit to the forces of disintegration.

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THE BATTLE OF KHANDAQ (627 A.D.)

Upon settling down at Khaibar, Banu Nadir decided to seek revenge against the Muslims. They contacted the Meccans, and 20 leaders from the Jews and 50 from Quraish made a covenant in the Ka`ba that as long as they lived, they would fight Muhammed. Then the Jews and Quraish contacted their allies and sent emissaries to a number of tribes. Banu Ghatfan, Banu Asad, Banu Aslam, Banu Ashja`, Banu Kinanah and Banu Fizarah readily responded. The Meccans, four thousand strong, including three hundred cavaliers and fifteen hundred camels, were joined by six thousand allies from among the Jews and the bedouin tribes. The three armies set out, ten thousand strong, under the command of Abu Sufyan in the beginning of the month of Shawwal, 5 A.H. (the end of February 627 A.D.) to attack Medina.

When news of these preparations reached Medina, the Prophet consulted his companions, as he always did during such situations. There was hardly sufficient time to make preparations for the war. He decided this time to remain within the city and fight back. The stone houses of the city were built adjacent to one another so as to make a high and continuous strong wall for a long distance except in the north-west where a wide open space could afford the enemy an easy entry. At this place, with the suggestion of Salman al-Farisi, who was familiar with the mode of defending cities in other countries such as his (Persia), a trench, fifteen feet in width and fifteen feet in depth, was dug. Muslims were divided into parties of 10 each, and each party was allotted 10 yards to dig. The Prophet himself participated in this task, carrying the excavated earth away. The *khandaq* (moat) was completed in nick of time: just 3 days before the host of the enemies reached Medina. The houses outside the city were evacuated, and the women and children were accommodated for safety on the tops of the double-storied houses at the entrenchment. Muslims could muster only three thousand men to face this huge army, and they immediately took cover behind the ditch. The Prophet camped in the center of the entrenchment in a tent of red leather on a space shaped like a crescent. The camp had the rising ground of Sila` on its rear and the trench in the front.

Huyaiy ibn Akhtab, head of Banu Nadir and the most antagonistic Jew, met secretly with Ka`b ibn Asad, head of Banu Quraizah, a Jewish tribe still in Medina. Banu Quraizah, on his instigation, tore down the treaty which they had concluded with the Muslims. The Jews decided that they would assist the pagan Quraishites after ten days' preparations and would attack the rear of Muhammed's army from the north-western side of the city that lay on the south-east side of their fortress and which was easily accessible to them.

Rumours reached the Prophet about the Jews' schemes, so he sent two chiefs, one from the Aws and one from the Khazraj, namely Sa`d ibn Mu`ath and Sa`d ibn `Abadah¹ respectively to ascertain the truth. Both men proceeded to meet the Jews. Having made searching inquiries and some scouting of their own, they returned to report to the Prophet that the temper of the Jews was even worse than had been feared. This news alarmed the Prophet. It was then necessary to take precautions against any surprise attack or treachery from the side of the Jews. The north-western part of the city, which lay on the side of the Jewish stronghold, was the weakest of all defences. In order to protect the families of

¹The reader may remember this same Sa`d ibn `Abadah in the earlier chapter of this book discussing the jinns.

his followers throughout the city, the Prophet, as a meager measure of safeguard, had no choice except to send a considerable number of his men from his already small army of three thousand to afford them such a protection. His men's supplies were hardly adequate due to the length of the entrenchment that formed his defense line. Still, he had no choice except to detach two parties, one of three hundred men under the command of Zayd ibn Harithah, his freed slave and adopted son, and another of two hundred men under the command of a chieftain from Medina. Their job was to patrol the streets and the alleys of the city night and day.

This treachery and danger from inside Medina, when Muslims were surrounded by the combined armies of pagans and Jews of all of Arabia on the outside, had a telling effect on the Muslims. The enemy was astonished to see the moat because it was a novel military tactic for the Arabs. They camped on the outside for 27 (or 24) days. Their number increased day by day, and many Muslims were extremely terrified, as the Qur'ān portrays for us. Surat al-Ahzab describes various aspects of this siege. For example, read the following verses:

When they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when the eyes turned dull, and the hearts rose up to the throats, you began to think diverse thoughts about Allāh. There, the believers were tried, and they were shaken a tremendous shaking. (Qur'ān, 33:10-11)

At that time, many hypocrites, and even some Muslims, asked permission to leave the ranks of the Muslims and to go home:

And when a party of them said: O people of Yathrib! There is no place for you to stand, and a party of them asked permission of the Prophet saying: Verily our houses are exposed, and they were not exposed; they only described to flee away.(Qur'ān, 33:13)

The bulk of the army, however, steadfastly withstood the hardship of inclement weather and rapidly depleting provisions. The coalition's army hurled arrows and stones at the Muslims.

Finally, a few of Quraish's more valiant warriors, `Amr ibn `Abdwadd, Nawfal ibn `Abdullah ibn Mughirah, Dhirar ibn Khattab, Hubairah ibn Abu Wahab, `Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl and Mirdas al-Fahri, succeeded in crossing the moat.

`Amr called for battle; nobody responded; he was considered equal to one thousand warriors. History accounts state that all the Muslims were as though

birds were sitting on their heads: they were too afraid to raise their heads.

Three times did the Prophet exhort the Muslims to battle `Amr. Three times it was only Ali who stood up. In the third time, the Prophet allowed Ali to go. When Ali was going to the battlefield, the Prophet said: "The whole faith is going to fight the whole infidelity; the embodiment of the former bounds is to crush the entirety of the latter. The Prophet put his own turban on Ali's head, his own coat of mail over Ali's body, and he armed Ali with his own sword, Thul-Fiqar, then he sent him to meet his opponent. Then the Prophet raised his hands to supplicate thus: "O Allāh! `Obaydah, my cousin, was taken away from me in the Battle of Badr, Hamzah, my uncle, in Uhud. Be Merciful, O Lord, not to leave me alone and undefended. Spare Ali to defend me. You are the best of defenders.

Ali invited `Amr to accept Islam or to return to Mecca, or to come down from his horse since Ali had no horse and was on foot.

"Nephew, said `Amr to Ali, being a friend of Ali's father Abu Talib, "By God I do not like to kill you. Ali replied, "By God, I am here to kill you! `Amr, now enraged at this reply, alighted from his horse. Having hamstrung his horse, a token of his resolve never to run away from the battlefield but either to conquer or to perish, he advanced towards Ali. They were immediately engaged in a duel, turning the ground underneath them into a cloud of dust, so much so that for a good while, only the strokes of their swords could be heard while they themselves could not be seen. Once `Amr succeeded in inflicting a serious cut on Ali's head. At last, Ali's voice was heard shouting, "*Allāhu Akbar! Allāhu Akbar!* That was his cry of victory. It always is Muslims' cry of victory. Seeing how the most brave among them has been killed by Ali, the other pagans who crossed the moat now took to their heels with the exception of Nawfal whose horse failed to leap; it fell into the moat. As the Muslims showered him with a hail of stones, he cried out thus: "I rather die by the sword than by the stones! Hearing this, Ali leaped into the moat and fulfilled his last wish, dispatching him to hell!

Ali, contrary to the Arab custom then, did not, however, strip either men from their armor or clothes. When `Amr's sister came to her brother's corpse, she was struck with admiration at the noble behavior of her slain brother's adversary and, finding out who he was, she felt proud of her brother having met his fate at the hands of the person who was known as the unique champion of spotless character. She said, as recorded in *Tarikh al-Khamis*, "Had his conqueror been

someone else other than the one who killed him, I would have mourned `Amr for the rest of my life. But his opponent was the unique spotless champion.

Ali, the “Lion of God, thus distinguished himself as on previous occasions: in the battles of Badr and of Uhud. About this battle, the Prophet said:

Verily, one attack of Ali in the Battle of Khandaq is better than the worship of all human beings and jinns up to the Day of Resurrection.

No further activity was attempted by the enemy that day, but great preparations were undertaken during the night. Khalid ibn al-Walid, with a party of cavaliers, attempted during the night to clear the ditch for crossing the next day. The next morning, the Muslims found the entire enemy force arrayed in fighting formations along their line of entrenchment. The enemies tried to overrun the Muslim side of the trench but were repelled at every point. The ditch served its purpose; it could not be crossed. During the entire military campaign, by the way, only five Muslims were martyred. The Muslims' vigilance paralyzed the enemies despite their Numeric superiority. Numeric superiority is not always a prerequisite for victory. The Almighty grants victory to whosoever He pleases.

But the Muslims were running out of provisions. The Prophet had to tie a stone on his stomach in order to minimize the pangs of hunger. Abu Sa`eed al-Khudri said: “Our hearts had reached our throats in fear and in desperation. On the other hand, the besieging army was getting restive, too; it could not put up any further with the rain and cold; its horses were perishing daily and provisions nearing depletion. The Prophet went to the place where the Mosque of Victory (Masjidul-Fath) now stands and prayed to Allāh. Said the Prophet, “O Lord! Revealer of the Sacred Book, the One Who is swift in taking account, turn the confederate host away! Turn them to flight, O Lord, and make the earth underneath them quake!

A fierce storm raged, uprooting the tents of the enemies; their pots and belongings went flying in all directions; it blew dust in their faces, extinguished their fires, and their horses were running around as though they were possessed. An unbearable terror was cast in their hearts. In the fourth night, after having finished his prayers, Muhammed asked Abu Bakr if he would go to the enemy's camp to discern and report their activities. He replied saying, “I ask pardon of Allāh and of His Messenger. The Prophet promised Paradise to be the reward of anyone who would venture out for that purpose, then asked `Omar ibn al-Khattab if he would do it. `Omar's answer was similar to that of Abu Bakr. The

Prophet's request is actually an order, a divine one, since it is coming from one who does not say anything or do anything without the Will of the Almighty. These facts are recorded in *Tafsir al-Durr al-Manthur*, *Al-Sira al-Muhammadiyya*, *Al-Sira al-Halabiyya*, *Tarikh al-Khamis*, and *Rawdat al-Ahbab* for all to review. The third person the Prophet asked was Huthayfah al-Yemani who readily responded to the request and proceeded to the enemy camp in the darkness of the night where he saw the devastation wrought by the storm. He saw Abu Sufyan looking very depressed. When he came back to his camp and reported in detail to the Prophet what he had seen, the Prophet was delighted to find out that his plea to Allāh was answered.

Either feeling the pain of the severity of the weather or struck with terror at that storm which was interpreted as a manifestation of the Divine Wrath, Abu Sufyan decided to lift the siege and to march back at once. Summoning the chiefs of his allies, he announced his decision to them, issuing orders to dismantle the camp. He and all the Meccans with him, as well as the pagan tribes that allied themselves under his command, fled away. The first to flee was Abu Sufyan himself who was so upset that he tried to ride his camel without first untying its rope. Khalid ibn al-Walid guarded the rear of the armies with two hundred cavaliers against a pursuit. The Ghatfan tribesmen and the Bedouin allies returned to their deserts; not a single person remained on the battlefield in the morning. It was with great joy that in the morning the Muslims discovered the sudden disappearance of the enemy, finding themselves unexpectedly relieved. The siege lasted for twenty-four long days ending in March of 627 A.D.

This incident is referred to in the Qur'ān in this *ayat* (verse):

O ye who believe! Remember the bounty of Allāh unto you when came upon you the hosts, so We sent against them a strong wind and hosts that ye saw not, and Allāh sees all what you do. (Qur'ān, 33:9)

And also in *ayat* 25 which says:

And God turned back the unbelievers in their rage; they did not achieve any advantage, and Allāh sufficed for the believers in fighting, and Allāh is Strong, Mighty. (Qur'ān, 33:25)

`Abdullah ibn Mas`ud was interpreting this thus: "And God sufficed the believers (through Ali ibn Abu Talib) in their fight, as we read in *Tafsir al-Durr al-Manthur*.

As a direct result of this defeat of the infidels' combined forces in the Battle of Khandaq (moat, or the Battle of Ahzab, coalitions), Quraish's influence waned, and those tribes who were till then hesitating to accept Islam out of fear of Quraish began to send deputations to the Prophet. The first deputation came from the tribe of Mazinah, and it consisted of four hundred persons. They not only accepted Islam but were ready to settle down in Medina. The Prophet, however, advised them to return to their homes.

Likewise, a deputation of a hundred persons came from the Ashja` and embraced Islam. The tribe of Juhainah lived near them, so they were influenced by their conversion. One thousand of the latter's men came to Medina to join the fraternity.

BANU QURAIZAH ELIMINATED (627 A.D.)

According to the terms of the treaty which Jewish Banu Quraizah had contracted with the Muslims, they were bound to assist the Muslims against outside aggression. But, not to speak of assisting the Muslims or even remaining neutral, they had sided with the Meccans and joined the besieging foe. What was worse, they had tried to attack the fortress where Muslim women and children had been lodged for safety. Living in such a close proximity to Medina, they had become a serious menace.

Having put aside his armor after his return from the site of the Battle of Khandaq, the Prophet, on the same day when the battle had come to a close, was washing his hands and face at the house of his beloved daughter Fatima whom he used to visit before proceeding to his own house and whenever he returned from an expedition or an expedition. It was then and there that arch-angel Gabriel brought him the divine command to proceed immediately against the Jews of Quraizah. He instantly sent Ali with his standard, then he followed in person with his army and laid the siege of their fortress, a siege which the enemy had not expected, thinking that the Muslims were already worn out following one of their most exhausting battles.

First, Quraizah Jews resisted, but the siege of twenty-five days sufficed to bring them to their knees and prepare them to pay for their treachery. They ultimately opened the gates of their fortresses on the condition that their fate should be decided by Sa`d ibn Mu`ath, chief of the Aws, a long time friend and ally of the Jews. Sa`d had been wounded during the battle of the moat and was still under treatment when he was brought to decide the fate of Banu Qurayzah. He came

riding a mule and looking quite weak. He could not walk, so he was supported by some of his friends. He was surrounded by men of his tribe who were all urging him to be lenient towards Jewish prisoners, reminding him of their services to the Aws when the war of Bu`ath was raging. Basing his judgement upon the verses of the Old Testament itself, Sa`d ruled that the fighting men, six hundred in number according to some accounts, should be killed, the women and children be taken captive, and their possessions be confiscated and divided among the besieging troops. The sentence was carried out.

Ibn `Abbas narrates the following with reference to the Prophet's conquest over Banu Qurayzah:

When the Messenger of Allāh called Ka`b ibn Asad so that he would be beheaded, he said to him, "O Ka`b! Did you avail yourself of the advice of Ibn Hawash who came from Syria? He (Ibn Hawash) said, "I have left wine and all intoxicants and came to misery and dates for the sake of a Prophet to be delegated. His advent will be in Mecca, and this (Medina) is the place to which he will migrate. He is the one who smiles quite often, and who quite often kills. A bit of bread and a few dates suffice him. He rides the donkey without a saddle. In his eyes there is redness. He puts the sword on his shoulder and does not care who faces him. His domain will reach so far that nobody can go beyond it.' Ka`b said, "Yes, all of this is true, O Muhammed! Had the Jews not taunted me of being too coward to fight you, I would have believed in you and followed you, but I am a follower of Judaism; a Jew do I live, and a Jew shall I die. The Messenger of Allāh then said, "Bring him forward and strike his neck, and so it was¹.

It was in reference to this conquest that the following *ayats* were revealed:

And He drove down those of the people of the Book who backed them from their fortresses, and He cast awe into their hearts: some you killed and some you took captive. And He made you inherit their land and their dwellings and their possessions, and (to) a land which ye have not yet trodden, and God has power over all things. (Qur`ān, 33:26-27)

Some critics had described this punishment as harsh. But what other punishment could be meted out to them? They had violated the pact and, instead of helping the Muslims, they joined the forces of their enemies and had actually besieged the Muslims. There were no prisons where prisoners of war could be detained

¹al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 15, p. 206.

nor any concentration camps where they could be put to forced labor, and the capture of women and children, though allaying to the notions of the present age, was probably the only method known in those days to provide sustenance to them when the earning members of their families had lost their lives. At any rate, this was the customary aftermath of a war.

One of the greatest losses suffered by the Muslims in the Battle of Khandaq (Moat) is the death of Sa`d ibn Mu`ath one month after the end of the battle under the weight of his wounds. That was in 5 A.H./626 A.D. Ubayy has narrated saying that Sa`d ibn `Abdullah quotes Ibrahim ibn Hashim quoting al-Hussain ibn Yazid al-Nawfali quoting Ziyad al-Sukuni quoting Imām Ja`fer ibn Muhammed al-Sādiq who in turn quotes his father Imām Muhammed al-Baqir saying that the Prophet performed the funeral prayers for Sa`d ibn Mu`ath then said,

Ninety thousand angels, including Gabriel, have attended the funeral of Sa`d ibn Mu`ath today to bless him and pray for him. I asked Gabriel, "What did he do to deserve your prayers, all of you, today?!" Gabriel said, "He used to recite Surat al-Ikhlās (Ch. 112 of the Holy Quran) standing, sitting, riding, walking, going or coming."¹

May Allāh have mercy on Sa`d ibn Mu`ath.

JEWS OF BANU MOSTALIQ (627 A.D.)

The Jews of Banu Mostaliq were neighbors of Banu Qurayzah. Although they saw what had happened to the latter, they did not learn a lesson from it and started making preparations to invade the part of Medina where the Muslims were residing. Having come to know of their designs, Prophet Muhammed sent them Buraydah ibn al-Hasib in order to verify the reports that had reached him. Upon his return, Buraydah confirmed the truth of what the Prophet had heard. A pre-emptive war was imminent. With Ali as the standard bearer, the Prophet led his troops on Sha`ban 2, 5 A.H./December 30, 626 A.D. to battle the Banu Mostaliq Jews. The fighting broke out, and ten Jews were killed, including the leader of Banu Mostaliq, namely al-Harith ibn Abu Zarar. Having seen their leader being killed, the Jews took to flight but not before the Muslims captured two hundred of them along with one thousand camels and five hundred sheep. Juwayriyya, daughter of the slain Jewish chief, was among the captives. Before

¹Shaikh Abu Ja`fer Muhammed ibn `Ali ibn al-Hussain ibn Babawayh al-Qummi al-Saduq, *Al-Amali* (or *Al-Majalis*), pp. 323-324.

the fight began, her father had already pleaded to the Prophet not to sell her in the slave market as was usually done in those days. Captives who could not buy their ransom or get someone to pay it on their behalf used to be auctioned at the slave market. Juwayriyya embraced Islam and was married to the Prophet who safeguarded her dignity and treated her like a queen. In order to please her even more, Muhammed set all her relatives free.

Nowadays, some Arabs sign peace treaties with the Jews, open embassies for them and welcome them with open arms without first going back to history to find out whether Jews respect treaties at all if and when the tide is against them... *Inna Lillahi wa Inna Ilayhi Raji`oon...*



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